

THESIS

HIP HOP FAMILY IN THE UNDERGROUND: THE WORDS AND ACTIONS
OF THE TRUE
SCHOOL COMMUNITY IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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Andrew Anil Kumar

Department of Anthropology

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Master's Committee:

Department Chair: Kathleen A Sherman

Advisor: Katherine E. Browne

Richard Breaux
Jeffery Snodgrass

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

HIP HOP FAMILY IN THE UNDERGROUND: THE WORDS AND ACTIONS OF THE TRUE SCHOOL COMMUNITY IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Hip Hop Culture is the fastest growing culture on earth. Around the world, people of multiple ethnicities, religions, economic backgrounds, and political affiliations consume and produce Hip Hop music and culture for a range of reasons. The music and art surrounding the culture has been intimately tied to the entertainment industry, and Hip Hop's national and international dissemination speaks volumes about the processes and outcomes of globalization. It is for this reason that the vehicle of Hip Hop is a useful tool to analyze a wide range of topics like gender, class, ethnicity, business, and performance to name a few. In my thesis I explore underground Hip Hop culture in Atlanta Georgia. My analysis draws on fieldwork I conducted from 2008 to 2009 and includes data from participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and a survey. In Atlanta Georgia, a group of underground Hip Hop practitioners and consumers who are affiliated with a socially conscious movement within the culture known as "True School," form a tight network. This network is rooted in deep local connections to one another reinforced by multiple exchanges of resources and information as well as commitment to a community ethos that is tied to the True School Movement.

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This thesis, as modest as it is, is dedicated to Hip Hop culture and the creative perseverance that people exhibit in challenging situations. I would like to take this great opportunity to give thanks and credit to the many people whose support and wisdom made this humbling and rewarding process possible. To begin with, I must express gratitude to Minister Server, my good friend, spiritual advisor and key informant. Ever since I have met him he has honestly shared his life, views, community, home and family with no hesitation. It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with, learn from, and get down with him these many years. My indebtedness to this man extends beyond the boundaries of this project. Additionally, I would like to give thanks and all due respect to Professor Griff of Public Enemy. After much deliberation, Hip Hop's Ex Minister of Information was gracious enough to afford me some time to share his wisdom and views as well. I am still trying to unravel the layers of knowledge that were imparted to me that hot summer day in Atlanta. Both of these men are part of a community that I feel honored to have been granted access. This community also opened their lives to me. I feel fortunate and humbled by the powerful words that were shared with honesty and passion in the hopes that I would do their community justice in my presentation of their story. I pray that I do, and again I give thanks.

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supported and nurtured this project as well as my academic interpretations of Hip Hop and community over the years with patience, dedication, and skill. The more time passes, the more grateful, humbled, and impressed I feel. I don't know how she does it all. Thank you so very much. I would also like to express my gratitude to my other committee members Dr. Richard Breaux and Dr. Jeffrey Snodgrass. Both of these men have made significant contributions to my understanding of ethnicity, community, and academic dialogue. This project would be far inferior without their contributions. I give all due respect and gratitude. I am also pleased to thank Dr. Norberto Valdez, who has challenged me for years in my academic pursuits and attempts in being a better human. I would not have engaged in this process without his prompting and support. Dr. Jan Valdez also deserves recognition and gratitude for her contributions. Without her support, academic talents, and constant words of encouragement I would not have completed this project. Thank you so very much for everything.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The notion of community has long been a point of academic and practical discussion. The reasons why and the means through which people come together forming groups around work, play, or for a specific goal are analyzed across fields and the body of work covering community functions and feelings is vast. In times of crisis, communities are challenged significantly. Analyzing the ways that members respond to tragedy can help bring greater understanding to what the concept of community means, and how it can be strengthened. The manner in which labor and goods are exchanged and shared between members reflects their level of commitment to the group, and to the guidelines for interaction that are mutually agreed upon by members. This examination can also foster a deeper understanding of what relationships between group members mean to one another, and how identity as a group plays into the exchange of goods and services.

I suggest that analyzing ideas and actions of a particular group inside Hip Hop culture can provide a deeper understanding of what community means and how it can be interpreted in terms of exchange. Over the past twenty years, increasing academic attention has been directed towards Hip Hop, creating a large body of knowledge and ideas. One goal of this research is to add to this corpus of work, and create new ways to understand how “Hip Hoppers”¹ function collectively.

¹ “Hip Hoppers” is a term to describe people who identify strongly with Hip Hop culture. Another term to describe them is as a “Hip Hop Head,” or just “head.” Internally, those who self identify as heads are

Hip Hop culture is currently a complex system that is made up of multiple communities that are separated by location, stylistic performance, lyrical content, and sometimes class or ethnic identity. When it began in the South Bronx in 1973, Hip Hop was a youth movement that formed in response to tough urban conditions. It started as an effort to minimize street violence, and have a good time. Communities of gang members, dancers, artists, and musicians came together to carve out a space for themselves through Hip Hop when they had little other positive channels to devote their energy (Chang 2005, Toop 1983; George 1998; Rose 1994; Pough 2005; Hager 1984).

While it is still a relatively young culture, Hip Hop has become a powerful influence in the entertainment industry as well as American culture in general. After gaining recognition and popularity in the 1980s, Hip Hop culture spread rapidly across the planet as globalization increased access to media and people through the 1990s. This spread lead to diversification and as trends in the culture specialized, divisions between groups of Hip Hop practitioners and consumers became more clear (Chang 2005; Bynoe 2006).

Business interest and media bias affected the way that the public was able to interact with these different groups. As time passed, negative elements within Hip Hop (also present in the larger American culture) received a heavier and disproportionate focus. Through this process, Hip Hop culture became an important and somewhat slanted vehicle through which many people understood the contemporary African American Experience². A negative and oftentimes racist portrayal of Blackness through Hip Hop

generally understood to be more dedicated to the “underground scene,” and in many cases within that, “True School,” which will be explained in detail later.

² It is important to note that Hip Hop is an urban construction that originally involved the participation of youths of a range of ethnic backgrounds in the Bronx area. The majority of participants were of African or

has focused on misogyny, hyper-consumerism, homophobia, and violence and was primarily expressed through “Gangsta Rap.”³ at the expense of more positive elements that remain hidden for the most part (Rose 2008).

The hidden side of Hip Hop is known as “underground,” and is comprised of artists who are not signed by large labels, and thereby lack visibility. Currently, within this group are artists who purposefully avoid the mainstream, based on its association with negative elements. These cultural practitioners focus more on positive elements in Hip Hop and seek to employ it as a tool set to increase the flourishing of their communities through positive means. The music they produce is known as “conscious rap,” or “message rap.” However, there was a short time when there was a more equal representation of the various forms of Rap in Hip Hop culture. During this period, in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, conscious rap shared the limelight with a range of other styles before it was pushed back underground (Watkins 2004; Chang 2005; McQuillar 2007).

It is my assertion that Hip Hop has several distinct underground waves. The first took place in the 1970s and was definitively underground as there was *no* Hip Hop before then. The second wave of underground Hip Hop started at the onset of globalization in the early nineties and effectively marked the end of the “Golden Age of Hip Hop,” which lasted from 1988-1992 (these dates are a bit contested). This was a period when message

Latin origins, many of who immigrated directly, or with lineage going back to the Caribbean (Chang 2005; Bynoe 2006; Ogbar 2007). The American status quo generally views it as a Black production. While this study recognizes the contributions of many people within Hip Hop culture, it is particularly concerned with the African American experience.

³ Gangster or “Gangsta” Rap focuses on the seedy underbelly of the urban experience. It at once laments and glamorizes the criminal element involved with making ends meet in trying urban environments. There is a focus on gang activity, drug dealing, hustling, pimping, and violence. Business interests unequal focus on young white males (the largest consumers of Hip Hop) in this, is primarily responsible for the uneven representation of Hip Hop in the media today.

rap had equal if not more representation in the mainstream. As this conscious version of Hip Hop was pushed underground and made less visible, Hip Hoppers who remained loyal to it acquired a new name, “True Schoolers.” True Schoolers go by many names: Underground, Conscious, College, Backpacker, Old School, and sometimes Golden Age. Their formalization marked the beginning of the second wave of underground Hip Hop.

Like much Golden Age Hip Hop, True School lyrical content focuses on social, political, and spiritual education as well as empowerment at both the individual and community levels. It is message rap that is stylistically diverse, and is most often consumed by members of the True School Community and the activist community. These communities overlap and are often times populated with college students, volunteers, and people seeking social justice. There are a variety of artists who have achieved national success and notoriety who fit squarely into this category, and many more who straddle genres. In the process of studying how “True Schoolers” fit academic definitions of community and what participation in a community means, I suggest we can better understand both Hip Hop and conceptions of community. But why study community specifically in Hip Hop?

Much of the literature that has been produced in Hip Hop studies focuses on conceptualizations of the culture explicitly. By concentrating on how community members identify themselves and others against outsiders, as well as how they interact, we can refocus studies on individuals and groups within Hip Hop instead of an overarching culture. In considering how True Schoolers act like a community, identify as a community, and exchange goods and services, we can connect actions and words: the rhetoric in the performance with the actions on the ground of Hip Hop (more specifically

True School) performers and consumers and if it is different from other communities. Simply, put the focus of this study can describe how community in True School is or is not, "...bigger than Hip Hop" (Dead Prez).

This research project focuses on the words and actions of True School Hip Hoppers in Atlanta Georgia. These individuals are networked around community radio station WRFG and are part of a tight network of educators, performers and activists that are engaged in work for the community at multiple levels. In 2008, two elders in this community suffered devastating losses in unrelated house fires. It is through analyzing the words and actions of True Schoolers in their response to the house fires I suggest that an academically defined community can be identified. Moreover, I assert, this community functions with an ethical framework that indicates how interaction and exchange takes place between group members.

Exchange within this community can be explained in terms of generating and spending multiple forms of capital as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1977). Furthermore, I suggest that the provision of support that came to the two elders in their time of need is a reflection of a reciprocal relationship in which the amount of work one puts in to the community can produce a "safety net," to catch a body or family in times of duress. This work performed by individual members of the community may be described in terms of one or more forms of capital as described by Bourdieu (economic, social, cultural) (1977).

Next, I suggest that there are two levels that discussion of exchange takes place. On the surface, the ethos of community implies that members take care of each other because "that is what they are supposed to do." On a deeper level, the notion of

exchange touches on reciprocity between community members. In the case of the Atlanta elders, True School community members donated their labor and money because of the vast amount of work that the elders had done before their tragedies, as well as an ethos of communal support. Finally, I suggest that a visible ethos of community with a subsurface message of reciprocity is consistent with the African American experience, and that Hip Hop is a contemporary product of that experience.

As this research project has continued, I have become increasingly aware of the need to place myself in the context of my study. By sharing bits of my life experiences with Hip Hop culture, I hope to provide a glimpse into some of the biases and ideas that help tint the lenses through which I view and understand Hip Hop. Doing so will help facilitate a more self-reflexive analysis that Rose (2008) describes as paramount in Hip Hop studies today. It is to that end I offer a brief reflection of my entrée into Hip Hop culture.

It was the mid eighties, I was about five years old, and watching Sesame Street. At the time, some break-dancers were making an appearance on the show, and their performance completely blew my mind. Granted, I was five, but that was my earliest experience with Hip Hop, and one of my strongest memories from early childhood. When I was nine, I got my first CDs for my birthday. Not surprisingly half of them were Hip Hop. I am a little embarrassed to say that Vanilla Ice, and MC Hammer were my first chosen forays into Hip Hop.

By the time I was 12, I had been exposed to movies like *Boyz in the Hood*, *Poetic Justice*, and *CB4*. My consumption of raw Hip Hop typical of the time like Dr. Dre, Snoop, and Sir Mix-A-Lot transitioned to artists like the Fugees, A Tribe Called Quest,

and Arrested Development as I grew older. It seemed that my exposure was typical of suburban middle class youth, but the majority of my musical cultural focus during those adolescent years was on Jam music and Jazz. Until I was about twenty-one, Hip Hop played a relatively minimal role in my life. I listened to a little mainstream, a little underground, and saw a few films, but it wasn't until college that I began to consume Hip Hop culture with some zeal; specifically underground.

In 2002, at the age of twenty-three, a filmmaker friend of mine employed me in some interviews he was doing in local Hip Hop culture in Denver Colorado. He was shooting a documentary for someone and needed somebody for interviewees to focus on and to prompt questions. During the course of this interview, I improvised and some passionate and compelling interviews were produced for the film project. The dialogues I had with Denver based Underground heads and activists fused my love of studying people with Hip Hop.

In 2003, I was introduced to KRS-ONE and his charismatic spiritual consultant, Minister Server. The following year I hired the Minister to do some workshops at the Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Fair in Fort Collins, Colorado, an annual event where he continues to speak and give workshops. Over the next few years, Minister Server and I became friends as we worked together. He shared his deeply compelling visions of Hip Hop and spirituality with me in our many conversations. In 2006, at the prompting of my professor, and soon to be committee chair Dr. Kate Browne, I conducted some participant observation and interviews in Hip Hop culture in Cape Town, South Africa where I was visiting. I was fortunate enough to meet some important figures in the world of underground Hip Hop in Africa. Like in the US, social activism took

place at the hands of a tight community dedicated to increasing human flourishing through Hip Hop.

The following summer, having taken a formal methods class with my advisor, I began exploring fieldwork in Atlanta, Georgia, where Minister Server lived. We worked on some life history interviews, and attended the World Social Forum together. By now, and by virtue of exposure to Minister Server and other underground heads, I was interested in the historical and modern connections between Hip Hop and spirituality. I wanted to know what made underground, so... ..underground, and how so many people that I met were able to make a living through Hip Hop being... ..well, underground. What I came to find is that underground artists are actually quite visible and audible, but only to specific populations.

Additionally, I found that I was an underground Hip Hop fan based on my musical and lyrical preferences and that through Hip Hop, an overwhelming number of topics can be analyzed. My functioning knowledge of artists, cultural forms, and language helped me gain a sort of “halfie” status within the community, a status that would later prove useful (Abu-Lughod 1988).

Through my own commitment to volunteerism and education, the access that I had gained to the local Atlanta community allowed me to explore ideas of exchange and relate these to Bourdieu’s multiple forms of capital (Bourdieu 1977, 1984). While discussing concepts of exchange and capital, Dr. Browne introduced me to ideas of community as identity, and provided some material through which to understand this. It was at this point that things began to crystallize both in formal fieldwork prospects and in terms of a theoretical foundation through which to understand Hip Hop.

In the spring of 2008, after I had conducted many informal interviews as well as spent a good deal of time observing and participating in the culture, I gained a unique opportunity to examine a particular segment of the True School community when tragedy struck Underground Hip Hop Atlanta. In unrelated occurrences, two core members of the community who were public figures, Minister Server and Professor Griff (Public Enemy's "ex Minister of Information") both suffered devastating losses in house fires.

The losses these two Hip Hop veterans faced provided an opportunity to witness how the positive work in Hip Hop that they championed, actually manifested. As a result of these tragedies, I had the opportunity to learn whether or not groups of people who participate in Hip Hop culture actually functioned as the communities they claimed to be in their lyrics and statements. Lyrics from artists like KRS One and information gathered from participants indicate a tight knit community that functions like a family under a "golden rule" of mutual responsibility and reciprocity.

It was only through the process of conducting this research that I actually discovered that networks of Hip Hoppers functioned as communities. My starting point was an exploration of a commitment to an underground ideology, but had an endpoint of community definition. The ethnographic work that I conducted in Atlanta Georgia allowed me to see that Hip Hoppers belonged to something beyond Hip Hop culture. These individuals were involved in creating and maintaining coherent communities that are maintained through exchange. This thesis describes my process of discovery of many things but ultimately focuses on respondents' connections to something beyond an abstract association to Hip Hop. Before I begin I will provide readers with a short roadmap for the following chapters.

In chapter two I discuss the methods and settings involved with my research. This will include my research design, how I gained access to the community, what methods I used to gather and analyze data, as well as some of the challenges I faced and realizations I had undertaking this project. In chapter three I will provide readers with a literature review that discusses Hip Hop's connection to the African American experience. I will cover the role of spirituality and religion, as well as performance, and historically relevant musical trends before recounting the birth and evolution of Hip Hop Culture.

In chapter four I review Hip Hop and True School in terms of that data provided by interviews and participant observation around the US, but most specifically in Atlanta Georgia. I will describe important community institutions, figures, and particulars of True School Atlanta. Chapter five then affords me the opportunity to review how the True School community provided support to Minister Server and Professor Griff in their time of need. This will include descriptions of exactly who gave support, what that support looked like, and a discussion of how Hip Hop participation helps other community members. Additionally I will discuss respondent's statements of how affiliation with Hip Hop comes with some costs.

In chapter six I will provide readers with a basic framework of how to understand community as described by previous theorists. Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) lays out the foundation for community studies, while Melvin Oliver (1988) adds to the discussion by providing a context to understand community in an urban environment. Suzanne Keller (2003) operationalizes the concept of community and provides us with a structure to comprehend how a group of Hip Hoppers in an underground network function. This ethnographic data was acquired through participant observation and semi structured

interviews. In chapter seven I will discuss the True School community and their reaction to the house fires in terms of exchange. This primarily will include the work of Marcel Mauss (1990) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984).

In the eighth and final chapter of this analysis I will provide a recap of my research before concluding with some suggestions of how it may be applied inside and out of the True School community in Atlanta Georgia. Now that we have a basic roadmap let us explore the methods and settings involved in this research.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS AND SETTINGS

In this chapter, I will discuss the various tools and techniques that were employed in the collection and analysis of data in this study of Underground Hip Hop. This will include a description of how I accessed communities, the research design, as well as the particular approaches and methods employed. Next, I will indicate the various times and places research was conducted, and who I was fortunate enough to study with. Finally, I will describe the tools I used to analyze the data followed by a concluding discussion of the various challenges I faced while conducting this work.

Community Access

Gaining entry to Hip Hop culture and later to the True School Community proved both easy and difficult. I do not believe that it would have been an easy task for most people, however luck was on my side. My long time interest in Hip Hop Culture predated my graduate work and was a critical asset for me.⁴ This was a good start but the most significant contribution to access facilitation was friendship with Minister Server. As it turned out, Minister Server was a highly respected elder in the Hip Hop Community, and served as a “gate keeper,” for access to knowledge and people.

⁴ My background as a social activist, and understanding of current events further facilitated this access, as well as my ability to crack people up, by making fun of my own ignorance when it so often became clear.

Without his introductions, diligence, social and cultural capital, this research would have been nearly impossible. When approaching potential interviewees, I offered my conversation, and the chance to break bread and spill wine together in an endeavor to honestly engage. It usually took several attempts to secure interviews, but once engaged, people were animated and willing to answer almost all of my questions. This held true across all research settings. My “halfie” status as a fan who was an academic, with access to the community through an elder and a gatekeeper, granted both interviewees, as well as an interviewer, some safety. My position too was secured and verified by people the community trusted.

Research Design

Dr. Browne helped me focus my wildly roaming interests in this captivating culture along lines of spirituality. While at the World Social Forum, I began to explore how spirituality, identity, and exchange were functioning in Underground Hip Hop. By the following winter (2008), I had prepared extensive literature reviews on Underground Hip Hop and had again traveled to Atlanta. This time I explored connections between Hip Hop and Black thought in the Hip Hop community over the Kwanzaa Holiday. Minister Server had opened his home and his community to me, and provided a first hand participant based education of Atlanta and Hip Hop. Two months later, Professor Griff’s house blew up, and within three months of that, Minister Servers house burned down.

In the course of our regular discussions, Server indicated to me that the Hip Hop community was throwing a benefit concert in response to the fires. I would later find out that this was more specifically the True School community. I was very fortunate when Dr. Browne again helped focus my energies and interests. She suggested I ask how this

concert and his community were benefiting him. We discussed how this investigation could be understood in terms of social capital, and from there, the final research questions were born: What defines community; What makes communities work; and how are various forms of capital exchanged that testify to the meaning of such communities. A focus on these questions as exemplified by underground Atlanta's support of Minister Server, and Professor Griff would be the goal. Throughout this process, committee members provided me with constant encouragement, challenges, and support, that helped me stay focused and energized while studying something so interesting and complicated, that distraction lay around every corner. Hip Hop is *really* interesting.

Data Collection

I had originally hoped to use mixed methods to create a body of knowledge that used both qualitative and quantitative methods but in the process of data collection, learned some important lessons. Quantitative collection can yield strong numerical data well suited for statistical analysis. Qualitative methods provide a deeper look at specifics and allow room for unique and unanticipated data to be discovered. It was my experience when working with cultures of performance like Hip Hop, that are also based in narrative traditions, qualitative tools prove more effective in the collection of usable data.

Quantitative Methods

The quantitative method that I chose to use was a fully structured interview in the form of a survey. I worked hard to create and fine-tune a survey protocol that addressed ideas of identity, exchange, and community within Hip Hop. Surveys were administered at two sites. The National Hip Hop Political Convention in the summer of 2008, and in an area of Atlanta recognized to be important to the True School community.

The survey consisted of thirty questions with scaled, multiple choice, and a few short answer questions. Many were distributed with self addressed and stamped envelopes, as people seemed rushed and unwilling to take a survey while I was there. Of the eight people who took the survey while I was present to answer questions, only six finished. The other two commented on the excessive length, and quit before completing it. Of the rest that were sent out, only eleven came back. Of those, none were complete and many seemed to reflect a cavalier attitude. While that survey was drafted at least ten times, it still was not dense enough, or more importantly, compelling enough to demand the attention of Hip Hoppers. Hip Hop is a performative and orally transmitted culture, so perhaps face to face interviews will remain the most efficient and entertaining way to gain access and information. It is possible that web based surveys can also provide a viable option in gathering data within the extended Hip Hop community.

Qualitative Methods

The vast majority of useful data collected for this project occurred using qualitative methods like participant observation. This intimate method can be employed in many settings and embeds researchers in the culture by getting up close and personal with respondents. It is an important tool that allows the researcher to feel the power of the words and actions of their subjects. Researchers are directly involved with phenomena that are significant to respondents (Bernard 2006). Participant Observation is the most flexible qualitative tool I used, and I relied heavily upon it at all times and across all sites during the research process. I spent time in radio stations, bars, music clubs, recording studios, poetry venues, churches, private residences, conferences, conventions, cultural centers, and parties around Atlanta and in other parts of the world. I was able to able to

immerse myself in underground Hip Hop culture and gain a personal, connected and intimate understanding of how the culture, community and movement functioned. This yielded the most significant data concerning True School as a movement across the country and planet. It also helped to situate it as the activist arm of Hip Hop.

The most substantial data specific to the community response to the house fires came with semi-structured interviews. I conducted seventeen interviews around the Atlanta area, primarily with members of the True School community who were directly involved in organizing a benefit concert for Minister Server and Professor Griff. All respondents self-identified as Black between the ages of 18 and 48. A more thorough description of site-specific demographics will follow the next section.

The interview protocol consisted of thirty open ended questions designed to explore respondent's notions of community and what it needed to flourish. I requested specific information about the house fires, the elders, and the community's response. How many people attended? Who organized the events? What was your participation? What is your relationship to the victims? Why did you participate? Interviews lasted from just over an hour to six hours at the longest, but most were around two and a half. The last question of the interview involved a bit of reflexivity and asked respondents what their opinions were of the interview,⁵ in an attempt to gain understanding of what the community thought of this academic work and how it could be stronger. I have been able to maintain contact with most respondents through email, phone, and Facebook, and their

⁵ Respondents were largely happy with the interviews, and at least half of them requested transcripts, indicating their interest in reviewing the often animated and passionate exchanges. Several respondents discussed their dismay that the fact that students from local colleges were not taking an interest in what was happening in their own towns, but were glad that at least I was doing something. Furthermore many respondents felt a connection with both the researcher and the work, speaking of the importance of producing research that recounts the vast good that can happen through the vehicle of Hip Hop.

continued support has helped maintain the integrity of this study. This combination of qualitative methods produced a usable narrative of the Hip Hop community and Atlanta and its response to the tragedy of two elders.

Research Settings

Research for this project took place in a variety of settings inside and out of the United States. Before I formally began research concerning the True School Community, I was exploring notions of “underground,” at home and abroad, and continue to do so today. In the United States this personal research took place in Denver Colorado from 2002 to 2008, in Cape Town, South Africa in 2006, and in Los Angeles California from 2006 to 2010. While the information I encountered is interesting and relevant, much of it goes beyond the scope of this project. The most salient information for this project, I discovered, points to a large network of Underground and True School communities that work locally but are connected globally through technology, common music, and performance, and a commitment to producing social change through Hip Hop.

Las Vegas Nevada: National Hip Hop Political Convention 2008

While formally conducting fieldwork for this research I encountered this same commitment to social change while attending a convention in Las Vegas with Minister Server in the summer of 2008. I was a discussant at the National Hip Hop Political Convention (NHHPC). Through participant observation was able to learn about the scope and reach of the True School movement. The NHHPC is a political platform through which Hip Hop culture is employed to politically and socially empower people who lack access through formal channels. Attending this convention were politicians, lawyers, students, actors, filmmakers, Black Panthers, organizers, writers, musicians, rappers,

cartoonists, academics, former political prisoners, dancers, and a host of other people who identify as Hip Hop.

Workshops covered a wide range of topics, and well-organized plans for action were developed during break out sessions. True to the fun loving nature of Hip Hop, there were many performances, and opportunities to dance as the convention progressed. This experience, as well as my experience at the US Social Forum held in Atlanta the previous summer, fortified my understanding of an international True School community and movement.

Atlanta, Georgia 2007-2008

Atlanta, Georgia, was the site of most fieldwork conducted for this study, and is home to the True School community networked around WRFG community radio station. Minister Server and Professor Griff are elders in this community and are widely respected for the labor they invest locally. Research took place over the course of a year with multiple trips to Atlanta combining to produce over two months of on the ground research.

My first foray into Atlanta took place in 2007 with my participation in the US Social Forum, which was the national arm of the World Social Forum being held in Venezuela that year. These events were designed to compliment/critique the World Economic Forum, which is interpreted to be exclusionary of important people and topics by some. At least 20 nationally recognized Hip Hop activist/artists participated in demonstrations and workshops specifically discussing issues in Hip Hop culture and how it can be employed in terms of social and economic empowerment. In addition to these

20 larger personalities, a host of Hip Hop heads and consumers attended and participated in workshops, demonstrations, and parties.

Workshop attendance ranged from 15 to 60 people over the week and topics were broad ranging from spirituality, gender, politics, to agriculture in Hip Hop. I participated in many of these workshops as a representative of Hip Hop Ministries, a non-profit that Minister Server operates. My involvement in activities surrounding the US Social forum helped establish an understanding of where Hip Hop activists sit in relation to other activists on a national scale. Additionally my observations helped clarify the complex network interaction that Hip Hop activists participate in and develop an understanding of it as a bound community that I would later come to know as True School.

Having placed Atlanta in a global context through the social forum, I returned to Atlanta the following December with the intention of establishing a more intimate understanding of the local community. I was able to do this by participating in a range of events surrounding the Kwanzaa holiday. I attended celebrations, ceremonies, sermons, concerts, and feasts around the community. These took place in private homes, churches, and important African American cultural sites like the “Shrine of the Black Madonna.”

Through this participation I was able to gain insight into the local connections between Hip Hop and the African American community, which would later prove important. I was introduced to most of these activities by Minister Server, and each event had a focus on family as a biological unit and community. In the songs and sermons that brought the Black community together as a whole, I heard discussions and descriptions of structural inequality, breaking bread, the middle passage, and of perseverance. Singing,

socializing, food, and drink were all involved in performances designed to strengthen and build community. Hip Hop culture was included in these performances.

In the summer of 2008 I traveled to Atlanta two more times to conduct more participant observation, and formal interviews. I asked True Schoolers about who helped Minister Server and Professor Griff as well as how and why this took place.

Traditionally, interviews like these are conducted in respondent homes, but for several reasons my interviews were conducted elsewhere. I was only invited to 3 respondents homes. Two of them I had known for sometime and I think a certain level of comfort had already been established.

Hip Hoppers can be a protection oriented and secretive group, especially True Schoolers. This is not without cause, as many True Schoolers reference the negative portrayal of Hip Hop in the media and academia and feel justified in protecting their culture. In an effort to make people feel more comfortable I offered them food and drink and suggested meeting in public places. I took time to tell respondents that I valued their ideas, their opinions, and their culture. Moreover, I verbally recognized that I could not place a financial value on their contributions, but the least I could do was to offer some small token of appreciation of their time and recognition of their work. I believe that combined with Minister Server's blessing and recommendation, this meager offering showed True School community members that my intentions were honest and positive.

The 17 interviews took place at a range of venues, but usually involved food or drinks. These interviews occurred in restaurants across Atlanta, the Martin Luther King Memorial, homes, radio stations, communes, and community supported agricultural projects (CSAs), as well as coffee houses, churches, bars, and car rides to late night dance

parties. It was a diverse experience that required flexibility, perseverance, and creativity to complete. It was also a lot of fun.

The sample of the community that I had access to was demographically varied in terms of their occupations and the Hip Hop elements they participated in, however all respondents self-identified as African American. They ranged in age from eighteen to forty eight, with half of all respondents in their thirties. Six of the respondents were females, while eleven of the respondents were male. Of the seventeen respondents only one identified as an Atlanta native, with thirteen coming from the northeast, two from the Midwest, and one not answering. This is consistent with patterns of African American and Hip Hop based migration back to the south that intensified in the late eighties.

All of the research participants in Atlanta that would answer queries concerning socioeconomic status described themselves as working class, economically disenfranchised, or middle class, and lived in similarly describable areas around the Atlanta area. All participants had at least a high school education, with five respondents having some college, five having a BA, two having completed masters programs, and one PhD. Within the sample there were four formal educators, a social worker, a head shop employee, a community coordinator, a media analyst, and a range of other jobs. All but one respondent are consumers of Hip Hop, and fifteen of them are producers. Indicating involvement in producing at least one element of Hip Hop culture⁶. Within this sample, there were at least four people who embraced all elements either through direct participation in or stating their identity as Hip Hop included a fundamental connection to

⁶ Many of the respondents were involved with multiple forms of Hip Hop. Each of these forms is known as an element, and according to the Temple of Hip Hop's Declaration of Peace include the following: Emceeing, Deejaying, Breaking, Graffiti Art, Street Fashion, Street Language, Street Knowledge, and Street Entrepreneurialism.

those elements. There were seven emcees, and five deejays. Several of the respondents are active writers on Hip Hop culture, and one, who founded his own university, is a fashion producer as well.

As noted by several respondents, Atlanta is a community of artists. Fifteen are directly involved with Hip Hop business of some sort and receive financial capital in exchange for their Hip Hop labor. All respondents are involved in volunteer work inside and out of Hip Hop culture with a range of focuses from the Humane Society, spiritual work, youth education, as well as mentorship and outreach with a number of populations. Of the 17 participants involved, three were direct beneficiaries of the aid concerts held after the fire. All but one showed up for the events, and seven were directly involved in the organizing and implementing of the events.

Data Analysis

Analyzing a complex data set can be daunting, but also rewarding. Through continuous feedback from community members, committee members, and reviewing literature as interviews were transcribed and processed, I was able to maintain a dialogue in this research that facilitated an understanding of the academic process, as well as the community itself. Having transcribed multiple interviews in the past, and being pressed for time with multiple jobs at home and work in the field, I hired a proficient academic to transcribe interviews. These transcriptions combined with my extensive field notes provided me a wealth of material.

Being a bit overwhelmed I started by reading all of the transcripts, adding field notes, and marking key quotes. I condensed much of the data into an Excel spreadsheet that highlighted specifics about each interview, listed answers to all questions in a

comparable form, and allowed me to graphically represent and visualize the same. This program provided me with basic quantitative tools that could be employed in creating a fuller data set. After some light analysis with Excel, Dr. Kate Browne introduced me to a software based qualitative analysis tool set known as ATLAS ti. This program allows the user to import qualitative data in the form of transcripts, lyrics, videos, and a variety of other media, and then assign codes to particular pieces of that text or media. After importing all of the interview transcripts into the program, I was able to go through each document and code specific data. These codes served as discrete markers through which to arrange data. Codes can be linked to quotes, other codes and memos, which can be used to demonstrate of connections and anomalies in the data.

Through the combination of the tools of Excel and ATLAS, I was able to determine boundaries of the community, different types of identity, motivations for exchange, and how individuals contributed to creating a safety net for Minister Server and Professor Griff. By comparing this now manageable and organized data set with the early large questions and literature, I was able to recognize a number of important issues inside the data as well as the techniques used to gather and process it.

Methodological Challenges and Realizations

Throughout this chapter, there have been allusions to challenges in collecting and analyzing data. This section will provide a more detailed recounting of such complications. The first challenge that I experienced was accessing the community. It took several years of significant investment of multiple forms of my own capital to be able to gain entry and access to the community. I realized that due to being burned by academics and journalists alike, Hip Hoppers are hesitant to share their lives with people

with whom they are not familiar or comfortable. Being honestly interested, expressing a dedication to preserving peoples ideas as they are, maintaining contact and transparency, as well as sharing sensitive information about ones self can go along way in creating a comfortable and safe space in which people can share.

Related to this challenge was the process of scheduling interviews. Not only were people somewhat guarded about talking to me, many people seemed to not have the time for it either. All but two interviews required multiple attempts at securing a time and place. In spite of the unique access provided through key informant Minister Server, several people were mildly hostile to the idea of speaking with me. One informant avoided me for almost a year. It took over eight attempts to secure an interview with him, and only after three other respondents had made multiple calls on my behalf would that person meet with me. I learned that social capital, cultural capital, and financial capital, can all speed this process along. I also learned that perseverance pays off, as that last interview provided compelling evidence in support of my questions, as well as other unique data that helped me gain perspective on Hip Hop and life in general.

After securing agreement for an interview, I commonly faced another challenge: identifying settings that were comfortable for interviewees created difficulty for conducting real work. Most public venues, whether restaurants, bars, coffee shops, clubs, or otherwise, were loud and poorly lit. While this ambiance is conducive to a great many things, semi structured interviews are not one of them. This problem was eased with the purchase of a small, but powerful digital stereo Dictaphone, and by writing the majority of my field notes immediately after the interview.

During interviews it became apparent that many respondents had their own agendas about what they wanted to discuss, and while all of it was profoundly interesting, some of it was not as relevant to the research questions as I might have liked. By employing interview techniques described by Bernard (2006), I was generally able to bring conversations back into range. In addition to tangential conversation, people reacted with silence or aversion to discussion of monetary specifics, either personally or concerning the benefits and other provisions of support. There seemed to be a pattern of being humble when it concerned giving anything, especially money.

This aversion to discussing financial information was initially challenging but proved to be rich data in and of itself. This aversion alludes to a focus on a holistic approach to health and wealth that quantifies success and happiness in non-financial terms. Many respondents described themselves as wealthy beyond what money could buy, indicating that they benefited from the non-material aspects of Hip Hop culture. Interviewees recounted how they have what they need in terms of the spirit, the community, their physical health, and that Hip Hop is in some ways, responsible for this. This aversion to financial discussion and my sense of their humility is consistent with the community ethos within Hip Hop, most specifically True School, and clearly indicates that some things are just taboo to discuss. It is not uncommon outside of Hip Hop to be hesitant to publicly discuss finances and it is probable that there are additional explanations for it. I hoped that by observing what the sample would, or could discuss openly, as well as what was preferentially discussed, I would be able to gain deeper insight into what the community ethos was from an angle that I had not anticipated.

Towards the end of my data collection, and as I began the data analysis process, several challenging questions emerged concerning the limitations of my sample. I would have liked to secure a larger sample size for several reasons. While many key members of the True School community surrounding WRFG provided strong and usable information, I could have gained a greater depth of understanding by finding more outliers as well as greater diversity within the community.

Additionally challenging, and sometimes painful were the lessons learned by realizing my own limitations as a researcher. Scheduling graduate work and other facets of life not easy. Several things gave, and I sometimes did not get to choose what, or who, those were. Beyond this, in an ironic twist of fate, my own house caught on fire and almost everything I owned was damaged or destroyed by smoke or flame. This troubling bit of experience drove home the need to have off site back ups of what one values as important. It is profoundly difficult to do justice to fieldwork or the analysis of it with a maelstrom of other things going on. Two things became clear in this process. The first is this: crazy stuff is always going on, and I had to deal with it; the second: I came to recognize that it is critical to make commitments to one's true priorities. I simply could not do it all.

At a deeper level, beyond the day-to-day functions of working and researching, several other perplexing issues arose. The more I learned about Hip Hop, the True School community, and the individuals I was fortunate enough to work with, the more I realized just how little I knew. Beyond this, I started to question what my actual impetus was for studying what I studied.⁷ At the heart of it, I found a host of questions about

⁷ The differences between Hip Hop, True School, and Black Thought were oftentimes difficult to discern. They are mutually informative, and have overlapping definitions. Furthermore, the differences between

myself, and a wealth of bias, that hurt to realize was part of me. I am a product of my time and place.

It is impossible to be objective, and I do not strive to be so. I seek only to provide compelling and useful information about what I learned from the people I was lucky enough to engage in an interview. After taking classes on race and ethnicity, gender and development, and the fact that I come from a mixed race family, I realized that I would still never “overstand”⁸ what I studied. Even still, I felt energized in my pursuit of knowledge, and realized that the journey itself is what is most important.

This chapter has provided the reader with an account of the particulars of how, where and with whom this project took place. It includes a description of how access to the community was gained as well as how the research was designed and data collected. Information was then provided on the settings and individuals within the research as well as the tools used to analyze that data. Finally, I covered the challenges and realizations I faced while conducting this project. The following chapter will focus on the historical connections between Hip Hop and the African American experience through spirituality and performance.

them have both diminished and increased since Hip Hop was born in the early 1970’s. This discussion is an important one, and in the case of this research was (and still is) ongoing. I would like to take this opportunity to own my ignorance in the matter. After many years of studying this, I am just barely beginning to understand the differences. This work is done with the hope that it can facilitate positive growth inside and out of Hip Hop. True School, and African American communities, but I am humbled by the wealth of amazing literature discussing these themes. It sometimes feels more like I am standing in the shadows of giants rather than on their shoulders.

⁸ “overstanding” is a term derived from “understanding” and indicates a deeper level of integrated knowledge that goes beyond basics. It is the ability to express that deep knowledge in both word and practice. The term is used almost exclusively by African Americans to describe mastery of that deep situational knowledge, and can be a signifier of “overstanding” itself. I speculate that this terminology may have roots in the Nation of Gods and Earths etymological practices of breaking down words into components and deriving meaning from the roots (insert term for this practice here).

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL COMPONENTS OF BLACKNESS THROUGH HIP HOP

Armed with the knowledge of our past, we can with confidence charter a course for our future. Culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle. We must take hold of it and forge the future with the past. Malcolm X

Hip Hop is an extension of Blackness, and reflects the complex and often harrowing experience of Black folk. Black thought includes a fusion of Abrahamic and African ethos, bound to narrative traditions, deeply embedded in performance and spirituality, and manifested in actions and words of creative reclamation and resistance. For Black folk, this spirit of creativity and resistance is its own cultural force. This spirit is visible in a community network that supported people from “the triangle trade” (the slave trade), through the Antebellum South, Jim Crow laws and practices, to the Civil Rights movement and beyond. Exchange within sectors of this community takes place at multiple levels, and is rich with cultural meaning and purpose, generally following “the Golden Rule,” which describes an ethic of reciprocity and collective responsibility.

Through this historical review I seek to provide a foundation for understanding some of the struggle associated with the Black experience and where African Americans have located support over the past two hundred years. I will address how a spiritual framework of support materializes partly in organized religion as well as how this support has helped communities survive hard times and create solidarity through collective activities and work. It is my intention to connect Hip Hop practices to these historical realities. I agree with Tricia Rose (2008) who asserts

that Hip Hop is the most current manifestation of Black folk's creative responses to hard times, and that this creative form is rooted in an ethos of solidarity and support⁹.

By highlighting the history of the African American experience in terms of spirituality and performance and providing a basic history of Hip Hop, I suggest that a more holistic view of community and exchange can be developed. The range and breadth of work focusing on concepts like Blackness, Hip Hop, community, and exchange, is impressive to say the least. I will draw on this vast literature in a selective manner to set up a discussion of contemporary True School thought and action in Atlanta.

Spiritual Practices: Religion in Community Support

Spiritual practices have been a way for people to solidify their communities, and create ethical codes of conduct. For African Americans (among others) these practices were born in the context of immense suffering. These practices also serve as means of helping members reaffirm and recommit to social codes and create a collective identity through which to support one another (Rose 2008; Turner 1997). While there is an obvious focus on a relationship to God through spirituality, religion in African American culture, like other cultures, also involves the relationships formed between spiritual participants. For many True Schoolers, Hip Hop is part and parcel of a spiritual practice that is tied to the history of Black thought: Hip Hop provides a channel to create identity and build solidarity. At the same time Hip Hop draws on many religions, and these

⁹ I think it is important to again reiterate that Hip Hop culture was not an exclusively African American construct, but is strongly tied to the Black experience. In addition to this, I think it is of some consequence that Hip Hop is employed world-wide by people who are resisting forms of structural oppression. This is observable from the favelas in Brazil, to the high rises in Shinjuku, to the suburbs of every American city. The spirit of resistance and reclamation, that is visibly performed through Black bodies, is a global commodity, and is a point of interest of young people, academics, and business people alike.

influences can be seen in the words and actions of Hip Hop heads, and more specifically True Schoolers.

Christian Influences

Christianity is an important part of this legacy and continues to exert significant influence on True School ethos among participants. Historically, churches have been central to African American communities and continue to be to this day. Tricia Rose (2008) provides a historical foundation for this idea stating that

The African American community has long been working internally for access to goods, services and education. Church groups in the 1700s did this work [and now Hip Hop does the same...churches still do too]. “These weren’t just casual individual decisions to give; “giving back” was part of a powerful ethos born out of black communities throughout U.S. history. These communities have long had to rely heavily, if not entirely, on a variety of self-help, community-based strategies since equal access to mainstream organizations has been denied or only insufficiently provided” (Rose 2008:205).

Within Christian church walls people found solidarity, salvation, and self-improvement in the music, scripture and various activities that the church facilitated. Hip Hop spaces and practices fulfill very similar roles in African American communities today. Like Hip Hop, the performance and consumption of spirited dance provided ease and comfort in hard times. Sermons from ministers, like Hip Hop emcees, are delivered with zeal, and full of lessons concerning treatment of oneself and others as well as the material conditions that the community experienced. The “giving back” that Rose describes is not only part of the ethos Black communities formed in the past, but is alive and well today. This ethos is clearly visible and actively employed in the True School community today. Some church spaces provided community help, leadership development, and were spaces of secular organizing as well as leadership (Turner 1997).

In many ways, Hip Hop culture and venues represent this same space, and nurture people along similar lines with varying degrees of success and connection to spirituality.

They are spaces filled with song, dance, and talent. They are places where people can network, discuss politics, social issues, and let loose, venting their frustration, and expressing their joy in the collective release of performance. In the late 1800s Gospel music and performance spilled out of the churches and into the streets and fields, as it grew and spread. Gospel gave rise to the Blues and a host of other performances that are tied to the Black experience and represent an expression of resistance and reclamation (Harris 1994). This “down low” music was originally hidden from the public, but as times changed, and music grew and evolved, these expressions of liberation became increasingly accessible to wider audiences (Hunter 1997; Danaher and Blackwelder 1993). Jazz in the 1920s and 1930s (Barlow 1995); Rock and Roll in the 1940s and 1950s (Dawson and Propes 1992; Garofalo 1993), Rhythm and Blues in the 1940s and 1950s (Gladney 1995; Ripani 2006); Funk in the 1960s and 1970s (Keyes 1996); and later Hip Hop would all emerge under similar pressures and along a similar route of access. Churches were spaces of creation, and are directly tied to the African American experience and performance. They were spaces where both action and words were shared and reinforced communally and then taken home.

Islamic Influences

While Christianity had a strong influence on performance and relief within the African American experience, this review will focus more heavily on Islamic contributions. Christianity’s influence on Hip Hop today is most visible within the “God Hop,” or Christian Hip Hop movement, but the connections to True School thought through the Black Power movement in the 1960s are more pertinent to our discussion here. For more than one hundred years some African Americans have submitted to the

will of Allah, integrating Islam into daily life and thought. Like its sister religion Christianity, Islam provided a space where African Americans could reclaim their strength, unity and community. While there are accounts of Islamic conversion and interaction among African Americans as far back as the 1830s (TURNER 1998) through the founding of the Moorish Science Temple in 1913, there are several movements that are of particular significance to True School. The heterodoxical Islamic Ahmadiyya movement attracted many Black followers in the early twentieth century and was inclusive of many schools of thought (Turner 1997). The legacy this branch of Islam left can be found in the works and teachings of the “Nation of Gods and Earths,” an organization that I believe has had significant influence on True School thought. Ahmadi practitioners were active members of the Jazz scene and went on to help influence a host of Islamic musicians who were directly involved in the Black Power Movement and later Hip Hop (Miyakawa 2005; Turner 1998).

While the Ahmadi helped set the stage for an increase in African American participation in Islam, it was the Nation of Islam, which, through charismatic figures like Elijah Muhammad early on, and Malcolm X (EL Haj Malik al Shabazz) in the 1950s and 1960s, vastly expanded the power of Islam in America. These leaders, as well as a massive second migration north of about five million people helped create the African American base for the Nation of Islam. The Nation provided a strong community-based ethical code that included civic participation through religious organizations, education, and personal as well as communal health (Turner 1997).

Through a combination of Ahmadi oriented Islam’s focus on renewal, and the Nation’s commitment to Islamic laws forbidding submission to injustice (that manifested

in actions of the tongue and pen), the stage was set for groups like Malcolm's Organization of Afro-American Unity, The Black Panthers and Five Percenters as well as other Black Nationalist groups (Barboza 1994; Haley and Shabazz 1964; Turner 1997). The ideology of the Nation of Islam and Ahmadiya movement combined to help create an ethical framework through which the Black Power Movement of the sixties would operate. The aforementioned offshoot of the Nation of Islam known as "the Nation of Gods and Earths" (Five Percenters), would later take this directly into Hip Hop as it began to coalesce at parties in houses, clubs and on the streets of the Bronx in New York City.

The ideology of "Five Percenters," or the Nation of Gods and Earths, is of particular historical importance to Hip Hop culture, and more specifically to the True School Community. Their informal name comes from a belief that eighty five percent of the human population is lost and fooled, and another ten percent are the source of that trickery. The remaining five percent are the Nation of Gods and Earths who live by a heterodoxical theology that is highly individualized and draws from Masonic mysticism, Gnosticism, Kemetic symbolism, esoteric numerology and a healthy dose of Black Nationalist rhetoric (Miyakawa 2005). Clarence 13X, the founder of the Nation of Gods and Earths attended Malcolm X's Harlem based Nation of Islam Temple Number seven (Haley and Shabazz 1964; Miyakawa 2005).

Through the supreme numbers and alphabet, as well as the twelve jewels (Knowledge, wisdom, understanding, freedom, justice, equality, food, clothing, shelter, love, peace, and happiness) and the nine basic lessons, Five Percenters sought community change through individual empowerment, spiritual education, and enlightenment. They

worked in the community through their temples, on the street ministry, and later through the lyrics and music of groups like X Clan. The ethical frame in this theology is espoused through a pedagogical strategy based in oral tradition, in which nine basic lessons are passed on from members to initiates. These lessons are focused on bringing about a greater degree of national consciousness, community control, and peace in the community and beyond. Five Percenters maintain that knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are the foundations of their philosophy (Miyakawa 2005; McQuillar 2007).

Philosophical underpinnings, rhetoric and actions of the Nations of Gods and Earths found their way into emergent Hip Hop culture in the early seventies since both communities were made of young black urbanites from the Bronx and Harlem areas. Clive Cambell, a.k.a. Kool DJ Herc, widely considered to be the Godfather of Hip Hop has been quoted on several occasions describing Five Percenter's significant presence and peacekeeping roles at house and block parties during the early years when gangs still controlled the Bronx (Chang 2005; Miyakawa 2005; Ogbar 2007).

Many "Gods" and "Earths" (males and females) attended the parties and clubs that Herc and other early DJ spun at. The philosophy that Five Percenter's espoused, in part, focused on community, love, and empowerment through vehicles like Black Nationalism (a connected and sympathetic ethos) were integrated in a more direct way through the works and rhetoric of Afrika Bambaataa's Universal Zulu Nation (UZN). Bam had attended several of Clarence 13 X's sermons, and had spent time in the Nation of Islam's temples. Furthermore, many Five Percenters actually joined the UZN, and

were participating members of what would go on to become the most enduring institution of Hip Hop (Hager 2004; Chang 2005; Ogbar 2007).

The focus on empowerment, community, education, and work that is manifest in UZN and Five Percenter doctrines is visible in the words, actions, and organizations of True Schoolers inside and out of the Atlanta area. Through this connection, among others, we are able to link the literature and lives of African Americans in the past to the present ideas of community in Hip Hop and more specifically, within True School. Much of this information combined with Black Nationalist ideology combines to create an intellectual basis for True School thought.

To further contextualize the community ethos of support and resistance in Hip Hop, a brief summary of artistic performance¹⁰ in the African American Experience will be of value.

Performance: From Griots to Emcees, creative reclamation and resistance

An irrevocable expression of the African heart, mind and soul. DXT

Early Performance

While churches, mosques, temples and other religious spaces have long been spaces for African Americans to congregate and share, the musical performances that took place were not limited to these early venues. Indeed musical performance has long been a tool in the African experience and has been employed for a wide range of purposes. Early accounts of performative oral traditions of griots and musical mercenaries reach back to the continent. These performers would verbally spar, mixing

¹⁰ Artistic and musical performances provided a strong medium through which African Americans could gain greater access to goods and services, but it should also be mentioned that sports performance has played a measurable and significant role in providing access to Black youth and beyond. Indeed, it is well understood on the streets in urban environments that along with street entrepreneurialism in the form of hustling or drug dealing, there are few other routes out of the ghetto.

gossip and satire in public spaces for political, economic, and personal reasons (Toop 1984). Accounts of this occur in the slave fields of the antebellum south where a competitive practice known as *Pattin Juba* was common (Watkins 2005).

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, Blues culture provided an outlet for African Americans to escape the wage enslavement of their lives at the time. Hunter argues that the spaces where Blues music took place were venues where African Americans could experience true freedom. At typically menial jobs, in the streets, and often in the home, Black folk were confined, even shackled by their experiences. Engagement in Blues music in venues where whites were excluded allowed African Americans to reclaim their bodies in time and space. In these clandestine performance halls, dance and song brought exuberance, personal gratification, communion and relief in hard times and often-dire conditions (Hunter 1997).

In the 1920s and 1930s, during prohibition Jazz and Swing provided the same relief as Gospel and later Blues. These new forms were more publicly accessible though. Unlike Blues, which was “low down music¹¹,” Jazz and Swing were experienced in larger and more public spaces (Hunter 1997; Barlow 1995). While it was still considered taboo by many people (whites included) to engage in such public displays, they still took place with increasing popularity. In the forties during Malcolm (X) Little’s early days as the zoot suiting “Detroit Red,” and the 1943 Harlem Riot, the dress, dance, and music of Bebop culture provided this same space for melanated people to cut loose, and get down

¹¹ “low down music,” was produced and consumed in private settings, usually under the auspices of avoiding prying, white, authoritative eyes. This is part of a musical continuum that may look like this: gospel>blues>rhythm and blues>jazz>bebop>rock and roll> funk> Hip Hop (personal compilation based on sources in text).

(Kelley 1994; Haley and Shabazz 1964). In the fifties it was Rock and Roll (Dawson and Propes 1992; Garofalo 1993).

By the 1960's urban poetry from acts like "the Last Poets," and Funk music from legends like James Brown helped establish more public communities of reclamation and resistance through fun, and still somewhat forbidden performance (Keyes 1996; George 2004; Chang 2005). From these particular beginnings, Black and Latin immigrants from the Caribbean as well as other Bronxites would continue a rich and often commodified tradition of performance and reclamation as they gave birth to Hip Hop and a whole new movement. Tricia Rose summarily states:

Black music has played an extraordinary role in the history of black people and in the world. It has helped black people to protect, nourish, and empower themselves and to resist forces operating against their freedoms. This music has not always been explicitly political or dubbed as 'protest music.' Indeed, its political significance has gone far beyond the confines of a direct protest standard, registering in the positive spirit of sounds tied to stories that exhibit a fundamental love of black people (Rose 2008: 264).

This brief review makes clear that both religion and performance have played key roles in the African American experience by providing outlets to educate, congregate, and emancipate people as they struggle to create beauty and meaning in hard situations. Hip Hop is a contemporary continuation of this struggle, and the community work that is done within True School stretches beyond its boundaries, through Hip Hop culture, and into a wide array of other areas. Now with this summary context through which to understand connections of religion, performance, and African American communities, we can look more deeply at the specifics of Hip Hop culture.

Hip Hop Culture

I think Hip Hop is more than community, I think it's culture, which has a way of informing what we would consider a community. So there's a shared experience on some level, whether it's just from the pure artistry of it, appreciation for the art form or it's born of a shared poverty, for example, which, as we all know, Hip Hop has come up and

*expressed through the pressure of contemporary society in being in the urban center.
(HHK-AK-016).*

*Hip-hop is a cultural expression of life passed on by our ancestors in which the elements
have taken new forms; it is the most significant renaissance of this era. Fabel*

Hip Hop history is deep, and only a broad outline is covered here, with a focus on what helped create the True School community in Hip Hop. Hip Hop had its beginnings in New York. The conditions in the Bronx during the late sixties and early seventies were difficult to say the least. The Cross Bronx Expressway had torn a chasm through a once integrated and diverse middle class community, and left a poverty and crime riddled shell. Nationalist social groups like the Black Panthers and Young Lords Parties had been dismantled by COINTELPRO¹² or fallen apart, and taken the community services they provided with them. Self-regulating youth organizations like the Savage Skulls, and Ghetto Brothers quickly filled the voids, creating the gang based communities and culture that would later be converted into Hip Hop (Hager 1982; Chang 2005).

Hip Hop Begins: 1973- 1979

As a whole, particularly in this country, people of African descent have always found a way to adjust to the circumstance and situation. With Hip Hop coming out of a social climate that was purposefully seeking to marginalize a group of people, seeking to ignore their existence, ignore their identity, I think what is unique is that these groups of young people in New York, in the Bronx in the latter 60s, early 70s found a way to validate themselves and we have continued to do that. And I think that's what makes Hip Hop so different is that we will seek to validate ourselves at any means and costs. (HHK-AK-023)

The first “element” of Hip Hop to gain public recognition was graffiti art when Taki 183 was recognized in 1971 in the *New York Times*, and while Graffiti art would not

¹² COINTELPRO, or the “counter intelligence program” was an interagency task force that sought to dismantle internal threats to American security from within their own organizations. Targets of this group were the American Indian Movement, the Young Lords, the Black Panther Party, and a number of other groups within the United States that sought reform of the dominant paradigm. COINTELPRO tactics were grim, and according to some sources are in a large part responsible for the dismantling of the anti war movement (Vietnam War), momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, and the collapse of most of the aforementioned groups. See Ward Churchill for more information (Churchill 2002).

be integrated fully into Hip Hop culture until five years later through the UZN, it was still an important date (Hager 1982; Castleman 2004; Chang 2005).

In 1973, Kingston born Clive Cambell, a.k.a. “DJ Kool Herc,” started a movement by throwing parties in the Bronx where he used Dub techniques and technology to mix Funk records while using local lingo to excite the crowd. Later, as the parties grew, dancers that he called “b-boys,” would compete and get the crowds going even more. Other deejays began throwing similar parties and within a few years two others gained strong reputations. Together these three early deejays became the “godfathers” of the movement. They would formalize and institutionalize what would soon be known as “Hip Hop,” a term coined by the “Furious Five’s” emcee “Cowboy.” (Toop 1984; Hager 1984; George 1991; Hebdige 2004; Chang 2005).¹³

While many people began to practice what was later to be known as “turntablism,” (deejaying) three powerful figures emerged in the then totally underground scene. Each of them hailed from a different part of the Bronx, and the three of them had faithful local followings in their respective neighborhoods. Kool Herc was in the western part of the south Bronx, Joseph Saddler a.k.a. “Grand Master Flash” was in the middle, and Kevin Donovan¹⁴, a.k.a. Afrikaa Bambaataa (Bambaataa Kahim Aasim) was in the south (Hager 1984). Flash brought technical saavy in generating foundation mixing methodology as well as technological innovation and showmanship that became hallmarks of the musical forms and created musical fellowship with both producers and

¹³ Afrika Bambaataa attributes the term “Hip Hop” to Lovebug Starski, a deejay from the South Bronx who would say “Hip Hop you don’t stop that makes your body rock.” Bam would then go on to use it in describing the newly forming culture (Keyes 1996).

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Bam’s true name and age are contested. It is well known that he does not like being asked about this information in interviews, and sources across fields, in and out of academia have a range of ideas about both.

consumers (Hager 1984; George 2004; Chang 2005). Later, with Producer Sugarhill Records, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five would go on to produce some of the most important Hip Hop ballads of the early years (Chang 2005).

Afrikaa Bambaataa, or “Bam” as he is affectionately known, is the most important figure of the first wave of underground (and later above ground) Hip Hop to this study. He was born to parents of Caribbean descent living in Manhattan, but moved to the Bronx River Project with his mother at an early age. She exposed him to a wide range of music and through her, her family and their community, Black Nationalist (Black Panther), and Black Muslim (Nation of Islam) ideology as well. As a youth he became a powerful Lieutenant in the Black Spades where he began to meet young Five Percenters. He was known for his ability to cross gang borders, create peace, and rally crowds, and in 1975 he formalized the ethical frame his upbringing and exposure had provided him, and sought a greater good for himself and his community (George 2004; Chang 2005; Ogbar 2007).

It was a combination of grim realities and liberating theologies that pushed Bam to reorganize the gangs into the Universal Zulu Nation (UZN). George Lipsitz posits, “Bambaataa and his Zulu nation used their knowledge as consumers of popular music to become skilled producers of it... ..Hemmed in by urban renewal, crime and police surveillance, and silenced by neglect from the culture industry, the school system, and city government, they found a way to declare themselves through music” (Lipsitz 1998: 26). It was this music, as well as dance and visual art that allowed the reforming gang members to transfer their energy and competitive spirit into something more economically and spiritually productive. According to Dick Hebdige,

In the Zulu nation he [Bambaataa] set out to replace ‘rumbles’ (fights) and drugs with rap, dance and Hip Hop style. He wanted to turn the gang structure into a positive force in the ghetto. Bambaataa’s dream is that a sense of community can be created within the community rather than being imposed by people coming from outside. He believes that through organizations like the Zulu Nation the people at the bottom of society will learn how to help themselves and each other (Hebdige 2004: 225).

Bam and the Zulus worked tirelessly to use elements of emergent HHK to bring the community up (Watkins 2005: 23-25).. In a 1982 *Vibe* interview, Bam tells Steve Hager that through the UZN Hip Hop culture is “...about survival, economics and keeping our people moving on” (Hager 1982:19). The Zulus solidified the tenuous unions between the four (original) Hip Hop elements (Rapping, Deejaying, Breaking, and Graff Art) of the time, and through his community focus and spirituality, Bam added that fifth, and important element to the game, knowledge, as the UZN pushed their agenda of “peace, love, unity, and having fun” (Chang 2005). Over the next thirteen years, Hip Hop grew, becoming increasingly popular and important in the mainstream and commercial music worlds. The 1980s were a period of intense diversification as it spread across the country and the globe. As new artists and styles showed up everywhere, Five Percenter ideology and Nation of Islam thought became more visible through the works of X-Clan and Public Enemy to name a few. The stage had been set for the beginning of an era in Hip Hop marked by diverse stylistic and lyrical content-based exposure in the mainstream as well as a peak in the popularity of conscious rap.

True School Hip Hop: The Golden Age: 1988-1992

In the late eighties, the next important phase of Hip Hop began; the Golden Age of Hip Hop. The Golden Age was a time when there was equal representation of the different trends in Hip Hop. Emcees and fans were in dialogue, each teaching the other and mixing street literature with Afrocentric literature as well as rhetoric from the Black

power and Nationalist movements. Charise Cheney must be recognized as the first academic to focus on “the Golden Age” as a point of academic inquiry. In her seminal book *Brothers Gonna Work It Out*, Cheney explores concepts like the gender binary, homophobia, and patriarchy within the politically charged Golden Age. She points to important discussions of how community may be challenged by deeply imbedded biases that effect the ways in which peoples gender identity and sexual orientation effect access to power, influence and information.¹⁵

The group of Hip Hop cultural consumers and producers who stayed loyal to the particular ethos and set of practices exemplified by Golden Age artists define the True School Community today. Jeff Chang describes the focus of definitional groups like Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions as a heterodoxical melding of Blackness and revolution that would create newer definitions of blackness. Founded in the works of the Watts Prophets, Gil Scott Heron, and H. Rap Brown, with a fusion of Five Percenter, multicultural Universal Zulu Nation, Black Nationalist, and Pan Africanist ethos and literature, was the first wave of what would become True Schoolers. These artists were dedicated in their lyrics and actions to supporting their local communities with whatever means were available to them (Chang 2005).

Groups like Public Enemy, specifically Professor Griff, and Boogie Down Productions, specifically KRS-ONE, would go on to be of particular importance to the

¹⁵ The discussion of sexual politics in Hip Hop is extremely important, but goes beyond the scope of this particular inquiry. In order to maintain focus on the particulars surrounding how community is defined and exchange informs these definitions, issues like gender have been saved for a later study. Additionally it is important to note that discussion of gender issues are often difficult and hard to gain as a researcher. As a person from outside the community I decided that community research that is more inclusive of gender would either be more effectively conducted after this initial work or by another researcher from within the community. Charise Cheney’s analysis can provide a foundational discussion of how sexual politics play out within the Golden Age, a period that significantly influences the stylistic and lyrical content of True School Hip Hop as well as that communities ethos.

True School Community in Atlanta. Both of these men invest significant time and energy in working to educate and empower their community. Professor Griff is nationally recognized for not only his contributions through Public Enemy, but more specifically for the vast amount of work he does in his hometown of Atlanta.

From around 1987 to around 1996¹⁶, ethnically mixed mainstream and underground audiences alike avidly consumed Hip Hop culture focusing on community development, spirituality, and reclamation (McQuillar 2007). Before being driven underground by its at one time, close cousin “gangsta rap,” Conscious rap shared the stage with a range of emergent styles of Hip Hop. The Golden age represented a time when all ideologies and styles in Hip Hop had near equal access to the mic.

Globalized Hip Hop: 1992-2000

The nineties saw a massive national and global explosion in Hip Hop cultural consumption and production. Hip Hop became the medium through which the world understood Blackness, and unfortunately the mainstream produced a version of this that Tricia Rose (2008) calls the “Black Gangsta-Pimp-Ho Trinity.” According to Mediamark Research INC, between 1995 and 2001, the white population consumed seventy to seventy-five percent of all Hip Hop music produced in the United States. Furthermore, in 2005, Hip Hop music sales represented nearly thirteen percent of all music sold in the United States (Rose 2008: 2) During this same period, new revolutionary acts like Dead Prez and Immortal Technique rocked the college underground scenes keeping the hard core side of True School kicking, while a second wave of underground conscious Hip Hop congealed.

¹⁶ The dates of the actual Golden Age are contested. I have described the largest possible window for that period, but many people agree that this period lasted from 1988-1992, and ended with the formal corporatization of True Schools close cousin, “gangsta rap.”

Rise of Southern Hip Hop

This same period also saw the rise of the “Third Coast” in Hip Hop, which was centered on the southern Black Mecca of Atlanta. From the “Dirty South came Bass, Crunk, Trap, and Snap Music. Artists like Outkast, TI, Little John, and others left an indelible mark on Hip Hop and popular music (Bynoe 2006; Sarig 2007). The rise of the South marked diversification of the Hip Hop industry at home and abroad. During this time, the True School Community surrounding WRFG radio station in Little Five points Atlanta kept the conscious movement in underground Hip Hop going while supporting one another.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a basic framework to understand the relationship of Blackness and Hip Hop in terms of spiritual practice, performance, and musical/cultural trends before and into Hip Hop. As discussed, African Americans have used religion and musical performance as ways to build communities of support to educate, enlighten and uplift people facing challenging and often dire circumstance. Hip Hop is a cultural tradition of performance that sits in a long line of famous musical ancestors and is tied to a history of resistance and reclamation. True School Hip Hop is typified by Golden Age style music and is generally understood as the activist community within Hip Hop culture.

The True School movement in Hip Hop has a measurable following in Atlanta Georgia, where community is built around nationally recognized figures, local organizations, and an ideology of support. By analyzing the actions and motivations behind the True School community’s provision of support to two elders in their

community in a time of intense duress, an ethos and its historical connections can be further illuminated, as well as the interconnectedness of the True School network at local and national levels.

The following chapter will describe how Atlanta True Schoolers fit into this historical review. I will also describe the composition of people who self identify as True School and provide short biographies of elders. A review of how the community went about supporting those elders will follow.

CHAPTER 4: HIP HOP ATLANTA

Introduction

Hip Hop really shows, it's a manifestation of post-Civil Rights Era where you have people of various ethnicities connecting across the culture, within Hip Hop culture, one shared culture. Many cultures in that one shared culture. And so you see people of various ethnicities appreciating the music and it's a way for people to connect (HHK-AK-017).

Before we can begin to understand how the True School Community fits into the theories and concepts found in the literature, a description of it will prove useful. These findings come from participant observation and interviews spanning five years and help situate how the community views itself, its geographic place within the US, and its cultural significance within the rest of Hip Hop. In the course of this discussion, I will introduce the two primary elders of concern in the community and describe how the community supports them.

Black Mecca

Because the city of Atlanta itself is a place where so many people come from so many places and because so many people come from so many places it allows that cultural diversity that I spoke about, and that's what makes it so dope, so fresh, so hot and so vitally important. What I'm looking forward to is when we begin to take it beyond the creative elements of Hip Hop and really begin to think beyond the models that we've seen and use Hip Hop as a spring board and those things are happening. On a certain level those things are happening. Politically, culturally, academically, socially, those things are happening. Definitely. So that's what makes Atlanta so important. Minister Server

Atlanta has been of great importance to Black people for many years. A significant percentage of respondents (insert percentage here) describe this importance as related to the city's great diversity of people and ideas, as well as its ability to change and adapt. In the first part of the twentieth century, two streets were providing safe outlets for African Americans to enjoy leisure time in public and commercial spaces. Decatur

Street was known as “the melting pot of Dixie,” as it provided a space for communities of African, Italian, Chinese, Greek, Jewish, and Western European origins to rub shoulders and break bread together. The second was Auburn Avenue or “Sweet Auburn,” the black version of “the Great White Way,” a shopping district in Five Points Atlanta where African Americans were excluded (Turner 1997). Sweet Auburn remained historically significant through the Civil Rights years, and was the site where Martin Luther King Jr. was born and raised. Currently it is a historic district, but ironically, like the Bronx, was split in two by a freeway, and has fallen into disrepair as crime and poverty have taken their toll.¹⁷

These two areas, the former of the working class, and the latter of the Black gentry, provided spaces to mingle and share in the day-to-day blessings of life. They also became entertainment hotspots and *the* places to find top African American talent at the time. Music and entertainment at the time was similar to Hip Hop today: there was a spectrum from sacred to profane, clean to dirty, and educational to mind numbing. The dance halls and concert venues were places where the Black community gathered in solidarity for entertainment, lamentation, and reclamation. By the late seventies, the first wave of migration of African Americans back to the south had gained momentum. Atlanta with an African American mayor was at the heart of this. In 1977, Jack “the Rapper” Gibson, a DJ and publisher working at WERD FM, America’s first Black owned radio station, created a music convention called “The Family Affair,” which ran for almost twenty years and was an important proving ground for Black artists inside and out of Hip Hop (Davey D 2000, Sarig 2007).

¹⁷ It should be noted, that many working class and economically disenfranchised communities are dismantled in the name of “urban renewal” and growth. Several other major cities in the US have bisected vibrant city neighborhoods with highways, and “gentrification,” is common across the US (Fullilove 2005).

According to one respondent (HHK-AK-021), the second massive wave of African American migration took place starting around 1989, the early years of the Golden Age of Hip Hop. This was due to a combination of occurrences. Publications in magazines like *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence* described the top ten cities in America in which Black folk could flourish. At the top of this list was Atlanta, which had been long described as a thriving city with a strong African American base (Jones 1978; Robinson 1996; Sjoquist 2000; Ferguson 2002).

In the entertainment world, TV shows like *Different World*, and Spike Lee's *School Days*, showcased African American colleges in the Atlanta area like Morehouse, Spellman, and Clark-Atlanta. With this concentration of colleges as well as a growing entertainment scene, Spring Break and Black Greek picnic/parties like "Freaknik," drew increasing crowds. It was in these crowds that Atlanta music titans like Outkast were able to gain national recognition.

A knowledgeable respondent (HHK-AK-021) continues describing the national shift towards the south within the music industry. Big time producers like Antonio "LA" Reid and Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds from LA, and execs from New York based Def Jam would move to the area as well as R&B and Hip Hop artists from all over, especially the North East. All of this combined to create conditions that contributed to the rise of the "Third Coast" (after New York and LA) in Hip Hop in what was quickly becoming a Black Mecca (Sarig 2007).

Institutions that are important to the formulation of the Black ethos embedded in Hip Hop would also make significant inroads in Atlanta. The Nation of Islam, Shrine of the Black Madonna, Auser Auset Society, Temple of Hip Hop, and others would solidify

their physical presence, and through community work, espouse their rhetoric of empowerment, sustainability, and reclamation through action. This ethos is taken beyond Hip Hop and Blackness in the melting pot of Atlanta, and in 2007 this became observable on a large scale. The US Social Forum, activists, academics, and free thinkers' alternative meeting to the World Economic Forum being held that same year, took place in venues all across downtown Atlanta. Participants from around the world would cover a wide range of topics that included Hip Hop as a target, tool, and discourse. Atlanta's progressive community came out in force to organize and educate and Hip Hop Atlanta, specifically True Schoolers, were a part of that.

Atlanta, Georgia: Center of the “Third Coast”

That Black people, all Black people here in America migrated from the south, everybody. So all of that culture, all of that spiritual history from slavery on is in our bones, it's in our blood, it's in our mindset, it's in our walk, it's in our talk. It's in our spirit and Atlanta encompasses all that. I mean, a lot of the fire that you feel from these kids is just something that's resonating from the past here, the past spirit, the past, just in the layman's terms, the past. The past is very much a part of them and that's why you can hear the soul when you listen to these guys because they turn the music here in the south, which most people would cringe when they listen to it, into something that's viable, and that says a whole lot. Think about it. When most people say, nah, when it was said Hip Hop for our generation wasn't going to work, Atlanta created another sound completely and made the world shift, even New York, the world! That's powerful. That's powerful (HHK-AK-019).

The growth in southern entertainment and the massive influx of Black people to the south proved to be fertile grounds for the already sprouting seeds of Hip Hop to begin maturing and flourishing. In the mid eighties and initially an extension of the Miami Bass scene, Atlanta started its own sound with artists like the Jermaine Dupri produced duo Kris Kross in the early nineties to Outkast and beyond. Increasingly, artists in Atlanta drew the nation's focus away from most other areas. New forms of Hip Hop started or were popularized through these local artists. Lil John popularized Memphis based Crunk music while TI would create “Trap” Music, and homage and discussion of the D-Boy

(drug-boy) scene and urban criminal underbelly of Atlanta. C-Lo and the Goodie Mob would rep “the Dungeon Family,” while producers like Dangermouse would create more radio friendly and melodic music. Homegrown record execs like Jermaine Dupri would continue moving up the corporate ladder and exerting increasing influence in the industry and community. In 2006 Yung Joc would keep Atlanta on the national scene with “Snap” before the South became less of a musical genre, and more of a permanent part of urban music as stylistic elements generated in the area were integrated far and wide (HHK-AK-021; HHK-AK-028; HHK-AK-026; all confirmed by Sarig 2007). All of these different neighborhoods in Hip Hop culture are bound together by a common struggle, by a family tradition. One respondent states this directly: “Atlanta’s Hip Hop community is also deeply rooted in southern tradition. It’s a more down south, family orientated type of community where, you know; we all represent the same struggle, so to speak” (HHK-AK-013).

True School: the “conscious” community in Hip Hop Culture: Atlanta, GA

[I]t’s just that when you deal with community, remember I was telling you with community I’m thinking about the big picture. I’m not just talking about entertainment aspect. The scene is the entertainment aspect. The community is everything, it’s the spiritual side, the family side, the emotional side, the, did I say spiritual side? Yeah, the financial side, it’s a little bit of everything. When I think of community, the educational side, [the] activism side (HHK-AK-024).

As a general description of True School was provided in the introduction, this section will focus more on the perceptions of community members relative to Hip Hop culture in general. True Schoolers in Atlanta are tied to southern traditions in a myriad of ways as well as Hip Hop in general, but there are some important differences that I would like to address. First, as indicated in the methods section, only one of the 17 people interviewed actually came from Atlanta, with thirteen of them coming from the North East. This part of the country, especially Long Island, is generally understood to be the

seat of the conscious movement as represented by the large number of Golden Age artists that hail from there. True School or conscious rap is produced all over the country, indeed around the world, but since the Golden Age, has been understood to have its deepest roots in the North East. The True School community in Atlanta has a strong contingent representing this geographic area.

A second way to differentiate the sample is that all respondents that participated in semi-structured interviews identified themselves as part of Hip Hop. Of the 17, 15 identified directly as the KRS-One “I am Hip Hop” version that carries with it a variety of implications. “I am Hip Hop,” is a signifier of identity and community connection, based in commitment to an ethos or a shared background. It is a mark that speaks of dedication to Hip Hop Culture as a movement, an identity, and a framework through which anything is possible. One respondent describes his identity as Hip Hop in the following quote:

What makes me Hip Hop is that I spread Hip Hop and one of the elements of Hip Hop is the people. So, that’s what makes me Hip Hop. I am Hip Hop because I dress Hip Hop. I am Hip Hop because I talk Hip Hop. I am Hip Hop because I walk Hip Hop. And this is without even getting on stage and performing Hip Hop. So without even getting on stage and performing Hip Hop, I am Hip Hop and others are, you know, others that walk, talk, dress, and sing, you know, help spread it through the exchange of ideas and music or just through becoming a musician yourself (HHK-AK-011).

Another respondent describes his moment of conversion to Hip Hop, when he became “Hip Hop.” “When you recognize you fell in love with Hip Hop, you can see, yo, I can actually use this vehicle to create social change” (HHK-AK-016) The commitment to using Hip Hop as a tool for constructive social change is definitively True School. Saying “I am Hip Hop,” is a way for True Schoolers to show other Hip Hop participants and to a lesser extent, people outside of the community that they identify

strongly with the conscious movement in Hip Hop most commonly associated with the Golden Age.

Third, many informants articulated strong opinions concerning the differences between “mainstream,” and “underground,” Hip Hop in which the True School movement is found. A range of ideas of the divisions became clear. For one interviewee it was clear. He states, “Well, it’s like this. The mainstream is corporate interests, period. The underground is underground” (HHK-AK-015). Young respondents and outliers did not express as much antipathy with the mainstream, while respondents (often times older) with a higher degree of vested interest in True School described it as follows:¹⁸

Mainstream media is what it is. The mainstream media is about a business of sex, violence and all that stuff sells, and that’s what they going to show. They never show anything positive about anything really see anything positive about Hip Hop on the news. But let something negative come out, they want to do that. They’ll show that. That’s the media (HHK-AK-025).

Professor Griff describes the mainstream focus on negative as...

...a frequency in Hip Hop that’s very destructive. There’s a frequency in Hip Hop that married the criminal element on to Hip Hop and you seeing some shit now in the name of Hip Hop, that ain’t Hip Hop (Professor Griff: HHK-AK-027).

Another respondent who is a University educator in the Atlanta area adds to this stating:

¹⁸ One respondent produced an eloquent summation of the Hip Hop/ American status quo discussion, and while it extends beyond the focus of this research, I still feel that it contributes to the dialogue of mainstream Hip Hop. It reads as follows “We live in a patriarchal world, so we live in a capitalist country that’s part of the globalization of capitalism, so what makes the most money is right, regardless. And if that means you have to, and exploiting sex is part of US culture. So it’s certainly not just a manifestation in Hip Hop, it’s a manifestation of a global reality and a national reality but the greater issue of it is that, and this is also not new to US culture, the worst of humanity gets projected into Black art for what they feel like they could not safely do to that extreme... they pay a willing Black person to do. So, it’s like, certain things that they wouldn’t necessarily do they do with Blackface. You know, the biggest consumers of Hip Hop are young white males last I checked. And the ones who are making the most money off it are white male executives. So obviously this appeals to them, this is part of their culture, their value system and their undervaluing of women, clearly. But they won’t necessarily do that or tolerate that in their own art forms. They won’t tolerate that, but they’ll go ahead and project that into our culture and they pay enough of us enough to prostitute ourselves. We’ll do it. But again, that’s not new in US culture. So no, it’s not unique but sometimes I feel like the Hip Hop community uses that as an excuse. I don’t really care if it’s unique or not, it’s not acceptable. So if everybody in the world is doing it, it still wouldn’t be okay because it doesn’t further our community in a positive way, and it doesn’t honor me as a Black woman and therefore it also doesn’t honor you as a Black man so it’s not acceptable, period.”

Mainstream radio, television, etc. is presenting a falsified representation, or replica of what Hip Hop music and culture is. So I choose not to participate in that. I participate in what represents my culture and so, you know, on the underground; that's where that integrity and that representation of true Hip Hop can be found. But it's very...it's just not readily available, unfortunately. At least on a larger scale, the mainstream is kind of squashing its existence to a large degree (HHK-AK-023).

A fourth indicator of True school affiliation described by informants is a recognition that within the True School Community at least, there is an ethos of reciprocity, social work, civic participation, and a commitment to social justice and family spirit. It is something that is very important to note at this point is the way in which True Schoolers discuss Hip Hop. A professor from Clark Atlanta (HHK-AK-023) contextualizes this commitment in relation to the mainstream:

Hip Hop maintains a certain level of integrity and it also sticks to the founding that said that Hip Hop was about unity, peace, having fun, love. That sort of spirit and so when that's not presented, and what we have in mainstream does not adhere to those ideals, it's not Hip Hop. It sounds like Hip Hop, it may look somewhat like it, it's probably even what we can call a derivative, but it's not Hip Hop.

Her concise statement reaches back to Universal Zulu Nation roots and helps create boundaries between the conscious movement of True Schoolers, and what is most generally understood through mainstream representation. It is this ethos bound in a Hip Hop upbringing that provides one level of discussion for provision of support to community members.

It is recognized that there are a range of definitions of Hip Hop that all come from specific contexts, and have specific intentions in their use. Additionally not all definitions are recognized. Each one is contested, and the various camps within Hip Hop have a variety of opinions in terms of the scope of how the term Hip Hop is used, how far back it applies, and what it may be used for. During the interview process, one outlier who did not identify as True School helped frame this point stating:

My definition of Hip Hop might be different from your definition of Hip Hop. That does not mean that we ain't Hip Hop. How Hip Hop relates to or speaks to me might be different from some body from Saint Louis, or Arkansas or the west coast. You know, it speaks to us in different ways, So definitely the culture aspect is still there from the way we dress, even from dancing, even from some of the music. The music might be different, but the community itself encompasses the culture, so to speak (HHK-AK-024).

Bringing this discussion of interpretations of Hip Hop full circle another respondent adds:

I'll reiterate this, that Hip Hop is a vehicle that many different people for many different agendas can use. I think it's initially intended as a continuation of human rights, civil rights movement but it's also become a very important component of mass media (HHK-AK-016).

Among True Schoolers there are many ideas as well, but there is consistent use in particular contexts, and it is tied to the True School ethos of Hip Hop as identity and empowerment. The quote by HHK-AK-023 on the top of page 53 exemplifies just that.

A sixth important notion of Hip Hop amongst respondents, that can sum up the other five points is while True Schoolers recognize the range of ideas about what Hip Hop means, they purposefully use the term Hip Hop to describe participation in the culture that matches their ideology. If you are rapping conscious rap, you are Hip Hop, and so is what you are spitting (rapping). They champion their version of Hip Hop as *the* version of Hip Hop. Everything else just *looks like* Hip Hop. This is consistent with a dedication to the ethos of Hip Hop as social change. Throughout the course of this analysis, quotes of True Schoolers are employed in describing the “conscious” identity, actions, or motivations within Hip Hop unless otherwise noted. More often than not, when True Schoolers say “Hip Hop,” they mean True School, their version of Hip Hop.

Finally, Hip Hop among True Schoolers is understood as the complex interaction of spirituality, identity and performance, and resistance (or activism). Professor Griff supports his sister community member's claim connecting the activism in Hip Hop to a long tradition of empowerment, identity, and spirituality:

Well that's the way that we deal with it. We don't separate it. It's white people who write about Hip Hop that separate it. Black nationalism, Hip Hop is one and the same. Our spirituality we put into the music. How you going to make a Hip Hop song and put no spirit into it? You understand what I'm saying? So when I listen to a Hip Hop song, a good one, I hear the Mau Mau, I hear Zulu, I hear the Dogon, I don't separate the two. I hear my grandmother in church. I don't separate the two (Professor Griff: HHK-AK-027).

For him, and many other respondents, there is no separation between identity, performance, and activism (among others) within the Hip Hop nexus. Like Blackness it is a total foundation upon which to build life and meaning through action and word. This statement from a community elder is directly supported by a wealth of literature concerning Blackness, spirituality, and Hip Hop. At the other end of the age spectrum of my sample was a young lady who I met in Little Five Points. This up and coming deejay expressed similar sentiments as her elder describing this same series of connections:

We definitely have that because inside the Hip Hop community there's also what they call the Temple of Hip Hop, like Minister Server. A lot of it is very spiritual. Again, with Africa Bambaattaa, the music, the drumbeat is from Africa. A lot of that has transferred here, how can I put this? Our message is spiritual. It's like the hymns we made up when we were in the fields, it's pretty much the same thing. It's just the way we're delivering it is different. We still make Negro spirituals, we're just not Negroes. So the spiritual support is definitely there. We've always had that bridge between God and Hip Hop, whether it's Allah, Jesus Christ, Yaweh, so we definitely have the spiritual support which is more than important. This is more than just a job to us, it's more the music, it's the way we live, it is our religion. The spiritual support is definitely there (HHK-AK-012).

Another respondent contextualizes the impact of True School Hip Hop in her life stating:

Hip Hop is my life and God is using me within this culture to make an impact and to make a difference and what he has for me is for me, if I benefit financially or not, I'm still going to have to do what I'm supposed to do. So, I'm spiritually led within Hip Hop, and everybody that knows me pretty much knows that about me.

I think this is what I know for me, Hip Hop has made me an intellectual. I have a mind of my own; you understand what I'm saying? And all the people I know in Hip Hop, they're not that heavily influenced by mainstream society. They're not influenced by the street, they're not influenced by, they're influenced by, it's like something inside of them. They're influenced by, I don't know. It's kind of hard to describe, I'm influenced just by, I'm spiritually guided, period. I'm spiritually guided. And a lot of people I know are spiritually guided (HHK-AK-020).

Her statement supports the identity complex within Hip Hop as a reflection of historical spirituality and performance as informed by local experiences, as well as a

dedication to spiritual practice and educational advancement through the vehicle of Hip Hop. True Schoolers often express these sentiments and in my fortunate experience, are often happy to share their opinions and ideas.

Questions about how people experience the connections between performance, spirituality and the African American identity were met with warm responses, and the vast majority of respondents described strong connections linking Hip Hop and spirituality. Over one third of the sample claimed that Hip Hop itself is spirituality, while almost the entire other two thirds claimed that Hip Hop was a fusion of faith, pulling from and respecting contributions from many spiritual paths. Answers to my question of whether or not spirituality existed within True School Hip Hop are graphically represented in figure 1.

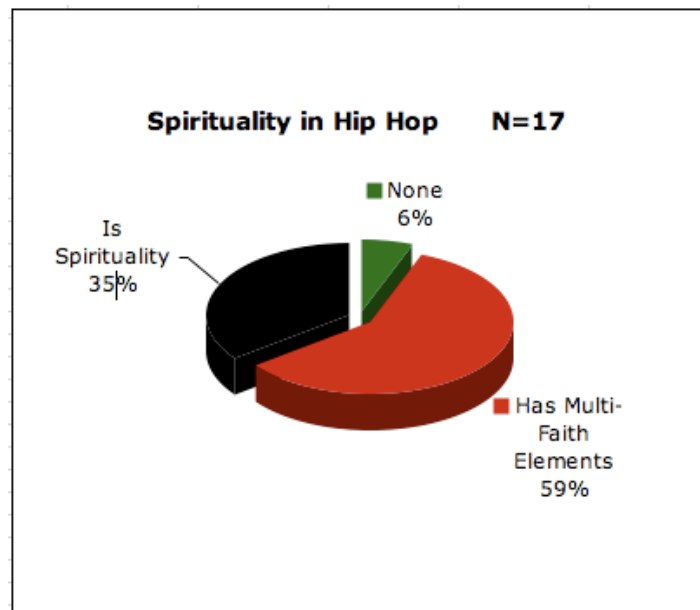


figure 1.

The depth of True Schoolers understanding of the connections between identity as a Hip Hopper, spirituality, and the African American experience are here described by another eloquent respondent and educator:

So my identity first of all, I see myself as a spiritual being, happening to be in a human body. As such I have a connection to God and God consciousness, and through that, that allows me to be connected to artistic expression, because I do believe that how we express ourselves artistically is directly related to our connection with God or Supreme Being or the Creator or whatever you call your spiritual center. So that's the first thing. Secondly, I see myself as an African and that to me directly relates to my connection with Hip Hop because Hip Hop is a, what you could call a co-culture, subculture of African diasporic culture. So therefore all of the elements of Hip Hop, be it DJ, Graffiti, B-boying, the MC, all of those have a direct lineage to African cultural expressions, and so, therefore it's just almost to me innate that I would be part of a Hip Hop movement because it's just encoded in my DNA, that how I view it (HHK-AK-026).

Another respondent who is a deejay at WRFG gives another example of some True Schoolers heterodoxical understanding of the relationship between spirituality and Hip Hop and its transformational power.

Black, white, old, young, you name it, let's start to one, recognize that change is inevitable And there's change getting ready to take place and it's with hip hop, what's interesting of the timing of what's happening with Hip Hop is synonymous with what's happening with the planet. There's a paradigm shift getting ready to take place, or it's taking place as we speak. It's been talked about in the circles of those that study the Mayan calendar, those who study the Osirian Resurrection within Hemitic? Science and even those that are Christians, Jews and Muslims. We talk about the days of Revelation. We're getting ready to go through a shift that is going to change the way everything is done. None of us know how extreme and apparent that shift may be, but we know that it's getting ready to take place. And what's interesting is that hip hop is synonymous with it. Who's to say that that's a coincidence. Must be a reason why Hip Hop was birthed right around the time when this shift is taking place (HHK-AK-015).

It is this diverse understanding of spirituality, mixed with a commitment to the community itself, that informs some of the bedrock elements (rituals and celebrations; myths and images; and a belief system all to be described later), that according to Keller (2007), are necessary for any group to sustain itself. This ideology can be observed in the community organizations and institutions in which True Schoolers participate.

Community Institutions

Atlanta has three main what they would call urban contemporary stations that specialize in rap music that they call Hip Hop music. They specialize in that, then they have two strong community, I mean two strong collegiate stations at Georgia State and Georgia Tech, which have won collegiate awards for radio. Then you have WRFG, which to me is the cornerstone to all of that, because that's the first place where Hip Hop was played on the airwaves in Atlanta. Most cities may have a common, one of those, but they don't have, very rarely a combination of that. Atlanta has that, man, and that's a blessing for us (Minister Server HHK-AK-028).

Within Atlanta there are a number of institutions that are of significance and worthy of note. While True Schoolers volunteer, work in, or run several of them, WRFG 89.3 FM community radio station, is the one that I will focus on in this review. It is a non-profit organization that has been on the air for the exact same amount of time that Hip Hop has been on the planet. In 1973, this community radio station was founded on the principle of providing public access to programming for specific communities:

1. Those who continue to be denied free and open access to the broadcast media,
2. Those who suffer oppression or exploitation based upon class, race, sex, age, creed, or sexual orientation.

WRFG has been a historically significant station for African Americans in general, as well as for Hip Hop, and continues to be so today with three separate shows dedicated to Hip Hop on six days a week.¹⁹ The rest of the station's programming reflects a dedication to diversity and an internationalist stance, speaking volumes of the melting pot that is Atlanta. Award winning shows cover diverse genres and topics from around the globe, from discussing social justice to just having fun. This inclusive material embodies what the True School Hip Hop zeitgeist espouses. One respondent that I bumped into across multiple venues while conducting participant observation and eventually interviewed at his home on an agricultural co-operative on the edge of Little Five Points expresses his ideas about WRFG in the following quote:

Thank God for WRFG as an example in this city, this so-called new capital of Hip Hop, the NY of the South or whatever. I give thanks for WRFG because I think that by having access to 100,000 watts, there can be accountability to the Hip Hop community. For example, case in point, with the recent benefits that we've had from Minister Server and Professor Griff, that reflects some of the accountability that I know I personally feel as a youth of the Hip Hop generation, be it in my 30s or whatever, but coming up that's all I know (HHK-AK-016).

¹⁹ All respondents within the sample are within one degree of separation from WRFG radio station, and many of them work there directly.

While WRFG is one of the most important spaces for True Schoolers, several other organizations are also worth noting. Nation Time Syndicate, a collective dedicated to education and spirituality in Atlanta, has been spreading the ethos of conscious Hip Hop for over fifteen years. They are an organization that has been sporadically active in the sample area and several interviewees as well as True Schoolers encountered during participant observation are members of this group. The Temple of Hip Hop is a Ministry, Archive, School Society that seeks to empower Hip Hoppers and beyond through bringing the word in the “Hip Hop Declaration of Peace” into action. It is a national organization founded by Blastmaster KRS-ONE, who was ordained as “Hip Hop’s Master Teacher” by Afrika Bambaataa’s Universal Zulu Nation. In addition to these organizations are others too numerous to list, that have multiple objectives ranging from consciousness raising, food distribution, political representation and spiritual mentorship to dance instruction, outdoor access for young people and prison outreach. Atlanta, the cultural melting pot of the South, is home to activism in all its forms.

Minister Server

I feel blessed, I feel, I don't know what I did in another life, but I'm doing a future life to be this blessed, But I feel truly honored that I believe that when it comes to Hip Hop spirituality that I'll be able to share some insights that you know, God has given me and my life an enabled me to live a life of health love, awareness, wealth, peace and prosperity and other people would express that same thing at whatever they choose to via the way spirit has allowed me to serve and thats no if-and-buts about that for me, and it's a pleasure knowing what I'll be doing my entire lifetime on the planet earth (Minister Server: HHK-AK-028).

Minister Server “the Hip Hop Life Coach,” has spent over twenty-five years dedicated to expanding and sustaining Hip Hop Culture at home and abroad. He was born in the mid sixties in Atlantic City, New Jersey. His life as a child was typical for his time and place, and by the time he was a teenager, the performative movement that was sweeping the city just to his north had drawn his interest. His first major engagement in

the elements of Hip Hop was at his high school where he would rap competitively in class when his teachers weren't around. At his prom he performed Rappers Delight (or the message?) on stage. He continued as a proficient emcee, but became more interested in deejaying and turntablism²⁰, where he spent most of his energy through his college years. While pursuing a degree in communication, Server met his wife, an Atlanta native, and moved there soon after. Server had always been aware of spirituality and social activism, and as an adult was active in all elements of Hip Hop culture except for breaking. His fashion sense was just too fresh to be spinning on the floor and getting all dirty.

In the early nineties he became an active member of WRFG community radio station, hosting and producing shows, and helping the station run smoothly. His first show was called "The Conscious Zone," and showcased artists with progressive and uplifting messages about empowerment and education at both individual and community levels. His second show "Tu Wa Moja," was a cultural talk show focusing on the spiritual and metaphysical sides of Hip Hop culture, and provided a public space where community members throughout the listening area could call in and dialogue about politics, education, spirituality, and other topics.

In 1992, he and other like-minded individuals, now known as True Schoolers, formed Nation Time Syndicate, a collective that extended the spiritual focus of Hip Hop on his show into action in the community. Through this vehicle his skills as a writer, educator, organizer, and activist began to garner national attention. In 2003 he completed his Masters in Metaphysical Thought and was ordained as a minister by the Barbara King

²⁰ Deejaying is the art of crowd control through fluid music selection. Turntablism is the art of manipulating records and mixing technology to create new sounds and music, and is most commonly associated with "scratching" records.

School of Ministry in Atlanta. Here he formalized his understanding of “New Thought Metaphysics,” most commonly seen in Unity churches.

This interpretation of spirituality is inclusive of contributions from many doctrines and basically contends that we are all divine spiritual beings, and that we are responsible to love and educate one another. It is my opinion, that the same heterodoxical approach found in the Ahmadiya movement is present in New Thought, and that this willingness to integrate new material is a hallmark of Hip Hop as well. The same year Server was ordained as a minister, he became a personal spiritual advisor of KRS-One who appointed him the national organizer and official Minister of The Temple of Hip Hop. Over the next few years Minister Server toured the country several times with “the Teacha” (KRS-One) and appeared on five tracks of his 2004 release “Keep Right.”

After returning to Atlanta in 2005, the avid organizer and inspirational speaker founded Hip Hop Ministries. This organization takes a heterodoxical approach to religion, race, and identity with an inclusive embrace to wisdom from all cultural and individual sources, a reflection of New Thought teaching and consistent with the Ahmadi discourse. Through Hip Hop Ministries, Server now holds weekly events in the Atlanta area called “Food For the Spirit,” through which he shares his personal testimony of spiritual-based community and self-empowerment through Hip Hop. He currently tours the country giving lectures and talks on such matters. While home, the minister works intimately with the city, developing community education programs for children of all ages. In both his personal and his private life, Minister Server seeks to embody the positive lessons that Hip Hop can teach, and works diligently in his community.

His investment in time and energy is significant, as is his dedication to the ethos found explicitly in the Temple of Hip Hop Doctrine of Peace, the Universal Zulu Nation Infinity Lessons, and traditionally understood texts. He is, in many ways a living embodiment of True School ideology, and is recognized as such at local, national, and international levels.

In the spring of 2008, Minister Server's house caught on fire, and burned. He and his family lost over ninety percent of their belongings and were left on the street with almost nothing to their name. The support that the Hip Hop True School Community, their family, and friends provided them, was all that saved them from complete personal catastrophe.

Professor Griff

You say my identity, first of all I am a Black man. So when you say related to Hip Hop, Hip Hop comes from the Black experience. Hip Hop comes from the essence of, Hip Hop comes from the essence of who I am. Hip Hop comes from, whether we pull it down from the etheric realm, or we pull it down from the spirit world. Nonetheless, we gave birth to Hip Hop. So you know I am Hip Hop to a deep esoteric sense. I am Hip Hop... ..Hip Hop is something that we brought down and made an art form... ..when I introduce myself I tell people I'm God having a human experience called Griff. So don't get it twisted, don't get me confused to being a Muslim, Christian, Hebrew or whatever. I'm all of that and then some (Professor Griff: HHK-AK-027).

Public Enemy's "Minister of Information," was born in the early sixties to a large family in Long Island, New York. Early on he developed a strong appreciation for martial arts, and during the 1980s provided security for Hip Hop parties through a variety of organizations. While working with Security of the First World, later known as "SW1" he met Chuck D and ended up as an intermediary between Public Enemy and SW1. In the late eighties, after a firestorm of controversy over interview material taken out of context, Professor Griff stepped out of the limelight of Public Enemy and decided to pursue his own career. During his solo career he formed his own band, the Asiatic

Disciples, through which he continued supplying hard-hitting polemic work that was largely in the form of spoken word.

It must be noted that the controversy surrounding Professor Griff's misquoted statements are often a major point of contention and focus when considering the Minister of Information. It is also of note that Professor Griff's direct community within Public Enemy was deeply challenged, and caused a significant amount of factionalism and discussion within the Hip Hop community surrounding Public Enemy. Years later Public Enemy and Professor Griff were able to rebuild their relationship and repair some of the damage that incident caused within the National True School community as well as their immediate community.²¹

According to earlier interviews, Professor Griff was a member of the Nations of Gods and Earths. In his personal interview for this research he revealed broader spiritual underpinnings (as indicated by his quote at the beginning of this section). Indeed the community focus, understanding of self, and heady revolutionary ethos was present, but Professor Griff portrayed a more cosmic connection to the universe, extending beyond Hip Hop, religion, or ethnicity. The identity that Griff shared with me encapsulated the very essence of the diversity of the African American experience through Hip Hop.

Through my personal interactions with him, as well as accounts from several other respondents, it was clear that, like Minister Server, Professor Griff was a man of both words and action. He tours the country giving talks and lectures on a variety of

²¹ The controversy surrounding Professor Griff's exit from Public Enemy is complicated and due to this as well as the focus of my work, I have chosen to only describe it in brief. For more information, see Professor Griff's book listed here:

Griffin, Richard "Professor Griff"

2009 *Analytix: 20 Years of Conversations and Enter-views with Public Enemy's Minister of Information*. Rathsi Publishing. Atlanta Georgia

topics, and within the Atlanta community provides many services. Several respondents have close mentor-based relationships with Professor Griff, and speak of his dedication to personal lives in the local community. Once a week Professor Griff provides free self-defense classes for women in Atlanta parks, and is well known inside and out of the True School Community as an elder of Hip Hop and the community in general.

In February of 2008, after some shady technicians came out to look at a gas leak, that was determined not to be dangerous, Professor Griff's house exploded. He lost everything. Within his home was a vast store of cultural material, books, records, magazines, original recordings, videos, and more that were an archive of Hip Hop. Much of the material there was irreplaceable and Hip Hop culture, specifically folk from Atlanta lost a significant library along with most of Professor Griff's personal effects.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided some basic connections between the Blackness and Hip Hop and True Schoolers in Atlanta Georgia. Additionally, I described institutions that are of importance to the True School community and background concerning the two elders, Minister Server and Professor Griff. In the next chapter I will describe the community's response to the house fires as well as how they support each other on a day-to-day basis. I will discuss this in the context of a discussion of how this fits into conceptions of community and exchange in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 5: TRUE SCHOOLERS REACH OUT TO THEIR ELDERS

The main thing is that the community came together and supported these brothers. Let's say if nobody could have paid any money, they still all came together, it would have been the energy and the love that they gave these brothers that night that was also helpful. It wasn't just about the physical money (HHK-AK-025).

It is a strange coincidence that two elders in the same community would suffer almost identical catastrophic loss within months of each other. In both of these house fires there was extreme loss. Professor Griff's house literally blew up, and he lost most everything he owned. Since I am discussing how the community is reaching out to provide support I think it is useful to discuss the value of what was lost. I will not go into great detail, except to say that it is nearly impossible to put a value on what was lost. In the following passage Professor Griff shares his feeling while describing the value of what he lost as well as the value of the support from the community:

How do you put a value on somebody giving you a pair of sneakers when you ain't got shit? I can't. How do I put a value on a book? By Count Volney, who I thought I'd never see again. How do you put a value on an old second hand copy of one of the Holy Korans that was written originally from right to left? Put a value on that. But then again let's turn around and put a value on what I lost. You're talking millions of dollars worth of stuff I lost. How do you explain that to an insurance company? How do you explain to an insurance companies that I went through rites of passage when I was 18, 19 and you know, the stuff that was given to me from one of the Zulu chiefs, gave me a spear, or one of my martial arts instructors gave me a broad sword. What kind of value do you put on that? And it's burned, it's gone now. Come on. I can't put a value on that stuff.

In this intimate response, it is clear that the loss of cultural and personal materiel is priceless, as is the gift of anything when you lose everything. In a move of solidarity and support, True Schoolers at home in Atlanta, across the United States, and in countries as

far away as Japan and England gave what they could to support Minister Server and Professor Griff in their time of need. This chapter is dedicated to describing exactly who was responsible for provision of support, and what that support looked like.

Who gave support

So, but, I've seen it done. You know what I'm saying? With Minister Server, Professor Griff, you know, the way the Hip Hop community rallied together for those two brothers, it was beautiful. I mean, the house was packed. You know, the performers came out and did their thing, everybody came out and lended their energy whether from the patrons paying the money to get in or the artists donating their time and their energy to bring the people in (HHK-AK-011).

Support came from local, national, and international levels, but as geographic proximity to the elders themselves increased, so did the level of direct participation. It is important to again note, that Professor Griff and Minister Server are elders in their community because of their vast knowledge of Hip Hop culture and spirituality, their visibility in the Hip Hop scene, and the amount of work, time and energy that they put into the community itself. When questioned about who exactly provided support in the community, respondents reflected membership in the categories that are represented in Figure 2.

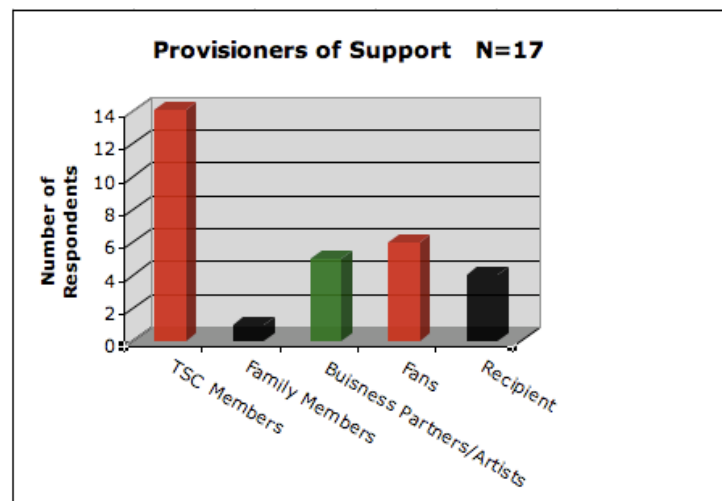


Figure 2.

Several of these categories overlap, but the main point is clear. It is the True School community that is providing support, whether it be fans, business people, family, or fellow artists. Estimates from Minister Server, the organizer of the benefit concert, and several of the performers range from three to four hundred people showed up to the benefit concert. Many core members of the True School community (who are respondents) work directly with WRFG community radio station and were responsible for the organization and implementation of benefit concerts. These core members gave significantly more in terms of financial and social capital contributions such as organizing, marketing, participating in, or performing at the benefit concert.

A fundraiser was held on July 3, 2008, at a venue called the “Five Spot” on Euclid in Atlanta. As mentioned earlier, this venue hosts a variety of hip and creative events often times with Hip Hop Deejays, and caters to a diverse group of people. The Five Spot is in the heart of an area in Atlanta called “Little Five (Points),” and is a cultural hub for people who have a strong interest in the arts, alternative lifestyles, and often times liberal progressive ideology. The neighborhood is old, full of parks, graduate students, communes, community supported agricultural projects, and a variety of counter cultural boutiques and ethnic restaurants. At the World Social Forum in 2007, the corner at the center of this culture area hosted a range of Hip Hop and Forum related events. Performances in Graffiti Art, Deejaying, Rapping, and Breaking all involved dialogues of social justice, community responsibility, and having fun. WRFG community radio station is just 4 blocks from the venue where the benefit concert took place. Respondents from both inside and outside of the True School community describe Little Five as an

important geographical space for their community as well as for the progressive community in general.

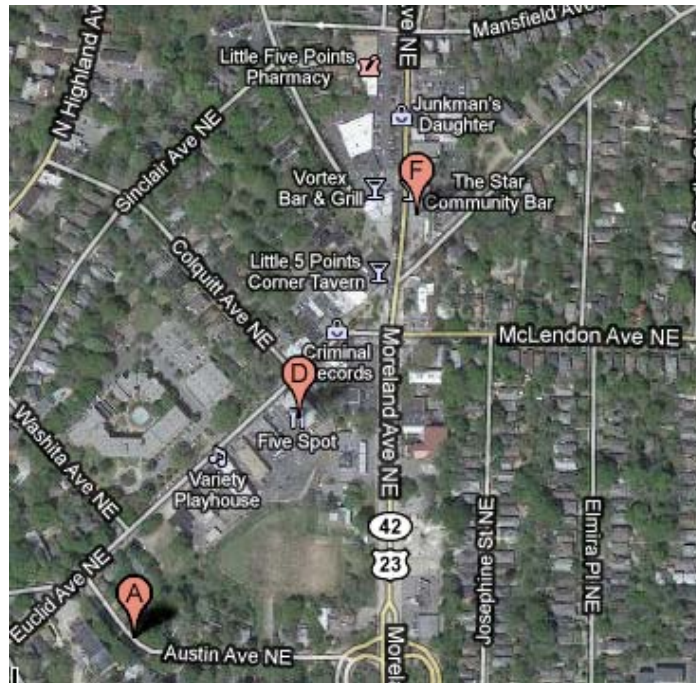


Figure 3. Little Five Points: Atlanta, Georgia (Point A is WRFG radio station; Point D is the Five Spot; Point F is the Little Five Points Business Association).

The benefit was called “The 4th of U-Lie Concert^{22,23}” and admission was set at \$10. Proceeds went directly to Minister Server and Professor Griff in an attempt to help

²² “The Fourth of U-Lie” concert was first held as a benefit concert for Griff and Server. It has continued and is still an event for True Schoolers, by True Schoolers. In 2010 Minister Server hosted the concert. That year it was employed to celebrate the transition of an elder in the community who had worked tirelessly for Hip Hoppers and African Americans Alike. She was the poet laureate of Atlanta, had won awards during the 80s for her work (Tony Awards) and her life celebration held at the concert was used as a way to educate young people about activism, the historical continuity of the Black experience and the need to stay dedicated to the cause. It was a community building exercise that bridged generational gaps.

²³ “The Fourth of U-Lie,” as a title to an event, has several layers discussing the lies and contradictions inherent in America. The first of which references Frederick Douglas’s 1852 US Independence Day speech where he articulated the hypocrisy of such a celebration for his people as they had no independence whatsoever. The second is involving the lies in ones personal life and addressing, with honesty the area where personal change and growth is necessary. The third layer of this title discusses the lies within Hip Hop culture, primarily the simplification of it into the violent, consumerist, sex crazed version that hides the wide diversity of other topics discussed within. Minister Server and Professor Griff are both concerned with “edutainment,” through vehicles like this concert series that was initially started to benefit them.

them offset the financial damage sustained from the fires. About 10 artists from the local True School community and some from the national scene performed to a packed house starting at around 10pm in the evening until the doors closed the next morning. This benefit concert was the most visible piece of the larger community support.

What support looked like

everything from emotional support, to people donating money, to people who just writing me a check, to people who just say, “I’ve got twenty dollars, here.” To, “I’m about to move and I was about to really throw all this stuff out, I wanted to give my furniture away to the Salvation Army anyway, here, why don’ you come by and take this, they can take this. You know, I’m getting rid of that.” So, people came through with all types of stuff. Goods, services, money, emotional support. People would email, like, how’s the family. You know, that’s how it manifested itself (HHK-AK-024).

A recounting of the kinds of goods and services provided can help crystallize what it took to get these two gentlemen, and in the case of Minister Server, his family, back on their feet. Information about the specific goods and services that were provided come from the three interviews conducted with Minister Server, his wife, and Professor Griff.

Financial support is of primary importance when people face hard times. Goods and services provide welcome relief, but money allows a greater amount of control, flexibility, and the ability to maintain one’s dignity. Both Griff and Server emphasize that there is no dollar amount that can be placed on what they lost since many of the material goods were imbued with vast amounts of cultural value. Fortunately, the community did produce financial support. Minister Server estimated that between \$10-15,000 in cash were produced through the benefit concert itself including private donations.

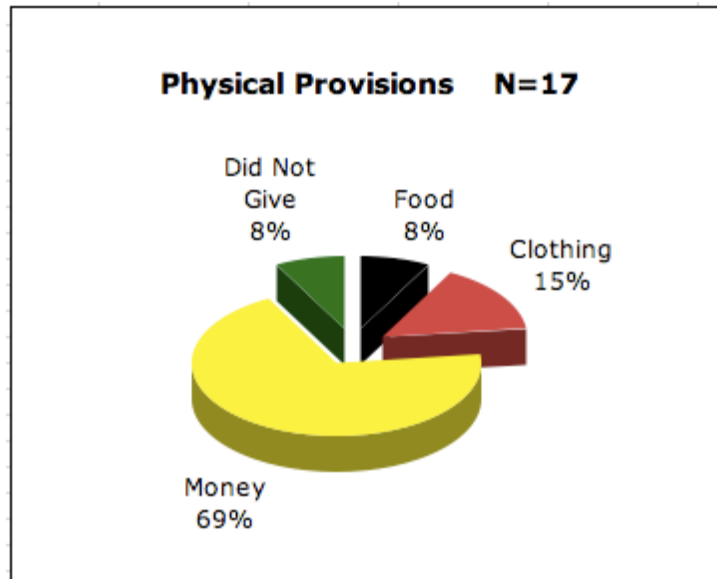


Figure 4.

Professor Griff also puts his estimate of money directly generated from the benefit in the thousands of dollars (*these funds were split 50/50: confirmed 08.18.10*). In addition to the gifts of cash came a variety of goods. Food, clothing, furniture, electronics, media material, appliances, and other related items were furnished to Server and his family as well as Professor Griff. According to all recipients interviewed as well as some of the providers, this physical support went a long way in keeping the victims and their families afloat.

Emotional labor represented a gift from many community members took place in several major areas. People invested their time and energy in a myriad of ways. For example, organizing of the benefit concert. This took place primarily at the hands of True Schoolers within the WRFG community. Securing a venue, contacting and interviewing artists, producing, marketing related materials, distributing said materials as well as on air advertising came primarily through three people, all of whom are respondents (HHK-AK-011, HHK-AK-020, HHK-AK-014,) and who identify as True Schoolers. Other forms of emotional labor include volunteering at the event, and

performing at the event, both major contributions. Two of the respondents filled those other roles at the event, along with about ten other members of the True School Community who were not interviewed.

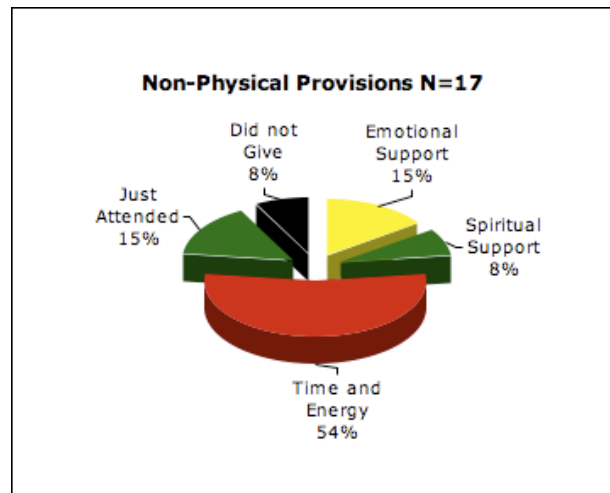


Figure 5.

All respondents in my sample for this project with one (exception²⁴), along with the several hundred people at the event came to the event and paid the entrance fee. Simply “showing up,” was recognized as an important indication of support and loyalty within the community. It provided a way to strengthen social networks, contributing financial support in terms of paying at the door, and generating cultural knowledge and access, by participating in visible and recognized institutions, for the benefit of known elders.

Professor Griff and Minister Server both claim that the True School community and Hip Hop culture provided them with absolutely everything, with the exception of Server’s car and house, which came through familial and fraternal (African American Fraternity) connections. One evening during an interview Minister Server provided an

²⁴ This interviewee was an outlier in the sample and did not participate in the community, or the benefit. I met this outlier at the Five Spot after being invited by another respondent. She indicated that he was a skilled deejay and was someone that I should talk to. His contributions to this research helped put boundaries on the community itself, as well as contextualize southern contributions to Hip Hop.

honest summary of how the national True School community, and to a greater extent, local True provided this support:

[T]his last situation where we had a house fire when I, you know, situation became real dire. That's when Hip Hop really supported me in ways that I would have never even asked them to, to be honest. People having fundraisers for me and my family, I would have never asked anyone to do anything like that... ...[E]ven prior to the fundraiser, the conversations, word of mouth that were going around that Minister Server and Professor Griff had something happen.... [and] they supported me in ways that are tremendous, man. And not just only in Atlanta, that the thing that's beautiful to me, it's been Hip Hoppers as far as Japan that are hitting me up, if nothing else to say, "Minister Server, is there anything I can do? Let me know. Peace to you and your family." Things of that nature. That's been tremendous for me, but Atlanta particularly they've been tremendous in their support and encouragement and spiritual, mental, physical, financial way, they've been extremely supportive of me.

The fires provided a concentrated moment and urgency for witnessing how True School elders were supported in a time of need. While money and a range of goods were provided, services like childcare or rides were not. However, in the course of interviews, I found that services like these were shared among respondents in their own times of need. These benefits were provided to True School community members, by True School community members on a day-to-day basis as well as in times of duress and are graphically represented in figure 4.

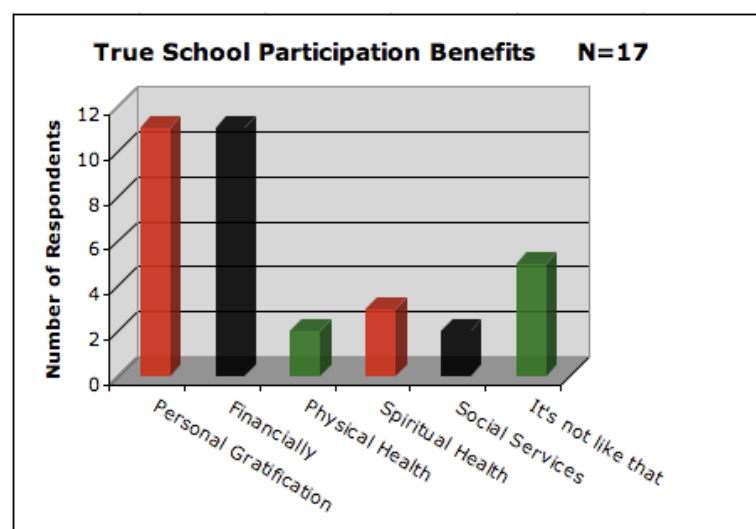


Figure 4.

Similar to the provision of emotional and physical support afforded to the elders, these benefits cover a range. Importantly, a number of respondents (4/17) were careful to point out that their participation in True School (and general) Hip Hop could not be measured in terms of costs and benefits (as indicated by the “its not like that” column). Some of them were unwilling to elaborate, while others implied that Hip Hop was an identity complex and did not need further explanation.

One respondent (HHK-AK-016) described how her Hip Hop community (the True School community) once provided her with food, clothes, shelter, rides, and a variety of other services in a time of need. She recounted a time when she was in financially trying times, had been robbed, and had no food. A sister in the True School community showed up to her house with hugs, groceries and money, and provided enough assistance to make it through. In the passage below, she clearly explains how this support came about within True School specifically.

Yes, yes. I wouldn't say the community as a whole, but I'm going to say the community because, this community, there's different people that's helped me at different levels. I told you when Didi helped me put groceries in my refrigerator, Drez used to give me rides, Stacy Epps, she's rockin right now, I don't know if you've heard of her, but she's on tour. You know, when I was late on something, I think I was going to get evicted and all I needed was two hundred dollars for my rent, she gave it to me on the spot, you know. And not because I owed them back, it's because we've done stuff, I've done stuff for her, just the same. She's like, you know what, I'm going to give this to you because this is her doing this for me. It's not that I gave her anything financial, it's just that I helped her out with her music, or I helped her out with organizing something (HHK-AK-020).

Her words indicate a reciprocal basis of exchange based on an ethos of community support. The need to compensate one another immediately, directly, and equally is not present. Instead there is a fluid transfer of money, goods, and services from one member to another.

Another (HHK-AK-019) describes how his Hip Hop network saved his life in a hostage situation. He was a cultural mover and a nationally known music producer during the Golden Age and had been kidnapped and beaten badly. One of his assailants fired a handgun next to his head destroying his hearing on that side. The respondent was able to make a phone call and through the influence and advice of the person he called, was freed.

Almost all of the respondents claim that Server and Griff support them in a direct way (11/15). This support comes in the form of mentorship, business networking, social networking, and access to the wealth of Hip Hop cultural knowledge both of them wield. Beyond this, these same respondents describe the elders as providers of emotional and spiritual support at the individual level. Additionally these respondents all repeatedly emphasized the labor that Minister Server and Professor Griff invest in the community on a day-to-day basis.

Only one (HHK-AK-17) respondent claimed that Hip Hop does not help her directly. She described her relationship with the culture as initially casual and now circumstantial. Being a Black woman who grew up during the late eighties and nineties, she listened to Hip Hop, but doesn't interact with the culture anymore, outside of her responsibilities at WRFG radio station. However, she as well as the rest of the sample described Hip Hop culture as providing them with emotional support. For her it comes solely in the form of lyrical support, but for other respondents this comes in multiple forms at multiple levels. One key organizer of the benefit describes this lyrical support within the community that showed up at the concert:

So what I'm saying is for 400 people to come out for something that was positive, where all of the artists on there was speaking positive things, positive lyrics, trying to share themselves and uplift the community, and uplift the people with their words. They just

wasn't coming up there and spitting some tunes and trying to... All of the people up there were activists in their own right (HHK-AK-025).

All respondents agreed with the previously mentioned respondents (HHK-AK-17) claims of lyrical support but also describe additional support in good beats, and a space to let loose. Of course True Schoolers generally listen to Conscious Rap, but something that I heard during interviews and participant observation came up again and again: a good beat is a good beat, and people love to get down. A space to be oneself, relax, and have fun is an important function of Hip Hop. This kind of support is observable at a cultural level, and based on participant observation I suggest this extends beyond True Schoolers to Hip Hoppers at large. The performative elements of support go beyond True School to the cultural level. In addition to this, and as previously mentioned, community level support among True Schoolers comes in more intimate forms. In particular, members provided guidance, counsel, prayer, hugs, and a safe place for respondents. These two levels of emotional support form a tight safety net to catch members and hold them up.

Another form of emotional support that respondents expressed to me during interviews had to do with the actual participation in Hip Hop elements. This form of support related to performance, and exists at both the cultural and community levels. Participation in consumption and production of these cultural art forms gave them peace, stronger will, solidarity, resolve and a feeling of controlling one's own destiny by not being fully, directly, and formally involved with the wage labor system. This is in part due to the fact that Hip Hop has created its own network of formal and more importantly informal businesses that give participants a feeling of increased control over their own lives. At the community level Hip Hoppers work together in their production of culture

for the economic success of individuals, and by working together strengthen the depth and diversity of bonds between one another.

These last two points remind me of the historical connections to previous musical forms in the African American experience that provided similar opportunities and relief. Blues, and Jazz both provided relief through performance in private spaces. As these spaces became public and commodified, consumption of cultural forms (like music and dance) afforded a higher degree of economic autonomy for African Americans who lacked access to financial control of their own destiny (Hunter 1997; Barlow 1995).

Hip Hop costs

Yeah, yeah. marriage. I've burned relationships with great women. I've missed out on certain moments of my daughter's upbringing. Moments with my family. A chance to have a 401K (laughing) and benefits from time to time. But it's wild, because I, are there certain things, yeah. Everybody sacrifices something to gain something else. You know. Shit, there has to be an even exchange. In order to gain something you have to lose something. It's just an issue of what price people are willing to pay (HHK-AK-021).

While participation in Hip Hop culture, and identification with smaller communities like True School inside that culture provides a wealth of benefits, I think it must be noted that a variety of costs can come with participation in, or identification with Hip Hop. These costs come with Hip Hop and general, being a True Schooler does not hold any more or any fewer stigmas than any other sector of Hip Hop. According to respondents these costs were experienced in a number of ways. Being identified as any part of Hip Hop has cost (7/17) participants' access to employment, people, and cast them in a negative public light. This is due to general misperceptions of Hip Hop as one homogenous culture that often excludes more positive interpretations. The time and energy that has gone into Hip Hop participation through the True School community has cost some respondents (8/17) in terms of their relationships with other groups or

individuals. By investing more time in True School and Hip Hop participation, other areas of their lives have suffered.

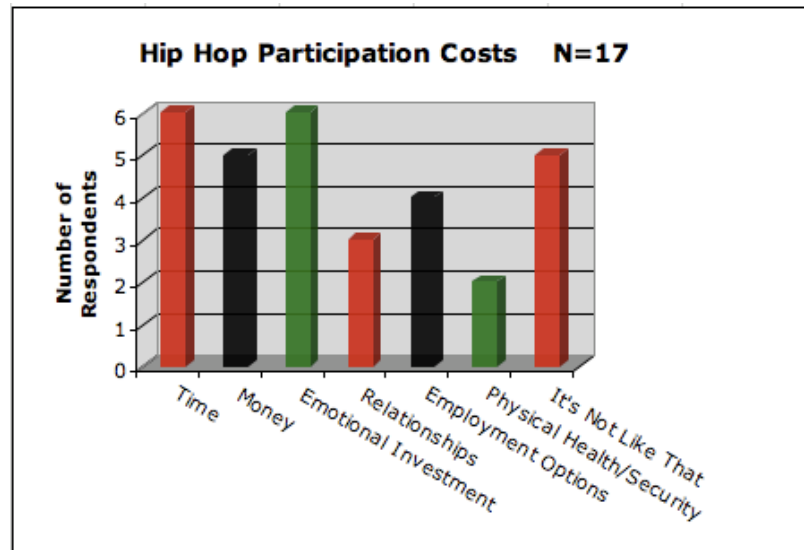


Figure 5.

This included a loss of trust, depth, or entire connections amongst family, friends, or lovers.

It should be noted however, that some respondents do not see their relationship in terms of direct costs and benefits. A little less than 33 percent (5/17) directly stated or implied that they did not view their relationships with Hip Hop culture through the True School community in terms of costs or benefits. Instead they described it as a give and take, that it was reciprocal and not really discussed between community members. They viewed Hip Hop culture through the True School community as a family, a village, or a neighborhood. It was something where obligations to each other and the group were unspoken.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided specifics about how True Schoolers created a safety net around their elders, Professor Griff and Minister Server. We have seen that physical support came in the form of goods and most importantly direct funds and those generated by holding a benefit concert. Donating labor in organizing and implementing that concert, as well as other forms of emotional and spiritual support came directly from True Schoolers. Beyond this participation in Hip Hop culture in general, also comes with benefits, as well as costs. In the following chapters I will discuss relevant definitions of frameworks of community and exchange as well as how they describe the actions, words and motivations of True Schoolers in Atlanta Georgia.

CHAPTER 6: HIP HOP TRUE SCHOOLERS IN ATLANTA ARE A COMMUNITY

I get supported by the Hip Hop community every single day of my life because they know that I am Hip Hop for real and that's it's not a game with me, it's not a fad with me, that it's not, you know that it's not some facade but it's how I walk and talk and breathe and eat and how I raise my children. It's everything that I am, everything. You know I work in the Hip Hop community and I'll probably more than likely die there too. So I get support from the Hip Hop community every single day of my life (HHK-AK-019).

Introduction to theoretical background

Now that we have established the historical importance and influence of religion and performance in the African American experience through Hip Hop and its relationship to True Schoolers in Atlanta, as well as what that community and its response to the fires looks like, we can begin an analysis of relevant theory as applied to True School. Hip Hop culture has been a phenomenon of journalistic and academic interest for decades. Within five years of the first cultural elements appearing in public spaces, journalists began to cover its emergence and within a decade, it had become a topic of academic study (Nelson 1982).²⁵

The main body of work concerning the culture began directly after the Golden Age of Hip Hop in the late eighties and the massive commercialization of the youth culture that took place in the early nineties. Writers in fields like musicology, ethnic studies, journalism, sociology, anthropology, criminology and a variety of others found that through Hip Hop, ideas of community, class, race, performance, gender,

²⁵ The New York Times wrote an article about “Taki 183,” a tagger in New York city who began work as early as 1968, but wasn’t formally recognized by media sources until 1971

globalization, and exchange could be discussed in a contemporary and relevant discourse (Chang 2005, 2010; Rose 1994; 2007; Dimitriadis 2004; Dyson 2004; Bynoe 2003, 2006; Potter 1995; Pough 2003, 2006). In my research, elements of all of these issues are apparent. However, as previously indicated I will be focusing on issues of community and exchange.

True School Community, Atlanta Georgia

I will now take some time to seat True Schoolers in Atlanta according to the definitions of community provided by Ferdinand Tonnies (1887), Melvin Oliver (1988), and Suzanne Keller (2003). Each of their community models builds on the other, and can provide greater clarity in understanding how True Schoolers in Atlanta function as a community. I suggest that a public dialogue of exchange is built into the framework of True School community, and that it is based on a family-like ethos of support that can manifests in actions creating a safety net in times of dire need. Furthermore, in the following chapter, I will discuss how that exchange represents a private dialogue of reciprocity or a “golden rule.” This reciprocal exchange takes place within the multiple forms of capital discussed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), and expanded upon by contemporary theorists Like Robert Putnam (2000). Before I examine how True Schoolers fit into models of community, I will take a moment to review their own thoughts about community and Hip Hop.

The primary way that I found out about respondent’s ideas about community was by asking them directly. I posed three major questions: “what is community?,” “is Hip Hop a community?,” and finally “is Hip Hop different from other communities?” The answers that respondents provided were compelling. My first question was met with a

description that focused on community as a neighborhood or as a family. Respondents described complex relationships with good and bad “neighbors,” or “uncles” that involved a lot of give and take. Sometimes this involved one party taking too much at the expense of another, but it was “family” so it was forgivable. This touches on Tonnies’s *Gemeinschaft* model of close ties and on Kellers’ “spirit of community,” both of which I will cover in greater detail momentarily. The answers provided to the second question of how Hip Hop was community helped me distinguish True School from the rest of Hip Hop culture. The answers are pictured below in figure 6.

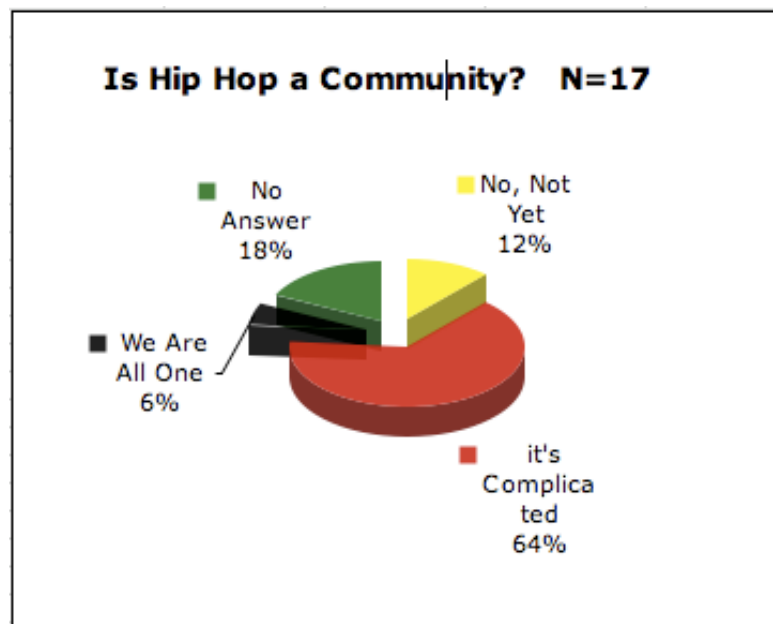


Figure 6.

Almost a fifth of interviewees did not answer the question, while just over one tenth implied that there was still work to be done in Hip Hop. An even smaller percentage directly espoused some True School rhetoric stating that “we are all one,” pointing to the cosmic connections that tie all of humanity together. This “oneness” is definitely a part of True School thought and rhetoric, but I feel that community members rely on and trust those closest to them first. The trust and reliance is deepest among True

Schoolers, and within that, community members who have provided real support. The majority of respondents described the Hip Hop community as complicated, and pointed to the fact that within *their* group (True Schoolers), there was community, but Hip Hop at large had some work to do before it was functioning as a community instead of a culture.

When I asked about the differences about the Hip Hop community and other non Hip Hop communities, some of the work that had been described as needed in creating deeper community became apparent. Respondents answered along several lines and these are pictured in figure 7.

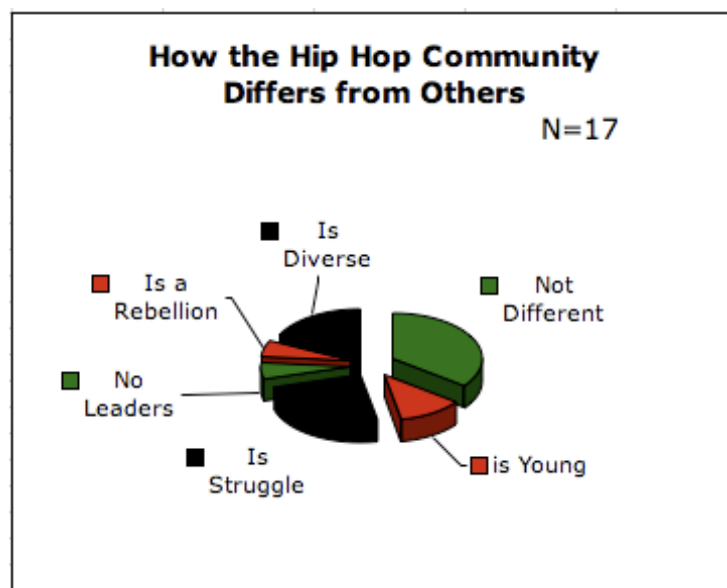


Figure 7.

Each of these groups of answers is discussed in Hip Hop cultural literature at length. Hip Hop is rebellion against and struggle within structural inequality in the socioeconomic system. It is a diverse community made up of dancers, artists, musicians and entrepreneurs that are both women and men from different ethnic backgrounds. Hip Hop is a young culture having formed in the early seventies (Chang 2005). Moreover many Hip Hop communities are made up of young people, under the age of forty and mostly

under the age of thirty. This age range is reflected by my sample. Furthermore, as indicated by Tricia Rose (2008), Hip Hop is in need of competent and functional leadership. Suzanne Keller (2003) describes this competent leadership as foundational to sustaining community, a point that will be discussed at greater length later in the chapter. Finally, it is useful to note that the largest response described the Hip Hop community as not being different than any other (6/17). This last answer supports our ability to cross analyze True Schoolers in Hip Hop with other community models and case studies. True Schoolers in their answers had provided the basis for further analysis of how their network functioned as a community. Lets take a moment to look at the work of Tonnies and then relate it to what we know about True Schoolers.

Early Ideas of community as applied to True School

In the late 1800s, Tonnies wrote *Gemeinschaft un Gesellschaft*, an analysis of community and society that broke from the long trend of German philosophical idealism rooted in works by authors like Kant, Moser, and Arndt. The breadth and depth of Tonnies magnum opus exceeds the boundaries of this analysis, but his work is foundational in community studies and is part of a long tradition that compares the impacts of modernization or industrialization to more traditional or rural lifeways. His definitive work on community and society was released in 1887 to lackluster reviews in a growing rationalist state during the time of the Kaiser. Sometime later and outside of Germany, his work would become influential in all three fields of sociology, but overshadowed by that of his contemporaries and predecessors (Loomis and McKinney in Tonnies: 2002).

Simply put, Tonnies' work sets up a dialectic discussion between two types of social organization. *Gemeinschaft*, or community, helps us understand a pattern of interpersonal relationships that are based on attachment, loyalty, shared experiences and a holistic commitment to the larger group. It is based on a concept that Tonnies calls *wessenwill* or "natural will." *Gesellschaft*, its counterpart, is based on *Kurkwille*, or "rational will" and refers to a more formalized framework of social norms, rules, and institutions he called "society." These more formal, rational, and abstract frames help people negotiate exchange, interests and goals and have been likened to running a modern business in a way that allows self-interest to rule. (Tonnies 2000; Keller 2003). Tonnies assumes that all human relationships are a product of these two types of will, and that individuals and networks can evolve from a familial *Gemeinschaft* mode of interaction to a more rational *Gesellschaft* mode as they age and mature (Loomis and McKinney in Tonnies: 2002). His work has been the source of much discussion and deliberation, but for the purpose of this study, a focus on the community model will help inform our understanding of how and why True Schoolers work to support each other. I assert that True Schoolers function in a *Gemeinschaft* mode within a larger *Gesellschaft* structure.

For Tonnies (1887), *Gemeinschaft*, or community, describes the network within groups of people themselves, the interpersonal relationships and the ethos. The tightly knit collection of individuals interviewed were, with one exception, involved in significant interpersonal relationships with Minister Server and Professor Griff, and within this network, shared a sense of family and communal obligation to one another. In the middle of an interview, one respondent came to a fuller understanding of who supported her in times of need and why, stating that the people who helped her

...were people from my Hip Hop community (True School community). You know what? I have been giving less credit than I should, these have been very loyal, loving and giving people to me. If it wasn't for Hip Hop we wouldn't have met at all, I wouldn't know these folks, at all. They're like my family (referring to Griff, Server and other respondents)" (HHK-AK-020).

Another respondent (HHK-AK-012) continues this explication of mutualism stating that:

Support is definitely a big part of the community, especially with the music community. What I've learned out here in Atlanta is that 99.9% of us are all artists, so going to each others' showing and supporting each other. This is our community. We all know a DJ who knows a singer who knows a bass player who knows an emcee who knows a flute player, so people. That's pretty much the number one answer.

Interpersonal relationships are strong and numerous blending business, friendship and community obligation all into one. Support networks are tight and localized. Community members know one another and share information and resources with little inhibition. This social organization and interaction typifies *gemeinschaft*, but it must be noted that True Schoolers work in more formal, societal ways as well. As previously indicated, *gesellschaft*, is the larger more structured social organization that is based on "rational thought," and is oftentimes associated with urbanization. Hip Hop is an unmistakably urban production. The pressures that Tonnies describes in fracturing groups and isolating individuals are precisely what drove Hip Hoppers together.

I suggest that True Schoolers work collectively as an individual in a large urban society, to get their needs met. Furthermore, I assert that certain urban African American communities do the same. In the case of this sample, the True School community and urban African communities overlap significantly. Based on my sample, the True School community sits within the African American community so it becomes difficult to pull apart the differences. I believe that because of the fast paced and jam-packed nature of post modern urban society, the True School community has blended Tonnies two types of social organization. True, Tonnies describes the relationship between *gemeinschaft* and

gesellschaft as a progression, much like the impacts of industrialization on rural immigrants who become city dwellers, but I think that now, in a post industrialized society, functions of both can exist.

We have seen that True Schoolers function as a community (*gemeinschaft*), but to flourish they must also navigate society (*gesellschaft*). True Schoolers employ formal institutions that are more often associated with society, formalization, and urbanization. Radio stations like WRFG where many interviewees volunteer, are places where community members network for information. Colleges and Universities like Clark Atlanta, where one respondent teaches and orators like Professor Griff lecture, provide platforms to recruit young people for the community and share ideology to people who are part of other communities.

True Schoolers get involved in the formal media machine, producing music and information for society in exchange for financial compensation and the ability to share their ideas with an even larger audience. Several respondents work for large media corporations like Clear Channel, CNN, or their subsidiaries. True Schoolers blend *wessenwill* (natural will), with *kurkville* (natural will) in a balance of community obligation and self-interest. They use and create formal institutions for the good of themselves and their community. It is a combination of loyalty and rational self-interest that helps negotiate exchange inside and out of their community. I assert that True Schoolers are not transitioning from community to society, but are building community within society, using the tools available to them, based on a communal sense of loyalty and obligation as well as self-interest. This assertion is in line with the work of Melvin Oliver (1988).

True School as a “community saved”

Sociologist Melvin Oliver is well known for his analyses of the relationships between visibility, race and inequality. He posits that African Americans as individuals and as communities have been regarded as pathological in the media as well as in academics. Through his work it becomes apparent that social networks in African American communities serve important roles in facilitating the sustenance of members (1988). Strong and weak ties in these networks bind people to one another and create bridges between organizations and communities through the exchange of information, work, and resources (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000; Wellman 1979). True Schoolers participate on much the same level, and in many cases experience the same sort of structural inequalities that marginalized populations like African Americans face.

In 1988 Oliver conducted a study based on the work of Barry Wellman (1979) and published a paper describing the lives of three hundred and fifty two African Americans spread across three communities in Los Angeles. The purpose of this research was aimed at producing a data set that can be applied in fostering understanding of social organization and networks within urban African American communities, which according to his article, had been previously described with a negative connotation as “pathological” (Oliver 1988).

Wellman suggested that within urban areas of industrialized and bureaucratized societies, three network patterns emerge: Communities Lost, Saved, and Liberated. Community Lost describes a degradation of community with primary relations being replaced by secondary ones, and close kin ties being replaced by sparse ties across multiple networks. Community Saved affirms strong ties of kin and neighborhoods that

are maintained through the provision of support and sociability with manifesting communal desires and informal social controls (ethos) with a network that is homogeneous and organized around employment or residential cross sections. Community Liberated admits that urban life has weakened interpersonal ties, but argues that primary ties are still important, and that solidarity is sparsely knit and spatially diverse (Wellman 1979).

Oliver posits that the “Community Saved” model most closely describes urban African American communities in areas like Compton, and that “kin and friendship networks... respond creatively to the economic marginality imposed on their residents by the larger political economy.” Primary relationships are maintained because of their importance in the mutual exchange and aid that they provide for residents. Networks are dense, and are usually tied spatially to the immediate neighborhood (Oliver 1988: 626). Oliver’s work is relevant to Hip Hop culture because it emerged under the same structural pressures that he describes.

Hip Hop is often portrayed in a negative light, and with pathological focus in the mainstream media. This has been true of academia as well, but there is growing trend that recognizes some of the positive contributions in Hip Hop. I seek to add to this body of knowledge, and assert that much of the “good” work being done in Hip Hop happens at the hands of True Schoolers, who I assert are the activist arm of Hip Hop culture. Like African Americans, Hip Hoppers are unfairly portrayed in a negative light, focusing on certain parts of the culture and ignoring others.

As previously stated, Oliver (1988) was one of the first sociologists to look at urban African American communities as networks of support instead of destabilized

groups. His employment of Wellman's (1979) network patterns (specifically community saved) can help us tie together the basics laid out by Tonnies. Oliver indicates that in urban areas, African Americans often network in tight *gemeinschaft* modes that Wellman described as the "community saved model." This model is of a close knit community that shares resources and information freely in a creative response to the structural pressures of the larger political economy. It is this kind of sharing that I witnessed directly and was informed of by True Schoolers. Not only do they share with one another in dire times, like those experienced by Server and Griff, but also on a day-to-day basis. It is through this provision of support that True School community members maintain primary relationships. One respondent summarizes the interaction of ethos, sharing, and maintaining community in a description of her participation as a Hip Hop educator and the community's response to her work:

In addition, with the work that I do, the Hip Hop community has really shown and proven in its support of the work that I do in trying to restore some level of integrity to Hip Hop and to what folks are calling Hip Hop in the mainstream arena. Trying to make young people in the new generations who are coming through, making them aware of what true Hip Hop is. The Hip Hop community has been tremendously supportive. I currently teach at Clark Atlanta and have been teaching a course dealing with Hip Hop as a rhetorical tool and the hi hop community has shown up. I don't have to pull teeth, I don't have to twist wrists, they show up, they present the information to these young people coming from a total spirit of love. Not coming from a spirit of gain or capital gain or anything of that sort. But truly out of love and that loyalty that we were speaking of, that loyalty to one another, where that whenever I have called for anyone from the Hip Hop community to assist in the work that I'm doing, they've shown up without questions. It's been a beautiful situation and really again showing me that spiritual and God connection where people are able to take themselves out of personal gain and assist in this movement called Hip Hop (HHK-AK-023).

She directly describes the work, based on an ethos, in a collective struggle, and its generation of solidarity and loyalty. As previously indicated, respondents describe their Hip Hop community as a family, or a neighborhood, and indicated that living in kin like

proximity as well as holding to an ethos of providing support to one another is the norm.²⁶

This same model of support described as a family or neighborhood, became apparent to me in other contexts as I visited other countries and conducted personal studies on underground Hip Hop culture. While visiting Cape Town South Africa, I found a kin-like system of exchange between local community members as well as an ethos and dedication to social justice. True Schoolers in the coastal city held workshops, competitions, and showcased Hip Hop as a means to get out of the terrible and dangerous conditions in the Cape Flats and other areas. Artists like Black Noise spearheaded this campaign and took the positive end of Hip Hop across sub Saharan Africa with their “African Hip Hop Indaba Tour.” Within their lyrics I found a wealth of pre and post apartheid words of wisdom and support that focus on community achievement through individual empowerment.

At both the World Social Forum in Atlanta (2007), and the National Hip Hop Political Convention in Las Vegas (2008), I observed True School communities from around the nation and globe, meeting for discussion, action, and networking to facilitate work in their local communities within a larger network of connected underground communities. This overarching True School community is a sort of imagined community that mirrors the local, but through technology and globalization, manifests in the electronic world and beyond (Anderson 2006). I suggest that it is a cultural movement

²⁶ I think it is important to again point out that 100 percent of my sample self identified as Black. Much of the complexity that is found in the African American experience is found in my sample of True School Hip Hoppers. Moreover this research and sample point to the importance of discussing how Blackness and Hip Hop are oftentimes viewed coterminally, for better or for worse (usually worse). Deeper work in ethnic studies and ethnomusicology will help create deeper understandings of the connections between Hip Hop and Blackness, how these frameworks are different, and how to use increased understanding to minimize suffering and increase flourishing in these overlapping communities.

made up of lots of local communities working in concert under a common set of ethical principles. True School has a place in the total pantheon of Hip Hop thought worldwide. It manifests in the mutual exchange and both the explicit and implicit understandings of responsibility in local communities.

Oliver's work gives us another piece of a foundational understanding of how communities tighten up in challenging urban environments. He also describes the ethos of community support that is found in Tonnies *gemeinschaft*, and is apparent in the interviews and actions of True Schoolers in Atlanta. However some of the complexity of Hip Hop is lost in this framework but can be illuminated through the extensive work of Suzanne Keller (2003).

Additional Definitions and True Schoolers

Keller's seminal work, a thirty-year case study with over one thousand interviews surrounding a housing development called "Twin Rivers" in New Jersey, provides an important basis for understanding how True Schoolers in Hip Hop culture form and function as a community. Keller describes how ideas of identity, shared goals, institutions, and an ethos of mutuality and reciprocity work to create a sense of community spirit. She provides a framework that includes two ways to look at community, descriptions of four different community types, and the forces that work to sustain or erode the cohesion of groups like the Twin Rivers housing development. Following in the footsteps of Plato, Rousseau, de Tocqueville, Tonnies, and Durkheim, Keller's analysis looks at differences between individual and community goals, senses of belonging and identity. She brings this dialogue to the present by looking at how the effects of globalization and industrialization affect communities over time.

Through rich historical analysis combined with her deep ethnographic fieldwork she concludes that the work done in communities goes beyond idealism and rhetoric to maintain networks and a sense of togetherness (Keller 2003). By comparing her analysis of past community models to the organization and actions amongst True Schoolers it becomes possible to locate the functioning of community members. Doing so will lend credence to, and guide conversations on Hip Hop away from culture and towards community.

Keller's description of the Ancient Greek Polis can help us understand a bit of what goes on in Hip Hop Culture in general, as well as in the True School Community. The Athenian community she describes had an exchange system that nurtured familiarity and reciprocity between group members, and is an imagined community that drew on a common ethnic heritage, ties to the land, and a common framework of politics. Competition in sports, public duty, and self-governance as well as strong leadership with a foundation in reason and justice were hallmarks of the ancient Greek Polis (Keller 2003). These elements are also manifest in the True School community where exchange is roughly reciprocal, Blackness informs action and thought (but is not exclusive), competition in performance of Hip Hop elements is the norm, and leaders like KRS-One (national), Minister Server (local/national), and Professor Griff (local/national) produce the moral rhetoric and action that describe and exemplify the True School ethos. Like the True School community "What they [the polis] urged was that it [the community] become enlightened self interest, which rests on people's awareness that they need others and have a stake in each other's lives. Therefore, the good life depends on the realization that it involves everyone's participation and effective leadership. Corrupt leaders could

spell disaster for a community” (Keller 2003:21). One respondent who I particularly enjoyed interviewing (HHK-AK-015), describes the understanding of reciprocal exchange through moral rhetoric in the context of Hip Hop, by recounting what “The Teacha,” KRS-ONE told him when opening the Temple of Hip Hop in Atlanta one holiday season:

...he talked about the word giving, based upon his definition that he studied and researched, implies more of a context of basic exchanging. Basically giving to somebody means like you’re going to hand it somebody with an expectation to receive and bestowing is more of you give without expecting to receive anything. So, naturally people always want to have trust in the exchange of help towards another.

Words from leaders like KRS-ONE, and local action based on those words are necessary in sustaining community. Respondents acknowledge the lack of this in the larger Hip Hop community as indicated in figure seven, but also recognize the contributions of local leaders like Minister Server and Professor Griff in their True School community at home.

These public figures have national recognition and work at multiple levels. Minister Server and Professor Griff are engaged directly in mentorship, education, and training for young people and Hip Hoppers around the Atlanta area. Chuck-D (Public Enemy front man)²⁷ and KRS-ONE maintain residences or ties to Atlanta, but are more recognized for their lyrical and musical contributions that are definitive of the True School ethos. They are highly visible Golden Age performers and leaders whose words carry much weight. All four men’s work and actions represent this ethos: the former are more integrated at a local hands on level, while the latter are recognized at an ideological and national level. No matter how that participation manifested, all four men are held in

²⁷ Chuck D is the front man for Public Enemy and is one of the many Hip Hoppers who moved to Atlanta during the late eighties. He and Professor Griff remain friends and sometimes work in the local community together.

high regard. This research focuses on the local (ie Server and Griff), but it can be useful to see how other elders in the community are integrated

A related type of community that Keller calls Nineteenth Century Utopian Communities, provide us with an important conceptualization of True School Hip Hop. Keller describes the ethos of this model as an "...impulse to construct better worlds survives in those "intentional" communities that emphasize sharing, cooperation, and a set of ideals that put the individual in a context of collective well being" (Keller 2003: 33). By combining this intentional idealism with notions from Oliver's Community "Saved" and "Liberated" models, we can begin to grasp how Atlanta True Schoolers define themselves as a community (Oliver 1988).

True Schoolers are the social activists of the Hip Hop community and definitely attempt to create better and intentional communities through their actions.

So there's a shared experience on some level, whether it's just from the pure artistry of it, appreciation for the art form or it's born of a shared poverty, for example, which, as we all know, Hip Hop has come up and expressed through the pressure of contemporary society in being in the urban center... I think there's sort of intentional community where people actually come together under a premise to fulfill objectives or goals or an idea (HHK-AK-016).

In the words of this respondent we find the dedication to construct better worlds through intentional communities that focus on cooperation, sharing and a common experience that are all described by Keller as important in forming and maintaining community.

In Keller's description of nineteenth century utopian communities we find this same ethos that the True School elaborates. A dedication to construct better worlds through intentional communities that focus on cooperation, sharing and contextualizing individuals inside of the common good or collective well being are hallmarks of Underground Hip Hop. Keller covers this same ideology as it occurred in the communal experiments of the 1960s in the United States. In her descriptions of the successes and

failures of these experiments, Keller defines forces that both sustain and break down communities. First I will review the former. Keller's sustaining forces are listed here:

- a. A territorial base that marks the community off from the outside world
- b. An ideology of mutual responsibility and a one-for-all and all-for-one philosophy that unites members across social ranks.
- c. Institutions that build for the future
- d. Members giving their time, effort, and devotion to the public good
- e. Symbols and rituals of community- a name, an emblem, community rites (Keller 2003:35).

Some of these concepts overlap with those described by both Tonnies and Oliver, and some of them aren't fully supported by interviews, but are arguable based on participant observation. The first sustaining force is a territorial base that distinguishes the community from others. In terms of geography, all (but one) respondents live in Atlanta, and with one exception, are transplants to the area. All of those in Atlanta are within 20 miles of Little Five Points. Most of them work, volunteer, or play in the progressive Little Five Points neighborhood where both the community radio station as well as the venue that held the benefit concert, are located.

That neighborhood itself is full of underground heads hanging out, selling wares, or meeting for performances or social reasons. The Apache Café, plays a similar role and is a spot where underground artists showcase their talents, and perform in a sort of proving ground that events like "Mic Club"²⁸ (now at a different venue) represent. Beyond this geographic space is the intellectual and cultural space that comes in the dress, language, and action of True School heads. It exists online, and in the floating scene that descends upon various venues around the city. When a group of True

²⁸ Mic Club is now held at a different location because of a rift between the host of the event and the club owner. The falling out and move significantly impacted the size and composition of the community surrounding the event.

Schoolers get together they create virtual spaces wherever they are that sustain them, and their ideology.

The ideology of mutual responsibility and communal participation that cuts across social hierarchy within the group is the second sustaining force of community as described by Keller, and is apparent at multiple levels within the words and actions of True School Hip Hoppers in Atlanta. First and foremost we can see the implication of the ethos in the actions of community members and elders. This is most apparent in the provision of support surrounding the house fires. Secondly, this ethos or ideology is explicitly described in the spoken rhetoric that community members use describing their responsibilities to one another and the community. Thirdly, it is found in the lyrical content of local and national True School artists like Chuck D and KRS-ONE who often speak of community responsibility, education, empowerment, revolution, reclamation, and renewal.²⁹

This same ideology of mutual responsibility is part of a continuum that is apparent in the Nation of Islam works of Malcolm X, through the Five Percenters Doctrine, and Black Panther Party Ten point plan in its early urban inception, to more specifically Hip Hop based doctrines like the Universal Zulu Nations Infinity Lessons. A university educator in the sample (HHK-AK-023) qualifies this placement of the Hip Hop ethos in historical context describing the continuum:

[W]e are at nature a communal people, and with Hip Hop being a co-culture of African cultures we still have that communal spirit about us... Hip Hop definitely has and maintains that communal spirit of the African American community and African diasporic cultures and communities as a whole.

²⁹ For a list of artists who describe this ethos in some of their work see Rose 2008 and McQuillar 2007.

Within my sample of True School respondents, several local written records of action (beyond those listed which are nationally recognized) came up in the interviews themselves. True School documents like The Hustlers Ten Commandments, Hip Hop Ministries Spiritual Beliefs, and most notably The Temple of Hip Hop's Declaration of Peace, all codify thought and suggest corresponding action within and without the Hip Hop community proper.

It is important to note that the True School ethos, as a written form is not regularly referenced. While Hip Hop culture is inclusive of multiple forms of information, conveyance has historically been tied to performance, in the majority oral. Life lessons and educational points are transmitted primarily through oral and narrative means, further supporting the imagined territories that Hip Hop heads take with them wherever they congregate.

The third important sustaining force that Keller describes is the construction and maintenance of institutions that build for the future. Reaching back to the formalized relationships described by Tonnies's *gesellschaft*, Keller reaffirms the importance of social institutions in maintaining a community. WRFG radio station serves as the basic institutions through which most (15/17) Atlanta based respondents are networked but other institutions exist as well. Venues, other radio stations, specific bars and restaurants, as well as production companies and educational institutions like Spellman and Morehouse Colleges all serve as formalized places where community is built and fortified. Another important sustaining force is taking the ethical implicit/explicit rhetoric formalized by institutions into the realm of action. Keller maintains that community

members giving time, energy and effort in their devotion to the public good is paramount in maintaining the **elasticity and cohesion** of a social network.

According to Keller, a fourth sustaining factor in maintaining and building community is public work. Community members must be able to put into action the words and thoughts that are found in their ethos and ideology. The community's organization of a benefit concert for its elders, day-to-day provision of support between community members, volunteerism and a host of other examples that have been covered at length in previous chapters indicate that this sustaining factor is clearly observable among True Schoolers in Atlanta Georgia.

The fifth and final sustaining force that Keller describes is a collection of ideas that creates identities. Signifiers, rights, rituals, names and emblems are paramount in distinguishing ones community from others. True School has many names, with emblems ranging from clothing styles to musical and dialects of spoken word. Proficiency in Hip Hop Knowledge, the most important element to True Schoolers, as well as taking action on that knowledge are some of the major ways that a Hip Hop head can become recognized as a community member. Rites of passage range from onstage performances to more personal encounters with established members (and are flexible and fluid, as is Hip Hop identity). The True School Community maintains each of the sustaining forces that Keller describes as foundational in sustaining a group or network.

Now that we have covered how True Schoolers sustain themselves as a community, we can take some time to look at the forces that Keller describes as detrimental. These eroding forces include:

- a. Factional Strife and dissention over land, wealth, goals
- b. The pursuit of self-advancement
- c. High membership turn over
- d. Precarious leadership (Keller 2003:35).

Keller's first eroding force, factional strife over resources and goals is certainly apparent within the True School community. Even though True Schoolers are activists with a generally common goal, the methods and shorter-term goals aren't always agreed upon, nor do the products of these actions fully fulfill its purpose. For example, one respondent in an interview pointed to several issues of contention made apparent by the benefit concert.

Well, you know, the individuals that I think you've met can definitely tell you that we came together. What's interesting is that the last fundraiser that we did for them, one of the participants was Scorpio from Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, and it let me know, one, that he knew his role and knew how to be humble about filling his role as an elder in the game. He was able to constructively tell me that we gotta do a little bit better at taking care of these cats, and Griff has even shared that kind of conversation with me about how people have done fund raisers, but without being ungrateful, he felt like they could have been better, you know. I don't think we should get mad at those that have put in- I don't think we should be surprised (HHK-AK-015).

While a lot of community members worked hard, laboring for their elders, some did not. The goal of getting Server and Griff back on their feet and running again was not met. The support that came to them caught them like a safety net, but did not go as far as it could have. Minister Server describes another situation in the True School community where members turned on each other because they had a lot to lose, where loyalties were challenged within dissention over words and goals.

Yeah. Loyalty to me is somebody, a Hip Hopper, let me use my brethren Professor Griff. Loyalty is so important to him that even after members of his crew, Public enemy, turned their back on him and left him out to the wolves, left him out to the wolves, man, and for those that don't know the history, go back in the history of Public Enemy circa 88-91. Go to that. But through it all Griff was able to, because he knew who he was, was able to stand strong and grow in his juice, you know what I'm saying? And yet still remain loyal to that unit and that unit of course is Public Enemy. That's one example that to me like when Griff and I became close as comrades, some of the conversation that we had, you know I was always asking him, like, "How'd you do it? How did you stay loyal? What was that really about?" ...it's like if you stand for something then even though people around you may be tripping or not, even standing for that, not even repping that. If you were who you say you are, then you stand with that person when loyalty is most certainly a principle in that.

Both of these elders face challenging times inside the community, but stay loyal to the cause, and this kind of leadership keeps the community going. Furthermore, this dissention can take place between generations in the community that may have different goals and methods as indicated by another Golden Age veteran who now works at a major Rap radio station in Atlanta.

So there is a gap there in between two generations involved in this culture, and that gap needs to close, so to speak. And that's where the creativity can come in, because number one, I think the older generation is turned off from the younger generation so they don't want to teach anything, and you're in kind of a conundrum there, the youth don't want to hear anything from somebody that's old, you know. I think people are not studying anymore, I think because of what is going on now with the lack of creativity and the lack of, and people throwing away the historic aspects of the music. It's also to me translating and trickling down to other genres of music, i.e., Jazz, i.e., R & B, and so on and so forth (HHK-AK-024).

The second eroding force that Keller describes is the pursuit of self-advancement. The presence of an individual whose self-interest takes precedence over their commitment to the group had been mentioned during the interview process. Several respondents who described the community like family, or a neighborhood, definitely expressed concern over "the bad uncle syndrome." This is a situation where one person in the group takes but does not give back, or creates generalized wreck without concern for the whole. During interviews and within participant observation several examples of

this became apparent. One respondent described a situation where a community member had collected donations for the house fires, and then kept them for themselves. Of course this caused problems in the community, and while that person was forgiven, the respondent informed me that person would never be trusted the same way again (which is, in itself a reassertion of community).

The third eroding force that Keller pulls from her analysis of twentieth century utopian experiments in North America is high membership turn over. It was hard to gauge exactly how membership turn over played out in the small sample that I worked with in Atlanta, however several things were clear. All respondents had strong relationships with Hip Hop from childhood on. According to interviews, many of them began participating in one of the elements at that time or in adolescence.

The two elders this study focuses on as well as two others were completely dedicated to the identity as Hip Hop (True School) and worked hard at nurturing younger community members and keeping them in the fold. They are about the same age as Hip Hop and are committed for life. Of the eight respondents in their thirties, one is no longer affiliated with Hip Hop, while the others seemed dedicated to both the local True School community, and even more so to the True School Movement. Of the four respondents in their twenties all seemed dedicated to this same movement and the community based on the way they spoke about it and the amount of time that they had been actively laboring within it.

The one respondent who was younger than twenty was the outlier and he indicated that he used to be really into “conscious rap” but had never gotten involved in the Atlanta scene. As he grew as a deejay in the area, his tastes in music changed, and so

did the crowds that he was affiliated with. He is still Hip Hop, just not True School.

14/17 community members remained dedicated to Hip Hop culture over the course of their lives. The other two respondents who are no longer participants in Hip Hop were both women over the age of 35.³⁰ It is unclear how long respondents will stay affiliated with the True School community itself, but I suggest that this community will stay tightly-knit because of its strong correspondences with Tönnies (1887) description of *gemeinschaft*, as well as Oliver's (1988) model of "Community Saved" where the urban experience drives community members closer together forming strong bonds while relying on one another for goods and services.

The final and, potentially most destructive force to a community is precarious leadership. Self interested, or poor leadership, spells disaster for a community according to Keller. The example mentioned earlier in the chapter of "Mic Club," adequately expresses this eroding force. Two local leaders, the host of Mic Club and the owner of the venue where it was hosted, had a massive falling out, on stage. It was recorded live and posted on YouTube, where I watched the whole thing after having heard about it from several respondents. The argument that set their collapse into motion concerned a combination of 2 other eroding forces. They had a difference of financial interests and were both more concerned with themselves than the event and the community around it. Their argument involved the crowd at the venue, and while there was more support for the Emcee (host), there was a faction supporting the owner as well. Things ended poorly and the event was moved several times. The lack of consistency and a geographic

³⁰ Perhaps this has to do with the misogynistic trends in popular Hip Hop today. Both of these women have college degrees, are socially active, volunteer, and are vocal about women's rights.

location around which to build in combination with the public display of drama by two leaders over money cost the venue and the event members.

In this same community, elders and leaders like Minister Server and Professor Griff are exemplary of the opposite as indicated by their work locally and nationally. Through Hip Hop education and outreach they tirelessly give their time and energy in word and in action in pursuit of a healthier community in which the next generation will be able to flourish. Furthermore, when a leader in True School fails to deliver the exact action that their words demand, a prudent and useful failsafe is built in. Several informants were clear to point out that it is important to separate the message from the messenger, thereby allowing the community to fluidly transfer leadership without getting caught up in cults of personality.

At the end of her long research project in Twin Rivers, Suzanne Keller makes two important assertions concerning the development of community that can be applied to an analysis of True School. The first is that it is “very difficult, especially in a culture of self advancement, to become mindful of, and foster social interdependence” (Keller 2003: 281). According to respondents, this is certainly the case with dominant Hip Hop culture where all too often the emphasis is on the individual, not the group. Additionally Keller suggests that the Twin Rivers case...

...reveals that tremendous lacunae exist in our general education for citizenship. This makes a collectivity extremely dependent on the active minority who devote themselves to building the rules and institutions need and who, by their example, engender a conscience for community. At the same time however, the active minority at the helm will arouse apprehension, resentment, and resistance to its power. It is an enduring tug of war, since community, if it is to be more than a rhetorical flourish, needs rules, sanctions and leadership” (Keller 2007: 281).

This statement rings true across communities and is exemplified by the relationship between True School and dominant Hip Hop Culture. For most Hip Hop consumers, the

visibility of and access to citizenship education and civic participation is minimal. Both of these concepts are championed by the True School minority that is constantly seeking to educate, build, and lead by example but is not always met with full support.

According to one outlier who was interviewed, True Schoolers just don't get it. They are focused too heavily on the conscious movement, instead of having fun. Keller is correct in her assessment. The Hip Hop community needs rules, people to enforce them, and the space and commitment to dialogue. Finally, all communities need the room for dissenting voices to be heard, and the space for people to express themselves.

Conclusion

In this last chapter I have covered the work of three major social scientists and their contribution to discussions about how community is defined and functions.

Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) provided an early structure to understand how people are affected as they shift from tighter kin-like networks in community-based life to more industrial and formal interactions in society. This basic framework allowed us to discuss True School in terms of community within a society.

Melvin Oliver (1988) helped us to focus on the stresses of urban life and the African American Experience in a modern context. Because all respondents identified as Black, and either lived or grew up in an urban environment, his insights proved contextually relevant. Through his work we were able to gain a deeper understanding of African American communities as flexible and supportive instead of with a negative, and pathology-oriented focus that had been more common before his work. We found that True Schoolers work in a tightly knit support network that is tied together through a common urban experience and localized exchange of goods and services.

Suzanne Keller (2003) expands on the notions of community laid out by Oliver within the framework of Tonnies as exemplified in the description of several community types that describe facets of competition, ethos, regulations, and forces that work to maintain or erode communities. We discovered that the True School community functions much like other communities, and has many tools at its disposal to employ in fortifying and expanding community, while minimizing erosion.

By discussing True Schoolers in terms of the work of theorists like Tonnies, Wellman, Oliver, and Keller, it becomes clear that they are in fact a meaningful community. To further understand the depth of commitment to these definitions, I suggest that briefly discussing community through exchange of multiple forms of capital can prove useful. It is my hope that combining these lenses can add to the analytical toolset to understand identity and action among groups like True Schoolers.

CHAPTER 7: EXCHANGE AND THE FORMS OF CAPITAL IN TRUE SCHOOL ATLANTA

The community theories that have just been covered provide us with a framework to understand how True Schoolers interact with each other as well as the impetus for that action. It has been made apparent that rhetoric surrounding reciprocity and group level sustainability, as well as leadership to espouse rhetoric and set examples, are important. Discussing this rhetoric in terms of exchange and capital can help us understand what peoples actions tells us about communities acting as a safety net beyond the rhetoric of words that are explicated in doctrines of ethics/ethos such as the Temple of Hip Hop's Declaration of Peace.

Reciprocity

Absolutely, that's [reciprocity] one of the laws of Hip Hop. You understand that divine laws at work have a cyclical nature and that's why I talked earlier that way about my father's passing. Death is a part of life. It's not life and death are separate things. They are parts of the same whole, like the yin yang symbols (HHK-AK-013).

Beyond a Marxian base, early theorists like Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and Marcel Mauss (1925) were some of the first to describe exchange beyond the western understanding that is bound to individual and self-gain. In his 1925 work, *The Gift*, Mauss discusses the anthropological accounts of the economic exchange within the Kula ring first described by Malinowski (1922) and the potlatch in the American Pacific Northwest. His work suggests that social and economic life as material and non-material goods and services were fully integrated and that "debt" would eventually be repaid through relationships of "generalized reciprocity."

In his study of Trobriand Islanders he observed exchange of *kula* goods (shells and jewelry). Exchange of these goods generated prestige, but if a gift were not given in return, one would lose prestige. This balanced or reciprocal exchange was a way to gain or lose face, which could affect one's overall effectiveness in the community. Like Durkheim, Mauss contends that social cohesion is maintained through the generation of solidarity by the connections formed in the exchange of gifts. In essence, exchange creates community and reflects and informs social hierarchy.

These concepts of exchange are embedded in religious, social, and political institutions, and in the modern context, still exist but are less obvious (Mauss 1990). Within the True School community of Atlanta, there is an expectation of reciprocal exchange, with access to resources tempered by time and work invested in the community. Mauss's work carried on a tradition left by Malinowski (1922) and remains highly influential. Theorists like Sahlins (1972) and others continued to describe and expand the concept of reciprocity, but the basic review just provided will suffice for the scope of this research.³¹

We have already seen that a golden rule of treating each other like family, or doing unto others as they would do unto you exists among True Schoolers. This ethic describes reciprocity, and through their justification for and provision of support of one another on a day-to-day basis, as well as for our two elders, it becomes clear that the exchange is generalized. There is no need for immediate or equal payback. One respondent who hosted the benefit concert describes her feelings about labor in the True

³¹ For more information like Mauss See Levi-Strauss (1987) and for critiques of his work see Testart (1998) and Derrida (1992)

School community surrounding the radio station stating:

...what you're working with inspires me to continue doing this, so that we can grow, so that when whatever it is that they're doing, whether they're making music, they're producing, whether they're, you know, teaching, whether they're going to get a company started, whatever it is, as their company grows, as a station or as a program, I grow, we grow together so, um you know, it's kind of just like a give and take that we have, that I love (HHK-AK-014).

Her words imply a communal responsibility that touches on the work of Tonnies (1887), Oliver (1988), and Keller (2003) as she and her community, build together. This is because True Schoolers share a common struggle and ideology and do visible work for their community, generating loyalty and sustainability. During interviews I found that this ethic existed, but respondents usually avoided referring to it directly. In order to draw this information out, I asked them whether or not they believed reciprocity was involved in their labors of support for Minister Server and Professor Griff. Their answers are graphically represented in figure 8.

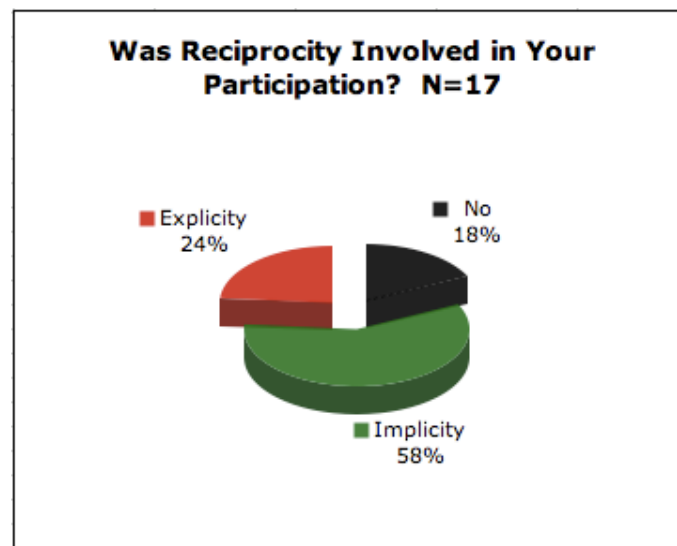


Figure 8.

Almost a quarter of respondents directly identified their own ethic of reciprocity as informing their contributions. They gave their time and energy because Minister

Server gave their time and energy. Sista Shawna, Minister Server's wife, provides a compelling account of this here stating her opinion of reciprocity in the community.

I think it's huge, huge. Because what you put in is what you get back and I know that me and the Minister have put out money, resources, love, knowledge, we open our home, we open our lives, we open our knowledge to people and so I believe that what you put out is what you get back. So we weren't surprised that we got some assistance (HHK-AK-010).

Around 3/5 of those interviewed described their contributions as just the way that their community worked. Members gave because it was the right thing to do, because it was in line with their ethos. Only eighteen percent of respondents did not see reciprocity as reflected in their participation in the event. Two thirds of that eighteen claimed that people give because of the community spirit. This again indicates, that some rules of exchange are taboo to discuss explicitly, but can be pointed to implicitly by referencing the "community spirit," that has reciprocity built into it. Another respondent who volunteers in the community, hosts events, started an online university, and owns his own clothing line describes this action based on an ethos of implied reciprocity:

You give because, again you're not thinking about the receiving aspect, but you know when you are part of a particular culture or community that that's what the community does. So you know that you giving is what you're supposed to do because you've already received (HHK-AK-013).

In sum, the overwhelming majority of my sample regardless of their answers to pointed questions about reciprocity recognize the reciprocal nature of exchange with their community.

While it seems clear that generalized reciprocity does exist amongst True Schoolers in Atlanta, respondents all had subtly different explanations, and many pointed to a need for philanthropic participation in life in general, both inside and outside of their community. They described their ethic of philanthropy as human nature, and not specific to True School. Different members have different ideas about why people give, but they

all give their time and energy to causes inside the community. To further understand how this exchange takes place, a discussion of multiple forms of capital may prove beneficial.

You all even with what you have right now, what you're working with inspire me to continue doing this, so that we can grow, so that when whatever it is that they're doing, whether they're making music, they're producing, whether they're, you know, teaching, whether they're going to get a company started, whatever it is, as their company grows, as a station or as a program, I grow, we grow together so, um you know, its kind of just like a give and take that we have, that I love (HHK-AK-014).

Multiple Forms of Capital

Like Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu looks at how exchange functions beyond financial capital. For him work and labor, do not necessarily equate to financial liberation, and instead may create a system of inequality. By looking at how other forms of capital are exchanged, hidden costs and benefits may be illuminated. These forms are economic, social, and cultural capital, and are transferable between one another, but oftentimes unequally with economic capital still maintaining more power (Bourdieu 1977).³² Discussions of these forms are long and multifaceted, but will only be covered briefly here, with an emphasis on what is important to understanding the True School Community.

Economic Capital

Economic capital is essentially money, or a material good that is directly convertible into access to other goods or services, and is the root for all other forms. Other forms are convertible to it, and it to others, yet some goods may only be acquired through social networks and deep understanding of how a particular culture works (Bourdieu 1977; Portes 1998). Economic capital plays a significant role in Hip Hop culture, and I would venture to say within a great many communities across multiple

³² See Aiwa Ong (1999) for contemporary examples

cultures. True School Hip Hoppers have a focus on community empowerment through the tools that are immediately available and easily accessible. This usually means direct labor and information or access garnered through a carefully kept socially network. It is possible to make some inroads into the True School community using financial capital, but without significant investment of time, energy, and demonstration of an understanding of the community ethos, one will not get very far. This community deals heavily in cultural and social capital.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu defines cultural capital as a system of skills, behaviors, thoughts, and perceptions that are constructed through interpersonal relations in the home, workplace, school, and beyond. There are three constituent elements of cultural capital: institutional cultural capital (associated with degrees, awards and qualifications); objectified cultural capital (associated with symbols and ownership); and embodied cultural capital, or *habitus*. This final form of capital is the complex set of tastes, ideas, values and implicit rules that one develops an understanding while being raised. It is a form of enculturation that informs thought and action. *Habitus* includes the ethos, or zeitgeist of the community described earlier by both Oliver (1988) and Keller (2003).

Institutional Cultural Capital

Institutionalized cultural capital may come in the form of recognition by certain segments of the record industry, or attaining certain types of degrees from particular institutions. This capital is understood as more easily transferable into economic capital than other forms (Bourdieu 1977). In the True School community, elders like Griff and Server have a wealth of this local entrenched capital, and it is almost exclusively

convertible within the general Hip Hop community and, to the greatest extent, within True School.

Both Minister Server and Professor Griff are affiliated with nationally recognized Hip Hop Institutions. They are tied to True School institutional cultural capital in their proximity to organizations like Public Enemy and the Temple of Hip Hop, and much of the power they wield on a national level is because of their association with these large names. One local emcee describes his feelings about his elders and their relationships with these organizations and how that affected community members in their provision of support.

...like in the case of Professor Griff, like, he's a member of one of the most influential rap groups in history. So, I mean, you could talk to any Hip Hopper out here and have them either name or quote anything Public Enemy and be more than happy to do it without hesitating to breathe, before they do it. Minister Server and his dedication and service to the Temple of Hip Hop alone is incredible. And the things that that organization has given back in knowledge and support, you know, and understanding, in sharing, that's tremendous (HHK-AK-021).

His statements validate both elder's institutional cultural capital and touches on the embodied cultural capital associated with them, which I discuss in greater detail in a few sections.

Objectified Cultural Capital

Objectified cultural capital is manifest in the dress, and physical art, such as graffiti within Hip Hop. It should be noted that the Golden Age of Hip Hop has its own style that is still associated with True Schoolers, but generally, just showing enough objectified cultural capital associated with Hip Hop culture at large can illicit initial contact. Additionally, based on participant observation, I suggest that being affiliated with one particular strain of Hip Hop over another could close doors within the True School community. Being too "gangsta" or "thug life," could affect the difficulty or ease

in which a person is allowed access to True School. It is not the dress or swagger that is most important to True Schoolers, it is the word and action, which are described in embodied cultural and later, social capital.

Embodied Cultural Capital

Embodied cultural capital is typically difficult to generate and requires significant accumulations of labor. This form may not be transferred instantly, but rather, requires prolonged exposure and participation like that of Server and Griff. These two elders are unmatched in their ability to wield embodied cultural capital in terms of understanding Blackness, spirituality, and Hip Hop History. Through their lives in the North East³³ during the dawn of Hip Hop, their reputation and credibility carries enormous weight.³⁴

By wielding such knowledge within networks one may gain influence, become a gatekeeper or a leader. This cultural capital itself flexibly accumulates into differential access to power and influence when working within the True Community proper and to a lesser extent the rest of Hip Hop Culture.

All respondents described Hip Hop culture as being an important part of their maturation process. For them, Hip Hop has always been a part of their life, and through their urban Black *habitus*, a part of their identity. Many of the respondents discussed the inextricable links between being Black, and the influence of Hip Hop culture. Elders like

³³ As previously mentioned Hip Hop culture initially radiated outward from the South Bronx in New York City and around the Atlantic North East before establishing itself in other major locations like Miami, LA and Chicago (Chang 2005).

³⁴ Because of their international, national and local recognition through association with institutional forms of cultural capital, their outward appearance as Hip Hop (when performing), as well as their vast knowledge of Hip Hop culture, I suggest that these men both become a part of objectified cultural capital. They are actually pieces of the culture at this point. I would compare this Michael Jordan's relationship with basket ball, or Bob Marley's affiliation with Reggae. While there is certainly a difference in scale within this comparison, I think it is still valuable to note.

Professor Griff, and Minister Server are leaders in their community partially because of their deep roots in Hip Hop culture, as well as their display of Hip Hop knowledge in the realms of history, spirituality, business, and politics. It is this knowledge as well as the work that they do in the community, or social capital that they generate, that make them respected community leaders.

True School represents a nexus of formal and informal networks and relationships where people engage in reciprocal exchange of goods and services that may be describe in terms of multiple forms of capital. This discussion of exchange is left unspoken, and if members are questioned about it, the ethos/zeitgeist that is manifest in documents like the Temple of Hip Hop DOP or Universal Zulu Nations Infinity Lessons are referenced. These documents represent a form of objectified cultural capital that hold embodied cultural capital in the knowledge they contain.

It is also important to note, that Hip Hop is tied to a long narrative and oral tradition, and much of this ethos is passed along verbally. This transmission is also part of the *habitus*. Understanding that Hip Hop is a narrative tradition, and embracing the True School ethic and movement comes through prolonged exposure and enculturation. Participation in transmission of these ideas through elements of Hip Hop generates social capital. It is this participation that is most apparent in the work of Professor Griff and Minister Server that has already been covered at great length. Their labor in the community (combined with the community ethos and cultural capital) is largely responsible for the outpouring of support that their community afforded them in dire circumstances.

Social Capital

Many knew of Minister Server and his work, but on a large scale, folks knew Professor Griff through his participation and his being part of Public Enemy. And so immediately, we've known, many of us were inspired by Professor Griff and Public Enemy and so he was directly, I know for me, directly connected to my identification as Hip Hop. My identification as a Black person, an African American person here in this country, my knowledge of self he was directly connected to that and for many of us he served in that capacity. So when it was said we needed to come his aid for all that he's given us, it was not even a second question for people to step up to show him that love and give him a little bit back of what he has given us over the years (HHK-AK-023).

Social capital has recently been embraced by policy makers and academics alike in attempts to discern meaning, action, and protocol for a range of applications across disciplines. It is essentially a way to describe the value of social networks in gaining access to goods or services. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) is often cited as one of the first theorists to give social capital a thorough analysis and posits that social networks of value are maintained and cultivated through regular casual social contact as well as reciprocal exchange of resources and services that generate feelings of trust and indebtedness. James Coleman adds to this understanding, supporting Bourdieu's focus on benefits yielded to individuals and small groups through trusting relationships, saying that social capital is mostly positive. This is qualified by Portes (2000) who states that failing to look at how networks can be exploited by greedy or lazy individuals can be dangerous and negligent, and is reminiscent of Keller's warning about poor leadership as well as the examples involving mic club and the True Schooler who mishandled donations.

Perhaps the most famous contemporary theorist to discuss social capital is Robert Putnam, who unlike his predecessors focuses on populations. In his work he discusses what he sees as decline in social capital in the US, primarily due to the compartmentalizing effects of globalization which fosters mistrust and breaks down generalized reciprocity, a tenant long held to be integral in maintaining social networks.

This trust can be described as thick or thin and is related to previous work by Mark Grannoveter as well as social capital being divided into bridging and bonding categories (Putnam 2000).

Putnam's most important contribution to the social capital dialogue as it pertains to the True School Community of Hip Hop points to civic participation. Some of his early work suggests that African Americans from lower to middle class backgrounds had higher degrees of formal civic participation through ethnic and religious affiliated organizations (Putnam 1995). Putnam's assertions fits well with the sample of interviewees from the True School Community who were all Black, and of those that did share economic information, they fit squarely into the lower to middle class categories.

Putnam's critics suggest that his claim of decline in social capital as measured through declining rates of civic participation is misguided and that this participation is actually materializing in areas of community life. Furthermore his handling of social capital fails to provide a clear definition of what it is, or to problematize it in the greater discourse of exchange (Arneil 2006). Lisa Sullivan defines social capital as "both the informal and formal networks and associations of ordinary citizens who have the capacity to facilitate, coordinate, and cooperate in efforts that benefit the entire community." She asserts that Putnam's focus on formal networks and associations hide the vitality of social capital in the informal sector, "especially among the poor and young" (Sullivan 1997). It is this young, and oftentimes economically disenfranchised community that identifies with (or is identified with) Hip Hop culture. True Schoolers are of all ages, but all respondents in my sample were under the age of 50, and closer to the age of 30. As

previously mentioned, all respondents³⁵ self identified as middle class or lower middle class.

We have seen how the formal affiliations, as well as words of Minister Server and Professor Griff are directly tied to the impetus for support provided by the community by it, but these elders have led the way in helping another generation of volunteers and social activists create a wealth of social capital, while giving back to their community. As described in previous chapters Minister Server and Professor Griff are most well known for laboring in the community disseminating their embodied cultural capital (knowledge of Hip Hop) from positions of power afforded to them by their institutional cultural capital (proximity to Public Enemy and the Temple of Hip Hop), and in doing so create more social capital. They do not do this for the sake of accumulating social capital, they do it because of their dedication to the True School ethos which is tied to embodied cultural capital. They are creating *habitus* for True Schoolers and Hip Hoppers today, giving them an opportunity to take Hip Hop and use it as a tool for positive social change.

Their words are reinforced by their actions. As previously indicated both men spend a significant amount of time volunteering in the community in acts of civic participation. Hosting events, giving lectures, mentoring, conducting self defense classes, organizing workshops, organizing events, showing up at events, and doing cameos on up

³⁵ All respondents that *would* answer questions about socioeconomic status: discussion of finances is taboo in many communities, and True School Hip Hop is no different. One respondent held strong to the ethos of True School describing himself as wealthy, just wealthy. When pressed for information he said that he was blessed, and did not waiver from this. For most of my interview with him, he was reluctant to share any specifics having to do with exchange or economics, always falling back on the ethos of taking care of people because that is “what we do.” He denied the existence of reciprocity, or the importance of Hip Hop in this dialogue, stating that we are all “just human,” and that “right and wrong,” are “right and wrong.” He was also a major contributor to organizing the benefit concerts and invested significant labor and finances to have it happen. In both his words and his action, he maintained the explicit dialogue of the community ethos, and perhaps championed the most extreme version of it, allowing no discussion of exchange.

and coming artists records, these men invest significant labor in the community for the sake of the community under the auspices of True School ethos. Thus they generate significant social capital that works well in combination with cultural capital to warrant an outpouring of support for these men during their times of crisis.

One of the respondents recounts how recognition of Minister Server and Professor Griff's labor in the community manifests as a provision of support for elders, in an implicit understanding of social capital.

When I approached those people they knew me from no one, had no idea who I was, but when I mentioned Griff, I mentioned Server and the work that they've been doing in the community. Some people knew of their work, some people didn't, but none of the DJs that I approached said no. Every single one of them said, "Absolutely, I'm on board. I'm going to do it." And they had no problem with the issue of hey; it was just immediately, "We're there, whatever you need. We'll do it. I'll do it" (HHK-AK-023).

Another respondent (HHK-AK-016) describes this same implicit understanding of social capital in his own life, as he works within the community stating that he has "both benefited from as well as contributed to [Hip Hop] in terms of time and energy, promotion, voicing, speaking, voluntarily... ..Hip Hop has definitely cost but it's a cost I'm willing to pay, it's just par for the course." Each of the respondents has this understanding of work and time in the community as a reciprocal relationship. Implicitly what you put in, you get out. Explicitly an overarching ethos of communal support and responsibility is championed.

We have seen how exchange based on community ethos and reciprocity takes place at a local level, but during our interview, Professor Griff provided me with a glimpse into how dedication to Hip Hop and the True School movement generated international support for him in his time of intense need.

[S]o I could never say that the Hip Hop community didn't support me, even up until the time of the fires. You know the average Hip Hop head was walking up man grabbing my hand and putting money in my hand. People I didn't even know. "I heard what happened to you, here you go." "I heard what happened to you, here's some old books that I've read already." Yeah you can't beat that bro, it almost brings tears to your eyes to see the average person that has been affected by your music and you work now coming back around and saying, "Yo, here's a 5 dollar money order. It's all I can afford." Yeah man. They had a benefit for me in Manchester, England. I wasn't even there and they raised a thousand dollars.....Eighty percent of the people [who provided support] I didn't know. This a new generation. They felt the effects of what I did in Public Enemy. They don't know me personally... I'm gonna be honest with you man, at every fund raiser, which I think there was about six or seven, every meeting, every person, yeah, I mean, literally it almost brings me to tears when I think about it. I was blown away, man. I was like, "Wow!" So they really, truly man. Cats was like, "Yo man, I got an extra copy of this 12 inch of so and so and so. You can have it." Or, I've got some old footage of you all from the thing, I'll put a string of DVDs together. You can have them." Yeah man, everything. I was getting coats, I got some old Public Enemy wristbands from one cat. One guy said, "Look, I made a copy of all of these old pictures. I scanned them. Here, you can have the originals." I'm like man these things are valuable. He said, "Don't worry about it." Somebody I don't even know. So the support has definitely been there. Yeah. I mean from the-- don't get me wrong now. The Ipod I carry was from some Hip Hop white dudes at Apple. You know the Skull Candy headphones I have in the car, their company store candy. Adidas gave me some sneakers. Yeah man, these young cats now that been influenced by Public Enemy? They're in positions now in certain companies. They like, "Yo that's Griff." (Professor Griff: HHK-AK-028).

Griff's social capital or work to generate and sustain his network at home, at a local level, garnered him reciprocal support from the True School community. They described their impetus for support as a community ethos, or a "golden rule." At the same time his massive cultural capital and visibility through Public Enemy gained him the support of Hip Hop Heads and True Schoolers around the world.

Of additional importance to the examples provided by the work of Minister Server and Professor Griff is that of the labors of the rest of the community. Each of these community members has tight bonds to one another with a kin like affinity to each other. They all labor in the community together, and share information with one another about that labor. As previously indicated they help one another out on a daily basis *because* of the provisions of support

they afford one another, and a commitment to the ethos of mutual support that exists inside of True School. In the words and actions of True Schoolers inside and out of the community response to the house fires I suggest that their flexible accumulation of multiple forms of capital as represented by a generalized reciprocity found in their ethos, does work as a safety net.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to provide readers with compelling examples of how the community ethos³⁶ of mutual responsibility and support can be described in terms of the reciprocal exchange laid out by Mauss (1925). We have seen that the ethos of support that fits into community models described in the last is the impetus for that support, and the total dialogue of exchange can be described in terms of multiple forms of capital described by Bourdieu (1970). In the concluding chapter of this analysis I will summarize key concepts and provide readers with some compelling suggestions on how to use this research.

³⁶ Again, this ethos/zeitgeist/spirit/ethic generally relates to a “golden rule” that describes the tight kin like mindset that Tonnies describes, Oliver reinforces in Community Saved, and Keller highlights in all of her models.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUDING REMARKS

A healthy social life is found only, when in the mirror of each soul the whole community finds its reflection, and when in the whole community the virtue of each one is living.
Rudolph Steiner

In the last chapter it became clear that True Schoolers see themselves as a community with an ethos of support that frames a reciprocal exchange across multiple forms of capital. Let us take a moment to give a bit more body to this by reviewing the research objectives of this project. At the outset, I was most concerned with what “underground,” meant, and I discovered that this subdivision of Hip Hop was made up of multiple, overlapping groups. After Minster Server and Professor Griff suffered their losses due to house fires, the first major objective of what types of people provided support crystallized.

At that point another question of whether or not these True School elders had actually been “caught” by their network arose. While many people from around the world donated heavily, a group of people networked roughly around WRFG community radio station provided the majority of the support. These Hip Hop activists, who usually existed in the “underground,” are sometimes identified as True Schoolers.

After I was able to identify some edges of this group, situating them in a larger historical context became relevant. True Schoolers are the activist part of Hip Hop culture, which is a contemporary production of African American creativity and reclamation. True Schoolers hold to the tenants of competition and community that were

most apparent in the early days of Hip Hop.³⁷ The labor, education, and spiritually oriented aspects of Hip Hop culture that are tied to Blackness are very visible amongst True Schoolers. Unfortunately, the large volume of mainstream pop Hip Hop music that generally glorifies money, sex, drugs and violence hides much of the work True Schoolers do musically or otherwise.

The third set of questions that I began to consider in my exploration of Hip Hop culture was whether or not the group of True Schoolers that had provided support to Minister Server and Professor Griff could be identified as a functioning community. By exploring ideas of identity, organization, and ethos within extant community theory, I was able to answer this question with a resounding yes. Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) provided an early framework that distinguished True Schoolers as a community of Hip Hop cultural enthusiasts and social activists that functioned inside and out of the confines of formal and institutionalized society. Melvin Oliver (1988) allowed us to again see the overlapping experiences of African Americans and Hip Hoppers who oftentimes employ creative coping strategies and solutions to structural problems faced in socio-economically and politically disenfranchised urban areas.

Suzanne Keller (2003) built upon the work of Tonnies and Oliver together describing an inclusive list of community features from four models that can sustain or erode the cohesiveness and flexibility of a group. At the end of her deep and broad analysis of community Keller provides a condensed list of components that are required in sustaining and growing a community. I suggest that this list is applicable to the words

³⁷ According to the Universal Zulu Nation, those tenants can be summarized as Peace, Love, Unity, and Having Fun.

and actions of True Schoolers. Her “Bedrock of Community” is pictured in figure. 9.

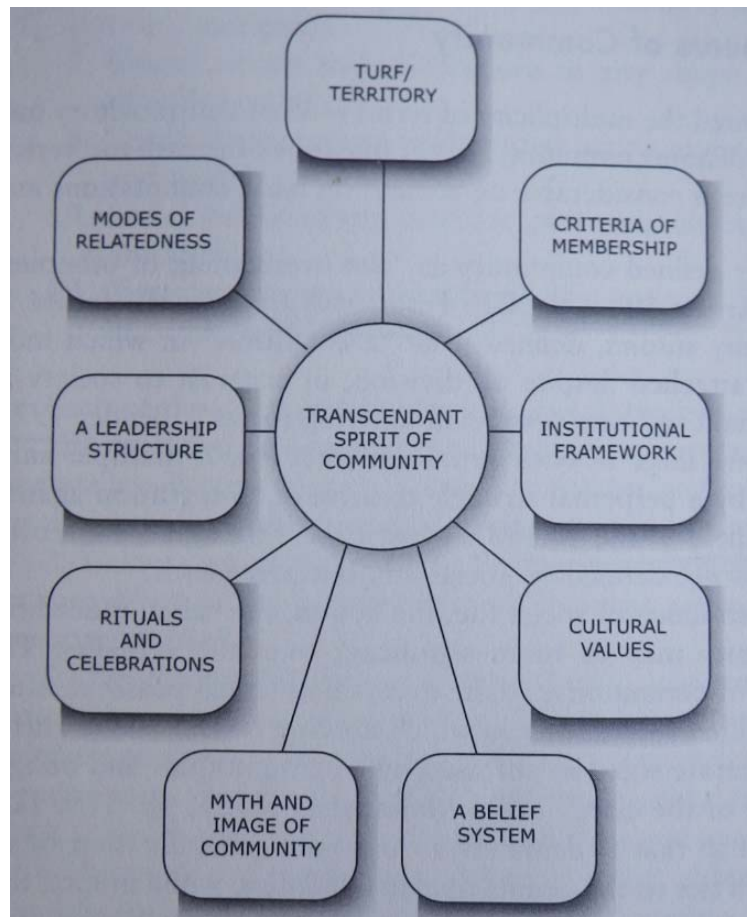


Figure 9. “Bedrock of Community” (Keller 2003: 265)

A community myth that is based in a shared history and common contemporary experiences; social relationships that are trusting and responsive; shared rituals that help bind people to one another in collective living and strong leadership to provide mentorship, guidance and support in maintaining a transcendental purpose that is captured by a “spirit of community.” One interviewee describes what this spirit of community means to him and how he recognizes it in other community members desire to build and work together:

You know, so the community provides that strength that you need to know that, okay, I can walk through this because why? My allegiance to the people lets me know that the people recognize when I need their help and they'll step up to the plate and help me out. And I think that's what you're witnessing at least within this so called microcosm of the Atlanta Hip Hop community, is that we know what our purpose is and we stick together. But, you know, a lot of cats man, they really want to do good, you can hear it, even in their voice (HHK-AK-15).

Through their organizing of a benefit concert for their elders, the work that all respondents in the community have done, and the implicit and explicit descriptions of ethos within True School, it becomes clear that it is a cohesive group with a sustainable future. Through their appreciation of an ideology of mutualism and their love of each other and their arts True Schoolers have created a community that meets Keller's criteria for strong and sustainable development. Minister Server himself states: "What makes you a real Hip Hopper is that you're invested in the community, the culture, the people."

It is this investment or exchange in community in people that I explored through the works of Mauss (1990), Bourdieu (1977), and Putnam (2000). I found that exchange was reciprocal, and could be described in terms of multiple forms of capital. There were two ways that this dialogue of exchange took place, together they describe an implicit commitment to communal responsibility. First, is the community ethos of mutual support that is found in lyrics and True School documents like the Temple of Hip Hop's Doctrine of Peace. Explicitly these ideas and commitments get expressed in the actions of True Schoolers. Some of them actually identified the idea of generalized reciprocity as an important, even defining function of exchange within the community (but to dissect it as such for discussion could have been seen as having tarnished it). Discussion of money and exchange is in some ways taboo within this community, and to talk about the community spirit that binds them together in such terms, while instructive, was perhaps

not the most sensitive thing to do. True Schoolers are engaged in reciprocal exchange, and this exchange is in line with their community ethic, it is just unspoken.

According to respondents, the community did its job to keep Server and Griff afloat during their time of need, but it is important to note that many participants still wished to see greater action. True, a safety net was created in the True School community, but it was only that. It did not create the requisite environment for human flourishing. It is this human flourishing that is the end goal of True Schoolers. The ethos goes beyond the borders of their community and includes others in working, "...all of us together, using what we have to get what we need" (Minister Server). It is this ethic that True Schoolers would like to see have greater representation in the Hip Hop lexicon as it is spoken around the country and planet.

So what is to be done with this information? What does it really mean? How are we to address the complex web of identity and structural phenomena in Hip Hop? How can Hip Hoppers employ their culture in creating greater positive change, in spite of overwhelming media misrepresentation? Tricia Rose, a respected Hip Hop scholar, states:

"We cannot truly deal with what is wrong in Hip Hop without facing the broader cultures of violence, sexism, and racism that deeply informs Hip Hop, motivating the sales associated with these images.... Yes, Hip Hop's excesses will continue to be used as a scapegoat; but we must develop our own progressive critique, not just stand around defending utter insanity because our enemies attack it. The mere fact that our enemies attack something we do does not make our actions worthy of defense" (Rose 2008: 28-9).

She provides an honest call for reflexivity, critical introspection and greater social action. In many ways, True Schoolers are developing that progressive critique that informs regulation of behavior within the community. Like Keller, Rose describes a need for more than an ethic, but for self-regulation, and even rules of conduct.

While these rules exist in documents like the Zulu Nation's *Infinity Lessons*, or the Temple of Hip Hop's *Doctrine of Peace*, they are still not consumed or understood on a wide enough basis to be part and parcel of regular Hip Hop vernacular. Keller (2003) reminds us that community is not something that happens instantaneously. It is a fluid construction that takes time to coalesce, and is an iterative process. In her book *Hip Hop Wars*, Tricia Rose provides a framework for creating progressive communities around Black music.

1. "Beware Manipulation of the Funk"
Sometimes funky beats hide very destructive content. "The life force of the funk has been wedded to a death imperative." Understand who is employing cultural forms and for what ends.
2. "Remember what is amazing about the chitterlings and what isn't"
Hip Hop is a testament to African Americans' ability to make great things out of what they are left with.
3. "We live in a market economy; don't let the market economy live in us."
Don't let personal greed go beyond community health and wealth.
4. "Represent" what you want, not just what is."
Make your participation in art about the world you want to see, not just as a reflection of what is. Lead by example and let your actions speak as your words do
5. "Your enemies might be wrong but that doesn't make you right."
Hip Hoppers can focus their energy on promoting ideologies and labors of love and positive action, instead of constantly proving detractors wrong. Including self criticism in the dialogue can shift the focus of detractors and promoters alike.
6. "Don't Settle for affirmative love alone; demand and give transformational love."
Set boundaries in the interest of change, growth and health. Form community around growth and transformation in addition to sustaining what has already been achieved (all quotes: Rose 2008:264).

Her main contribution to dialogue of community in Hip Hop is a finely tuned, self-reflexive, analytical lens. In a combination of the warnings from Portes (2000) and Keller (2003) (people who take but do not give, and people who exploit leadership status and thus lead poorly), Rose asserts that maintaining the ability to distinguish both internal as well as external threats to community at multiple levels in the social strata will add to the sustainability of any group. This introspection and regulation from within came up in interviews on numerous occasions. It is the True School community that is taking an active and self reflexive approach at developing and maintaining a contemporary moral

compass for Hip Hop, that is reflective of its roots and the historical continuum of performance, reclamation and resistance in which it sits. St. Thomas Aquinas eloquently states that “Law; an ordinance of reason for the common good, [is] made by him who has care of the community.” His words echo the self reflexive dialogue that Rose asserts and reminds us of the importance of boundaries set by community members for community members. Professor Griff contextualizes this in terms of our current discussion stating “the Hip Hop community needs to police itself, because as soon as we allow other people to police us it’ll become something different.” To maintain and sustain a community, action, exchange, and regulation, must be self reflexively understood and critiqued internally, by community members who care about their neighbors, themselves and the whole.

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APPENDIX 1: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Hip Hop Community Pros/Cons Safety: Interview Protocol D
2. How is your identity related to Hip Hop? (or do you identify as Hip Hop?)
3. How long have you considered yourself to be HHK?
4. How did you get involved in HHK? (is this a conversion experience? Parents? School, everyone did it?)
5. How would you define the Atlanta Hip Hop community? “factions” (neighborhoods)?
6. What makes the Atlanta Hip Hop community important?
7. How is HHK in ATL related to the CRM?
8. How do you define community?
9. Do consider Hip Hop to be a community? What makes it a community?
10. Define Loyalty? Is there loyalty within the HH Community? Loyalty to the community?
11. How about accountability? Do you think people hold themselves accountable? Does the community hold individuals accountable?
12. Is there trust between members of the community? Trust for the com. itself?
13. What makes the Hip Hop community different than other communities?
14. When does the Hip Hop community support you?
15. Has the Hip Hop community supported you in times of dire need, like after a traumatic situation? Or do you know of any situations like this?
16. Can you give exact monetary figures, or provide specific examples and details of goods and services?
17. How many people gave? In what ways?
18. Who in that community provided the actual support? (demographics and more)
19. Why do you suppose these people or groups in the Hip Hop community chose to assist?
20. What is your relationship to the people providing support?
21. How was that relationship changed (or not) after the provision of support?
22. Do you think trust fits into this? How?
23. Do you think reciprocity fits into this? How? (might answer accountability)
24. Has the Hip Hop community itself ever cost you anything? Please explain
25. How about your identification with Hip Hop? Has that cost you anything?
26. In what terms have those costs come about?
27. Is there anything about HHK you don’t like, or aren’t comfortable with? So what makes HHK worth being a part of in spite of that?
28. Do you think that the mainstream shows the “giving” that you have experienced?

29. Is there anything else that you want to share or feel is of importance?
30. Do you know anyone else who would want to discuss these things with me?
31. Demographics: Age, Sex, Education, Class (Income), Marital, Groups,
32. Would you take a survey later? Follow ups? How do you feel about this interview?

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY PROTOCOL

Hip Hop Culture and Community: Atlanta 2008 Survey

This survey is concerned with your ideas and opinions about several themes in Hip Hop Communities and Culture. The questions ask your opinion about social capital, community outreach, spirituality, identity, and media... There are NO wrong answers. All comments are welcome and valuable. Please use the margins of the page if you need more space. Thank you for participating. Your contributions will help create a more holistic picture of the potential of Hip Hop and help us all to do better in serving through it.

1. "I am Hip Hop."

Strongly disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. I consume Hip Hop Culture in the following ways: (circle all that apply)

a. music	d. clothing	g. comics
b. food/ drink	e. language	
c. videos/film	f. ideas	

3. I make Hip Hop Culture in the following ways: (circle all that apply)

a. Emmcee (vocalist)	e. urban economics (entrepreneur and more)	
b. DeeJay (turn tablist)	f. fashion designer	i. Film
c. dancer (breakin and more)	g. Urban Language: linguist	j. Food/Drink
d. visual artist (graff art)	h. Knowledge: writing/ journalism	k. comics

4. When I think about my everyday life, I am Hip Hop _____% of the time....

5. The Hip Hop music that I listen to is _____.

Underground		Mainstream
1	2 3 4	5

6. I consider myself to be more a part of _____ Hip Hop Culture

Underground		Mainstream
1	2 3 4	5

7. To me, mainstream Hip Hop is about

8. To me, underground Hip Hop is about

9. I believe that Hip Hop is related to the Civil Rights movement. (YES / NO)
How?

Spirituality, Morality and Hip Hop

10. Members of the mainstream Hip Hop community are spiritually oriented
a. true for most all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know

11. Members of the underground Hip Hop community are spiritually oriented
a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know

12. Hip Hop is a spiritual experience
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

13. Hip Hop provides me with rules or guidelines to live by
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

14. I believe that there are moral codes that people follow within the Hip Hop Community.
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

15. I have seen this code in written form. (YES / NO) Where?

16. I believe the following documents are known primarily in the underground community.
(circle all that apply)
a. Hip Hop Declaration of Peace b. Infinity Lessons c. Hustler's 10 Commandments
d. other _____ e. none of the above

17. I believe that in the community of Hip Hop I am part of, spirituality is important.
a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know

Social Capital

18. Where I live I am part of a local Hip Hop Community. (Yes/ No). This community has about ____ members and is primarily underground / mainstream / other _____

19. I am part of a Hip Hop community in which people can use resources (like social networks) other than money to get their needs met. (True /False).

20. My definition of social capital *includes* the following: (circle all that apply)
a. reciprocity b. loyalty c. trust d. indebtedness e. respect f. fear g. status
h. other _____ i. other _____

21. I do things that help the Hip Hop Community.
a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never
22. My community supports me because I do the following things: (circle all that apply)
a. produce music b. educate c. volunteer time d. donate money e. donate goods
f. get people jobs g. feed people h. mentor i. donate skills j. none of the above
23. It has been my experience that people in the local Hip Hop Community support each other because of an ethical code that is apparent in Hip Hop Culture.
a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know
24. It has been my experience that people in the national Hip Hop Community support each other because of an ethical code in Hip Hop Culture.
a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know
25. Compared to most people in the Hip Hop community, I believe my own social capital is
a. greater than most b. more than some c. average d. less than some e. less than most
26. I explain my own degree of social capital as a result of _____
27. I believe that the social capital of elders in the Hip Hop Community like Minister Server and Professor Griff is greater than most.
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

Community

28. I define community as _____

29. I believe that community is important in mainstream Hip Hop.
a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know
30. I believe that community is important in underground Hip Hop.
a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know
31. "I am part of a Hip Hop community."
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

32. In the underground Hip Hop Community, I believe that there is a high degree of tolerance of...

	Always		Sometimes		Never
Political differences	1	2	3	4	5
Gender differences	1	2	3	4	5
Sexual preference	1	2	3	4	5
Religious differences	1	2	3	4	5
Class differences	1	2	3	4	5
Ethnic differences	1	2	3	4	5

33. In the mainstream Hip Hop Community, I believe that there is a high degree of tolerance of...

	Always		Sometimes		Never
Political differences	1	2	3	4	5
Gender differences	1	2	3	4	5
Sexual preference	1	2	3	4	5
Religious differences	1	2	3	4	5
Class differences	1	2	3	4	5
Ethnic differences	1	2	3	4	5

34. I believe that my local Hip Hop community values tolerance of these differences.

a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know

35. I believe that my national Hip Hop community values tolerance of these differences.

a. true for all b. true for many c. true for some d. true for few e. not true f. don't know

36. The local Hip Hop Community makes my day-to-day life easier. (YES / NO)
How?

37. The national Hip Hop Community makes my day-to-day life easier. (YES / NO)
How?

38. My local Hip Hop Community HAS helped me out of a bad “_____” situation.

Economic Y / N HOW?

Social Y / N HOW?

Emotional Y / N HOW?

Political Y / N HOW?

38 *cont.* My local Hip Hop Community HAS helped me out of a bad “_____” situation.

Spiritual Y / N HOW?

Physical Y / N HOW?

Other aspects Y / N HOW?

39. People in the Hip Hop Community help me out...

because I am Hip Hop. (YES / NO)

because I am Black. (YES / NO)

because I am

40. The Hip Hop Community HAS cost me significantly in my...

Economic life Y / N HOW?

Social life Y / N HOW?

Emotional life Y / N HOW?

Political life Y / N HOW?

Spiritual life Y / N HOW?

Physical life Y / N HOW?

Other life Y / N HOW?

Time Y / N HOW?

41. I help people in the Hip Hop Community get material goods, or things.

A. food a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

B. drugs/alcohol a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

C. luxury goods a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

D. movies/music/media a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

42. The Hip Hop Community helps me get material goods, or things.

A. food a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

B. drugs/alcohol a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

C. luxury goods a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

D. movies/music/media a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. rarely f. don't know

43. The Hip Hop Community provides me the following with social services:

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. Access to transportation
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| B. Access to jobs
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| C. Access to medical care
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| D. Access to sex
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| E. Access to child-care
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |

43 *cont.* The Hip Hop Community provides me the following with social services:

- | | |
|---|---|
| F. Access to communication.
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| G. Access to housing.
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |

44. I provide the Hip Hop Community with the following social services:

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. Access to transportation
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| B. Access to jobs
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| C. Access to medical care
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| D. Access to sex
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| E. Access to child care
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| F. Access to communication.
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |
| G. Access to housing.
don't know | a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. yearly e. never f. I |

45. The Black Community and my local Hip Hop Community grant me similar levels of access to goods and services.

- | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------------|----------------------|
| a. Strongly agree | b. Agree | c. Neutral | d. Disagree | e. Strongly Disagree |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------------|----------------------|

46. _____% of people who help me in the Hip Hop community are also in the Black Community.

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

47. The Hip Hop Community and the Black Community overlap significantly. (YES / NO)
How?

48. The Black Community and Hip Hop Community are different
Politically Y / N How?

Spiritually Y / N How?

Economically Y / N How?

Participation

49. I see the Hip Hop community participating in community building events.

Scale: **1** is never **3** is sometimes, **5** is always; “x” is I don’t know or mixed results

1 2 3 4 5 x

50. I lend a hand (time, money, services) to other people in the Hip Hop Community when in need.

Scale: **1** is never **3** is sometimes, **5** is always; “x” is I don’t know or mixed results

1 2 3 4 5 x

51. Other people in the community help me because I am Hip Hop.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

52. Other people in the community help me because I am Black.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

53. I help others in the Hip Hop community because I am Hip Hop.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

54. I help others in the Hip Hop community because I am Black.

a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

55. I help others in the Hip Hop community because they are Black.
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

56. I help others in the Black community because they are Black.
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

57. One thing that I would wish for the Hip Hop Community is...

58. One thing I would like the media to get about Hip Hop would be...

Demographic Data

59. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

60. Age: _____

61. Occupational Status:

- a. I am working full-time
- b. I am a full-time student
- c. I work part-time, and/or am student part-time
- d. I am a stay-at-home-mom/dad
- e. I am unemployed
- f. I am retired

62. Estimated annual income

- a. \$0 – 30,000
- b. \$30,000 – 50,000
- c. \$50,000 – 100,000
- d. \$100,001 +

63. Race/ Ethnicity

- a. Black/ African American
- b. Hispanic/ Latin
- c. Asian American or Pacific Islander
- d. Native American
- e. Other _____

64. Number of Children

- a. 0 b. 1 c. 2 d. 3
- e. 4 f. 5 g. 5+

65. State of Residence: _____

City of Residence: _____

66. Highest education level achieved

- a. Less than high school
- b. Some college
- c. College graduate
- d. Post graduate

67. Are you an enrolled student?

- a. yes b. no

68. Employment Status

- a. Employed (full time)
- b. Employed (part time)
- c. Under the table
- d. Unemployed

69. Relationship Status

- a. Married c. Divorced/Separated
- b. Committed Rel. d. Single

70. Sexual Orientation

- a. Straight c. Gay/Lesbian
- b. Bisexual d. Transgender e. Other

Optional: contact information (for follow ups):

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Thank you again for your participation, together we can make a difference... Blessings!

Peace and