Chapter 1

Gettin' Present as an Art: A Signifyin(g) Hipstory of Hip-hop

R&B disco, pop country jazz
All thought hip-hop was just a fad
But here comes Grandmaster Flash non-stop
And right after Flash, Run DMC drop
Now they had to pay attention to the scale
Where other music failed, hip-hop prevailed
See, rap music has gone platinum from the start
So now in '89 we gettin present as an art . . .

—KRS-One, "Hip-Hop Rules"[1]

Signifyin(g) Histories

Can hip-hop be defined? Or is definition a kind of death, a refusal of the change that any evolving artform must embrace? These questions are particularly urgent for a musical/verbal artform which is as deeply imbricated in the politics of identity, authenticity, and reception as is hip-hop. Whether one sees postmodern culture as marked by the 'free play of signification' or a politicized struggle for meaning in the face of indeterminacy, hip-hop is a paradigmatic instance; at once carnival and contest, it is a cultural crossroads through which everyone passes—whether in a Lexus with the windows rolled up and the a/c on, or in a Jeep loaded with speakers blaring out phat bass lines. For those who have grown up in, or moved into its discursive and social world, there's no need for commentary (Ice-T: "I'm through explaining

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this shit")—as for everyone else, well, "something is happening here, but you don't know what it is—do you, Mr. Jones?"[2] So what exactly is going on? Certainly, with so many doctas, professas, and teachas 'in the house,' somebody can explain it all?

Hip-hop is all too often conceived of by casual listeners as merely a particular style of music; in one sense they're right, though the question of *style* has far more political significance than they may attribute to it. For others—including many musicians and music fans—it is not music at all, but rather from-the-gut "street" poetry or (as with many of the performers quoted in a recent issue of *Musician* magazine) just so much noisy, mindless boasting. Leaving aside the historical ironies of middle-aged rock-n-roll fans using the same arguments their parents once used about the Rolling Stones (that's not music, it's *noise*), it is clear that hip-hop continues to pose a problem for the old categories of music; it has recently reached the point where country and soft-rock stations make "no rap music" part of their promotional campaigns. Despite the fact that its audiences today are more diverse in terms of race, class, and region than any other music, the reception of hip-hop continues to be a central element in highly polarized arguments about race from both white and black communities.

Before engaging, however, with the postmodern politics of audience, reception, and (sub)culture that hip-hop incites, it is crucial to locate the music (as well as other elements of hip-hop culture such as graffiti, clothing styles, and verbal comedy) in the specific cultural histories within which it, like previous African-American artforms, has emerged. Precisely because the media debates over the "dangers" of rap music ignore these histories, it is crucial that they be recovered, and indeed it is one of hip-hop's own central strategies to re-invoke its own history as well of the history of African-American and black expressive culture in general. Hip-hop's continual citation of the sonic and verbal archives of rhythm and blues, jazz, and funk forms and re-forms the traditions it draws upon, and without specific attention to this process of cultural recycling and production, its central place in the ongoing 'culture wars' cannot be understood. Hip-hop, moreover, draws not only upon African-American traditions, but upon its dense interconnections with black diasporic music, from dancehall to Afro-pop, from soca to UK funk.

It has only been about seventy years since the first commercial recordings of African-American music were issued on the "race" labels

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of the 1920s. Yet even at that early date, the multiple threads of tradition were already interwoven; field hollers, arhoolies, and spiritual songs had evolved into the blues, New Orleans jazz, and ragtime—and already these traditions were continuing to evolve alongside and against their commercialized doppelgangers, from minstrel shows to vaudeville to Broadway. "Race" records, part of a system of musical apartheid that had its origins in "black" and "white" theater and carnival circuits, at first featured black women vocalists, whose repetoire included not only blues but show tunes. The market for such records grew rapidly, and by the late 1920s (when new electronic recording technology enabled record companies to set up "field units" to travel the country in search of new music), "race" labels had expanded to cover a wide variety of African-American music, ranging from Delta blues to Chicago honky-tonk, from New Orleans jazz to Memphis jug bands.

Thus, early on, African-American traditions were able to draw upon recorded music as one of their key sources of continuity and communication; not only did rural and urban styles cross-influence one another, but the practice of making performances that copied, referred to, or set themselves in variation against previously *recorded* works became widespread. And, just as Henry Louis Gates Jr. has documented with African-American *written* traditions, the vernacular, aural/oral traditions of black music produced and framed these variations through the modes of Signifyin(g).[3] While Gates outlines some quite specific modes within which verbal Signifyin(g) operates—and which I will discuss in detail in chapter 3—it also functioned on a musical level, and it is on this level that the structural variations and styles of African-American music have developed. Simply put, Signifyin(g) is repetition *with a difference*; the same and yet not the same. When, in a jazz riff, a horn player substitutes one arpeggio for another in moving from key to key, or shifts a melody to what would be a harmony note, or "cuts up" a well-known solo by altering its tempo, phrasing, or accents, s/he is Signifyin(g) on all previous versions. When a blues singer, like Blind Willie McTell, "borrows" a cut known as the "Wabash Rag" and re-cuts it as the "Georgia Rag," he is Signifyin(g) on a rival's recording.[4]

Thus, African-American music is fundamentally *at variance* from "Western" music, with its obsession with the precise reproduction of written notation, and indeed *at variance* from itself; when New Orleans jazz evolved into swing, or the hard boppers broke from swing, or the

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"cool" jazz school drifted away from hard bop, these new forms were Signifyin(g) on their precursors. Within African-American modes of expression, to "break" with the past is itself a tradition; to "cut" or "bite" on one's precursors is to invoke them; to deviate is to remain true. Given this, it is little wonder that the twentieth century has witnessed the Africanization of music on a global scale; what becomes more remarkable, in fact, is the strangely hostile reception many listeners have given rap music. On the one hand, as Amiri Baraka observes, for many white listeners the only good African-American music is a *dead* one; indeed collecting old jazz and blues records and commenting on them has become an old Euro-American tradition.[5] On the other hand, mass culture, dominated though it may be by homogenized and sanitized cultural products, has always embraced exactly what it most feared; in this sense, hip-hop (to Signify on a phrase of Ice Cube's) is "the music ya love ta hate."[6]

To understand the status of hip-hop within its own Signifyin(g) traditions, it is crucial to know the histories of recorded (and performed) African-American musics, since without these histories the musical and verbal texts against which hip-hop music has (re)marked its difference would be obscured, and the double valences and resonances of the Signifyin(g) weave would pass unnoticed. The historical and social significance of Signifyin(g) itself cannot be underestimated; it stands as the principal bridge between two kinds of distinctly African-American stances: on the one hand, a reverential feeling for the past, a sense of ancestral voices; on the other, a deeply agonistic sense of social and verbal rivalry. Gates postulates two separate modes of Signifyin(g) corresponding with these two social functions: "motivated" Signifyin(g), which is parodic and agonistic, and "unmotivated" Signifyin(g), which is empathetic and reverential.[7] Despite the fact that the difference between these two modes is often hazy, the distinction is still worth making, as it offers a model for two different modes of reception, *both* of which are continually at work in the articulation, the (un)-folding, of hip-hop's musical praxis.

Given, then, that Signifyin(g) histories are always already *double*, there would be little point in constructing a linear 'history' of hip-hop; instead, I will set forth a series of historical vectors, which (re)trace the crooked pathways by which the musical and verbal texts of the past (both distant and recent) eventually found themselves embedded in the liquid amber of hip-hop.[8]

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1. Tramps

Lowell Fulsom first recorded the song "Tramp" in Los Angeles in 1965–66, and it was released shortly afterwards, reaching number 52 on the pop charts.[9] In his version, the song is a monologue, spoken and sung in the voice of a man who boasts to his lover that, while she may call him a tramp, that he's "a lover" and that "lovin' is all I know to do." Fulsom quotes his absent interlocutor only to brush aside her name-calling, and to undercut her accusations ("Heh...call me country, right from the woods, I'll answer when ya call me") with his assertions of (implied) sexual prowess, adding that he has a "big bankroll" and "three Cadillacs" to boot. Fulsom's monologue itself 'tramps' over the words of an unequal speaker, a woman whose words are quoted only to be implicitly devalued.

Fulsom may have been surprised, in 1967, to hear a cover version of his song cut by Otis Redding and Carla Thomas (then the reigning 'King and Queen,' as the album cover billed them, of Memphis Soul).[10] This version transformed Fulsom's monologue into a *dialogue,* the reported speech into a playful bantering between the sexes. This kind of banter, which at times approached the agonistic extremities of the 'dozens,' was itself hardly new to the African-American tradition. It went back at least as far as 1930, when Lonnie Johnson and Clara Smith cut "You Had Too Much" for the Okeh label.[11] Johnson and Smith engaged in a 'spirited' debate over which one was drunker than the other, each using increasingly vivid figurations of drunkenness in an effort to out-trope the other. To transform the Fulsom monologue into such a playful bantering song may well, for Otis and Carla, have been an instance of 'unmotivated' or empathetic Signifyin(g). Yet to Fulsom, their interpretation 'made fun' of his song, and according to some reports he was far from pleased; from his point of view it was a parody, and a highly 'motivated' one at that.[12]

To engage with the question of who is Signifyin(g) upon whom in these two versions, it may be helpful to compare them in detail:

Fulsom version:

Tramp? You can call me that . . .
I don't wear continental clothes . . .
Stetson hats . . .

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[Chorus] *But I'm a lover*...heh heh...mama was...papa too
I'm their only child...lovin' is all I know to do.

heh...call me country...right from the woods
I'll answer when ya call me,
heh, baby, that is, if it makes ya feel good.

[Chorus] *But I'm just a lover*...mama was...papa too
But I'm their only child... lovin' is all I know to do

Now what if ya called me . . .
heh, I'll even go for that.
'Course I keep a fat bankroll in my pocket, baby.
You know I own three Cadillacs . . .

[Chorus] *'Cause I'm just a lover*...(etc.)[13]

Thomas-Redding version:

[Carla Thomas]	[Otis Redding (sung lines in italics)]
Tramp!	
	What you call me?
Tramp!	
	You didn't!
You don't wear continental clothes or a Stetson hat . . .	
	But I'll tell you one doggone thing. It makes me feel good to know one thing...
	I know, I'm a lover
It's a matter of opinion, baby	
	That's alright...Mama was
so?	
	Papa too!
hmmm.	
	And I'm their only child, *Lovin' is all I know to do....*

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You know what, Otis?

What?

You're country!

That's alright!

You're straight from the
Georgia woods!

That's good!

You know what? You wear overalls!
Them big ole brogan shoes . . .
And you need a haircut, tramp!

Haircut? Woman, you too
Oooh, I'm a lover. . . .
mama was, grandmama, and papa too

Doesn't make you one!

Oh, that's alright.

But I'm the only son of a gun
This side of the school [?]

Tramp!

That's right, that's what you are!

baby. . .brand new hat. . .[?]

You're a rat and a tramp!

You know what, Otis, I don't care
what you say, you're still a tramp!

What?

You haven't even got a fat bank-
roll in your pocket. You probably
haven't even got twenty-five cents!

I got six Cadillacs, five Lincolns, four
Fords, six Mercuries, three T-birds,
Mustangs . . .

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oooh I'm a lover....

Prove it by me!

my mama was...my papa too

What?

I'm a tell you

Well, tell me!

I'm the only son of a gun
This side of the...so long!

You're a tramp, Otis!

No!

I don't care what you say, you're
still a tramp!

Don't call me that!

Looka here, you ain't got no money!

I got everything!

You can't buy me all those minks
and sables and all that stuff I want!

I can buy you rat [?], frog[?], squirrel,
rabbit, anything you want, woman!

Look, you done go outta the Georgia
woods to catch them, baby!

Oh, but you're ruthless!

You still a tramp! A tramp, Otis,
just a tramp! You wear overalls.
And you need a haircut, baby!
Cut off some o' that hair off your
head!

You think you're a lover, huh?[14]

In Otis and Carla's version, Carla not only gives voice to the hitherto absent interlocutor, but provides undercutting commentary on

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the male singer's claims, commentary which reiterates her doubt as to his sincerity (and, for that matter, his sexual prowess).[15] Carla's commentary fills the rather lengthy (in Fulsom's version, two full bars) pauses between the spoken lines leading up to the chorus. And, while she picks up on many of Fulsom's tropes, she elaborates them and personalizes them through a variety of Signifyin(g) strategies. Fulsom's "Call me country...right from the woods," becomes Thomas's "Otis...you're country, you're straight from the Georgia woods!"; she adds her own details about Otis's shoes, overalls, and need of a haircut. Redding, for his part, offers formulaic defenses ("That's alright") to her accusations, and turns the vocal fervor of the chorus up at each turn; Fulsom's "only son" becomes Redding's "only son of a gun." In the final verse, where Fulsom had boasted of his "three Cadillacs," Redding ups the ante to "Six Cadillacs, five Fords, six Mercuries, three T-birds, Mustangs"—but this doesn't impress Thomas, who rejoins with "I don't care what you say, you still a tramp!"

Thomas and Redding's version thus not only makes Fulsom's monologue into a dialogue, but shifts its weight through Signifyin(g) on its tropes; a male boast becomes the site for a female toast, and Fulsom's hoochie-kootchie man persona is sent packing. His bravura was to suffer still further under the dual assault of women rappers Salt 'n' Pepa in 1987. Salt 'n' Pepa's version samples the Thomas/Redding version with a tape loop of the 'Memphis Horns' chorus, as well as a sample of the single word "tramp!" from the early part of the song. Hip-hop drums and some funky instrumentation are added, along with a (now barely audible) male voice that lingers in the choruses, where it protests "Tha's alright baby, I'll be your tramp, you know what I'm sayin'? Fat rings, thick gold chains, you know what I'm sayin', gold on my *teeth* . . ." But once the intro ends and Salt 'n' Pepa begin their rap, this voice hardly stands a chance; they don't even bother to address him directly. In their version, the song is instead addressed to *women* in the audience:

> Home girls, attention you must pay
> So listen close to what I say!
> Don't take this as a simple rhyme (*Tramp!*)
> 'Cos this type a thing happens all the time.
> Now, what would you do if a stranger said, 'Hi'
> Would you diss 'em, or would you reply?

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If you answer, there is a chance
That you'll become a victim of circumstance
Am I right, fellas? Tell the truth
Or else I'mma have to show an' prove
You are what you are, I am what I am
It just so happens, most men are

Tramps!
(male voice, sampled) What you call me?
Tramp!
What you - what you call me?
Tramp!
What - what you- what you call me?
Tramp!

[male voice: "Yeah, I'll be your tramp"]

Have you ever seen a dude that's stupid and rude
Whenever he's around, he dogs your mood
I know a guy like that, girl
He thinks he's God's gift to the world
You know dat kind, excited all the time
Tramp!
With nothing but sex on the mind
I'm no stunt, on me you can't front
I know the real deal, I know what they want
It's me (why?) Because I'm so sexy!
It's me (what?) Don't touch my body!
'Cos you see, I ain't no skeezer
But on a real tip, I think he's a...*Tramp* (etc.)

[male voice: "This is gettin' ridiculous. Don't waste my time!"]

On the first date, he thought I was a dummy
He had the nerve to tell me he loved me
But of course, I knew it was a lie, y'all
He undressed me with his eyeballs
Tryin' to change the whole subject
'Cos everything he said pertained to sex

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So I dissed 'im, I said 'Youse a sucka!
Get your dirty mind out the gutter!'
You ain't gettin paid, you ain't knockin' boots
You ain't treatin' me like no prostitute
Then I walked away, he called me a teaser
You're on a mission, kid! Yo! He's a...*Tramp* (etc.)

[male voice: "Now why you gotta be all that, damn! You know what I'm sayin'? I'm tryin' to talk to you, you tryin' to diss me, you know what I'm sayin'? Now if I rolled on you, I'd be wrong, right?"]

Shut up, Tramp![16]

Salt 'n' Pepa Signify upon the Thomas/Redding version by completely fragmenting it, building their rap among its disjointed pieces. The male voice, dominant in Fulsom and comically punctuated in Thomas/Redding, is completely marginalized here, appearing only as a one-dimensional comic foil (a similar technique has been used by many other women rappers, including Roxanne Shanté and BWP (Bytches With Problems)).[17] Salt 'n' Pepa switch off voices, but only to create an open, conversational frame, not to diss each other (though there is a hint of rivalry in the last verse). The slowed-down, slightly scratchy Memphis Horns plug in and out at the chorus, ending in a "wicki wicki" scratch; Carla Thomas's sampled voice breaks in with the word "Tramp" at various moments during the verses, sometimes joined by Salt and/or Pepa. If Fulsom's version is monologic, and the Thomas/Redding cover dialogic, Salt 'n' Pepa's is *heteroglossaic*, two to the power of (at least) three (including Spinderella, Salt 'n' Pepa's DJ). Even the samples, which through their familiarity invoke the larger tradition of African-American music, are anything but what they were. There is a Signifyin(g) difference between emulation/citation (again, Gates's *unmotivated* Signifyin(g)) and literal *sampling*, which in its replication of a ghostly aurality is ever po(i)sed on the edge between mocking pastiche and reverential invocation of musical ancestors.

Sampling, then, is not intrinsically either positive or negative—and, for that matter, the multivalent lines of Signifyin(g) upon African-American (and other) musical traditions, cannot be readily separated into "motivated" or "unmotivated" categories in the sense that Gates

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uses these terms (indeed, the entire Signifying Monkey paradigm hinges precisely on the inevitable possibility of mistaking one for another). Such "motivation" is to a great extent in the ears of the consumer, not in the turntables of the producer; Lowell Fulsom may think Otis and Carla are mocking his song, and Carla Thomas may or may not appreciate being sampled by Salt 'n' Pepa. Sampling, as EPMD might say, is always "business, never personal"; as an element in a new musical construction, the sampled material, whatever it was, becomes something else, an element in a far more complex discursive structure. Rap has even reached the point where rappers sample other rappers; Chuck D is a particular favorite.

In a sense, the hip-hop practice of "sampling" pre-recorded sounds constitutes its founding gesture: an incursion against the author-function, a midnight raid on what Houston A. Baker Jr. calls "the 'in effect' archive."[18] It also constitutes a reversal of the traditional modes of production and consumption that have fueled the music industry in its exploitation of African-American music. The rap DJ evolved from the party DJ, whose ostensible role was merely to play pre-recorded music for dance parties; like their audiences, these DJs were *consumers* of pop music. Yet by taking these musical sounds, packaged for consumption, and remaking them into new sounds through scratching, cutting, and sampling, what had been consumption was transformed into *production*. Such a cut-and-paste valuation of the hitherto unvalued put hip-hop in a unique relation with commodity capitalism, and concomitantly with cultural production in general. If consumption could be productive, it could never again be regarded as merely passive; at a stroke, hip-hop framed in acutely materialistic terms a question that had hitherto been though merely philosophical. Or perhaps, in a still more revolutionary sense, hip-hop simply made visible (and profitable) a productivity of consumption which had been there all along, albeit in a more diffuse form.

2. Earthquake on Orange Street

The shift from consumption to production can ultimately be traced back to the Afro-Caribbean traditions of Jamaica, which in many ways stands as the link between identifiably African elements and European musical conventions. The question of hip-hop's relation to Afro-Caribbean music has been given too little attention; aside from a chapter in Dick Hebdige's *Cut-n-Mix* and a brief article in the *New York*

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Times, most critics have preferred to pursue the roots of rap in funk, soul, and "rhythm and blues."[19] Yet in many ways both the narrative and musical connection between hip-hop and Caribbean musics are the most central to its musical identity. For one, the making of an indigenous music out of materials made ostensibly for *consumption* (records) was certainly practiced in Jamaica long before it reached the South Bronx. Jamaicans, living within listening distance of U.S. radio stations, heard the rhythm-and-blues music of the '40s, '50s and early '60s and liked what they heard. Yet because of their poverty, much of the population had little access to the musical instruments, amplifiers, and other sound equipment necessary to *make* such music on their own. The pioneers of ska took American R&B records, especially instrumentals, and played them over amplified sound systems at parties, mixing in shouts of encouragement to the dancers. Later, when the first recording outfits were set up by sound system men such as Prince Buster, their recordings reflected these heteroglot beginnings; over a chorus of upbeat horns playing a slowed New Orleans-style shuffle, Buster boasted and cajoled, calling out challenges to his rivals on Kingston's music row:

> Man, stand up and fight if you're right!
> Earthquake on Orange Street! [20]

Buster was one of the first sound-system men to go into the recording studio; while the older DJs like Duke Reid still valued imported American R&B singles, Buster and the new generation of producers made their own records, subtly altering the rhythmic emphasis, flattening the jump beat into more of a shuffle, and intermixing the 'burru' rhythms of Rasta drummers like Count Ossie.[21]

The earliest Jamaican-produced records were mostly 'specials'—discs pressed in very small quantities for the exclusive use of the sound-system men who had footed the bill for their recording. It was only later that these records were commercially distributed, mostly through licensing arrangements that enriched the producers (though not necessarily the performers). Yet even as these records moved back from the place of production and were re-marketed for popular consumption, they returned again as sites for production, through the 'talk-over' or dub records that were produced from the late sixties onwards; these records featured b-sides with only the instrumental

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tracks, b-sides that could in turn be used as the basis for new recordings, talked-over at system parties or on the radio, or as the soundtrack by the new school of dub poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson. And, while the toasts of the early sound system men had consisted primarily of topical rhymes or exhortations to the dancers, the lyrics from the mid-sixties onwards, along with the poetry of the dub poets, voiced social protest and suffering.[22] By the time ska began to shift over to the more thoroughly Afro-Caribbean forms of rock-steady and 'reggae,' the music had become thoroughly identified with the "concrete jungles" and other impoverished areas of Jamaica, an identification which singers such as Bob Marley helped create, and used as the basis for creating a global voice for the disenfranchised in the 1970s.

That much has been widely known, but what is less often noted is the strong similarity between the rhetorical and narrative conventions of ska and reggae with those of hip-hop. Of particular significance is the early "rude boy" style, which glorified the angry, young, tough-living kids of West Kingston; there are striking similarities, both cultural and musical, between the 'rude boys' of ska and the 'gangstas' of hip-hop. A case in point is Prince Buster's well-known series of songs on the "Judge Dread" theme. Each song contains a courtroom vignette narrated by Prince Buster as Judge Dread; before him come a number of 'rude boys' who plead their crimes.[23] In the first of several 'sequel' songs, when a rude boy brings "a barrister from Europe," Judge Dread is particularly incensed, dealing out as harsh a sentence to the barrister as to the defendant; one unlucky rude boy is sentenced to 'four thousand years imprisonment.' The next song in the sequence (all of which share the same upbeat horn riffs), "Judge Dread Dance," uses the courtroom drama as the pretext for a new witness, who turns out to be the horn soloist who plays the dance's theme. Buster finished the series with his "Barrister Pardon," in which Judge Dread releases the prisoners, followed by a celebratory ska dance; there are also a number of answer records, including Derrick Morgan's "Tougher Than Tough" (produced by Buster's arch-rival Leslie Kong), and Lee "Scratch" Perry's "Set Them Free,' in which Perry comes before Judge Dread, mentions the defendants by name, and makes a lengthy plea for mercy based on their poverty and lack of education; this record runs out, however, before the judge can offer a reduced sentence.

Even before the 'rude boy' craze, Prince Buster had injected gangster machismo into his mixes; in one early cut, "Al Capone," Buster

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tells his listeners "Don't call me Scarface! My name is Kerpown-C-A-P-O-N-E Kerpown!"[24] As the poverty and oppression of Kingston's slums increased, so did the gangster/rude boy ethos, which eventually laid part of the foundation for Marley's political reggae of the later '60s. Compare all this with the courtroom drama which N.W.A. stages in their now-infamous cut "Fuck tha Police": The courtroom opens with "Judge Dre in full effect," and the various "niggaz" in the court step forth one by one to give their "testimony." Not only is "Dre" an accurate dialect spelling for the Jamaican patois "dread" (final stops are often dropped in the patois), but the rude boys, now gangstaz, have effectively turned the tables; this judge, like Lee Perry, is on their side, and the trial ends with the white cop being dragged off cursing his accusers. I do not mean to suggest here that Dr. Dre took his name or the song from obscure old ska recordings (though he well might have); even the courtroom drama has other analogs in U.S. popular song—but only to observe that the narrative framing of power relations *via* music adapted remarkably similar strategies in both hip-hop and in the early days of ska.[25] Part of this similarity may be due to similar social inequities, but it is also clear that many of the influences at work here came via the Jamaica–New York–Los Angeles connection. U Roy, Big Youth, and other Reggae talkers produced major hits in Jamaica in the early- to mid-'70s, delivering a powerful message with tracks such as U Roy's "Wake the Town" (1970). Kool DJ Herc, one of the pioneering DJs of hip-hop, came to New York from Jamaica, where as a child he had heard and seen the system men.[26] In fact, the Jamaican connection is hip-hop's strongest claim to specifically African roots, since not only the narratives and the basic technology, and the concept of talking *over* recorded music arrive via this route, but also the rhythmic, cut 'n'mix sound that is at the very heart of the hip-hop aesthetic.

Jamaican music continues to be a central influence on hip-hop, particularly through the faster and more insistent "dancehall" sounds that have come to dominate the scene since Marley's death. Some artists, such as KRS-One, used Jamaican-style rhythms in their raps (listen to his chorus, "Wa da da dang, wa da da da dang / Listen to my nine millimeter go bang" on BDP's early cut "Nine Millimeter"); other rappers brought in dancehall collaborators to add some regga flavor up their hip-hop mix. KRS-One himself cut a single with Shabba Ranks, and similar collaborations took place in the early '90s between Queen Latifah and Scringer Ranks, Ice-T and Daddy Nitro, Q-Tip and Tiger,

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and Patra and Yo-Yo. In the mid-'90s, many hip-hop crews literally *embody* the black Atlantic continuum; groups such as Mad Kap, the Fugees, and the Fu-Schnickens have a dancehall or "ragamuffin" rapper as one of their lead members, and one, "Worl-a-Girl," includes women from Jamaica, the United States, and the United Kingdom. When Patra remakes Lyn Collins' seminal "Think (About It)," or Worl-a-Girl cuts a new version of Prince Buster's "Ten Commandments" (reversing the terms and listing the "ten commandments of 'oman to man" rather than Buster's "ten commandments of man to 'oman"), the cultural phonelines of the black Atlantic are 'ringing off the hook,' and the odds are that this connection will remain open.[27]

3. Sound of the Funky Drummer

One of the deepest veins of ore that hip-hop has mined is the soul/funk tradition, from Junior Parker to Isaac Hayes, and the uncontested Papa-lode of that vein was (and is) James Brown. Yet however prevalent JB samples were in the mid- to late-'80s, back in the days of '79, his brand of hard-working soul filled only one of the many crates DJs hauled from show to show; Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa—to name two— took equal delight in cutting up "white" music (Neil Diamond, the Rolling Stones, Simon & Garfunkel, the Pink Panther Theme, Thin Lizzy, the Beatles) as they did in sampling funk or soul tracks. The radio playlists of the '70s, it should be recalled, had not yet fallen under the musical apartheid of "format" radio; it was still possible to hear Stevie Wonder or Miles Davis on a "rock" station—or to hear the Doobie Brothers or Rod Stewart on a "soul" station; in any case, DJs like Bambaataa took pleasure in fooling the crowd, getting them to dance to music they would rarely play on their own.[28]

Nonetheless, James Brown was an early and powerful influence on hip-hop. He had already enjoyed one of the longest careers of any black vocalist, and despite his occasional tendency to ramble, he set the standard for high-energy beats, as well as classic message songs such as "Say It Loud, I'm Black and Proud," and "Funky President." Yet Brown's broadest influence, perhaps, was not his voice, but his band, which at one time or another included Fred Wesley, Bobby Byrd, and Catfish and Bootsy Collins. It was November 20 of 1969 when Brown brought the band into the studio to record what would later be known as "Funky Drummer"—and become the single most-sampled beat in

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hip-hop. It was one of Brown's last sessions with his old band (within a few months he dropped his veteran sidemen and replaced them with the Collins brothers). Brown's drummer for this session was Clyde Stubblefield, and it was Stubblefield's drum break three-quarters of the way into the seven-minute cut that gave it its name. The distinctive syncopated 4/4 beat of hip-hop is there loud and clear, along with Brown's repeated interjection "Ain't it funky now!"[29]

In the earliest days of hip-hop, DJs would mark off the drum break on a record; with two copies of the same record, it was possible to 'cut' back and forth and produce a continuous rhythm track. Later, "breakbeat" albums were compiled, with longer samples built from tape loops and ample room for cueing them up; digital technology eventually rendered even these compilations obsolete, as even a low-end sampler could grab and repeat four bars of *anything* you could feed it. Digital samples also enabled the slowing down ("shrinking") or speeding up ("stretching") of classic beats; one can now order a compact disc featuring such cuts as "Funky Drummer 110 bpm" or "Stretched President 121 bpm."[30] An astonishing list of the break beats given on one of the earlier DJ compilations is given by David Toop:

> *Super Disco Brakes*, a four-volume set of poorly transferred disco classics mixed with [disco promoter Paul] Winley product, contains tracks like 'Funky Nassau' by West Indian group The Beginning of the End...'Funky Drummer' by James Brown, and other b-boy source material by The Meters, whose New Orleans fatback funk was one of the main roots of hip-hop beats, Creative Source (disguised as Creative Service), the JB's, and The Blackbyrds. Some of the major breaks records are included—Magic Disco Machine's 'Scratchin',' Dennis Coffey's 'Scorpio,' Captain Sky's 'Super Sperm' and Bob James's 'Mardi Gras.' There are two African tracks , 'Soul Makossa' (Winley was the first to jump on the New York craze for Manu Dibango's Cameroon Afro Quelque Chose) and Easy Dancin' by Wagadu-Go (reputed to be the Nigerian highlife star Prince Nico). Grouped together on volume three are Gil Scott-Heron's disco hit 'In The Bottle,' a track from Lightnin' Rod's *Hustler's Convention* (basically a Last Poets record, but credited to Alan Douglas on *Disco Brakes*), and the legendary 'Apache.'[31]

This bizarre smorgasbord of pirated, misattributed, and recompiled tracks (assembled, appropriately enough, by one "DJ Jolly Rogers") was

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only one attempt to appeal to the rapidly-changing and highly competitive DJ market for breakbeats to slap on for a hip-hop party. Hip-hop had begun its raids on the musical *archive* of the past, and for the time being music licensing organizations weren't paying much attention.

Since the era of this particular compilation, rap DJs have continued their raids not only on African-American musical traditions, but on every form of discourse, ranging from newscasts, talk-shows, movie dialogue, sound effects, television themes, and answering-machine messages. Yet beyond what might be merely a fragmentary citation or duplication of these "samples," the hip-hop culture has Signified upon them, rearranging them to produce a new art, what might in itself be called a *transvaluative* art. A drum break, only enough to fill a measure or two in the "source," becomes reconstituted as an entire seven-minute rhythm track; a scream, a howl, or an electric-guitar twang becomes a rhythmic accent on the second or fourth beats of a four-beat measure (James Brown's shout in Public Enemy's "Fight the Power"; Jimi Hendrix's wailing guitar in digital underground's "The Way We Swing"). "Scratchin" the pre-recorded sound, originally done on a turntable by the DJ, is now done electronically as well, taking a horn riff and turning it into a howl of percussive sound, a grinding back-n-forth beat. Single words, excerpted digitally from speech, can be assigned to keys on an electronic keyboard; one rap producer programmed all eighty-eight keys with different intonations and voicings of the word "bitch," creating in effect a new verbal-electronic instrument.

The double-edge of sampling can be most clearly seen at play in rap cuts where spoken-word samples are employed. Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Huey Newton, and Dick Gregory are among the positive African-American voices heard in rap, most often in introductions, but often throughout songs as a chorus or rhythmic accent. This is not a new practice by any means; from the earliest days of commercial recordings of African-American spiritual music, such as the Reverend J.M. Gates' "Death's Black Train is Coming" (1926), it was a common format to issue "sermon" recordings in which a sermon or monologue was framed within two choruses of sacred song.[32] A similar format appeared around the same time in "hokum" blues, which used double-entendres ("You Can Play With My Pussy, but Please Don't Dog It Around") and comic dialogue to build an exaggerated sexual narrative.[33] Typical examples are Big Bill Broonzy's "Terrible Operation Blues," which frames a staged "operation" ("Doctor, doctor, what's

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that?" "Oh, don't you worry, that's just a doctor's *tool,*" etc.) with a musical chorus, or the comic interludes of duos such as Butterbeans and Susie or Harris and Harris, who often did 'guest' appearances on blues recordings.[34]

This chorus–spoken word–chorus format carried over, as David Toop notes, into the 'love raps' so common in '60s and early '70s soul, such as Laura Lee's "Guess Who I Saw Today?," Irma Thomas's "Coming from Behind," and on into Barbara Mason's "Another Man" (c.1983).[35] At the same time, inspirational spoken (not rapped) messages on political and personal issues continued to play a part in Black music; among the best known are James Brown's "King Heroin," "Public Enemy #1," and "Rapp Payback (Where iz Moses?)," but there were numerous other recordings of a similar kind, ranging from Isaac Hayes's mixtures of soul-lover and tough-guy to Lou Rawls's 'Dead End Street.'

The first generation of 'old school' rappers, rather than sample earlier spoken word recordings, preferred to cut up drum breaks and melodic riffs, though an occasional James Brown "aaaw" found its way into the mix. It was not until rap's productive series of changes in the mid-'80s—aided by new digital sampling technology—that *samples* of spoken materials became common. Most of these were fairly straightforward, rarely consisting of more than a few words, such as Bobby Byrd's ubiquitous "I'm Comin'." In part, this was due to DJ's preference for short, percussive sounds, in part due to the limits of technology; aside from mixing in tape or vinyl, digital samplers capable of storing more than a few seconds of music were not readily available until the mid-'80s. Afrika Bambaataa claims that a record he cut with Soul Sonic Force in 1983, "Looking for the Perfect Beat," was the first record to use digital sampling.[36]

Yet another crucial breakthrough in terms of what sampling could do to the hip-hop mix came in 1983, when former Sugar Hill house drummer Keith LeBlanc cut snippets from speeches of Malcolm X and produced the track "No Sell Out."[37] While some were outraged that "Minister Malcolm's" words would be sonically mingling with hedonistic dance music, there were many who realized the political potential of such a technique; fortunately, Dr. Betty Shabazz, Malcolm's widow, was among them, and the recordings received her seal of approval.[38] Before long, samples from Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and other black leaders became hip-hop commonplaces, even spreading into late-'80s techno dance mixes.[39]

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Such samples soon became a straightforward way to signal political awareness; the tone and context into which these samples were inserted tended to reflect their content; the Signifyin(g) mode here was generally "unmotivated" and respectful.

Of course rap also Signifies in a fairly unambiguously *motivated* way by sampling everyone from Hitler to George Bush; with the proper tape loops and edits, it is relatively easy to render anyone's words ridiculous (though it certainly helps if they are worthy of ridicule beforehand) . The industrial-rap group Consolidated, for instance, samples George Bush and cuts his voice in with that of a newscaster, producing sentences such as "Every morning, I receive an intelligence briefing from THE KNIGHTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN" along with "I don't...I don't...I don't care what the facts are."[40] Similar samples have been used by other political rappers, such as Laquan; the rapper Paris even went so far as to alter a sample of George Bush, changing "our outrage against Iraq" to "our outrage against the poor" in order to make explicit Bush's attitude towards urban Americans.[41] Thus, samples have the capacity to strengthen and consolidate a tradition (as when rappers sample identifiable fragments of cuts from James Brown, Isaac Hayes, Otis Redding, or the Last Poets), but also to mark the profound *alienation* of the voice from its "original" speaker(s) and interlocutor(s), making an art of taking things out of one context and inserting them in another.

The effect, for instance, of a sample from *either* Hitler or Martin Luther King (Shazzy, in her "Intro" cut to *Attitude: A Hip-Hop **Rapsody***, samples *both*) is going to be vastly different on listeners who were born long after the '60s, still longer after the '40s; the historical contexts which made both voices intelligible are absent, and many of these listeners may be unable to readily supply them.[42] When I play a rap by Paris in a classroom, for instance, with the sample, ""Stick 'em up, motherfucker, we've come for what's ours," most of my students (born well after the glory days of the Black Panther Movement) have no idea who is speaking. Without prompting, some think it is the rapper himself; others say "it must be from some movie" (popular choices include *Lethal Weapon* and *Boyz N The Hood*). Fortunately for them, Paris has filled the liner notes to this recording with biographical and historical articles on the Panther movement (though of course no one is compelled to read them, and they are thus absent from many actual listening situations (parties, clubs, and [if it were possible] radio).

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Thus, even when it can be said that a verbal sample is being inserted into a recording in a profoundly 'unmotivated' way, there is no way to guarantee that all the record's potential listeners will receive it in an empathetic manner. Empathy, after all, requires knowledge; when I play a hardcore political rap for my students, most of them feel threatened, as many of them are unsure exactly who Paris is threatening when he says he'll bust "Fat Tom's" cap with a tech-9 (both African-American idiomatic phrases such as 'bust a cap' (= blow someone's head off) and brand names of semi-automatic weaponry such as 'tech 9' are obscure to many of them).[43] Through the noise, both the music and the heteroglossaic din of rap language, many people don't get the message at all; like listeners sampled on Ice Cube's *The Predator*, they react simply to the anger: "I'm scared!" "I think we hear...violence."[44]

4. Adventures on the Wheels of Steel

When pressed to name the "first" hip-hop recording, most people who know something about 'old school' music will name the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," which was released in 1979. There are numerous variations on the story of how Sylvia Robinson rounded up (or created) the Sugar Hill Gang: that she picked them up off the streets, that she hired someone she heard rapping at a pizza parlor, that their rhymes were all borrowed from Grandmaster Caz, that in fact the Fatback Band's "King Tim III" was *really* the first hip-hop record, and so forth; true or not, these anecdotes have long been part of hip-hop mythology. Yet what most listeners don't realize is that "Rapper's Delight" is not a hip-hop record at all, but a rapping novelty single. As David Toop puts it, "Rapper's Delight" was a sort of "translation"—or, more precisely, a *crib*—of hip-hop. There were rhymes, sure, and a disco backup track, but the most crucial elements of hip-hop practice—turntable scratches and cuts from record to record, audience call-and-response, breakneck battles on the mic—were all absent.

Hip-hop's remaking of consumption as production was the first thing lost in this translation; despite its appropriation of Caz's rhymes, "Rapper's Delight" was first and foremost a *thing* to be consumed, not a *practice* in action; its relation to hip-hop actuality was like that of a "Live Aid" t-shirt to a concert: a souvenir, a metonymic token. Hip-hop was something goin' down at 23 Park, 63 Park, or the Back Door on 169th Street; you could no more make a hip-hop record in 1979 than

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you could make a "basketball game" record or a "subway ride" record. As a vernacular practice, hip-hop depended on its audiences, its sites, and its technologies to construct a zone of sonic and cultural bricolage which was produced as much by the dancers or listeners as by MCs or DJs; no two jams were the same, and such unpredictability was built into its antagonistic aesthetic. At best, a record could offer a *trace* of one or another jam—as did the tapes Grandmaster Flash used to sell for a dollar a minute—at its worst, as with the Sugar Hill Gang, it was a Disneyland simulacron, a robotic hip-hop recreation.

Nonetheless, despite the lack of connection between the Sugar Hill sound and that of the street, it was an influential recording, even at street jams; whatever had happened before was now haunted by the knowledge that its imitation could be sold for big bucks.[45] "Authenticity" as constructed by the b-boys and b-girls was decentered by the acts of mass consumption that received "Rapper's Delight" *as* hip-hop. The problem, as Walter Benjamin puts it, is that "technical reproduction can put a copy of the original into a situation which would be out of reach for the original itself"; in such a situation, questions of "authenticity" turn into a struggle between the contexts and cultures of the producers (both the street DJs *and* Sylvia Robinson) and those of consumers (both the South Bronx breakdancers and club-hopping disco fans).[46] The *reproducibility* of the record radically increases the probability that it will be (mis)taken as an accurate sample of the productive culture as a whole, since it can now be consumed far outside of its indigenous sites of production.

In the case of "Rapper's Delight," despite the fact that all the established DJs and MCs knew how distant its sound was from what they themselves produced, they imitated it anyway; the "Sugar Hill sound," built around elaborately remixed multi-track masters preselected by Sylvia herself and watering down the strong language of street boasts into "party time" inanities, became *the* sound of hip-hop on record well into 1982. Hip-hop in the parks and clubs went on as before, though now alongside new, larger venues whose patrons were a mix of b-boys and punks, but when it was time to go into the studio, there was *that* sound again. Sylvia even had the nerve to take Grandmaster Flash, whose cutting and scratching skills were the stuff of legend, into the studio and *assign* him a twenty-four-track master tape to use as the basis of his first Sugar Hill single.[47] Even when a few of the better-known DJs established the use of scratching in studio

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sessions, the overall backing track was still a homogenized studio tape. It wasn't until 1982 that DJs like Flash and Bambaataa really got a chance to prove their capabilities in a studio, and the results were the first tremors of the earthquake that would eventually render the "Sugar Hill sound" obsolete.

Finding a way to put hip-hop's indigenous modes of production onto the very vinyl that it founded itself on cutting into pieces was no small task, but if anyone could do it, it was Grandmaster Flash. "Adventures on the Wheels of Steel" was Flash's record, a DJ record (since most of the rapping on it was cut by Flash from earlier records). Flash took no fewer than six instrumental cuts to use as his breakbeats, and every one of them he brought into the mix from a turntable instead of a twenty-four-track master. Dropping the needle down on Chic's "Good Times" or the Sugar Hill Gang's "8th Wonder," he immediately lifted, dropped, and lifted again without missing a beat. Namechecks were provided by cuts from his own earlier records (the Furious Five's "Birthday Party"), Blondie's "Rapture," and an old radio sign-on for "The Official Adventures of Flash" [Gordon].[48] Cowboy provided his signature "Say ho, ho!" call-and-response, and in an inspired moment, Flash cut in a snippet from what sounds like a fairy tale record: "Why don't you tell me a story?" pleads a child's voice; "Well, it went pretty much like this," answers a male voice in a condescending tone; in an instant Flash breaks in with a blast of nine heavy percussive scratches that tear up the audio fabric and kick into yet another perfectly timed backbeat. "Adventures" was more than a sonic bricolage, it was a tactical neural implant, a short circuit in the inner wiring of the music industry, a tone-poem to chaos that brought the street back into the studio.

The impact of "Adventures" was immediate and sent everyone in the business back to the drawing boards. What Sylvia Robinson and her peers had never understood, Flash had realized and put into practice: hip-hop was not able to *record* itself until it could sample its own previously recorded selves, until the audience for *records* knew as well as the club crowds the precise *situatedness* of each of its outbursts. The doubleness implicit when Flash or Bambaataa cut up an old Bob James or James Brown track was lost when, in the studio, these aural recyclings were replaced by the spiffy, polished-chrome sounds of disco. Bambaataa took his listeners back to school via a slightly different path; he worked *within* the multi-track environment, but remade it to his

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specifications. Using keyboards to move bass lines and beats from Kraftwerk or Queen into the mix, he added a multi-layered *vertical* bricolage: electronic game noises, chants, sound effects, and scratches piled one atop the other, creating a funky, raw yet polished sound that would later be known as "electro-funk"; "Planet Rock," which hit big in 1982, was his founding gesture.[49] Whether through a return to "street" rawness or a re-appropriation of such formerly inaccessible technologies as multi-track tape and digital samplers (often through *both*) hip-hop was on the verge of the first of many cycles of collapse and re-invention, which was also—inevitably—a central moment in ongoing anxieties about authenticity, consumption, and a broader listening audience.

5. Just Living in the City is a Serious Task

Despite a tradition of social commentary that stretched back to the Last Poets and earlier, despite the hard-hitting cuts such as Brother D's "How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise," Flash's "The Message," or Run DMC's "It's Like That," most hip-hop in the early- to mid-'80s was not outwardly political; while many groups cut a "message" rap or two, few if any were looking to make a career of them. Yet the worsening situation in the inner cities, aggravated by Reagnomic cuts in urban aid, with the concomitant increase in both affluence and arrogance among the moneyed classes, added a new element of urgency to hip-hop. Performers such as Run DMC and LL Cool J made their claims to fame on stripped-down breakbeats with rock guitar accents that appealed to a large, multiracial audience that bridged the growing social rift; as one of the few artforms to do so, its capacity to communicate the sense of crisis was unparalleled. Yet on the west coast, while the necessary elements were certainly present, there was as yet no performer or group capable of serving as the catalyst for these raw energies.

The initial rumblings were there, nonetheless; like many earthquakes, this one was first felt in Los Angeles. L.A., as sociologist Mike Davis has documented, had been a magnet for blacks and Latinos seeking well-paying industrial jobs in the postwar boom years; as those jobs vanished, it was rapidly becoming a city of dreams deferred.[50] Seeing the landscape of South Central in a film like John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood*, it is not hard to turn back time a bit; the modest,

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stuccoed bungalows whose doors and windows are now covered with iron bars would have had a fresh coat of rosy paint, flowerboxes in the window, maybe a new Frigidaire whirring away in the kitchen. The long slide from working-class community to ghetto was greased with effectively racist seniority systems, corporate relocations overseas, white flight to outlying areas, and (eventually) bank and insurance company red-lining. The kids who grew up in South Central in the '80s looked out over a horizon of possibilities that was framed by police barricades; the L.A.P.D. was one of the most openly racist police departments in the nation, with an unmatched record of beatings, shootings, overzealous raids, and harassment.

Early west coast rap, like the east coast hip-hop scene it started out imitating, was upbeat, funky, and fun; most of its rhymes were as hedonistic and unapologetic as a busload of Valley Girls.[51] A few early message raps, such as Captain Rapp's "Bad Times (I Can't Stand It)," notable for the sheer number of issues it crams into six minutes (beatings, robbery, unemployment, nuclear waste, nuclear war, El Salvador, AIDS, and drugs among them), made some waves, but if anything the scene was more commercialized, more above-ground than anything a self-respecting South Bronx b-boy would be impressed by.[52] Yet the worsening economic situation, combined with political frustration at Reagan's re-election, took its toll, as did the reign of L.A.P.D. Chief Daryl Gates, who was everything his predecessors were only more so; Gates's boys were known to bust ass, and got so excited during one raid that they trashed an entire building, spraying "L.A.P.D. rules" on the walls.[53] Slowly, surely, west coast rappers began to see hip-hop as a medium through which to bring a sense of resistance and power to their communities. In 1985, Toddy Tee came out with his cut, "Batterram," which dramatized the arbitrary use of a powerful battering ram designed to cave in reinforced steel doors on supposed drug dealers' houses; that same year the Future MC's "Beverly Hills Cop" and Kid Frost's "Terminator" hit the streets. These latter two cuts, despite their titles' rather bald attempt to cash in on current hit films, were filled with vignettes of social commentary in a style reminiscent of Flash's "The Message"; the list of grievances was being aired, but as yet the manifestos were unwritten.[54]

The political messages of these cuts notwithstanding, their sound and production values were still pretty much old school, flavored with a west coast proclivity towards electronic funk; their lyrical urgency

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was undercut by their musical predictability. Yet at that very moment, east coast old school hip-hop was about to be overthrown; at the head of the new school were artists united in their desire to replace techno-excess with a stripped-down sound closer to the beat of the streets. When Jam Master Jay cut up Bob James's "Mardi Gras" on Run DMC's "Peter Piper," he wasn't doing anything Flash or Bambaataa hadn't done before—but he was doing it *on a record*, and that made it revolutionary. Similarly, kids with LL Cool J's bag of egotistical tricks (if not his lyrical skills) were rapping at every house party, but for LL to make it to vinyl with no more accompaniment than a drum machine, a snip of rock guitar, and a couple of cowbells was something never heard before. Hip-hop's subtractive mathematics of style had never been so fully put into effect; it didn't take long for perceptive west coast ears to pick up the frequency. By 1986, Ice-T had thrown out the "cold wind" sound effects and was cranking out "6 in the Morning" over a raw, solo beatbox:

> Six in the mornin', police at my door
> Fresh Addidas squeak across my bedroom floor
> Out the back window I made my escape
> Didn't even have a chance to grab my old school tape[55]

Ice-T wasn't the only one who left his old tapes behind; by 1986, almost all of the first generation of hip-hop had seen their stars fade. Melle Mell went back to small-time theft; the "Basketball" court emptied out as Kurtis Blow deflated overnight; even Dick Gregory's wholefood diet couldn't save the Fat Boys from taking the express train to oblivion.

The hungry young rappers and DJs who took their place wanted a harder beat with more bass but no synth; rock guitars gave it an edge, and sirens, screeching tires, and fast-paced dialogue gave it a street-theater soundtrack. For some groups, the change was so fast as to make for unexpected ironies. On the jacket of one of its singles, the World Class Wreckin' Cru had thanked the L.A.P.D. for providing security at its concert; by 1987 its refugees (among them Dr. Dre and DJ Yella) were at the center of a loose collective known as Niggaz wit' Attitudes; within a year they would be cutting "Fuck the Police." Meanwhile back east, LL was rapping over his own siren samples, "Bigger and Deffer," while the Beasties were making their tongue-in-cheek punk-hop collages; in the wings, Chuck D and Flavor Flav were

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in the studio with Hank Shocklee and Eric "Vietnam" Sadler, who were about to make a sound 'louder than a bomb.' Within the brief span of two or three years, hip-hop had gone from being party music with PSA add-ons to an angry, minimalist-with-a-vengeance rhythm of revolution; the change was so sudden that at least one fan was heard to protest that Public Enemy wasn't hip-hop at all, but "black punk rock."

And so it was, but with this difference: it was no longer at the edge but at the *center* of hip-hop culture and attitude; whereas before music critics went to some lengths to remind listeners that there was a serious message in that stuff they were dancing to, they now had to go out of their way to explain that "rap music" (as it was still frequently referred to in the press) was not *only* the music of angry, political, polemical poets and gat-toting gangstas with an attitude. Of course hip-hop had been both all along—and *more*—though in the media theater of the Spectacle you are only allowed one costume change a year. Despite that, the tables were turned, even as the broader audience generated by acts like Run DMC and LL Cool J was hooked; this was audience participation night, and as Ice-T once rapped, "I'm not runnin' from ya, I'm runnin' at cha!"

The soundtrack that emerged from the implosion of the old school had many forms; like the range between Flash's back-to-the-street basics and Bambaataa's multi-track techno extravaganzas, LL's minimalism and the Bomb Squad's infamous "bring the noise" squall were not opposites but complementary parts of a music that had made art out of cultural detritus. The message, too, had its range, from the raw resentment of "Fuck the Police," through the tactical ambivalence of Chuck D's poetic riddles, to the laid-back didacticism of Salt 'n' Pepa's "Let's Talk About Sex." It may seem odd that hip-hop's turn towards a more politicized, uncompromising ethos ended up *broadening* its audience—but no more odd, perhaps, than the fact that the Sex Pistols' uncompromising nihilism and anti-commercialism turned out a smashing commercial success. Somewhere deep down in the ethos of bourgeois culture there is an insatiable thirst for the different, the dangerous, and the dislocated, and hip-hop located that nerve. Whereas most American kids were utterly oblivious to the class politics of British punk, they could not miss the racial politics of rap's messages. To the tensions on every side in the '80s, hip-hop gave an insistent and uncompromising voice.

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One of the least compromising of these voices undoubtedly belongs to Boogie Down Productions leader KRS-One. Give some early-'80s hip-hop like Whodini's "Friends," the Boogie Boys' "Fly Girl," or 2 Live Crew's "2 Live" a spin; over bleepy beats and synth, the rapper's words slide along like Luther Vandross over silk sheets. Then someone hands you an obscure tape from Rock Candy records, and you say "What the heck?" and cue it up: the track begins with the sound of clashing metal reverberating in a skeletal, irregular beat, calling to mind Einstürzende Neubaten's "Stahlversion" (which consists entirely of sledge hammer blows to a metal bridge). A few moments later, however, fractured scales emanate from a dislocated portable organ, while the pounding intensifies. Is this the soundtrack to a Satanic thriller? A recording of a music-therapy session in a mental hospital? Suddenly, without warning, the beat arrives, and a percussive chant superimposes itself on the sonic chaos: "Because we've got to advance, we've got to advance / 'cos nothin' in our lives ever happened by chance..." It's the underground, the raw ghetto sound, it's one of Boogie Down Productions earliest recordings, a verbal-sonic collage instigated by the "Grand Incredible Scott La Rock" and the no less incredible KRS-One (Kris Parker).[56] The BDP sound broke over the South Bronx in '86 like a sonic boom. Nuclear war, despair, information overload—as KRS says, "we have elevated far beyond the Rapper's Delight."[57] BDP brought back knowledge raps with a gangsta edge, rolling over fun-and-games rappers like a bulldozer over a playground.

Despite the shooting death of Scott La Rock, KRS-One carried on; his second recording, *By All Means Necessary*, featured a cover photo that did photographically what Keith LeBlanc had done sonically; with an uzi in his hand, KRS peered out through the curtains in a retake of the famous photo of Malcolm at the time when his house was firebombed. KRS was soon regarded as the premier political rapper on the east coast; by 1989 he sat at the head of a growing BDP empire (posse members Ms. Melodie, Harmony, and D-Nice were all at work on solo projects), and took seriously his role as hip-hop historian and authenticity sound-check:

> I've come to show a different look
> And that look is the whole of rap
> Not just the commercial pap
> But the underground, that raw ghetto sound

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From which rap music was found
So you can't deny it, you cannot refute it
I be rockin' that ghetto music

—KRS-One, from "Ghetto Music," by BDP[58]

As always, KRS raps this message over a relatively simple machine-generated drumbeat and handclaps. In the gospel according to Parker, while hip-hop has both commercial and "underground" sounds, it is fundamentally "ghetto music," "raw" (as opposed, he implies, to more "cooked" commercial rap). Rap music, in this sense, was not so much *founded* as *found* (a claim strikingly similar to that made by the medieval troubadours and trouvères, whose name means "those who find"); it is "found" in the ghetto, and its sounds, as well, are "found" via a combination of electronically generated sounds and samples from earlier (predominantly African-American) musical traditions. Because it is "founded" on the experience of the ghetto, it cannot be "refuted," and will not be "denied"; like many other rappers, Parker sets forth an ironically constructivist definition of rap's "authenticity," a standard of ghetto aesthetics that echoes Ice-T's "ear to the street" test of authenticity.

Conclusion

From these fragmentary and multiple tangents, several things are clear: (1) That the fundamental practice of hip-hop is one of *citation*, of the relentless sampling of sonic and verbal archives; (2) That the distinction between "consumption" and "production" is rendered untenable, with profound implications for questions of audience and authenticity; (3) That hip-hop's inventions and re-inventions insist on their *situatedness* within a long and complex musical continuum. Hip-hop *sites* itself as a product of African-American urban cultures at the same time it *cites* the sonic past in order to construct a radical present. This present, like the past(s) of which it is constructed, resists by its very temporal liquidity the pressures of commodification (Ice Cube: "can't bury rap like you buried jazz").[59] It is musical, kinetic, sartorial, and verbal style; it is process as well as product ; Ice-T plays upon the notion of "product" (drugs) in his cut "I'm Your Pusher"—only now the 'product' is the music.[60] It is also firmly localized, whether in broad categories such as "new school" or "old school" rap, posses such as

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Native Tongues, the Juice Crew, Boogie Down Productions, or the Flavor Unit, or in the numerous hip-hop *sitations* of the [neighbor]-hood (e.g., BDP's "South Bronx, South South Bronx" and N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton"). Finally, hip-hop's coherence and continuity are a result of its practice of its improvisations upon language itself, which form the verbal corollary of musical samples, repeating *with a difference*, troping dopes, and serving as a crucible for reformation and *de*formation of language. This verbal Signifyin(g) is not, in the end, fully separable from the sonic Signifyin(g) out of which it grew, but its practices constitute the fundamental backbone of hip-hop's political incursions; as a rapper who's about to cap another shouts, "It's time to get some schoolin'!"

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