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## Prophets, Studio Revolutionaries, and On-the-Ground Activist: Hip-Hop/Rap Artists' Approaches to Community Engagement

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PROPHETS, STUDIO REVOLUTIONARIES, AND ON-THE-GROUND ACTIVISTS:  
HIP-HOP/RAP ARTISTS' APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

With few exceptions, previous scholarship on rap and hip-hop music focuses on the study of lyrics and videos; emphasizing the negative influence that artists have on their communities and on perpetuating inequality in the United States. Contrarily, this study explores artists' embeddedness in local communities, their interpretation of the connectedness of their work to their communities, and the impact they have as individual civic actors outside the narrow limits of their art. Using in-depth interviews with self-identified rap and located in the Southern region of the United States, I explore artists' personal narratives of the social issues that plague their communities and how they address them as artists within the framework of new social movement theory. My findings indicate that rap and hip hop artists see themselves as addressing community issues in two ways: through physical activism within their communities and verbally motivating listeners with their music.

## INTRODUCTION

The societal impacts of hip-hop music have long been discussed and debated (Binder 1993, Rehn and Skald 2003, Rose 1994, Watkins 2005, Wheeler 1991, Yousman 2003), and there is no denying the mass consumption of hip-hop culture. High numbers of record sales and music video programming clearly substantiate hip-hop as being one of the most popular music genres (Chang 2005, Tanner, Asbridge, and Wortley 2009). From its use in marketing and advertisements (Rehn and Skald 2003) to its use in educational resources (Diaz 2011, Diaz, Fergus, and Noguera 2011), the prevailing presence of hip-hop cannot be overlooked.

Although often criticized for its negative tones and controversial dialogues around violence, misogyny, and illicit drug use (Blanchard 1999, Dawkins), hip-hop still manages to connect with youth in a way unlike any other medium has (Watkins 2005). Thus, extensive research has been conducted in an effort to explore the cultural contributions of hip-hop (Blanchard 1999, Forman 2002, Imani 1999, Kitwana 2005, Mahiri and Conner 2003, Morgan 1995, Ogbar 2007, Perry 2004, Quinn 1996, Rose 1994, Watkins 2005). Most of this research focuses on the sexism (Morgan 1995, Rose 1994), machismo (Morgan 1995), prison culture (Quinn 1996), style of dress and nuances of distinctive vernacular (Cutler 1999) use that have now been interwoven into the broader everyday mainstream culture. There is also literature that attempts to spotlight the advantages of using various aspects of hip-hop as a means of engaging the youth in matters such as education, social justice affairs, or overall personal or communal upliftment (Diaz 2010, Diaz, Fergus, and Noguera 2011, Flores-Gonzalez, Rodriguez, and Rodriguez-Muniz 2013, Ginwright and Cammarota 2002, Hill 2009), but far fewer studies are conducted drawing on the

perspective of hip-hop artists themselves (for exceptions, see Mohammed-Akinyela 2012 and Diaz 2010)

Therefore, in this study I investigate hip-hop artists' self-perceived relation to and impact on their community. To get a better understanding of the relationship that hip-hop artists have with their community, I conducted 26 in-depth interviews with self-identified hip-hop and rap artists. I used new social movement theory to examine the artists' use of their music and physical activism as a means of engaging with their communities. New social movement theory, from the cultural and social mobilization perspective, examines the use of cultural means to mobilize individuals to achieve a collective goal or objective (Buechler 1995). More specifically, Melucci (1996) views that the roles of culture, identity, and communication are particularly meaningful in quest of collective action in a postmodern society.

Seen as a social movement within itself (Everett-Hayes 2013, Simon 2003), hip hop artists use the cultural and social factors found within the context of hip-hop, such as the historical and social origins of hip-hop music or their cultural experiences, as a strategy to mobilize their community to acknowledge and address relevant social issues.

## BRIEF HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF HIP-HOP

“None of hip hop exists in a vacuum; each artist provides but one orientation within a diverse community, to be understood within the context of that community.” -- Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood* (2004)

Similar to all other cultural art forms, the impacts of hip-hop cannot be analyzed unless viewed through the lens of its historical and social context (Blanchard 1999). Clive Campbell, better known by his moniker Kool Herc, would spinning records at house parties that were held on Sedgwick Avenue in The Bronx, New York in the early 1970 (Forman 2002). Eventually moving the party outside where the entire block would be packed with both the young and the old, Kool Herc perform what he termed the “Merry-Go-Round” by taking funk, soul, and disco records and turning a five second instrumental break into a three-minute loop of playing the same break repeatedly (Keyes 2002).

Similar to the selectors that Kool Herc admired as a child in Jamaica, while the breaks were being played, he would use the microphone to engage with the crowd and encourage them to dance. “You never heard it like this before, and you’re back for more and more and more of this here rock-ness” (Chang 2005). As DJ Kool Herc’s “Merry-Go-Round” and rapping became more popular, there was a declining interest in gangs and an increasing interest in crews made up of DJs or break-dancers. Instead of being a part of a gang, becoming a member of a crew that had the aspirations of being known as the best break-dancers or best DJs was the popular thing. Hip-hop scholar Chang (2005) writes that: “[i]n the Bronx’s new hierarchy of cool, the man with the records had replaced the man with the colors” (p. 82).

According to historian Jeffery O.G. Ogbar (2007), hip-hop is a result of three distinct social facets of New York in the early 1970s; the Black Power movement, Puerto Rican



national activism, and the deindustrialization that resulted in a large increase in unemployment within New York city and surrounding areas. The Black Power Movement and the Puerto Rican national activism efforts were driven by the frustrations of African American and Puerto Rican American's pursuit for fair treatment and civil rights as American citizens. At the same time as these movements began to loose steam in the early 1970's, the deindustrialization of New York City caused a sharp decrease in jobs forcing many minorities into poverty with the South Bronx, the poorest section of the poorest of New York's seven boroughs, to be impacted the most (Ogbar 2007). The dissatisfaction of civil rights treatment and the impoverished economic conditions help to give birth to hip-hop; a cultural outcry of frustration from a population of minorities that were being excluded by mainstream institutions as a result of segregation and the lack of representation in media and other cultural outlets.

Fueled by annoyance in the lack of advancement of civil rights and economic conditions of the times, many inner-city residents turned to violence and gangs as a means of resistance even in spite of nationalists groups such as the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam's endeavors to channel frustrations into more political avenues (Ogbar 2007). Afrika Bambaataa, born as Kevin Donovan, found himself mesmerized by gang life similar to the other youth, but using DJing as a creative outlet, he desired peace as racial tension began to control his local high school followed by frequent confrontations with white gangs. About a year later, after returning from a life-changing trip to Africa and Europe, Afrika Bambaataa decided to pursuit convincing as many people as he could to stop the violence that was currently overtaking the Bronx (McQuillar, 2007).

By the summer of 1975, almost everyone in the Bronx knew about Afrika Bambaataa and his movement the Universal Zulu Nation. Those who decided to join the Nation saw the organization's philosophies as a way of life.

The job of a Zulu is to survive in life. To be open-minded dealing with all walks of life upon this planet Earth and to teach [each] other truth (Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding). To respect those who respect them, and to never be the aggressor or oppressor. To be at peace with self and others, but if or when attacked by others who don't wish peace with the Zulus, then the Zulus are ordered in the name of ALLAH, Jehovah to fight those who fight against you (Chang 2005).

The Zulu Nation grew to become a non-profit organization known as The Universal Zulu Nation, encompassing many reformed gang members who used the various elements of hip-hop culture, such as music and dance, to organize cultural events for youth in efforts to reduce gang activity. As the culture of hip-hop started to catch fire outside of the seven-mile Bronx area and spread throughout the north, other crews began to join in similar unifying mindsets as those that made up the Universal Zulu Nation.

"Hip hop created a voice and a vehicle for the young and the disposed, giving them both hope and inspiration," explains author S. Craig Watkins (2005). It provided a space for youth, who were previously guided by the unrest of gang violence, to use the various elements of hip-hop culture, such as music, dance, and graffiti, to creatively express themselves (McQuillar 2007).

Filled with energy and momentum which provided a breathe of fresh air for inner-city residents who were surrounded by disheartening conditions, hip-hop quickly became a source of uplift and reformation for the community. As the phenomenon expanded to inner cities across the country, hip-hop became a prominent voice of a population of youth that were going unnoticed by mainstream institutions (Jones 1994). Artists began to use hip-hop music as a medium to expose the social conditions of their communities, like the artist

Grand Master Flash in his 1982 hit "The Message":

Broken glass everywhere  
People pissing on the stairs  
You know they just don't care  
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise  
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice  
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back  
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat  
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far  
Cause a man with a tow truck repossessed my car  
Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge  
I'm trying not to lose my head  
It's like a jungle sometimes  
It makes me wonder how I keep from going under  
(Ed "Duke Bootee" Fletsher 1982).

These lyrics paint a vivid picture of the social conditions that Grand Master Flash was living in. It illustrates the state of destitution his apartment complex was in with broken glass, an unbearable stench, and the infestation of pest and rodents. Grand Master Flash is also expressing his frustration with the desire for better living conditions but the lack of resource and concern of other residents to change the living conditions. This lyrics display the social conditions that many inner-city residents experienced both locally in The South Bronx, as well as the frustration that others residents may have felt nationally as a result of desiring better living conditions but lacking the resources and support to better themselves.

Following suit, late 1980's emcees such as Rakim, Public Enemy, and KRS-One filled many stereo systems with lyrics that illustrated the dismal social conditions that plagued their communities and others similar to it (Jones 1994).

But not all early hip-hop music focused on the conditions of the environment. For example, early 1980s hip-hop artists like Sugar Hill Gang created songs such as "Rapper's

Delight,” credited by many for exposing the rest of the world outside of The Bronx to hip-hop (History.com 2014), which consisted of fun rhymes that were a reflection of the good times that people had within their neighborhoods in spite of the surrounding negativity:

I said, a hip-hop the hippie the hippie  
To the hip hip-hop, you don't stop  
The rock it to the bang, bang boogie  
Say up jump the boogie  
To the rhythm of the boogie, the beat  
Now what you hear is not a test I'm rapping to the beat  
And me, the groove and my friends  
Are gonna try to move your feet  
(Sylvia Robinson 1979).

As time progressed, hip-hop became a movement of expressing oneself, “Everybody had something they wanted to say,” stated Will Smith, a well-known late 1980's hip-hop artist by the stage name of Fresh Prince (Jones 1994). Artists like Fresh Prince, Run-D.M.C., and LL Cool J arrived on the scene; the content of hip-hop music was no longer a dichotomous discussion of inner-city social conditions, as artists began to express their experiences of being raised outside of underprivileged neighborhoods. Hip-hop began to be embraced and used by persons of all backgrounds as a way of expressing their individual ideas and everyday experiences.

Equivalent to the sociological concept that expressive-symbol elements of culture are influenced by the systems in which they are created (Peterson 1979), hip-hop music presented a variety of experiences and stories that were a direct reflection of the diversity among hip-hop artists and their respective communities and neighborhoods (Jones 1994). The culture of hip-hop serves as a symbol through which artists creatively express their social experience. No longer was hip-hop an outlet only for those who experienced the social strains of inner-city communities, but had expanded into the suburbs and rural

communities.

As hip-hop ventured beyond inner-city communities, it became an outlet of expression for anyone who found interest. By crossing social boundaries, hip-hop's context broadened beyond the socio-political framework in which hip-hop was historically grounded, and began to encompass ideas and attitudes reflecting various backgrounds. Discussions of social conditions resultantly grew to include anything from personal feelings of love or anger to opinions of corruption (America 2013), expanding hip hop's relatability to a wider range of listeners.

## LITERATURE ON HIP-HOP

Considering the implication or significance of hip-hop on those that it represents, examining hip-hop music through a sociological lens is nothing new. Existing literature on hip-hop mainly focuses on three major themes: its effect on listeners (particularly youth and minorities) (Mahiri and Conner 2003, Tanner, Asbridge, and Wortley 2009), the social framing of hip-hop music within broader mainstream culture (Binder 1993, Blanchard 1999, Rose 1994), and the analysis of hip-hop music's content and performance (Kubrin 2005).

The first theme in the literature on hip-hop seeks to examine the effect that hip-hop music has on its listeners, particularly youth and minorities. Listeners have expressed a fondness of hip-hop music in that it voices their everyday apprehensions of living in disadvantaged communities (Mahiri and Conner 2003). By being exposed to the discussion of social conditions that are frequently heard within hip-hop music, Tanner, Asbridge, and Wortley (2009) reason that those who listened to hip-hop are more likely to openly express feelings of unfairness and injustice than compared to those who did not listen to hip-hop music. Listeners find hip-hop to be life affirming (Sullivan 2003), and Mahiri and Conner (2003) suppose that listeners enjoy hip-hop music because they are able to easily relate to the messages that affirm their social experiences, feelings, and attitudes. Even while hip-hop's listening audience continues to become more diverse, such findings directly reflect the social context of the communities and neighborhoods in which much of hip-hop music is created and originated.

The second theme in the literature of hip-hop music and culture considers the social significance of hip-hop music within the context of broader mainstream culture. In

comparison to other genres, hip-hop manages to connect with listeners unlike any other genre of music. Binder (1993) discusses how hip-hop has a counter frame that distinguishes it from other genres like heavy metal, in that hip-hop music is viewed as an art form of “artistic communication from the streets” and possesses important messages. In addition to being an outlet for urban youth, hip-hop also provides a window through which outsiders can better understand social affairs of hip-hop artists and their community.

As Simon Frith, sociology of music professor, explains, “music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social...(Frith 1996).” Hip-hop can be interpreted as a cultural practice of illustrating one’s identity within their social context, through a medium that allows others to indirectly partake in hip-hop artists’ lived experiences.

The third set of studies on hip-hop music embodies the analysis of lyrical content and the performance of hip-hop. Through a content analysis, Kubrin (2005) found that the content of “gangsta rap music” embodies the same principles that researchers identify to be symbolized in street code of many inner-city communities and neighborhoods. The messages that hip-hop music conveys serves as a lens through which artists can publicly display the inner workings of their communities and neighbors.

When reviewed holistically, the literature on hip-hop uncovers a missing gap of the artists’ voice in their music and their performance as hip-hop artists. Mohammed (2012) interviewed rappers in regards to the use of their music as a form of activism, however only artists whose music was considered to be conscious rap, or promoted political and social improvement was included in the study. Yet, little to no research has been

conducted in relation to hip-hop artists and their self-perceived relation to their community.

Previous research has analyzed hip-hop artists based upon their performance and the content of their music, but studying artists in relation to their community provides information that can only be found within the original communal framework, which is displayed in the historical and social context of hip-hop. As Imani Perry (2004) explains, “While the individual artist and the individual composition provide compelling subjects for analysis, the validity of that analysis in part depends on knowledge of the community from which it emerges.” Therefore, this study will use in-depth interviews to investigate hip-hop artist’s reflection of their music within the context of their community in order to provide a deeper understanding of hip-hop artists and the music they create. My research suggests that hip-hop artists are activists within their communities, and use their time and music as resources to mobilize listeners, and to critically and actively address social concerns in a way that has the potential to create change.



## **NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY**

To better understand hip-hop artists and their approach to community engagement, new social movement theory serves as an applicable framework. New social movement theory considers collective action through the use of cultural and social mobilization processes in civil society (Buechler 1995, Melucci 1996). New social movement theory diverges from the traditional social movement theory that was based on the Marxist view of collective action in that new social movement theory moves away from a more economic reasoning of social production and favors a more social and cultural reasoning for collective action (Buechler 1995).

By focusing on social and cultural mobilization processes, new social movement theory holds collective action to be driven and largely shaped by the socially constructed nature of society (Buechler 1995). Melucci (1996) theorizes that social movements are a result of inconsistencies that are embedded within everyday life in relation to the larger, more dominant society. The more individualistic –personal, spiritual, and expressive – tendencies of contemporary life attribute to the foundation of new social movement theory in that social movements are grounded in articulating and expressing direct rejection of the more dominant society (Melucci 1996).

Within the context of new social movement theory, hip-hop can be seen as a social and cultural mobilization process that expresses collective thoughts and ideas in a manner that has the potential to lead to collective action amongst listeners. This ideology can be observed through the historical lens of hip-hop; the foundation of hip-hop music emphasized the collective views and opinions of previously overlooked minority youth, and projected their voice into the more mainstream culture (Trapp 2005). As Melucci (1996)

writes:

“Contemporary movements are prophets of the present... They force power out into the open and give a shape and a face. They speak a language that seems to be entirely their own, but they say something that transcends their popularity and speaks to us all.”

Thus, hip-hop serves as a mobilization process in which underrepresented ideas and opinions strive to become more visible within mainstream culture where by artists are attempting to create a space for their ideas and experiences. And by being “the face” of this social movement, hip-hop artist can be regarded as prophets who seek to use their own cultural identities to project the collective identity of people associated with the movement into the more dominant culture.

## METHODS

This research is based on 26 in-depth interviews that I conducted with self-identified hip-hop and rap artists in the southeast United States from September 2013 through February 2014. I scouted participants with flyers that advertised for the study, as well as through word-of-mouth referrals, from people at hip-hop functions that I attended throughout the community. I posted flyers in libraries, bars, open mic and music events, and also posted to a free public advertising venue (craigslist.com). The flyer called for self-identified hip-hop artists over the age of 18 who were interested in participating in a research study about hip-hop artists and their community. Out of the 26 participants, eight were recruited through the use of snowball sampling (Babbie 2010) after other artists recommended them to me during the interview process. Ten of the participants responded directly to flyers that were posted either in public venues or online, and eight were recommended through informal conversations with people in my social network. The interviews were completely voluntary, and I did not compensate any participants. All of the participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms for privacy.

All participants were between the ages of 18 and 53 at the time of the interview, with the average age being 26 years old. Of the 26 participants, all were African American with the exception of two Caucasians, and there were 22 men and four women. Twenty-one of the respondents are currently located in Louisiana, two in Tennessee, one in Arkansas, one in Georgia, and one in Florida. A table of the demographics of each participant can be found in Appendix A.

A 45-90 minute in-depth interview was conducted with each artist in person either at a local coffee shop or public library meeting room. Since hip hop music is historically

known for giving a voice to those within minority populations (Chang 2005), I opted on a qualitative study in that I reasoned that it would give artists an unrestricted opportunity to describe their personal stories and feelings toward their community, as well as their roles within the community as hip hop artists. The interview guide covered many topics, including the neighborhood and community in which the artists were raised, the neighborhood and community where they live, their community involvement, the perceived connection between their music and their community, and the artists' definition of "community." A background of the artists' general involvement and history with music was also discussed. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

I transcribed the audio recordings of each interview verbatim and transferred the transcripts into Atlas.ti, a computer based software program that facilitates qualitative data analysis. Open coding (Babbie 2010) was used in this study, where all transcript data were read and loosely labeled with preliminary codes by principle ideas such as artists' interpretations and opinions about various subjects relating to their community and their identity as artists, accounts of various actions within their community, of thought processes of their music's effect on their community, and their feelings of responsibility to their community as an artist. During this period of open coding, codes such as "being relatable", "use of platform as an artist", "inspiring", "evoking change", "giving back", and "positive impact" were used to organize the interview responses. Using Atlas.ti, I reviewed the categories and visually sorted or connected them into sub-categories or themes based upon the artists' expressed relation to their communities. Codes such as "being polarizing", "desire for music to emote", and "being a voice" were linked into a theme of the pursuit to stimulate thought within their communities.

With the use of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), an open-ended approach to the data was taken with the hypothesis being modified as the analysis progressed. Starting out with the assumption that hip-hop artists have a strong connection to their community and neighborhood, due to the historical background of hip-hop culture being an outlet for inner-city residents to voice their concern of their community's social condition (Roy 2008), I initially set out to explore the extent that hip-hop artists took to express their connection to the community in terms of their music and their musical performance. Artists spoke of a perceived responsibility to positively address the conditions of their community, but as the study evolved, I began to notice that the artists articulated different approaches to fulfilling their expressed roles. A number of artists expressed using their music as a channel to discuss the conditions in their community. Other artists spoke of physical engagement, while some expressed a mixture of both approaches.

Thus, I coded the interview data using three findings that emerged: the articulated conditions of their community, the pursuit to stimulate thought within their community, and the performance of activism within their community. The theme "articulated conditions of their community" included sub-codes that encompassed the various ways in which the respondents spoke of the social and physical state of their communities. The theme "pursuit to stimulate thought within their community" includes sub-codes that embodied the artists desire to use the music they create to encourage listeners to reflect on community conditions in a way that may provoke action. The theme "performance of activism within their community" includes sub-codes that describe the physical acts of

community engagement that artists perform in aspiration of bettering the current social and physical conditions of their community.

## FINDINGS

### ARTISTS' CONCEPTIONS OF AND EXPERIENCES WITH COMMUNITY

When asked about their communities, many of the respondents shared similar narratives of the dismal social conditions that plagued the areas they lived and grew up in. The majority of interviewees shared accounts of poverty, broken homes, gangs, violence, and drugs in their communities. As Justin said about the community he currently lives in:

“If I was to go outside, I wouldn’t be talking about [seeing] birds and bees, you know. I would be talking about black people standing on the corner in front of the store. Walking down the street at 4 o’clock in the morning looking for drugs, you know. Shooting guns in the air, stealing from out your house or your car. Taking your radio, stealing your air conditioning units, you know, because that’s all you see. I don’t see, ‘Excuse me ma’am you need help with those bags?’ or kids outside playing sports or anything. Almost everything I see is negative. It’s a bunch of people that’s not looking for a change. You know, matter of fact they are looking for CHANGE [alluding to money] and they will do anything they can to get it, you know. A lot of drugs, a lot of killing, gun shots every night. That’s the neighborhood right now”

Even though the artists were from different neighborhoods throughout the southeastern United States, the majority (n=19) grew up in an urban setting and painted nearly identical pictures of their communities. Having social backgrounds that are not mutually exclusive to the individual communities from which the respondents are emerging, hip-hop artists are able to project social and cultural identities that are distinctive yet relatable to others within similar communities across geographical boundaries.

Describing the community where he grew up and considers home, Walter explains:

“It was bad ... I mean--not an exaggeration--we heard gunshots, it was just poverty. There were people begging for money. It was just a troubled area, drugs around but just the typical inner city activity in an urban area.”

Bryan similarly confesses:

“My community is a geographical location that I don’t think anyone really wants to be in but are forced to be there because of the conditions they are in. It is one that people can escape if they are taught to escape it. But I think that the American educational programming doesn’t really teach individuals how to escape the conditions that we come from. I think it has a lot to do with the individual himself, and if he is being taught who he actually is and not what other people say he is. I see so many people accepting what other people say they are and not researching for themselves who they are.”

The existence of such undesirable social conditions creates an opportunity for social movements to develop. New social movement theory considers activism in terms of being “a defensive reaction to a systematic dominance” that has the potential to threaten systemic controls (Buechler 1995). Thus, the oppositional stance towards systematic dominance like the American education system serves as a catalyst for social movement within communities similar to those the participants articulated. With interest and concern for their communities, hip-hop artists can serve as leaders or initiators of social change out of optimism that those who are forcibly maintained in damaging social condition can overcome systemic dominance if trained to do so.

The remaining respondents (n=6) grew up in rural settings, and one respondent grew up in a more suburban setting. Even though these respondents were not from the inner city, they still expressed similar social conditions of drugs and violence. As Joshua explains:

“I’m from the country... I mean, it’s the same everywhere you go really. They gone have crime, they gone have drugs dealing. You know it’s the same thing.”

However, the one respondent who was had a more suburban background expressed her community as a more abstract entity in contrast to the more tangible aspects that her counterparts depicted. Lauren articulates:



“I would say that I feel like my community is online. My day-to-day life is pretty reclusive. I don’t interact, you know as an artist, I don’t interact much with the community here. There are a handful of people, who are kinds of scattered across the globe, but we all hang out on the Internet together and we are all making art, and we all talk to each other and support each other and vent to each other. They are my friends, but even the ones that I am not intentionally friends with I feel like I am a member of that same community of young people making challenging art.”

Even though she described her community in a more non-physical manner in comparison to the other artists’ physical descriptions of community, she still believed that the music and art that she and those within her community are creating is challenging, or to be considered mobilizing.

#### PROPHETS AND STUDIO REVOLUTIONARIES

The artists articulated their self-sensed role or responsibility to their community as hip-hop artists, which translated into their objective to stimulate thought among listeners as a way of encouraging change within their communities. Respondents articulated an approach of using their music as a way of communicating with listeners about issues that are relevant to their communities. By engaging in such communication with listeners, artists anticipate that it would be an inspiration for a change that is desired within their community.

Lawrence stated, “...my specific role would be to push the envelope to make people realize that there are wrongs going on and that we all need to change it.” Not only does Lawrence see his music as a means for encouraging change, but also necessary in order to encourage that change on a large scale due to his consideration that change is a responsibility shared by everyone. These artists are acting as activist by using their music

as a social mobilization process to influence listeners to become more analytic towards the social conditions that are present within their community.

Respondents felt compelled particularly as artists to use their music as a way of stimulating thought among listeners. As Malcolm affirms:

“I think an artist has to be provocative...you have to spark something in people to cause them to do something. So I think it’s my role to be a spark. It’s almost like being a prophet. Like when a prophet come he gives a word and it can be something people want to hear or it can be something people don’t want to hear. But it’s going to cause a reaction...I think an artist should be polarizing.”

Using music “constructed of truth revealing parables and pictures, hip hop artists are often self-proclaimed contemporary prophets” (Perry 2004) who are able to open up a dialogue about the things that are going on within their communities in a way that has the potential to evoke change that they feel their community needs. The artists are using their social experiences and cultural familiarity as a strategy to mobilize listeners with the intent of collective action. As Malcolm stated, there will be some who are not accepting of the message that they are attempting to spread, but nevertheless a reaction will follow.

Using his music to address the issues of violence and drugs that plague his community and others like his John shares, “[I] question how guns got here, question how dope got into our communities. Question these things and if you question it I think that will make you think about it enough to where there is a reason other avenues aren’t pushed as much.” By encouraging listeners to question the source of the issues that are afflicting his community, John has confidence that it will foster a space where solutions could develop that will ultimately remedy the problem.

Viewed within the framework of social movement theory, John's actions can be regarded as a performance of activism that assists in fostering an atmosphere of collection action (Oliver and Marwell 1992). By using his music as a social mobilization strategy, John and the other hip-hop artists interviewed are attempting to expose the possibilities of alternate existing state of affairs (Buechler 1995) by encouraging listeners to question and reflect on the social conditions in their communities.

By verbalizing the meaning of raising such questions, it is possible that John may assume that those within his community are not engaged in such thought prior to hearing his music. Alluding that the problems and concerns of his community are present and continue to exist because community members fail to consider the root of social issues opposed to simply tending to them on the surface. So by initiating such discussions of the social issues that are relevant to their community, these hip-hop artists are using their music as a approach to convey communal concerns with the hopefulness of mobilizing listeners (Mohammed-Akinyela 2012) and to foster collective participation even if it's at the minimal level of an individuals' thought process.

Joseph illustrates how he incites such dialogue, not necessarily by questioning the issues but by presenting the realities of such issues:

“So what I did was I came up with an idea...called Trap Hop, which is an acronym for True Rebellion Against Poison Harmony Oppressed People. So the whole concept of the project was let's talk about the trap<sup>1</sup> and lets talk about what it really is. We not talking about the glorified trap where people just sell drugs all day and kill people and floss<sup>2</sup> and don't nothing happen to

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<sup>1</sup> Term used to reference areas and locations within neighborhoods where drugs are sold (Shipp 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Term used to reference the act of flaunting expensive merchandise or proudly showing off something of high value (Kow\_Heman 2005).

nobody. Lets talk about how it deals with how drugs affect us...I got a song where I talk about a revenge murder, but it's from the other side of the situation. Not like 'I'm a killer, killer, and I go home and go to sleep and everything is great.' [I am] talking about remorse and what led up to it. [I am] talking about the effect that it has on families. I have a song...and it's about addiction...So you done smoked, you done snorted, you done popped or whatever...That happened Friday night, lets talk about Saturday morning when you got that hangover. Lets talk about how you causing problems in your family and people are trying to do interventions and things like that."

Joseph speaks of approaching the issues that he sees within his community not from the glorified perspective in which they are often being depicted (Arnold 2006, Dawkins) but instead addresses them in terms of the pragmatic concerns they present to those who choose to engage in such activities; along with the effects that it has on others within the community. Instead of admiring activities such as drug selling/usage, murder, and ignoring its detrimental effects, Joseph urges listeners to rethink their attitudes toward current trends that are detrimental to his community and others like it. Joseph is acknowledging that the issues of his community are not limited to negative effects of drugs and violence, but the problem also lies within the community's endorsement of social issues by viewing them in a manner in which they are seen as normative or even in some instances admired. Like John, Keith wants to challenge listeners to rethink their vantage point on issues that trouble their community. "I kind of take that responsibility on to show people an alternative to what I think they are brain washed into thinking," Keith expresses.

The respondents seem to approach their community in terms of an individualistic manner in contrast to utilizing a social or communal approach. When discussing their tactics of using their music as a way of stimulating thought amongst listeners, they undergird their approach with the notion that individual thought processes should be challenged or dismantled in order to achieve the collective action they are pursuing to

combat the adverse social conditions of their community. Encouraging listeners to reframe the way they view social conditions and to inquire about the source of the community's social conditions illustrate the artists' concentration on mobilizing their community on the individual level as an approach to achieve collective action.

The individualistic approach is valued in Melucci's (1996) interpretation of new social movement theory where in that in modern society it has become more difficult to achieve mass appeal of large groups of people due to the increased diversity within groups and subgroups. Thus, in order to attain collective action, attention should be focused on the individual versus the social or communal. So by these hip-hop artists approaching community engagement in terms of stimulating thought at the individualist level, they are attempting to increase their likelihood of mobilizing collective action amongst listeners.

Once again, using their music careers as a means of social and cultural mobilization, these artists are individualistically charging their listeners with communal responsibility of addressing relevant social issues in hopes of an end result of collective action. The anticipated collective reaction is for positive actions that will lead to the betterment of their community.

#### ON-THE-GROUND ACTIVISM

The artists not only referenced engaging with their community through the content of their music as a means of addressing social issues, but many also shared accounts of their physical involvement within their communities. All of the respondents expressed some type of physical involvement in their communities, but the level of involvement ranged from only volunteering during holidays and or monetary donations to specific

causes, to the creation and operation of non-profit organizations. Walter explains how as an artist, the responsibility to one's community goes far beyond lyrics:

“The main thing about it is that, as an artist who wants to give back you have to realize that enjoying the music and making music for people to relate to is not enough... What would I look like not giving back to the lady who bought my first CD, what would I look like not investing in her business because she invested in me when I was coming up. You have to have that. Your biggest responsibility as an artist is...to give back.”

Walter feels that his relationship to his community extends beyond music. He believes that it is essential as an artist to connect with the community on a more personal level by showing interest in their individual attainment. Walter deems that the investment in the activities and pursuits of others will ultimately uplift the overall community.

There was a sense of importance from the artists for their civic responsibility to extend beyond the content of their music and to be carried out in their everyday activities and behaviors. “I don't want to be a studio revolutionary. I want to be about that life that I am rapping about,” states Joseph, as he expresses how he wants his life to be exemplary of what he talks about in his music. In addition to using music as a method to mobilize listeners, artists also used their time as a resource to further their ability to be a change agent within their communities.

Many respondents shared accounts of tutoring, volunteering at local non-profit organizations, holding concerts in benefit of social awareness campaigns, or creating their own organizations. Bryan shares about a particular organization he started within his community:

“...it's an organization where we basically focus on young African American males, but we offer help to anyone at risk. But we see African American males growing up without father figures and we try to be father figures. We try to

be that mentorship that they need to become a man. So many young men are growing up without even being introduced to a man, so that's why they go out and do the type of things that they do. So we go out and we try to introduce that manly, masculine [image that is missing] inside the home."

Bryan not only alludes to the deficiency of positive role models in the lives of young males in his community, but actively chooses to improve the lives of the young males in his community by establishing an organization that will provide them with the positive influences that are currently lacking. His physical presence is driven by his confidence that the time spent within the community, optimistically addressing issues inspire community residents to also be actively involved in approaching social concerns.

Other respondents expressed using their expertise as hip-hop artists to give back to the community. Eric contributes to a local music organization for inner-city youth where he musically mentors kids that are in the program. He coaches them through the technical and creative processes of constructing a song, including teaching concepts such as a 16 bar verse, beat, and hook.

While working with youth as a program manager for a hip-hop program that focused on youth asset development through lyric writing classes, Disk Jockey classes, hip-hop dance classes, and one-on-one mentoring, Joseph recognizes the power of using music as a way of mentoring and works to expand his efforts beyond the youth in the program and out into his community. He started a recurring hip-hop showcase where individuals from the community could come and perform their music. From there, Joseph hand-selected a few talented individuals and developed a mentoring relationship while presenting opportunities to travel with him to concert venues where he would perform.

"So we started doing this thing called Lyricist Lounge and like that was at [a venue] not far from over here at [a local hotel]. And so there was some um, whack dudes and you know what I'm saying, young cats, nice cats, freshmen

in college/seniors in high school. Very very talented, it was cats that was garbage but it was a bunch of cats that was talented. So what I started doing was I started putting on my own hip-hop shows aside from that, you know what I'm saying. So I would kind of pull like the best ones from the Lyricist Lounge over to my events or what have you."

Darren and Lawrence also spoke of launching similar hip-hop platforms within their respective communities for interested artists to display their talents and receive positive feedback for improvement. Revealing his motives behind creating an atmosphere for artists within the community, Lawrence states:

"When I really became serious about what I was doing ... I started touring and I would go places and see how they had things set up and the opportunities for hip-hop artists and I would come back and kind of compare it and notice that we don't have that same infrastructure as these places. We may have certain things in place, but it just wasn't put together and working together in terms of the hip-hop artists. So I started doing that performance series to do a few things. First to have a stage for us to showcase our music, but also to kind of get familiar with presentation and properly equipped as an artist to do shows....So I set up a concert...for the merging artists to do stuff like that. In addition to being a platform for artists, I just wanted to provide some space and I also wanted to serve as like a touring component in just the underground circuit that we travel. Folks always want to come [here], so I was like that would be a good way to provide a space for people that wanted to come through."

Lawrence felt that it was necessary for him as an artist to give back to other artists who were trying to follow in his footsteps. By creating a space where individuals could come and sharpen their artistic skill, Lawrence is now able to provide others with the guidance and mentorship that he did not receive as an upcoming artist. While touring, Lawrence observed resources that were available to artists in other locations that were not available to artists in his community. And by giving those within his community access to such resources, he also established a space to connect with other artists providing an even richer pool of resources. Again, the artists articulated their value of an individualistic approach to community engagement. By investing time and resources into the individuals



within their community, the respondents attempt to foster collective action as a means of achieving a social change within their communities.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The interviews disclose these hip-hop artists' articulated passion and concern for their community. In opposition to previous research alluding to hip-hop's damaging repetition of illegal hustling and sexual exploitative language, these interviews illuminate the concern and desire that the artists have in seeing their communities improve and progress. The artists then expressed the usage of their time and music as social and cultural resources to mobilize listeners in becoming more involved and critical of the current social conditions with hopes of creating a change within their communities.

Applying the new social movement theory, artists can be viewed as activists by using their cultural relatability and social understanding as a means of fostering collective action amongst listeners within their community (Calhoun-Brown 2000, Morris 1992, Tarrow 1992, Trapp 2005). The interviews reveal the respondents' use of these resources and their identity as artists in an attempt to initiate social participation of listeners, whether that may be through on-the-ground activism or by using their music to act as a prophet to their listeners. Artists' musical and/or physical performances of activism within their communities act as a stimulant to encourage listeners to be more cognizant of the social issues that are present within their community and the urgency to address those issues (Mohammed-Akinyela 2012).

Through their personal accounts within this study, the artists recognize and illustrate the disheartened conditions within their communities, but aspire to turn a sense of hopelessness into awareness through the messages in their music. By creating music that will stimulate thought within their community, these artists are expressing their initiatives to challenge their listeners' views of social conditions.

As social movement activists, these participants use their identity as artists to create a space where they can positively give back to their community in ways that will benefit and improve the condition of their communities. They discussed their use of hip-hop music as a way of connecting with youth with the intentions of supporting the youth of their community interests. Seeing the value of utilizing an individualistic approach by investing in the activities of those within their community, and encouraging their creativity through the art of music, these artists have the confidence that their investments promote a sense of hopefulness within their overall community.

This work extends the literature of hip-hop artists by examining artists' self-perceived relation to their community. It provides insight to artists' personal accounts of using their music as a platform of activism, opposed to previous research alluding to hip-hop having a negative influence on the community and its listeners (Dawkins , Blanchard 1999). The artists that were interviewed for this study expressed concern and a motivation to better their community.

The implications of hip-hop and rap artists approach to community engagement discussed within this study suggest the need for further research. The literature on hip-hop artists would benefit from a deeper analysis of artists connection to their community and the response of listeners and community members. Even though artists are pursuing to initiate such engagement with their community, are listeners and community members as responsive as the artists may anticipate? To fully understand the relationship of hip-hop and rap artists with their community, further research should explore the interaction from the perspective of the listeners' reactions to the artists' music and physical involvement.

In addition, further research should also be conducted on the relationship between

artists' social and cultural background and their self-perceived relationship and/or interpretation of their community. As pointed out earlier, the one respondent who had a more suburban background did not articulate her community in the same socially constructed context as the other artists who had a more urban upbringing. With hip-hop music becoming more diverse in terms of its audience, artists, and the mediums through which it's culture is experienced, more research on the role that artists' cultural and social background play on their interpretation of their community should be explored.

Limitations to this study are present in the sample population in that the hip-hop artists included in this study musical audience varies. Even though all of the artists have been creating music since a very young age, some artists possess a wider audience reach than others. Thus, the effects that each artist holds their music to have on their community may have a greater or lesser effect than others. A sample of artists that roughly have an equivocal audience reach would allow for a better assessment of their artistic effect on their community.

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## APPENDIX A PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Justin	29	Male	African American	Some College	Part-Time Waiter
Richard	23	Male	African American	Some College	Air Force Staff Sargent Select
John	25	Male	African American	Master's Degree	Engineering Consultant
Joshua	23	Male	African American	High School Diploma or	Unemployed
Carl	22	Male	African American	High School Diploma or	Home-Depot Associate
Christophe	24	Male	African American	High School Diploma or	Unemployed
Joseph	30	Male	African American	Bachelor's Degree	Stay at Home Dad
Simon	23	Male	African American	Some College	Full-time Student
Bryan	53	Male	African American	Less than High School	Community Activist/Crime Prevention
David	18	Male	African American	High School Diploma or	Fast-Food Worker
Michael	18	Male	African American	Some College	Full-time Student
Anthony	29	Male	African American	High School Diploma or	Unemployed
Kenneth	23	Male	African American	Some College	Part-time Customer Service Employee
Malcolm	26	Male	African American	Master's Degree	Full-time Student
Ashley	22	Female	African American	Bachelor's Degree	Full-time Student
Tiffany	21	Female	African American	Some College	Full-time Student/Part-time Retail
Eric	22	Male	African American	Some College	Part-time
Larry	19	Male	African American	High School Diploma or	Trade-student, Part-time Retail
Darren	29	Male	African American	Bachelor's Degree	Full-Time Journalist
Kelly	19	Female	African American	Some College	Part-time
Travis	24	Male	African American	Associates Degree	Air Force Engineer
Walter	20	Male	African American	Some College	Full-time Student/Part-time Retail
Zachary	29	Male	Caucasian	High School Diploma or	Full-time Truck Driver
Lawrence	40	Male	African American	Bachelor's Degree	Computer Specialist/College Professor
Keith	31	Male	African American	Master's Degree	Full-time Student
Lauren	35	Female	Caucasian	Bachelor's Degree	After-School Program Coordinator

## APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

### PART 1: Background Questions

1. I want to start by talking about your early life. Can you tell me a little bit about the place you grew up? [*If they only talk about the city, use this follow-up*]: Can you describe the neighborhood that you grew up in?
2. What about your school? What was it like?
3. Tell me about your family.
  - a. What are your relationships like with them?
  - b. Who raised you?
  - c. [*If they didn't already talk about extended family*]: What about your extended family... like aunts and uncles, siblings, cousins, grandparents? What are your relationships like with them?
  - d. Do you have kids?
    - i. [*if yes*] Can you tell me about them?
    - ii. How old are they?
    - iii. Who do they live with?
    - iv. What is your relationship with them like?
    - v. [*if do not live with interviewee*] How often do you see them?
    - vi. What grade(s) are they in?
    - vii. How do they do in school?
    - viii. Do you help them with school at all? [their school work, transportation to/from, talking to teachers] Why/why not?
    - ix. Do they participate in any after-school programs or any activities?
      1. [*If yes*]: What kinds of programs/activities?
      2. [*If no*]: Is there a reason they don't?
  - e. Have you ever been married or had a long-term partner?
  - f. [*if yes*] Are you currently (married/partnered)?

### PART 2: Neighborhood Life

1. Okay. We are going to move into talking about your life now. If someone asked you where "home" is, what would you say? Why?
2. Can you tell me about the neighborhood you currently live in?
3. Who do you live with?
4. What kind of relationships do you have with your neighbors?
  - a. [*possible follow ups*] Do you get along with them?
  - b. Do you know them well?
  - c. Do you socialize with them?
5. Do you feel like you have a certain role in your neighborhood?
  - a. [*If yes*] What is that role? How would you describe it?
  - b. [*If no*] Why not?
6. Are you involved in any community or neighborhood organizations?
  - a. [*If yes*] What kind of organizations/groups? What role do you play in them? (i.e. what kind of work do you do?)
  - b. [*If no*] Why not?
7. Are you involved with any groups or organizations outside your own neighborhood?

- a. [*If yes*] What kind of organizations/groups? What role do you play in them? (i.e. what kind of work do you do?)
  - b. [*If no*] Why not?
8. Do you have a group of friends that you usually hang out with?
- a. [*If yes*] What are they like?
  - b. How did you meet them?
  - c. Do most of them have full time jobs? [*if yes*] What kind of jobs?
  - d. Do most of them stay out of trouble?
  - e. Are any of them also musicians? If yes, do they help you with your music at all? How so?
  - f. Are any of them involved in the community? If yes, how so? What kind of work do they do?

### PART 3: Your Rap/Hip-Hop Work/Artistry

1. How long have you been creating/making music?
2. Do you remember what got you started? How and why did you get into making music?
3. Do you have an artist name? If so, how did you get it?
4. What are you doing right now in regards to your music?
5. Who would you compare your music style to?
6. What influences your music?
7. What are your goals regarding music? Is it a means of income or more of a hobby? Why?
8. Do you have a job outside your music?
  - a. [*if no*, skip to next question]
  - b. [*If yes*] What kind of job?
  - c. How long have you worked there?
  - d. Is it full time?
  - e. Do you like it?
  - f. Does it interfere with your ability to make music?
9. (If does not have a job) How does your family (ask about family generally and about kids, specifically, if they have kids) feel about your decision to solely focus on your music? How do YOU feel about that decision?
10. On average, how many hours a week would you say you devote to your music?
11. Do you record your music at a studio or at home?
  - a. What is a typical day like in the studio (or recording, if they do it at home)?
  - b. Who is normally there with you?
  - c. How do they add to the recording experience?
12. How do you market and distribute your music?
13. What is your target audience?
14. Where do you see yourself in 5 years in regards to your music and career goals?
15. Are you currently signed to a label? If not, do you have the aspiration of being signed? Why/why not?
16. How do you know your music is good?
17. Is there anyone who helps you or mentors you with your music?
  - a. [*If yes*] Who? What kind of help/mentoring do they do?
  - b. [*If no*] Why do you think that is?

18. Do you help others with their music?
  - a. *[If yes]* Who do you help? How do you help them? Why?
  - b. *[If no]* Why do you think that is?
19. Has your family heard your music before?
  - a. *[If no]* Why not?
  - b. *[If yes]* Do they listen to it frequently?
  - c. How do they feel about it?
  - d. Do they give you feedback on it?
  - e. *[If they have kids]* Have your kids listened to your music? How do they feel about it? Do they give you feedback on it?

PART 4: Your Music and the Community

1. If someone asked you what “your community” is, what would you say? Why?
2. Do you feel like your music has an effect on that community?
  - a. *[if yes]* What kind of effect? Why do you think this is?
  - b. *[if no]* Why not?
3. Does your music reflect your community in any way?
  - a. *[if yes]* How?
  - b. *[if no]* Why not?
4. Do you feel like you, as a musician and artist, have a responsibility to your community?
  - a. *[if yes]* What kind of responsibility? Why do you think this is?
  - b. *[if no]* Why not?
5. [possible follow-up]: Do you feel like you, as a musician and artist, have a specific role to play in to your community?
  - a. *[if yes]* What kind of role? Why do you think this is?
  - b. *[if no]* Why not?
6. When I asked you to tell me what you thought of as “your community,” you talked about it in terms of [summarize their answer according to one of the two options]:
  - [a specific geographical space like a neighborhood, city, or hometown
  - [a symbolic community like “the black community,” etc]
 Other people talk about it in terms of [select other option here]:
  - [a specific geographical space like a neighborhood, city, or hometown
  - [a symbolic community like “the black community,” etc]
 I’d like to walk through some of these previous questions with that definition of “community” in mind...
  - [repeat questions, but with relevance to either their neighborhood/city or a symbolic community]
  - [IF they talked about geographic community first and you are doing the symbolic one second, you will have to first ask them if there is any sort of symbolic community like “the black community” or “the Jewish community” that they feel like they belong to]
7. Okay, so, going back to the beginning of this section one more time, when I asked you what “your community” is, you defined it as [fill in blank: neighborhood/city/symbolic]. What do you think lead you to define it in such a way?

#### PART 5: Imprisonment Experiences (if any)

1. Have you ever been in jail or in prison?
  - a. *[if no]* SKIP TO PART 7
  - b. *[if yes]* If so, for how long and where did you serve your time?
2. Why were you in prison?
3. Where did you live right before you were incarcerated?
4. Who did you live with prior to your incarceration?
5. What was your relationship like with them?
6. *[if has kids]* Did you live with your children prior to going to prison? What was your relationship like with them?
7. Were you working before you went to prison?
  - a. *[if yes]* What kind of job? What happened to that job when you were arrested?
  - b. *[if no]* Why not?
8. What did your normal day consist of while incarcerated?
9. Did anyone come visit you while you were incarcerated?
  - a. *[if yes]* Who? How often? What were those visits like?
  - b. *[if no]* Why not?
10. Did you keep in contact with any family member via phone or mail?
  - a. *[if yes]* Who? How often? What were those phone calls/emails like?
  - b. *[if no]* Why not?
11. Did you participate in any programs during the time you were incarcerated?
  - a. *[if no]* Why not?
  - b. *[if yes]* What type of programs?
  - c. How did you find out about them?
  - d. Were you required to participate in them or did you choose to on your own? Why?
12. Did you work on your music while you were incarcerated?
  - a. If not, why not? [skip to question 7]
  - b. If so [ask questions 4-6]
13. Do you feel like the music that you created while you were incarcerated is any different from the music you created when you weren't incarcerated? If yes, how so?
14. Did you share any of your music with others while you were incarcerated? How? What were their reactions?
15. Did you work on your music with others while you were incarcerated?
16. Do you think your incarceration had any effect on your music?
17. How about the reverse? Do you feel like your music had any effect on your experiences in prison?

#### PART 6: Re-entry Experiences

1. Where was the first place you went when you were released?
2. Describe what your life was like the first few months after you were released.
3. Were you on probation or parole? If yes, for how long? What kind of restrictions were placed on you? When did it (or will it) end?
4. Is life different after your incarceration compared to your life before you were incarcerated?

- a. *[if no]* Why do you think that is?
  - b. *[if yes]* How?
5. What type of obstacles or difficulties have you experienced since you have been released?
6. Have you overcome those obstacles or difficulties?
  - a. *[if yes]* How?
  - b. *[if no]* Do you feel like you will overcome them at some point? Why/why not?
7. What has been the hardest thing you have to deal with after being released? How did you deal with it?
8. What has helped you the most since you have been released?
9. Have you participated in any programs since you were released?
  - a. *[if no]* Why not?
  - b. *[if yes]* What type of programs?
  - c. How did you find out about these programs?
  - d. Why did you choose to participate in these programs?
  - e. What did you have to do in order to participate in these programs?
  - f. How long did the programs last?
  - g. Were these programs helpful? Are there specific aspects of the program/s that were helpful? That could use improvement (or could be done differently)?
10. Do you still keep in contact with anyone that you met while you were incarcerated? If yes, how? Who?
11. Have your relationships with family and friends changed since you have been released?
  - a. *[if no]* Why do you think that is?
  - b. *[if yes]* How?
12. *[if has kids]* Has the relationship with your children changed since you have been released?
  - a. *[if no]* Why do you think that is?
  - b. *[if yes]* How? Why do you think that is?
13. *[if has kids]* Do you think your children were impacted in any way by your incarceration? If so, to what extent? How? If no, why not?
14. What is your ideal job or career?
15. Have you shared these ideas with family and friends?
16. If so, what was their response? If not, why not?
17. Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? 10 years?
18. Did your music change in any way once you were released?
  - a. *[if no]* Why not?
  - b. *[if yes]* How? Why?

PART 7: Rap and Prison (Others)

1. Do you personally know anyone else who is currently making music who has also been incarcerated for any period of time? [IF NO, SKIP TO PART 8]
2. If so, how did you meet them?
3. Are you close to these individuals, or are they just acquaintances?
4. Do they solely focus on music or do they also have a job?
5. Do they work with other people on their music?

6. Do they mentor or help others with their music?
7. Do they do any community work that you know of?
8. Do you feel like prison affected the music that they make?

PART 8: Demographic / Concluding Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How far did you go with your schooling? (i.e. what's the highest grade level you completed or the highest degree you have earned)
3. Which of the following categories does your current income fall into?
  - a. Under \$15,000 a year
  - b. \$15,000 a year - \$30,000
  - c. \$30,000 a year - \$50,000
  - d. \$50,000 a year - \$75,000
  - e. more than \$75,000 a year
4. How do you identify in terms of racial background? [possible explanation: Tell them that rather than giving categories like "white/black/etc" we like for people to be able to self-identify]
5. If I have additional questions, can we meet again or could I contact you via phone or email?
6. Do you know any other people who might be interested in participating in this study? [make sure they know that the people can be men/women, from any city/neighborhood, and that they do not have to be famous or successful, just making music and/or individuals who see themselves as rap/hip-hop artists]

## **VITA**

Castel Sweet, a native of Memphis, Tennessee, received her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice/Criminology at Hampton University in 2012. Thereafter, she enrolled as a graduate student at Louisiana State University in the Department of Sociology. She will receive her master's degree in December 2014 and will continue as a doctoral student in the department of sociology at Louisiana State University.