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CONSCIOUS RAP MUSIC: MOVEMENT MUSIC REVISITED

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CONSCIOUS RAPPERS AND ACTIVISM

by

IFE J. MOHAMMED

Under the Direction of Dr. Sarita K. Davis

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how conscious rap is used as a form of activism. Ethnographies of conscious rappers based in the Atlanta, GA area will be used to understand this relationship. In order to complete this investigation, ten unsigned conscious rappers will be given a series of questions to explore their involvement as activists; some of these artists were also recruited due their affiliations with political organizations also based in Atlanta, GA. By gathering interviews from conscious rappers who consider their music as a form of activism, scholars of African American Studies may further understand the role of music and political activism when mobilizing the African American and minority communities.

INDEX WORDS: Hip Hop, Conscious Rap, Activism

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IFE J. MOHAMMED

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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Ife J. Mohammed
2012

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CONSCIOUS RAPPERS AND ACTIVISM

by

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May 2012

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my family, Zayd A. S. Akinyela, Zayd Y. O. Akinyela and Zayd Y. J. Akinyela. I could not have accomplished any of this without the three of you. Family First and in loving memory of Arvitis Jackson Mohammed, I am because you are. This is also dedicated to NuAfrikan ENT., much love to the lifestyle: Zayd Malik and Ife Jie.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of the conscious rappers out there that have dedicated their careers to going against the mainstream grain and choosing to stand outside the box.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I remember the day the L.A. riots started. I was ten years old. My father and sisters were on our way to First African Methodist Episcopal church for bible study in our ’83 Toyota mini-van. We lived on 51rst Street and Denker Ave, directly down the street from a popular shopping mall, the Slauson Swapmeet. That night we took the street Normandie Ave, a major street in South Central towards the church. I remember looking out the window and noticing a growing crowd consuming the streets as we headed further down Normandie Ave. Soon the crowd became a mass of protestors lighting stores on fire and throwing items in store windows. I knew that the Rodney King verdict had been delivered, we all did, and my teacher at Marcus Garvey Elementary School allowed the entire class to watch the guilty L.A. cops be given a not guilty verdict for the brutal beating of this now vindicated black driver. I didn’t know that I witnessed history that night. As the reality of the riots became inescapable, by father very calmly turned our van around and we returned home. The night of rioting was still early, and as I stood on my porch that night, I remember watching the clouds of smoke growing around my neighborhood. By morning, it was literally raining ashes, an image I will never forget. My father, a schoolteacher and single parent to four girls, announced that no one was leaving the house until the riots were over. And so, the television became my source of information to understand the world around me. One of my favorite stations, MTV, spoke to me the most through the segment MTV News. Every time they talked about the riots, an interview or quote was given from one of the more popular rappers from the West Coast. I, like many others began to associate rap music with the voice of those many young black men and women that found themselves in the middle of the L.A. riots. It wasn’t until I became older, that I understood first the significance and history of rebellions amongst African people, but secondly and most importantly, the role music and musicians play in times of resistance and protest.

People of African descent use music for the most significant experiences in life. Songs are created for life, death, marriage, rites of passage ceremonies, and even war (Oba Tshaka, 2000). It is no coincidence that once enslaved; Africans used music to cope with the conditions of oppression. Songs used during enslavement became known as spirituals and the tradition of Africans implementing music

into daily life was not lost once enslaved Africans were freed. Once again, African descendents would rely on the legacy of song to endure a time period of hardship.

Butler (2005) suggests that the April 9, 1939 concert of acclaimed African American singer, Marian Anderson, sparked a renewed sense of empowerment and possibility for social change. During this time, African Americans, although freed from physical enslavement, faced new versions of oppression, including the existence of voting restrictions and Jim Crow laws. During the concert, the African American singer stood poised in front of the Lincoln Statue at the Lincoln Memorial facing a mixed audience of both whites and African Americans. As the song, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've seen", a popular spiritual, was sung by Anderson, the backdrop of the president responsible for the emancipation of enslaved Africans and the passion from the song lyrics drew audiences into a renewed sense of action that confronted the conditions of African Americans (Butler, 2005). This passion became a movement, and the song was attributed to encourage the beginnings of the Civil Rights era.

The song Anderson chose was familiar to many of the African Americans among the 75,000 audience members that day. This song, like many other popular African American cultural songs, were preserved by the black church and often embraced during parts of church services. In fact, the black church preserved several songs that were used during the Civil Rights Movement, and for that purpose, gospel songs became critical in providing the soundtrack for the political activity during this era. These songs transcended the realities of social movements that often resulted in violence, incarceration, and fear, transforming activists into invigorated revolutionaries prepared to sacrifice for change. The power of song, became one of African Americans most poignant weapon during times resistance.

The following paper will discuss the significance of African American artists and the significance of song in the formation of the Civil Rights and Black Power movement. Additional attention will be given towards highlighting the importance of conscious rap music as a possible form of contemporary movement music or activism

1.1 BACKGROUND

Several social movement theorists have researched the ways in which populations mobilize in order to bring about political and social change. Prior to the Civil Rights movement, theory was void of considering the role of music in creating a social consciousness and reinforcing political aspirations. For instance, resource mobilization according to Calhoun- Brown (2000) did not account for the role of the black church as a key instrument in recruiting and sustaining members of the Civil Rights movement. As aforementioned many of the songs permeating the Civil Rights movement developed in the black church, and as such members were drawn to the rhetoric of political speech that created emotional and spiritual connections to political activity by way of song, similar to the purpose of song during religious ceremony. The topic of music in relationship to movement has since then been revised in order to account for the role of songs and popular artist who played a pivotal role in encouraging mobilization. Morris (1999) accounts for the significance of song within collective action or behavior suggesting that culture became critical in the creation of a collective framework as 'black music, prayers and religious doctrines were refashioned to critique Black oppression" (p. 534).

Collective action and the impact o f an institution within the African American community such as the black church may not influence the political activity of today's generation as it did during the 1960's and 1970's. The role of music among African American youth has not dissipated as many are influenced by the music and culture of Hip Hop (Chang, 2005). Interestingly, those churches that do encourage political awareness and engagement often implement rap music within church culture. Barnes (2008) has found that those denominations most likely to use rap music to appeal to the current taste of today's youth are the United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches. Many rap artist have also drawn a connection to rap music and the black church by transferring their influence from the stage to the pulpit including Rev Run of the Hip Hop pioneering rap group Run- DMC, Kurtis Blow who is apart of a Hip Hop Church in Harlem, N.Y., and Chris Martin also known as 'Play' of the Hip Hop group Kid-n-Play who is now apart of the gospel rap scene (Barnes, 2008).

Although rap music has created a space within the black church, there still remain few institutions that can serve the African American community in initiating social and political change as seen during the Civil Rights and Black Power Era. As a generation that is lacking a formal movement for social and political reform, conditions and realities of African Americans necessitate some form of change, a change that is often verbalized and expressed in one of the most popular forms of musical expression among young African Americans; that is conscious rap music. Conscious rap has been defined as having a "black nationalist sound, image, and message [and] draw from both recent struggles that anticipate the coming of the black nation (nation time) and a mythical attitude toward an immemorial African nation (nation place)" (Decker, 1993, p. 54). According to Newman (2007, p.132) conscious rap "provides overtly political, and specifically a progressive and/or Black Nationalist perspective". Conscious rap particularly encourages critique of social and political conditions and embraces rhetorical styles found in past African American social movements. The political potential for rap music was best expressed during what Hip Hop scholars have come to label the 'Golden Age of Rap' music in which Black Nationalism, revolution and politics were at the forefront of many popular rap songs and represented by several artist. This era according to Cheney (2005) was best described between 1988 and 1993, a period in which such artist as Public Enemy and Ice Cube became leaders in announcing the disenchantment of African American youth living in impoverished communities. Rap music during this era did impact a generation however this impact was compromised by external forces within the music industry that demanded other types of less political rap genres, including gangster and party rap to be promoted (Rose, 2008; Cheney, 2005). By 1991, record reports suggested that gangsta rap album Niggaz4Life by N.W.A. was on top of the charts (Samuels, 1991; Krohn & Suazo, n.d.)

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although conscious rap music has been marginalized from mainstream media (Rose, 2008), the general need for this study is to explore the relevancy of conscious rap music as a current form of activism. This study also broadens the discourse regarding the relationship of African Americans using music as a form of political mobilization. For the purpose of this research, the term activism will be used

as to not infer a discussion of rap music being considered a movement within itself. Conscious rap music may have the potential to continue to politically influence a generation of rap fans.

The specific problem with this relationship is that it is often overlooked (Gordon, 2005). An opportunity however is presented when exploring how African American conscious rap artists encourage political and social critique much the same as artist during the 1960's- 1970's. Some rap artists such as Jay-Z and the Fugees have drawn directly from previous artists associated with movements including Gill Scott-Herron, James Brown and Marvin Gaye (Demers, 2003). Many rap artists are therefore drawn to the relationship of using music to influence politics and social change, however market demands by consumers have forced several artists to create those types of rap songs that have commercial appeal or are profitable (Rose, 2008; Skold, D. & Rehn, A., 2007).

In order to explore the relationship between conscious rap music and activism, the design of this research is focused on gathering interviewed accounts of how different conscious rap artists use their music to encourage social reform. A qualitative approach is used as this topic is largely investigated due to my personal, political and musical interest. The artists, who consider themselves as conscious rappers or produce conscious music, create music that encourages political and social criticism or reform situating them as rap activists. These artists may also define themselves based on their affiliations with current political organizations. The general population of this study is conscious rappers who create music that can be considered a modern form of activism, providing the same function music played during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

1.3 PURPOSE

The research method for the proposed study is qualitative. One of the benefits of researching a topic that is of current importance is the accessibility to artist that can address issues in their own words. Rap music particularly is known for giving voice to the voiceless minority communities of America (Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005) and in that fashion interviewing artist directly, allowing them to detail their own stories, best suites the design and purpose of this study.

The qualitative method will provide personal insight from the artist and allow them to qualify their music as a form of activism. This method is particularly necessary when dealing with conscious rap artists who are often marginalized from mainstream markets because of their political and social commentary. An additional consideration is made in allowing artist to detail their intent; a characteristic that may go unnoticed by simply looking at lyrical content. The design also allows conscious rap artist to describe how their music encourages political activism and the political framing of ideas that are relevant to social and political reform; elements that social movement theorist have come to recognize as essential in the creation of potential movement and mobilization.

In order to meet this design of a qualitative study, first-hand accounts on what conscious rappers intend when creating their music in addition to anecdotal accounts of how they may see themselves, as participants in current forms of activism will be provided. Each interview will be compared to find similarities and differences in how artist define themselves as conscious rappers and how their criticisms of political and social conditions influence listeners.

The specific population of conscious rappers will be those artists who are associated with a political or social organization or specifically identify their music as a form of activism. Members of the conscious rap community have in some instances overtly aligned themselves with current social or political reformist organizations and have identified the necessity to providing conscious rap music that support organizational ideals. Others chose to use the platform of conscious rap music as a mobilizing force to encourage listeners or non-activists to become involved in political activity. In both circumstances, the conscious rapper emerges as an activist, fueling the demand for collective action on behalf of urban African American communities. The geographic location of this study will be conducted in Atlanta, Ga. home of many organizations including the Zulu Nation, the Temple of Hip Hop, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, NCOBRA, and other African American centered reformist communities.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement have been two significant periods of history studied by African American Studies scholars. Interest is usually given to the forces that drew members of the African American and minority communities to participate in these movements. Within each movement scholars have identified the impact of music; specifically the role of music as a source of empowerment during political activity and in creating social and political frameworks that help to describe the oppressive conditions of African Americans. Music has therefore served as both a formal and informal influence providing political and social critique that has resulted in collective action (Morris, 1999). Although no current social movement has captured the African American community with the same magnitude as the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements; their still remains an undercurrent of music that is potentially influencing the political awareness and activity of African Americans. Rap music has undoubtedly surfaced as one of the most influential musical genres among youth within the African American and minority communities (Chang, 2000; Sullivan, 2003). Within rap music, there are several genres and subgenres that appeal to the diversity and ideals of fans across the globe. One of the most politically vocal genres has been considered to be conscious rap music (Rose, 2008; Cummings and Roy, 2002). By exploring the role of conscious rap music as a contemporary form of activism, scholars may further understand the significance of current music, specifically conscious rap in addressing popular issues of politics and social ongoing.

The creation of organizations such as CORE and SNCC are a testament to the role of youth during the Civil Rights Movement. The Black Panther Party, one of the more popular organizations during the Black Power Movement, opened doors to many young people who sacrificed their lives including Bobby Hutton and Fred Hampton, both of which were less than 25 during their political participation and unfortunate deaths. Current scholars of social movement may be interested in conscious rap music's appeal to young African Americans who may also be encouraged towards political mobilization and empowerment due to lyrical inspiration and frames described in conscious rap lyrics. The results of this research will draw on the specific ways in which conscious rap music has served the

African American community in providing a social and political framework and source of activism, which becomes necessary in mobilizing populous intended for social movements.

1.5 NATURE OF STUDY

As aforementioned the research method for this study will be qualitative. Interviews are used by many social scientists such as anthropologist who are eager to learn about other cultures and subcultures. The focus of qualitative research relies on the description of culture and the nuances that may not be revealed by gathering statistical data used in quantitative studies. A qualitative approach to this research would allow for personal descriptions of conscious rap music, an element of Hip Hop culture that has a unique function as a genre that is eager to embrace political and social critique.

The choice of this method is appropriate to the study as previous researchers (Hsuing, 2005; Calhoun-Brown, 2000; Feldstein, 2005) have interviewed artist directly or civil rights activists who spoke of the utility of music in the course of movement. In many ways author and activist Bernice Johnson Reagon has become an exemplar for this type of study. She has written several articles regarding the use of music during the Civil Rights Era including Let the Church Sing "Freedom" (1987), and her acclaimed PhD dissertation entitled "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History" (1975). Several Civil Rights scholars who investigate the use of music during movement have relied not only on her academic works but also interviews in which she recollects pivotal moments when she began to sing freedom songs. Hsiung (2005) details an interview with Johnson- Reagon in which she remembers singing the song, 'Over my head I see'. She describes the impact of changing the song lyrics to reflect a moment of political activity suggesting "It was the first time my living had changed a song even as it came out my body, Freedom!"(Hsiung, 2005, p. 23). The approach to study music that is based in personal descriptions of an event or cultural behavior as it is presented in movement has inspired the design of this study. Because the subjects of this study are accessible, direct interview and interpretation would best serve the purposes of gathering how conscious rappers currently use their music as a form of activism and provoke political activity.

The aim for this study is to explore how the tradition of movement music and activism can be found in conscious rap music. By answering this question, various definitions of activism and collective action may be offered by conscious rappers. A qualitative approach would best capture the meaning of conscious rap music in relationship to current political activity.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question that drives this study explores how rap artists use conscious rap music as a form of activism. Also, the question of how conscious rap artists consider himself or herself as apart of an organization or local movement will be explored.

The overarching research question will be explored via the definition of how social movement theorists focused on mobilization understand activism in everyday political circumstances, or times unlike the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements (Oliver and Marwell, 1992). During times of heavy political involvement however, music has been understood in two forms. The first is labeled songs of persuasion (Denisoff, 1966) and the second involves the creation of political frames (Tarrow, 1992). Artists were asked specific ways in which they identify their music as a form of political activism. These questions include, are you a member of a politically or socially critical organization (s)? And would you consider your rap music as a form of activism? These questions will provide a basis in which the artist may explore how their music can be understood as activism.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that encourages the exploration of movement music or music used as a form of activism is social movement theory that explores mobilizing structures including various forms of social movement tactics. Mobilization as understood within social movement theory suggests one of the key elements that encourage collective action is the creation of belief systems and the establishment of a collective goal or issue (Tarrow, 1992; Oliver and Marwell, 1992). Within the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement, the cultural framework of many African Americans reinforced beliefs that necessitated political action. The ways in which these beliefs were supported became a tactical approach to movement as many included formal and informal organizations, communication networks, local movement centers,

social movement organizations in addition to leadership structure (Morris, 1999). Within this framework, theorist have come to recognize that artists and the music they produce serve as both informal and formal tactics used to view the importance of particular issues necessitating social engagement (Calhoun-Brown, 2000; Tarrow, 1992; Morris, 1999). One example of this is the song "We Shall Overcome", a song that personally triggers images of Martin Luther King Jr. marching for freedom, or students sitting at white only counters all in hopes to bring about change. In many ways, conscious rappers use their music as a form of activism to define these collective goals or issues in order to mobilize non-activists or listeners to participate in political activity at minimal levels.

Although Hip Hop has yet to be confirmed as a movement within itself, rap music does play a role as a mobilizing strategy as understood by social movement theory. Rappers can be considered as activists based on Oliver and Marwell's (1992) description of activist behavior that helps to create the atmosphere of collective action and the mobilization of resources including time and money. Oliver and Marwell (1992) define activists as those persons who "care enough about some issue that they are prepared to incur significant costs and acts to achieve their goals" (p. 252). Many of these goals are determined based on available resources and therefore may differ on an individual basis; for this purpose mobilizing theorist use the term collective issue. A collective issue may be broad, as in the case of young African American rappers who may focus on the broad issue of oppressive societal conditions many urban youth experience. According to Oliver and Marwell (1992), the sixties and seventies were periods in which the political climate necessitated collective action, and as such, activists were not charged with mobilizing the masses but instead found they were keeping up with masses of people that in many ways began to organize themselves. An atmosphere that is not politically charged requires unique strategies and techniques that would encourage mobilization, a task for political activists. Rappers as activists use their time or careers to encourage non-activists towards a shared goal or collective issue. In this sense, rappers communicate collective issues via production and mobilizing technologies detailed in rap lyrics and the career strategies conscious rappers may employ. These technologies refer to the creation of knowledge that describes the resources and avenues used to achieve a goal (Oliver and Marwell, 1992).

Rap activists use the medium of rap music to describe various ways towards addressing a collective issue but may also provide and support opportunities to obtain tangible resources such as money in order to mobilize listeners in collective action. In the case of rap music, conscious rappers may sale c.d.'s or choose to participate in concerts and events that fundraise to support collective issues.

Prior to the Civil Rights movement particularly, social movement theory was void of analyzing the role music played in shaping the beliefs that influenced collective behavior. Social activists may also create songs to encourage political activity as seen in the 'freedom songs' used by members of the Civil Rights Movement (Reagon, 1987). As described by Johnson- Reagon, songs were often altered from its original meaning and lyrics of freedom and politics were infused. This blend of religion and politics by way of song, according to Calhoun- Brown (2000) were one of the ways in which religious institutions were susceptible to embracing political rhetoric that demanded political activity. This, according to Calhoun-Brown (2000) was yet another omission that social movement theorist failed to recognize as a resource presented by social organizations that assisted in sustaining the Civil Rights Movement.

Despite these omissions, scholarship critical of social movement theory have since validated the use of song as a mobilization tactic creating belief systems or collective goals and political frameworks. The differences in the use of song have been described by Tarrow (1992) and Denisoff (1966) who discussed the two major functions of music and movement; for the purpose of this research these types will be referred to as formal and informal functions.

Although activists are primary in collective action, (Oliver and Marwell, 1992) one of the goals of activists is to mobilize others, considered to be non-activists, or in the case of rap music, the rap audience. Non-activists or rap music listener is not expected to take up direct action, but instead is encouraged to participate minimally in political activity in a variety of ways. Non-activists are described in three primary forms, the best of which describe the person who is 're-affirmed [in their] self-identity" and feel good about doing the right thing (Oliver and Marwell, 1992). This research attempts to identify the informal ways in which conscious rap music influences non-activists particularly its perpetuation of frames that may encourage listeners to become critical of current social conditions. This research is also

interested, in the possibility of formal influence; perhaps there are organizations that adopt conscious rap songs as apart of their activist culture during collective action.

One of the major criticisms of social movement theorists is the lack of consideration for the use of outside influences and resources that encourage political activity (Calhoun-Brown, 2000). Post Civil Rights considerations however began to explore the usefulness of social organizations such as the black church and the role music played in perpetuating movement activities. This research therefore seeks to further the understanding of how music, particularly conscious rap music, remains to be relevant in political activity.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this study two primary terms drive the ways in which artists use music in relation to social movement; that are frames presented in social movements and the use of songs referred to as songs of persuasion. Informal frames refer to how one comes to understand the world (Calhoun-Brown, 2000), which often work best if aligned with 'cultural meaning and symbols of a movement's audience' (Tarrow, 1992). These songs are often intended to arouse listeners' consciousness to issues, ideals and information that is critical in their community or their experience. One of the best examples of this type of song is 'Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud' by the late James Brown. This song became an anthem for many African Americans who struggled with the exclusion from mainstream society because of their identity. Because this song was written to be politically provocative, it is considered an informal influence, its impact in creating a sense of collective pride among African Americans served as a bridge to inspire social analysis of what it means to be black and proud and perhaps what it meant to defiantly be proud in the midst of oppression; factors that contribute to collective beliefs.

Formal songs of persuasion are also referred to as propaganda songs. These types of songs become pivotal in the formation of opinion and behavior although perhaps not intended by the artist (Denisoff, 1966). "Oh Freedom", a song used by the Civil Rights Movement was not written to be used as a propaganda song, however Denisoff (1966) discusses how the Civil Rights activists adopted this song as it became one of the more popular songs used in addition to "We Shall Overcome". Martin Luther King

Jr. remarks that the use of these two songs created a sense of solidarity and "emphasized the strength-in-unity pattern of the movement and that in individualistic terms the participant is not isolated but a segment of a group" (Denisoff, 1966, p. 583).

1.8 ASSUMPTIONS

A critical assumption of this research topic is that conscious rap music is the sole musical genre within the black community that is socially and politically engaging. Within rap music itself, there are many rap songs that have been noted to be socially or politically critical, unfortunately these songs have not been recognized as profitable my media conglomerates (Rose, 2008) and the artists who have produced the occasional social or political song, are not allowed to do so in large quantities when signed to major labels. For this reason, conscious rap music abundant with social and political commentary cannot be presumed to be the only rap within Hip Hop culture that can offer music that has the potential to be considered a form of activism.

There also may be other musical genres outside of rap music, for example gospel music that can influence the creation of social movement among minority peoples. As aforementioned, many rappers have turned to gospel rap and in this medium have the potential to encourage social change. Gospel in general has proven to serve a critical function within former movements and although not considered to be the most popular musical genre among today's youth, may impact the political attitudes of its listeners.

The rationale for this assumption is that rap music is one of the most popular musical genres of today (Chang, 2005). However rap music has yet to directly impact a social movement as compared to freedom songs and gospel music. In order to best examine the potential of rap music, conscious rap music will be examined for its relevancy in encouraging political activism. As a study interested in the role of music in current political activity, it must not ignore the role that any musical genre produced by African Americans has the potential to create beliefs essential for collective behavior. Many artists create songs that are diverse in topic however when producing music for a mass audience, listeners are only given a portion of what artists have to offer. The assumption for this study also recognizes the impact of this type of omission.

1.9 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Although there are other genres that exist within the African American musical community, the scope of this study is interested in focusing only on conscious rap music and conscious rappers. This scope is presumed to best explore the relationship of music to activism and the consideration for conscious rap music as a revisited form of movement music. Rap music has proven to be the most popular contemporary musical genre (Chang, 2005) and conscious rap music has been noted to be the most politically and socially critical rap genres (Roy and Cummings, 2002). The scope of this study has therefore been determined by these two considerations.

Limitations are presented in that other popular musical genres may be considered movement music, although not explored for this study. Limitations are also presented in the sample size for this study later discussed in Chapter 3. A larger number of participants would allow for a better assessment of how conscious rap music impacts political activity, and how conscious rap music as a genre may be presented as not just a popular genre within rap music, but recognized as modern day movement music. For the purpose of this study however, no generalizations may be made from this research due to focus of only conscious rappers and the small sample of participants.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Conscious rap music may be considered a form of activism due to its political and social commentary and potential to influence collective issues. It is essential to investigate the tradition of music in relationship to movement, as people of African descent have used the power of music to endure and invoke resistance to oppressive conditions since the Maafa. Every time a song is played that listeners recognize, memories can often be recalled. When applied to movement, popular songs of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements have indeed served as a soundtrack that has inspired generations, including the Hip Hop generation.

Scholars have recognized that within social movement theory, music as it relates to movement has served in both formal and informal fashions. These two forms although different have impacted both the creation of collective beliefs and issues and the mobilization of African American youth and minority

peoples. Within rap music, conscious rap is thought to be influential by its establishment of collective issues that may explain the social and political conditions of the African American experience as well as mobilization of listeners to participate in political activity in a variety of ways. Perhaps there are local movements or various political activities that use conscious rap music as propaganda songs or songs used during political activity. There might also be consideration for conscious rappers to consider their rap music as a vehicle to promote the ideals of a particular social movement or organization.

The following chapter will include an analysis of how music has played a role in the development of social movements initiated by the African American community, specifically the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Detailed information on the significance of music informally and formally will be examined. The impact of rap music on today's youth and its political potential will also be discussed. An emphasis will be given to conscious rap music as a rationale for examining its role in contemporary forms of activism.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore how current rap artists use conscious rap music as activism. A review of literature will reveal how the use of music in movement is exemplified the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Music's relevancy is still applicable to political movements of today, as explored with activism in association with conscious rap music. As a generation that is not apart of a mass formal movement it is important to understand that the youth of today are involved in political and social critique by way of rap. Conscious rap music is understood to have been influenced by Afrocentric rhetoric and unafraid to address topics that are political in content (Cummings and Roy, 2002). These features along with the mass appeal of Hip Hop culture which includes not only rap music but also the art of graffiti, break-dancing and DJing, together generate the potential to effect social movements in the same manner as the music produced during the 1960's-1970's.

The following chapter will discuss the two primary ways in which music has influenced activism, that are formal and informal influences. The informal ways in which conscious rap music has influenced current forms of activism will be emphasized via the creation of frames or collective issues that help to explain the current social and political positions of African Americans. Music that has contributed to the shaping of frames can also be found during the Black Power movement. Formal influences are described as being integrated into political activity and are exemplified best with the role of freedom songs used during the Civil Rights Era.

2.1 TITLE SEARCHES

When researching this topic of movement music, the phrases Music of the Civil Rights Movement, Freedom Songs, Activist Music, and Hip Hop and Activism were explored. These phrases presented a series of articles on the type of music most used during activist movements, the role of music in movement and Hip Hop's relationship to activist culture. Some of the most frequent authors to write on the topic of music and social movement are Bernice Johnson Reagon, who wrote three articles used in this research including her articles 'Nobody knows the trouble I See': or, 'By and By I'm gonna lay down my Heavy Load' and Let the Church Sing "Freedom". Several authors discussed how music used during

the Civil Rights Movement changed the nature of how social movement theorists became to understand mobilizing, framing and collective behavior. These authors include Serge Denisoff who wrote Songs of Persuasion: A Sociological Analysis of Urban Propaganda Songs, Aldon D. Morris author of A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks and Allison Calhoun-Brown who researched the role of frames and the black church in the article Upon this Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement.

2.2 RESEARCH DOCUMENTS, JOURNALS RESEARCHED

One of the most commonly used research documents for the development of this topic and others in this area is the Ph. D dissertation of Bernice Johnson Reagon written in 1975 entitled "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History". This seminal work to the discussion of music and social movement has impacted scholars interested in the topic of music and activism but also has changed the way social movement theorists have come to understand mobilization since the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement. Due to this work, and following research based in the discourse of music and movement, journals such as Political Science and Politics, Social Problems, the Journal of American History, the Journal of African American History, the African American Review and the Journal of Black Studies have hosted several articles and studies used for this project.

ARTICLES

Within the discussion of Hip Hop and social movement or activism, noted authors such as Jeff Chang, Bakari Kitwana, Portia K. Maultsby and Errol Henderson have written on topics ranging from Hip Hop culture and rap music being an extension of West African musical traditions as with Maultsby's (1990) article African Retentions in African American Music and the role of Black Nationalism and rap discussed in Henderson's work entitled Black Nationalism and Rap found in the Journal of Black Studies. Bonnette also has researched the role of political rap arguing in here dissertation Key Dimensions of Black Political Ideology: Contemporary Black Music and Theories of Attitude Formation that "the music of the hip hop generation is critical for knowledge, awareness, mobilization and action" (Bonnette, 2009, p.11). Together these articles and other related works provide a background to understand not only the

role of music in the African American community, but also the appropriate use of music during politically demanding times.

2.3 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Oba'T Shaka (2000) argues in Integration Trap: Generation Gap that African descendants used music for every aspect of social life encompassing birth, death, times of work, and times of war. Tim Dennison in The American Negro and its Amazing Music written in 1963 also reinforces the tradition of music in the lives of African people. Dennison (1963) details that African Americans have maintained a long tradition of using music to describe the daily nuances of life under oppressive conditions; enslaved Africans once used music to endure the harsh conditions of plantation life, by singing to distract from the realities of intense labor and enslavement. These songs, inspired by a rich African heritage retained despite the Maafa, Ki-Swahili for the 'great disaster', have become an essential element in African American life taking shape in many genres and musical styles based in a West African musical aesthetic (Maultsby, 1990). An often time, this aesthetic is reflected in the use of words and concepts that find root in West African culture and language. Although the conditions of European enslavement were foreign to Africans, they were able to articulate their conditions using a mixture of native and English languages.

When using song to formally influence movement, song lyrics are also created as a blend of language and of concept. Formal influences are defined as those songs that directly influence the nature of movement, which according to Denisoff (1966) can be referred to as songs of persuasion. Movement activists used songs of persuasion to encourage unity, political collectivity and maintain attitudes during political activity, despite the intentions of the artist who created these songs. In many ways, songs were adopted from spiritual circles and rewritten to perpetuate movement (Reagon, 1987).

One of the best ways African Americans have maintained their sense of connection to music is found in the African American church. Gospel songs particularly have surfaced as a mainstay during spiritual ritual and ceremonies. Once the church became a centralizing body during the Civil Rights Movement, gospel music became the blueprint for songs used as formal influences during movement (Reagon, 1987; Harris, 1994). During the Civil Rights movement, the church became a pivotal element in

recruitment and sustaining a sense of collective behavior but also played a practical role in providing a location to conduct meetings and host gatherings. It was during these meetings that the development of song would take form.

2.4 MUSIC AS A FORMAL INFLUENCE – GOSPEL MOVEMENT MUSIC

In 1963, one such meeting encompassed the blending of gospel songs and freedom songs by way of singer, leader, and well-respected activist, Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. At the closing of meetings, Hamer was described as offering a song to culminate the evening and invigorate all in attendance with the singing of "We Shall Overcome". According to Reagon (1987), the popular song originated as a congregation song, and later adopted by Guy Carawan from the Highlander Folk Center in Mount Eagle Tennessee during a sit-in movement. This song later was adopted by Zilphia Horton wife of Miles Horton, musical director of the Highlander organizing union who in 1947 taught Peter Seeger who published the song in the People's Song Bulletin in 1949 (Reagon, 1987). Carawan, used the song at a sit-in meeting in 1960 in Nashville, and recalls the impact this former gospel song had on the political activities of Civil Rights activists. He recalls:

> It's amazing what strength this song has. It's just unbelievable sometimes how it can bring people together. One night in 1959, a group of about 60 of us had assembled at the Highlander School. It was the end of the workshop, and we were having punch and cake and seeing a movie. The local police and sheriff burst in. You see, Tennessee officials were always trying to break up the school- they considered it subversive- and a couple of years later they succeeded. Well, for an hour and a half they forced the people –some of them students- to sit in the dark while they went through rooms and searched suitcases and bags. Somebody started to hum "We Shall Overcome" and someone else took it up. Then from a Negro girl- a high school student (Mary Ethel Dozier) from Montgomery, Alabama- a new verse came into being. Sitting there in the dark, this girl began to sing. "We are not afraid, we are not afraid today" (Lowen, 1965, p. 2-8).

"We Shall Overcome" became one of the most popular songs used by Civil Rights activists during the movement and can be identified as a formal song of persuasion (Denisoff, 1966). This song not only was used during political activity, as seen by the description above, it was additionally used during meetings of Civil Rights organizers. Other songs also became popularly used during political activity such as "Nobody Knows the Trouble I see", " By and By I'm Gonna Lay Down my Heavy

Load", "Guide my Feet as I run this race", "I'll Be Alright", and "We Are Soilders" (Reagon, 1991; Hsuing, 2005).

This description also shows the way in which music has had a formal influence in sustaining activists during political activities. For this reason, I would argue that formal influences also serve as a source of empowerment during social movements. Not only were songs of persuasion used during political activity as themed songs for describing attitudes, behaviors and beliefs; they also became a source of empowerment. Empowering songs were crucial during the Civil Rights Movement as many African Americans faced intense violence during their political involvement. Some of the most popular images associated with the Civil Rights movement include acts of brutality by police officers caused by high-pressure water hoses, dogs and in some cases batons. Many of these activists were incarcerated due to their political activity and during the course of their incarceration; they would use song to empower those who faced the circumstances of imprisonment.

In many ways these songs helped to rationalize the realities of political action. This process was also reinforced by the black churches support for the Civil Rights Movement. Black church members who also became movement activists thought of themselves as doing a righteous act in seeking out reform and justice for African Americans. Barnes (2008) describes the black church as serving two major functions that are prophetic and priestly in nature. Churches that are perceived as 'priestly' focus on the preaching of the Christian gospel and the salvation of its members; as opposed to prophetic churches, priestly focused black churches avoid involvement in activities outside of the mission of Christianity. Prophetic churches on the other hand are often critical of social conditions and encourage political involvement in order to correct disproportionate circumstances many of its members may face. These types of prophetic churches became eagerly involved in the Civil Rights Movement as their religious beliefs encouraged Christians to take action in changing the realities of African Americans (Calhoun-Brown, 2000). This relationship also alludes to the use of gospel songs being transformed into freedom songs. There were no contradictions between being a Christian and being a political activist (Calhoun-Brown, 2000). Music therefore served the same function in Christian worship services and in political

behavior. Freedom songs created from gospel music, indeed served as songs of persuasion and lead activists to not only become empowered but also feel justified in participating in the Civil Rights Movement.

As aforementioned a plethora of gospel songs were transformed into songs of persuasion via freedom songs used not only during political activity but also during strategy meetings and in times of intense resistance. The definition of songs of persuasion as provided by Denisoff (1966) is based in six main criteria that describe various ways music can influence or encourage movement. These criteria include songs that:

1. Attempt to solicit and arouse outside support and sympathy for a social or political movement
2. Reinforce the value structure of individuals who are active supporters of a social movement or ideology
3. Create and promote cohesion, solidarity, and high morale in an organization or movement supporting its world view
4. Attempt to recruit individuals into joining a specific social movement
5. Involve solutions to real or imagined social phenomena in terms of action to achieve a desired goal
6. Point to some problem or discontent in the society, usually in emotional terms

For the purpose of this research, songs such as “We Shall Overcome”, “Aint Gone Let Nobody Turn me Around”, “I Woke up this Morning with my Mind Stayed on Jesus”, “This Little light of mine” among many other popular gospel songs, once transformed into freedom songs, meet the six criteria listed above, making them songs of persuasion exemplifying music as a formal impact on movement behavior. The underlining theme of songs of persuasion is that the artist had no intention for these songs to be used during movement, but once adopted by activists became crucial aspects of social and political behavior. Unlike songs of persuasion, there exist an element of music during movement that specifically encourage some examination of the political and social climate, and although perhaps not directly linked to a political movement, these intentional songs help encourage a framework that social movement theorist recognize become essential during mobilization and political behavior.

Both Calhoun-Brown (2000) and Tarrow (1992) discuss the way in which music can have an informal impact on social movements by creating frames. Frames have been argued to be essential in shaping a collective identity necessitating political action. For instance, a popular song may bring light to a social or political issue that when discussed as a song, helps to encourage attitudes and reactions to said conditions. Social frames are also critical in music because unlike songs of persuasion the artist who produce social and political lyrics within their songs are intentionally drawing attention to issues that may otherwise be ignored.

2.5 MUSIC AS AN INFORMAL INFLUENCE – SECULAR MOVEMENT MUSIC

Tarrow (1992) has argued that frames work best when aligned with pre-existing beliefs and values of a community. Considering this, shared attitudes about politics prior to the creation of popular songs help to solidify the role of political frames. Some of the best examples of how music can shape movement informally in my opinion is the creation of songs such as "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" by James Brown, "Mississippi Goddam" by Nina Simone, Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On', the Isley Brothers 1973 recording of "Fight the Power", and Gil- Scott Heron who recorded countless songs filled with political criticisms such as "Whitey On the Moon" recorded in 1970 and "Get Out of the Ghetto Blues" released in 1972 (Angelos, 2005; Felstien, 2005; Demers, 2003). Various artists to highlight issues concerning African Americans through a post- Civil Rights Era and the ushering in of a new Black Power Movement intentionally such as the Isley Brothers, Marvin Gaye, the Spinners, Leroy Huston and many others (Demers, 2003) created informal songs.

Many of these artist also recognized that music was a powerful way to inform the African American community of conditions that were not reconciled by the efforts of the Civil Rights Era. In the song "Get Out of the Ghetto Blues" by Heron, assessments were made of the effects of integration on the black Ghetto, a 'catch-22' of integration was presented as some African Americans were granted better conditions while others remained in impoverished circumstances. On one hand, many Civil Rights activists fought for equal treatment many of the institutions within American mainstream, including educational systems. The effects of that however, was a backlash of African Americans who left

impoverished areas for better opportunity, leaving many others behind in the ghetto. As a country of 'equal opportunity' a reality of black life is that not all African Americans can and do take advantage of life changing opportunities. In the song Gil-Scott Heron sings:

> I know you think you're cool, Lord if they bus your kids to school
> I know you think you're cool just 'cause they bus your kids to school
> But you ain't got a thing to lose, you just got the get out of the ghetto blues
> I know you think you're cool if your gettin' two welfare checks
> You done told me you think you're cool because you're getting two welfare checks
> Yeah but you get ten years to lose if they catch you
> Just trying to fight that get out of the ghetto blues
> If they don't get you in the washer, Lord knows they'll get you in the rinse
> I know you think you're cool just 'cause you shooting that stuff in your arm
> And it don't matter which pan box you choose
> You got the get out of the ghetto blues (Demers, 2003, p. 44).

Although Heron is not thought to be a political leader similar to Huey Newton, Fred Hampton or Martin Luther King Jr., he does utilize the medium of music to make key arguments about the continued struggle of African Americans living in the ghetto. As an African American music fan, or listener of the artist mentioned above, this type of commentary leads to the shaping of political identities and social evaluations. Some audiences, living outside of the ghetto are now exposed to issues of drug abuse and consequences of social reform programs that may not be at the forefront of their political and social assessments. In other words, these intentionally produced political and socially critical songs help to create a way in which African Americans frame their political and social identity.

Social movement theorists recognize the significance of collective identity as a precursor to collective action and behavior. In that, African Americans have been greatly influenced by music as a common ground upon which many could identify. For Christians during the Civil Rights Movement, the use of gospel songs, re-written as freedom songs, helped to blend the religious mission of many black churches with the political mission of political activists (Calhoun-Brown, 2000). Prior to the Black Power Movement, popular songs helped to create ideals that ushered in a new wave of consciousness; that is black pride. Black pride, an element of the African American community that all members could adopt, reached beyond the black church and incorporated a secular component to the community attracting many young people. A sense of pride in oneself helped to shape a collective identity of

blackness and an unapologetic attitude of worth. The most noted song to exemplify this phenomena is "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" by the infamous James Brown.

The life of James Brown is very interesting as he came of age in South Carolina during the Jim Crow era in which many African Americans were faced with the realities of racism in their every day lives. Because of this, Brown was 'relegated to cotton-picking, street performing, and eventually theft, which led to his incarceration' (Angelos, 2005). Unlike recognized leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, Brown's music came from his experiences of growing up in America during a tumultuous era. Angelos (2005) writes that the:

> Lyrics of "Say it Loud, explicitly express the necessity of social reform in the U.S.: "Now we demand a change to do things for our self/ We're tired of beatin' our head against the wall/ And workin' for someone else". Not only does this excerpt function alone as civil rights literature, but the passage can also be correlated to King's sentiment presented in the archetypal "I Have a Dream" speech, which repeatedly emphasizes the perils inflicted by discrimination". Brown's lyrics, like Martin Luther King Jr.'s oratory, bolster awareness of African American unity and become increasingly significant to recent U.S. history considering the widespread audiences that his albums, and thus the message, reached (p. 58).

Audiences could undoubtedly relate to the life and lyrics of James Brown as he was later crowned "The Godfather of Soul". One of the major attributes of James Brown was his unprecedented popularity, which allowed for an increased impact of songs such as "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud". The popularity of the song increases its embrace by the black community in addition to its lyrical proclamation. In many ways, James Brown made it 'cool' to be black. The lyrics helped to shape a collective identity in that during the Jim Crow and post Civil Rights era many African Americans were conflicted with identity and the conditions of their realities. Although there was serge of pride during the Civil Rights Era, the Black Power Movement adopted a different way of expressing collective identity. Cultural nationalist would identify a shift in hairstyle, dress, and attitude associated with 'black pride'. Interestingly, the political aspirations of many Civil Rights activists was one of integration and equal treatment, as opposed to the new era of activists under the Black Power Movement who became entrenched with the doctrines of leaders such as Malcolm X who focused primarily on Black Nationalism.

The manifestation of songs with informal influences was the creation of frames that helped to explain what it meant to be African American during the 1960's and 1970's. In many ways, artist spoke to the demands of the social and political climate of the time, offering commentary on the issues that were critical to black life. As such, song topics were extremely diverse as described by the many artist and song titles listed previously. Many artists were inspired to create songs based on popular events during movement, as exemplified by Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam".

Feldstein (2005) argues that Nina Simone is often omitted from the discussion of artist helping to shape Black Nationalist ideals and influence politics because of her association with jazz, blues and classical music. Despite this however, Nina Simone can be considered one of the premiere voices during an era of social and political unrest. Simone took the opportunity as a popular artist, much the same as James Brown, to write songs that would informally influence audiences. Also similar to Brown, Simone's 1966 release of "Four Women" became an assessment of how identity was shaped in the African American community, particularly for women. This song, describes the differences of skin-tone and experience among four women who range from tones of dark brown to light brown. The social commentary of the song recognized the stereotypes and social treatment each woman experienced, an experience in which many African American women could relate. It is this song and others that has led authors such as Feldstein (2005) to place Simone as one of the contributors to not only the Civil Rights activities but also toward ushering in a new wave of feminism.

Simone did not gain this acclaim on her own, for she was associated with many African American artists and musicians in the late 1950's in Greenwich Village and Harlem. Some of these early influences include 'Langston Hughes, Lorraine Hansberry, Leroi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), Abbey Lincoln, Miriam Makeba and James Baldwin' (Feldstein, 2005, p. 1353). A crowd of influential African Americans who used the medium of art and music to create socially and politically relevant works indeed surrounded Simone. However it wasn't until 1963 that Simone officially created her first 'civil rights song'. Feldstein (2005) writes of Simone:

> On September 15, 1963, Nina Simone learned that four young African American girls had been killed in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Immediately after hearing the events in Birmingham, however, Simone wrote the song "Mississippi Goddam". It came to her in a 'rush of fury, hatred and determination' as she suddenly realized what it was to be black in American in 1963 (p. 1350).

Through this account, the informal ways music helps to shape movement can be explored. As an artist, Simone used the opportunity to take a socially critical event, the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, to provide critique or what could be considered a rebuttal on behalf of the African American community who were drastically affected by the deaths of the four young children. Simone's specific intention was to use her music to shed light on the bombings and to address the contradictions African Americans were facing living in the South. The presumption was based in the 'separate but equal' ideal; that African Americans were to obtain the same amenities of whites except in different environments. Simone uses the song 'Mississippi Goddam' to overtly address the unfairness African Americans faced despite this ideal. She sings:

> All I want is equality
> For my sister, my brother, my people, and me.
> Yes, you lied to me all these years
> You told me to wash and clean my ears
> And talk real fine, just like a lady
> And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie.
> But this whole country is full of lies
> You're all gone die and die like flies
> I don't trust you anymore
> You keep on saying "Go Slow" (Felstein, 2005, p. 1350-1351).

The attempts of African Americans to adjust themselves to white standards of behavior, speech and dress weren't satisfactory for racist whites that proved despite these attempts, white supremacy and racism would still prevail. Hearing about the bombing of the young girls at the Baptist Church inspired Simone to speak out and against the assumption that white Americans would one day be accepting of African Americans. This powerful sentiment was perhaps shared by many observers of this incident and expressed by other African American leaders and community members; however once addressed by way of a song, exposes a larger audience to these attitudes. Outrage, resentment and disenchantment with the

American social climate, may have lead African American audiences to become inspired once exposed to this song and others like it to take up action and join the current social movement.

This is an example of how social and political frames become a factor as a mobilizing force for movement. As I listened to this song for the first time, I was somewhat surprised by the bluntness of the repeated phrase , "what about Mississippi, Goddam". My first thought was that this was a black woman singing this song, and after listening to her acclaimed "Four Women" the rage and passion of the lyrics became more evident. Simone was clearly in an artistic space to use her fame and talent to say to the American mainstream, as a black woman I see what is happening in our society and I am fed up. The song's tempo underscored this feeling, as it seemed almost ironic that a song of this nature would have such a fast pace. I would've presumed this song to be sung slowly, and with an air reminiscent of a gospel song or freedom song, yet Simone used her jazz style to create a song that is moving and full of conviction.

Simone is but one example of how frames are perpetuated with songs that have the potential to heavily impact social and political movements. As aforementioned, songs such as "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" and "Four Women" help to bring about critical social commentary of black pride and self-esteem for many African Americans. This song is often used in television and film to indicate an air of inspired revolution, providing somewhat of a theme song to the Black Nationalist and Black Power Movements. Gil-Scott Heron and other artists such as the Last Poets not only influenced their generation with socially and politically relevant lyrics but also helped to inspire future generations of rap artists and listeners. Marvin Gaye's "What's going on", speaks to the conditions many African Americans faced living in the 'ghetto' discussing issues of drug abuse, pollution and corruption (Demers, 2003). This type of 'ghetto' narrative became a trend in the 1970's, as many African American artists felt the need and inspiration to write about the conditions of the ghetto. Artists such as the Spinners "Ghetto Child" released in 1972, and Leroy Hutson's 1973 classic "War's the World is a Ghetto" set a stage that helped to create a framework upon which many African Americans could understand their environment and exposed their realities to a larger listening audience (Demers, 2003). Many of these songs have inspired a

generation of activists often times giving reference to the preceding social movements as seen with the Impressions song "People Get Ready" (Demers, 2003). Music has therefore been an extension of African American life and a resource to display the realities of oppression. It has also served in providing frames for social and political understanding of these conditions helping to shape the climate in which movement has occurred.

2.6 CURRENT FINDINGS ON HIP HOP AS ACTIVISM

Since the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, African American music has developed in a variety of ways. Mautlsby (1990) describes all African derived music as an extension of the West African musical tradition. From this tradition, the Gospel- hymn preceded the genres of rhythm and blues and civil rights songs. These genres gave birth to soul and from soul, disco, rap and funk emerged. The focus of this study is on rap music, a wide spread musical genre initiated by African American and minority youth during the early 1970's in the South Bronx of New York (Rose, 1998).

Hip Hop is often used interchangeably with rap music; however Hip Hop refers to the four primary elements of the culture which are DJ'ing, graffiti, Break-dancing and raping or MC'ing. Rap will be used for the purpose of this research; conscious rap music will specifically be emphasized to draw a connection to the ways in which music has influenced movement during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and how rap music has the potential to influence activism for a new generation. Hip Hop culture and rap music are suggested to be focal points in which values, aesthetics and identity are shared. The notion that conscious rap music through its lyrical content invokes a collective identity or social movement may be grandiose. Gordon (2005) suggests that art is not responsible for invoking social movement and that "those who speak of the revolutionary potential of art without thinking of art in artistic terms may face contradictions" (p. 357), however he concludes that "art does not have to change the world, but it always plays a role in how we live" (Gordon, 2005, p. 387).

Both Chang (2005) and Keyes (1996) discuss the role of technology and South Bronx, New York in shaping Hip Hop music and culture. Keyes (1996) argues the emergence of rap music and Hip Hop culture is the result of two major factors that are the 'dismantlement of the Bronx in the late 1950's giving

rise to gang culture and the commercialization of disco' (p. 224). According to Chang (2005) the Bronx was apart of the 1929 New York Regional Plan Association, which implied building a major freeway through the city. The construction was contingent upon many 'urban renewal' rights that allowed for the destruction of homes belonging to African Americans, Puerto Rican and Jewish families (Chang, 2005, p. 11). Urban builder, Robert Moses is accredited for drafting and executing this plan. Keyes (1996) writes:

> As a result of the expressway, property owners sold apartments at lower rates to slumlords who neglected apartment upkeep, yet charged exorbitant rent. African American and Hispanic residents were forced to live in dilapidated housing and rodent-infested conditions. As conditions worsened, crime escalated. Some youth felt the need to form neighborhood groups or gangs to police their apartments, housing projects, streets and neighborhoods from outside invaders (p.228).

In response, following a drastic renewal and gentrification that increased violence among youth, Hip Hop culture was created and became the balm that eased the conditions in the South Bronx. Hip Hop crews in many ways replaced the gangs in South Bronx, instead of engaging in gang violence, young people participating in community organizations such as The Bronx River Project and often attending parties (Chang, 2005). Because of rap music's growing popularity among youth, participating in Hip Hop culture became an outlet for many disenfranchised youth who were surviving an environment that was heavily impoverished. Afrika Bambaataa is accredited with the establishment of The Bronx River Project in 1973 that encouraged youth to cease violence between gangs (Keyes, 1996). The BRP was renamed the Zulu Nation which exemplifies the role of rap music among youth in the South Bronx. Hip Hop encouraged youth to end the violence in their communities and provided an artistic freedom of expression. In many ways participating in Hip Hop culture in any of its elements allowed for youth to escape and find more sufficient ways for positive social interaction (Chang, 2005); in fact, Bambaataa added a fourth element to Hip Hop: Knowledge. Concepts such as the cipher or rap freestyle battle exemplify how constructive Hip Hop culture and its affiliate organizations became in replacing potential violent gang activity.

2.7 THREE MAIN TYPES OF RAP GENRES

Within rap music, there are three main rap genres that are party rap, gangsta rap, and conscious rap music. Michael Newman (2007) separates rap music according to ideological styles; resulting in two main schools of thought- conscious rap, message rap or progressive rap that is "overtly political" and hard-core rap. Conscious rap has been distinguished by its "politically progressive and racially conscious lyrical content- conscious rappers rap about racist hypocrisies, Black Nationalism, black solidarity, gender politics in the black community, and African American history and culture" (McCorkel & Rodriquez, 2009, p.367). Hard core rap is "not usually thought of as political" (Newman, 2007, p.132). Other types of rap music categories are divided by content such as those offered by Tyson (2006). Tyson (2006) developed the Rap Attitude Perception (R.A.P.) scale that identifies three contextual areas of rap music, misogynistic rap, violent rap, and empowering rap music. Rap critics also use the term gangsta rap (Brennan, 2004; Tyson, 2006; Cheney, 2005).

Many of the messages in gangsta and party or commercial rap music, although profitable, perpetuate negative stereotypes of African Americans and require many African American artists to balance notions of "keepin it real" and financially succeeding as recording artists signed to major labels (Newman, 2007; Skold & Rehn, 2007). The conflict of producing lyrics that are socially or politically relevant and the pursuit of profitability have been managed by artists such as Jay-Z (Newman, 2007), who garnered a successful career, started his own record company in 1995 with partners Damon Dash and Karem "Biggs" Burke, but never lost his appeal to African American rap audiences. All artists do not share the resolve of profit and quality of lyrics, as Jay-Z is a unique example. Rap group The Fugees struggled as a 'conscious rap' act signed to a Ruff House/Columbia Records. Reynolds (1996) argues that in 1993, The Fugees released 'Blunted on Reality' produced by engineers who didn't allow the artists to have creative input. Reynolds (1996) writes in Billboard Magazine that the Blunted on Reality album was:

> A creative set, the album featured beats and rhythms that were slightly out of sync with the music of the day. As a result, it sold only 118,000 units, according to SoundScan(p. 18).

Wyclef ‘Clef’ Jean, Lauryn Hill, and Prakazrel ‘Pras” Michel make the Fugees and in 1998 released their second album the “Score” which they were granted artistic freedom to produce. The Fugees career during their sophomore album shows the advantages of allowing rap artist to express him or herself while still ensuring profitability. Columbia records however were forced to market the rap trio in a variety of ways, stepping outside their traditional market strategies. The group was put on a mini-tour to target potential audiences to support and buy the upcoming album, the tour targeting black colleges. The Fugees went on to receive great acclaim for the Score propelling the solo careers of both Lauryn Hill and Wyclef Jean.

Many artists struggle with the conflict, which is compiled by the meanings, associated with their preferred rap genre. Myer & Kleck (2007) argue that rap genres in a sense:

> Could be considered social categories because the names, standards, and inclusive qualities of genres in the music industry have been representative of the society in which these genres emerged. It is safe to say these genres are shaping the music industry in the same way the music industry is shaping them; in other words, supply is shaping demand Negus 29-30(as cited in Myer & Kleck, 2007, p. 142).

Three main rap genres however have emerged encompassing many of the sub-genres. Gangsta Rap, party rap and conscious rap in many ways reflect the major varieties within rap music.

2.8 DEFINITIONS OF CONSCIOUS RAP MUSIC

Conscious rap music therefore is understood as music that maintain Afrocentric concepts, embraces elements of spoken word, music that has quality lyrics, music that gives voice to the African American or minority community, and rap music that occasionally refers to the Black Power Movement and/or politics. Cummings and Roy (2002) define conscious or political rap as offering an Afrocentric alternative to the types of messages in popular rap music. Henderson (1996) suggests that Afrocentricity in rap music provides:

> A standard of behavior and a new rites of passage away from guns, dope, sexism, and violence, and toward more African centered definitions of manhood and womanhood rooted in righteous behavior, support for liberation struggles and political prisoners, Afrocentric community building, and good entertainment”(p. 308).

As compared to gangsta rap music, conscious rap messages empower African American rap fans. This idea is further supported by the Sullivan (2003) study asserting African American rap fans seek out rap music not simply for the beat, but also for the lyrical content. In fact, Chaney (2005) argues empowering ideals based in Afrocentric rhetoric generate a sense of nationalism and influence among rap fans. Like the rhetoric of the Zulu Nation, Afrocentricity takes root in the Black Nationalist movement of the 1960' s-1970, and make claims similar to Keyes (1996) who argues that rap culture is a derivative of African culture.

The Afrocentric element in conscious rap music is attributed to encourage some resistance towards the dominant culture (Cummings and Roy, 2002; Dixon, Zhang & Conrad, 2009; Martinez, 1997). In a 2009 study on the effects of rap videos on rap audiences, Dixon, Zhang & Conrad (2009) conclude that although rap videos with political or positive themes are viewed and appreciated by rap audiences, rap fans are less likely to seek out these types of videos choosing instead to engage rap videos that portray problematic themes. However when Afrocentric videos are consumed it increases levels of self-esteem and opportunities to shape a collective identity (Dixon, Zhang & Conrad, 2009). This process according to Allen (2001) occurs because Black audiences use a cultural lens to decipher those messages that affirm their collective self- esteem. Much of this cultural lens is composed of African retentions in addition to African American aesthetics (Keyes, 1994; Salaam, 2005; Dixon, Zhang & Conrad, 2009).

Another element of conscious rap music that positively affects the listener is based in the concept of nommo (Keyes, 1996). Stephens (1991) defines nommo as the "supernatural power of the spoken word" (p.25). Asante (1987) writes Afrocentricity encourages a "productive thrust of language into the unknown in an attempt to create harmony and balance in the midst of disharmony" (p. 35). Similarly Cummings and Roy (2002) argue that Afrocentricity and nommo together signify the "generative power of the spoken word" (p. 63). The power of nommo in rap music can be found in several forms. These forms include call and response or "harmony indicators", "soundin-out", repetition, stylin', improvisation, historical perspective and quality of lyricism (Cummings and Roy, 2002).

Quality of lyricism refers to the audiences' ability to exhibit "appreciation for the importance of poetry as a vehicle that conveys emotion and imagination (Cummings and Roy, 2002, p. 67). The history of struggle for African American people specifically draws on an emotion or imagination that combined with Afrocentric rhetoric invokes a quality specific to conscious rap music. Cummings and Roy (2002) recall the song "Pump Your Fist" by artist Kool Moe Dee who according to the authors exemplifies the essence of quality of lyricism. The song is "filled with rich imageries and metaphors, comparing the slavery experience with a holocaust" (Cummings and Roy, 2002, p. 67). Artists such as Tupac Shakur is argued to portray a quality of lyricism and detail of a broad collective issue in the song "Keep Ya Head Up", an anthem to young African American women bringing to light issues of sexism, classism, neglect, and interactions between African American men and women (Cummings and Roy, 2002, p. 67). These songs would be considered conscious songs in that they utilize Afrocentric concepts in addition to the power of nommo.

The final element that Hip Hop scholars suggest is a positive element of conscious rap music is its identification with ancient Egypt and "inspiration from black power movements of the 1960's" (Decker, 1993). Decker (1993) writes rap group X-Clan "reclaims the ancient Egyptian empire as the African origin in order to generate racial pride and awareness in the struggle over injustice in America" (p. 54). The inspiration from the movements of the sixties have been rearticulated in the conscious rap of artists who use "black nationalist sound, image, and message [and] draw from both recent struggles that anticipate the coming of the black nation (nation time) and a mythical attitude toward an immemorial African nation (nation place)" (Decker, 1993, p. 54). Decker (1993) traces the lineage of Black Nationalism beginning in the eighteenth century including poignant periods during the 1920's with Marcus Garvey and the UNIA and the 1970's with Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. Rap music, Decker (1993) argues embraces these Black Nationalist models and exemplify these messages in 'nationalist-conscious' rap music.

One of the benefits of the Afrocentric standpoint and conscious rap is the incorporation of female artist. Although gangsta rap music is not lacking in female rappers, conscious rap music based in

Afrocentric ideals of empowerment tend to be inviting to black female artists. As Afrocentricity embraces the role of the black woman in the male dominated sphere of rap music, Decker (1993) details the contradictions that are presented by Afrocentricity in which black women become limited in expression.

The time period in which rap was thought to be its most creative and progressive was between 1983 and 1989. Some popular hits during this time period were 1985's Roxanne, Roxanne released by Selected Records, 1987's The Bridge released by Down by Law/ Cold Chillin Records and the response record to the Bridge, The Bridge is Over released the same year by Criminal Minded/ B-Boy Records. The rap classic album, Paid in Full, reached a high point in popularity during the 1986-87 year (Peterson, 2006). Curiously, despite the popularity of Paid in Full, in 1986 the Beastie Boy's Licensed to Ill "became the first rap record to reach number one" (Fraley, 2009). Ironically, Lena (2006) indicates that beginning in 1988, "the largest record companies charted substantially more "hardcore" rap songs than independent labels" (Lena, 2006, p. 487). Consumption of rap music by white audiences during this period may contribute to this phenomenon.

This period also reflects the growing political commentary of rap songs by artists such as X-Clan, A Tribe Called Quest, Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions (Peterson, 2006). By the early 1990's these groups would be joined by the messages of artists such as N.W.A., Ice T., Snoop Dogg, TuPac Shakur, and Notorious B.I.G. (Peterson, 2006). Chaney (2005) refers to this period as the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism, suggesting that during this time rap music was "used as a tool to both inspire and translate what French philosopher Michel Foucault called an 'insurrection of subjugated knowledge'- the sometimes radical, always subversive thinking and/or activism that characterizes the politics of dominated and exploited peoples" (p. 285). What is interesting to note, are the variety of rap genres during this period. Chuck D, lead rapper from the group Public Enemy says that during the 90's there was a Golden Age of rap music in which audiences could find a variety of rap music on mainstream airwaves (Mitchell, 2010).

Although the Golden Age of rap music exemplified the ways in which rap music provided political and social frames, rap music throughout its development remained politically and socially conscious. Artists such as Grandmaster Flash who in 1982 released "The Message", created a song that described conditions of the ghetto, much the same as previous artists that framed the Black Power Movement (Angelos, 2005). In many ways "The Message" has become a rap cannon for describing the world many African American survived and a critical issue in which many could relate. Grandmaster Flash raps:

> Broken glass everywhere, people pissing on the
> stairs like they just don't care,
> I can't take the smell, can't take the noise,
> Got no money to move, 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 the man with the tow truck repossessed my car (Aldridge, 2005, pg. 243).

Other artists also voiced their inspiration from the Black Power and Civil Rights Movement in their lyrics offering political and social issues as with the Grand Puba of Brand Nubian in the song "Wake Up", he raps:

> Drugs in our community (that aint right), Can't even get a job (that aint right), Lying who is God (that aint right). Puba however, provides a solution: "Knowledge of self to better ourself 'cause I know myself, that we can live much better than this'. The conclusion of the song leaves an echoing message of self-determination: "Move on black man, move on, you gotta move on black man move on…" (Aldridge, 2005, pg. 235-236).

Rappers have indeed provided a legacy of resistance and social and political critique and issues that have influenced generations since its inception. Although the Golden Age of rap music was the most impacting period with the potential to create political and social change, no real movement occurred during this time period (Chang, 2005). This is perhaps due to the commercialization of rap music and the influence of media conglomerates whom after 1996, began to heavily control the types of rap music and messages that were to permeate airwaves (Rose, 2008). The marginalization of political rap music may also be due to the relationship between rap music and collective action as suggested by the 1992 Los Angeles Riots.

2.9 HIP HOP AND THE THREAT OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

The Los Angeles Riots were the response of a 'not-guilty' verdict being given to police officers caught on tape beating an African American male, Rodney King. This event was the culminating moment of a series of incidents that involved the police brutality of African American men by the hands of LAPD officers. The trial of the police officers became the focus of media nationally but especially by local Los Angeles media. When the verdict was given, an immediate response of rage and rebellion broke out in the city. In the area of South Central Los Angeles, predominately African American youth began to loot, torch and pillage stores that were owned by whites and Koreans. Media coverage of the riots in many ways fueled the rebellion as many viewers became aware of the riots because of the news and joined the activities. As a young person living in South Central at the time, I remember seeing ashes rain from my front porch and witnessing fires surrounding my neighborhood. I knew I was witnessing something unique and later became aware that it was a moment to be recorded in the history of South Central Los Angeles.

Following the riots, the media immediately turned to rap music, as many of the rioters were young African Americans, most of which were reported to be local gang members. In July of 1992, the New Music Conference was held in which several panel discussions took place regarding new trends and new genres to emerge in the music world. One of the more popular topics however to be discussed was the role rap music played in the L.A. riots, in which artists such as Sista Souljah and Ice-T announced that rap artists in many ways predicted the onset of the riots (Chicago Tribune, 1992). Ice-T, a few years earlier, released the song "Cop Killer", a song that record executives immediately pulled off the shelves of record stores. This song, and many others, described the tense relationship between African Americans and the white and Korean population that owned and controlled most of the businesses in South Central. Other artists such as Luke, Sir Mix-a-Lot, Public Enemy and Ice Cube also explained that the riots were in many ways inevitable, as many of these artists discussed the collective issue of rampant police brutality and harassment of African Americans in their rap songs. Eazy E, for instance explained that:

> This aint nothing new. A few years from now, blacks will be back in slavery. What happened to Rodney King is typical. Not long ago, I was driving down the freeway after appearing on 'The Arsenio Hall Show' and 10 police cars and an LAPD helicopter chased me down, pulled me over and made me lie face down on the concrete with shotguns pointed at my head. Seems my BMW matched a description of a stolen car (Salt Lake Tribune, 1992, pg. C5).

As a response to the riots, and the acknowledgement of rap artists who felt that their lyrics and the social climate of South Central in many ways predicted the riots; rappers decided to become politically involved. The song "You Can Get the Fist" was recorded by artist Ice Cube, Yo- Yo, Cypress Hill and other artists dedicated to using rap music to directly influence political framing and behavior (Hochman, 1992). The Brotherhood Crusade would be the ultimate benefactor of any money's earned with the production of the song, however after its release, few media outlets supported the song, as rap fans were not made aware of the songs release until almost six months after the riots (Hochman, 1992).

Despite media conglomerates efforts to suppress conscious rap music that provide social and political frames as well as collective issues, many artists continue the traditions set forth by artists such as Grandmaster Flash, Grand Puba, Melle Mel, the Coup, Public Enemy and countless others. Artists such as Talib Kweli, Dead Prez and Common have continued the legacy of early rap artists and despite the conflict of 'keepin it real' and becoming financially successful have found a voice that has reached millions of minority audiences. For the purpose of this essay, underground conscious rap artists will be explored as they further the tradition of rap music as a form of activism and align themselves with local movements based in the Atlanta, GA area.

2.10 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The above literature reviews the ways in which music can influence movement via formal ways that provide a source of empowerment and serve as a role in political activity; and informal ways that help to create a framework that necessitates political involvement (Denisoff, 1966; Calhoun-Brown, 2000). The formal influences of music is best exemplified by the song "We Shall Overcome" and other popular freedom songs used not only during political activity but also organizing meetings during the Civil Rights Movement (Denisoff, 1966; Reagon, 1987). These songs helped to shape a collective sense of action and reinforced political behavior serving as a source of empowerment. Informal influences of music are

achieved when artists provide social or political frames that help to encourage a climate necessitating collective political action. Several artists and songs exist that help to influence both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements including, “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud”, and “Mississippi Goddam” (Angelos, 2005; Feldstein, 2005). Rap music also has contributed to the shaping of frames and the establishment of collective issues with songs such as “The Message” and “You Can Get the Fist”, two songs recorded at different periods of rap music history however both dedicated to the tradition of using the genre as a voice to describe the realities of black life (Aldridge, 2005; Hochman, 1992).

2.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

There exist three major types of rap music; that are party rap, gangsta rap and conscious rap music. Conscious rap music borrows from the rhetoric of the Black Power and Nationalist Movements and embraces elements of Afrocentricity, in addition to upholding the African tradition of griot or storyteller (Cummings and Roy, 2002). For this reason, conscious rap music best serves as a center point to examine the role rap music may play in providing collective social and political issues necessary for activism. Rap music has gained in its popularity through the decades (Chang, 2005), however due to the content of conscious rap lyrics, much of the political and social lyrical content has been marginalized from mainstream outlets (Rose, 2008). The marginalization of conscious rap music can also be attributed to the political potential of critical lyrics as seen with the relationship between the Los Angeles riots and rap music. Although not responsible for the riots, many rap artists voice the social issues that encouraged tensions between African Americans, whites and Koreans. Rap artists embraced this relationship and used their voices to directly influence political behavior with the recording of “You Can Get the Fist”(Hochman, 1992). Media conglomerates however blocked the success of this song, furthering the role of media conglomerates in establishing what types of rap songs are able to reach large audiences. Despite these attempts, there still remains a community of conscious rap artists that maintain their influence and offer frames that explain collective issues of contemporary realities lived by African Americans.

In order to better understand the role of conscious rap music as a current form of activism, interviews will be conducted. The following chapter will detail the many political organizations locally based in Atlanta, GA. Conscious rap artists who consider their music as a form of activism or who are members of these organizations were the focus of the study as many of their song topics and messages not only uphold the traditions of early rappers in providing collective issues influencing collective action but also encompass the political rhetoric of the organizations in which they are affiliated. These artists have been sought out to further explore how conscious rap music may be considered to be a form of activism. It is no doubt that rap music has a tradition of explaining oppressive and impoverished conditions for many African Americans. Once charged with collective issues that have the potential to encourage its listeners to become political involve on a basic level, conscious rap artists have the potential to recreate the ways in which music can influence movement.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore how current rap artists use conscious rap music as activism. Oliver and Marwell, (1992) have defined activists as persons who are willing to "incur significant costs and act to achieve a goal" (p. 252). They utilize their time and lyrics towards promoting goals or collective issues non-activists can adopt and potentially support. Non-activists or rap listeners can also be understood as engaging in political activity in three primary ways; "those with zero, low and high probabilities of contributing" (Oliver and Marwell, 1992, p. 253). Listeners can participate in political activity by monetarily supporting their favorite conscious rap artist by purchasing c.d.' s or attending an event in which conscious rappers fundraise monies for a collective or recognized issue. The legacy of using rap music to provide political and social issues has been expressed since rap music's inception. The media however has attempted to suppress songs and artists that are socially and politically critical, by marginalizing the conscious rap genre (Rose, 2008).

Because of the African American youth that initiated and participated in the riot, rap music was said to have invoked the atmosphere in which rioters felt eager to respond to the police beating of Rodney King (Brennan, 2004). Rap music instead, reported the tense conditions in which many African American males, who like Rodney King, were constantly harassed and brutalized by law enforcement. By describing this tension, rap artists became influential in providing a collective issue that articulated black life post Civil Rights and Black Power Movements; which may be a point of interest for African American Studies scholars. Years later, the creation of four media conglomerates would further ensure the omission of conscious rap music, and by 1996 the most promoted version of rap music was gangsta and party rap (Rose, 2008; Lena, 2006).

There still remain conscious rap artists who are dedicated to using the rap genre to give voice and provide frames that describe the oppressive conditions many African Americans still face today. Conscious rap music could be considered a modern version of activism, as many of its messages have the potential to describe social and political issues. In addition, if aligned with a political organization, as portrayed with the associations with organizations such as the Brotherhood Crusade, rap music may be

used fund political activities. The following chapter will explain the directions for obtaining an understanding of how conscious rap music can be described as a form of activism. A description of qualitative methods will be discussed.

3.1 DESIGN APPROPRIATNESS

Qualitative methods will be used via reflection and interviews, which will allow for artists to describe their intent and lyrical content in addressing social and political issues. O'Reilly (2005) acknowledges the significance of interviews as it allows the researcher to "produce a richly written document that acknowledges the role of theory, consists of a family of methods, respects the irreducibility of human experiences, recognizes my role as the researcher and involves direct and sustained contact with humans" (p.3). Previous research on the role of music has focused on investigating artists themselves as to inspiration and intent for the creation of political and socially critical music. Feldstein's (2005) article 'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism of the 1960's relied on interview transcriptions taken directly from Nina Simone as she described her inspiration to create the song "Mississippi Goddam". Other authors who described the role of music in movement also relied on the personal accounts of both artists and political activists such as Lowen's (1965) research on the impact of the freedom song "We Shall Overcome." The best example of the research design used for this study, is the Bernice Johnson-Reagon Ph.D. thesis entitled Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History written in 1975 and the 1991 article 'Nobody knows the trouble I See': or 'By and By I'm gonna lay down my Heavy Load". Both of these works describe Reagon's personal association with music of the Civil Rights Movement that propelled her scholarly interest on the subject.

The design of this study is focused on the perspectives of conscious rap artists who consider their music as politically or socially critical or consider their rap music as a form of activism. Some conscious rap artists align themselves to organizations and reflect the goals and principles of their political organization within their music. Other rappers are without organizational affiliations but consider their rap music as a viable form of activism due to its lyrical content and mobilizing potential. Because of this relationship, conscious rap artists may be considered to provide both formal and informal rap songs that

can influence political activity. Perhaps conscious rap songs have become apart of political and organizing activity as described in the relationship between freedom songs and the activities of the Civil Rights Movement. The goal of this study is to allow these artists to describe their relationship to activism both by affiliations with political organizations and by the use of their music as activism. Artists described how their music describes political and social issues that reflect African Americans present realities.

In order to better understand how conscious rap music can be understood as activism, conscious rap artists were asked directly for examples of informal and potential formal ways in which their music influences political activity or mobilizes non-activists. As described by Denisoff (1966) songs of persuasion or music that formally influences movement adhere to six primary factors that ensure its role in collective action. These artists were asked if their music addresses these principles via a screening form prior to the interview questions. This provided me the opportunity to understand how the artists use their music as apart of political movement while affirming the research other scholars regarding music with formal influences. Artists engaged in a one-on-one interview in which key questions were be asked in order to understand their associations with activism and if there is political intent within their lyrics that encourages political behavior.

The study design is qualitative, using interviews to capture personal and influences that may have encouraged the creation of rap music with activist intention. A secondary aim of this research is to understand how the tradition of movement music can be found in conscious rap music. The use of interviews also encouraged artists to describe how they understand themselves and their music as apart of this tradition. The qualitative approach is also conducive to the researcher's personal affiliation as both a member of a political organization and the underground conscious rap community. Providing perspectives of conscious rappers without political affiliations may create a holistic understanding of how both female and male conscious rap artists described their music as a form of political activism.

3.2 POPULATION

The target population for the purpose of this study is the conscious rap community due to their political and social lyrical content that encourages listeners to participate in some form of collective action. Within in rap music there are two types of artists, those who are signed to major record labels and those that are considered 'underground' or artists that are without music label representation. One group that has defied the laws of record label acts and epitomizes the vitality of the rap underground is Dead Prez. The term 'conscious' for many artists signed to major labels invokes an association to music that is highly political. For that reason many artists reject the label of conscious rapper. Some rappers fear the social stigmas attached to the label 'conscious rapper', others find a balance between labeling and profit while some completely stand outside the reach of the industries influence. Rap artist Kweli explains that "corporate branding" of rap assumes conscious rap is a "sub-market that is often pushed first to educated, middle-class, multicultural audiences" (Chang, 2005, p. 43).

> When artists label themselves or are labeled a conscious rapper, associations are made regarding the profitability of conscious music leaving artist such as Kweli to regard the label as a "death trap" (Chang, 2005, p. 43).

The attitudes regarding conscious rap music, as outside of the rap norm and socially stigmatized by other rappers is perhaps the result of marginalization specifically institutionalized marginalization that contributes to the success of gangsta rap music. Scholars suggest that conscious rap music does not have to be the exact alternative to gangsta rap messages but should discuss issues of sex, drugs and violence, which are realities of urban life (Rose, 2008). Many of the conscious rappers that continue to speak about social and political issues can be found in the 'underground' rap scene. As rap music's appeal has reached a global audience, underground rappers can be found in almost any major urban city. Atlanta Georgia hosts a viable underground rap network complete with a variety of conscious rap artists. Although there are some controversial associations with the term 'conscious rapper', many of the underground conscious rappers embrace the title and for that reason maintain a loyalty to using their art form to remain socially and politically critical. The target population therefore is based in the Atlanta underground conscious rap community.

3.3 SAMPLE

Furthermore, the sample group for this research was ten recognized conscious rap artists some of whom have identified association with organizations based locally in Atlanta; others may identify their music as a direct form of activism although not aligned with any organization. For the purpose of this study, locally based conscious rappers were recruited due the accessibility of these artists although conscious rap communities with political affiliations may exist nationally. In addition to a thriving underground conscious rap community, Atlanta Georgia has also embraced a series of politically focused organizations. These local organizations include the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), Habesha, The New Black Panther Party, N'COBRA and Free the People (FTP), all of which have majority African American membership. Due to my associations with the conscious rap community based in Atlanta, GA, many of the participants were recruited personally. All of the ten participants are artists that the researcher has worked with personally whether on the same show line-up or in the studio recording songs together. The ten participants recognize their music as a form of activism and have identified themselves as conscious artists. Some of the artists specifically recruited for the purpose of this research are members of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement that is responsible for hosting a series of Hip Hop concerts dedicated to the perpetuation of not only conscious rap music but also the dissemination of politically and socially relevant issues. Dead Prez recently headlined the Mutulu Shakur Benefit Concert in Atlanta, Georgia in 2010, which is a fundraiser for local independent freedom schools and legal costs for political prisoner Dr. Mutulu Shakur. The researcher also performed at the Mutulu Shakur Benefit Concert. This organization was selected due to its accessibility and my membership as both a Malcolm X Grassroots Movement activists and member of the local conscious rap community who often participate in these types of fundraising events. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement encourages six major principles that are the right to self-determination, the end of sexist oppression, freedom for political prisoners and prisoners of war, reparations, a sustaining of all human rights, and the end of genocide. The conscious rap artists that are also members of this

organization may incorporate these six core principles into their music, further solidifying their conscious rap music as a form of activism.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION and PROCEDURES

Because this research is a qualitative approach, consent was requested from all ten of the participants via an informed consent form. Participants were recruited for the study because they have identified themselves as a conscious rap artist. Each participant was asked to provide a pseudonym to protect their privacy and ask to give consent to be recorded. Their legal names were kept confidential and made available only to the student investigator. Upon completion of the research these transcriptions and files were deleted. The informed consent was certified by the IRB review board at Georgia State University. The confidentiality of the interviews were maintained, as transcriptions were kept in a secured file on disk as well as a hardcopy stored in the office of African American Studies at Georgia State University and eliminated by May 2012. Only the reports in the result section of this study reveal transcription details. The geographic location for conducting the interviews was Atlanta, GA and most likely to occur at the home of the researcher. The location was ultimately determined between the interviewer and the interviewee at the convenience of both.

The interviews were collected via vocal recording followed by the creation of typed transcriptions and the incorporation of field notes taken during the recorded interview. Recordings ranged from one to three hours in length. Each participant was asked a series of questions; responses may be recorded using contemporary transcription computer software. Other researchers who have interviewed members of the Civil Rights and Black Power community have used a variety of recording techniques that correspond to those used for this research. For instance personal accounts of events and various use of song were reported via written interviews in both the studies of Lowen (1965) in We Shall Overcome, origin of the rights song and Hsiung (2005) Freedom Songs and the Modern Civil Rights Movement. The information to be recorded details how each artists identifies their lyrical content that encourages collective action or activism as well as their involvement in organizations and other movements. Due to the nature of the

interview, with questions that have been drafted to be open-ended, artists may provide additional information not directed by the proposed interview questions.

3.5 RATIONALE

The design of this research is to understand how conscious rappers use their music to encourage political activity or associate their music as apart of activism. In order to gain this understanding a collection of data via interviews will suffice. Other research that has focused on the impact and usefulness of rap music has utilized various methods; however these studies were focused on rap fans and not the artists who create rap music (Sullivan, 2003; Iwamoto, Creswell, Caldwell, 2007).

The instruments for this research relied on interview questions designed to encourage a semi-structured interview. Basic demographic information was asked including gender, age, and education. The Bonette (2009) study concludes that education can impact the acceptance of Black Nationalist ideology; therefore this criterion was included in the study. Age is asked as Kitwana (2002) has identified the significance of age within the rap community, offering a temporal sequence to understand various Hip Hop generations since rap music's inception. The rap generation refers to those born between 1965 and 1984. One consideration based on the age of the participants is based on notions that the generation between '65 and '84 "grew up and were socialized by rap music" (Bonnette, 2009, p. 20) and considering the growth of Hip Hop culture and rap music, future generations have the potential to have been socialized in the same fashion.

Participants were asked a series of questions that investigated how each artist is inspired during the creation of song topics and lyrical content, and personal goals the artist wishes to accomplish with the creation of their conscious rap lyrics. Questions also included if the artists' affiliations with an organization influences the type of music they create and do the members of the organization use their conscious rap music as a part of political activity? The nature of the interview was also open to allow for a conversation between researcher and participant and in many ways the questions presented are to guide the content of the interview. The interview may be considered semi-structured.

The reliability for this research may be found in probing for both informal and formal ways in which the artists considers their music to be apart of activism based in the literature of Denisoff (1966), Tarrow (1992), Calhoun-Brown (2000) among others. Also participant's membership to an organization in addition to being apart of a conscious rap community may serve to create reliable responses to the interview questions.

3.6 VALIDITY- INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

The internal validity may be found when comparing the screening question responses to the interview questions of each artist's. Additional consistencies and differences may be found in the responses from interview questions based on the participants' membership to organizations in combination with demographic information.

External validity was achieved via the researcher who is also apart of both grassroots and conscious rap communities. Also based on the literature reviewed for this research, key points and concepts may be identified that are consistent with other analysis of music's involvement to activism. In addition to the transcriptions field notes were also incorporated to provide validity in combination with my analysis. External validity was therefore heavily dependent on the researcher's prior knowledge and understanding of both the political organization and the role of conscious rap music within the rap community.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Transcriptions and field notes were used to conduct a content analysis and reflexive writing which places the role of the researcher at the center of data interpretation. Richardson (1994) describes reflexive writing as involving 'narratives of the self' and as such was used to interpret the transcriptions of each interview. The consistencies were grouped into themes based on the responses of the participant's however, themes focused on how the artists understands their music as a part of activism, how the artists may contribute to social and political issues and how some of the artists have been influenced by the political organization in which they are affiliated. Differences may be influenced by age, education and background of each of the participants. Ultimately, all interviews were compared to

one another to find an overall understanding of how locally based conscious rap artists some of which who are affiliated with local movements and others that are without political affiliations consider their rap music as a form of activism.

The design of this study emphasizes how conscious rap artists personally understand their music in relationship to movement and political activity. The ability to use the voice of the artists directly and provide individual experiences as artists producing rap music with activist intent was consistent with other studies interested in allowing artists to articulate the ways in which their music contributes to movement. Similar to music having upheld a tradition of being used for political and social commentary, this study's design attempts to borrow from the close relationship between researcher and those being researched.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The identification of ten conscious rap artists some of whom are associated with current organizations and others with no organizational affiliations was recruited for the purpose of this study. Within rap music, three major genres have emerged that are party rap, gangsta rap and conscious rap. Despite social stigmas found in the label of 'conscious rapper', underground or unsigned artists have embraced the term and the associations made when using the label (Chang, 2005). Conscious rap music is considered to be highly Afrocentric and unafraid to address politically and socially relevant topics (Cummings and Roy, 2002). As such, a community of conscious rappers exists that not only embrace the term but also aligned themselves to political organizations or consider their music as a form of political activism. The city of Atlanta, Georgia is an intersection between a thriving conscious rap community as well as a community that is considerably political active. For this reason, the conscious rap community with members that may or may not be affiliated with political movements best sufficed in responding to the overall research question of how conscious rap music may be considered a modern form of activism.

The design of this study is focused on allowing the artists to describe their relationship to activism, the nature of which has been inspired by works from Reagon (1987), Hsuing (2005) and Angelos (2005) among others. In order to better explore the relationship between music and activism,

participants were interviewed in order to examine their individual understanding of how their music is aligned to activism by offering collective issues and ways in which non-activists or listeners can minutely participate or support political activity.

The following chapter will include the results of each interview detailing the consistencies and differences in which ten participants identify their music as activism and retain the tradition of African American social and political movement's use of music. The results were categorized into major themes in order to better understand how each artist meets the six criteria describing songs of persuasion or the formal use of music, how each artist describes political and social issues articulated in lyrical content and overall how each artists considers their music as activism.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to explore how current rap artist use conscious rap music as activism. According to Oliver and Marwell (1992) activism during normal political climates differs from activism during times such as the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. The authors therefore define activism as individuals who "care enough about some issue that they are prepared to incur significant costs and acts to achieve their goals" (Oliver and Marwell, 1992, p. 252). Several questions used to investigate conscious rappers as activists included:

1. What types of behaviors does your music encourage listeners to adopt?
2. What are your intentions for your music?
3. What are some of the goals you wish to achieve with the creation of your music?
4. Do you consider yourself a socially or politically critical artist?

In order to understand the relationship between conscious rap music and activism, qualitative methods involving the collection of interviews were conducted. A total of ten participants were recruited for the study. Because of my personal associations as a member of the underground conscious rap community in Atlanta, GA many of the participants are personal friends. Each participant was called and invited to conduct an interview. Twelve participants were recruited for the study but ten people were able to engage in interviews. See Table 2/ Appendix C.

Eight of the interviews took place in my home studio. Because my home is equipped with a recording studio, three of the artists were interviewed following recording sessions. Observations and field notes were taken at the sessions and used as contextual support for the study. One interview was taken at the home of the artist and another interview conducted at the home of a mutual friend. The artists were equally divided into five males and five females. The artists ranged from those who solely create rap music and those who rap and also sing. Some of the artists have been making music for several years while others considered themselves new to the craft of making music.

Each interview was recorded and copies of the interview were offered to each participant. The length of time for each interview varied from 29 minutes to 12 minutes with the average interview lasting

approximately 18 minutes. Interestingly, following each interview, many of the artists and I began a conversation about their experience of being asked to participate in this study and the significance the results of the study may have in defining conscious rap music and the conscious rap community. Although these conversations were not recorded, they were helpful as they offered reflections from both my perspective and the artists' perspective about the questions posed. These reflections were also considered in the creation of the major themes that emerged from the collection of interviews.

Due to my position as researcher and participant in this study, much of the analysis involved reflexive writing by using a narrative approach towards understanding the data. Richardson (1994) describes reflexive writing as involving 'narratives of the self' and as such was used to interpret the transcriptions of each interview.

The following chapter will discuss the major themes and sub-themes presented after careful review of each interview. Transcriptions were drafted to best capture the responses to each interview question in addition to listening to each interview once recorded. The chapter will be broken into three sections, the first of which will briefly describe each participant including demographic information in addition to why they rap, the types of topics they rap about and how they would describe their music. A second section will detail the themes and sub-themes that offer a response to the research question exploring how artists use conscious rap music as a form of activism. Finally, a summary of the chapter will be discussed.

4.1 PARTICIPANTS

Each of the participants was recruited for this study because of their affiliation with the conscious rap community in Atlanta, GA. Ten participants, five male and five female were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Some of the artists interviewed mentioned affiliations with the national organization Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) or claimed a sense of consciousness that is reflected by their identification as New Afrikan. All of the artists except for one used their popularized or 'stage' names for the purpose of the research. All of the artists chose not to disclose their income. Only two artists had a college education or degree while the others ranged from obtaining GED's and High

School diplomas. As a member of the conscious rap community, I also provided responses to the interview questions and participated in the study.

Zayd Malik, a 30-year old African American male is originally from Los Angeles, California. His occupation is a Hip Hop artist. He says that he raps because he enjoys rap music and thinks that he is talented enough to create rap music. He describes his music as a reflection of who he is and the culture in which he was born and says that he raps about what his life is about. He says that he raps about things that go on in black communities like police brutality, community organizing and other topics that others rap about. The quality that separates him from traditional artist is his principles that are a reflection of his New Afrikan upbringing.

Esther King is a 25-year old African American female is also from Los Angeles, California. She says her occupation is a musician. Her description of her music is that it's an extension of her soul and it speaks to the pain many people have experienced. She describes her music as bold and refreshing and a combination of many kinds of music that helps to communicate who she is as an individual. She raps and sings about being independent, peace, movement and most importantly letting things in your life go. She encourages her listeners to look within first and to confront the things they dislike in their lives.

Big N.E.L. is a 30-year old African American male who claims Chicago, Illinois as his hometown. He is a student, organizer, activist, and scholar pursuing a master's degree in African American Studies at Georgia State University. He currently has a bachelor's degree from Georgia State University. He raps because it gives him the opportunity to express what's in his heart naturally and not be concerned with catering to others. He describes his music as gangsta rap music that is created by someone who is educated and revolutionary because it embodies things that he's seen and his upbringing in the streets. The topics that he raps about reflect his life and encompass the good times of life, his revolutionary ideas, the love for his daughter and wife and his knowledge of New Afrika.

Queen Nef, originally from Eritrea, is a 27 year old female who claims Atlanta, Georgia as her home town. She is an emcee and activist. She raps because it's a form of expression that helps her to

reach the masses offering substance based, provocative and lyrical music. She raps about things that she has gone through and her observations of the experiences of others.

King Malachi says his age is infinite and considers himself as a Hebrew. His hometown is South Carolina and his occupation is a record executive and a musician. He makes music because he considers himself as a warrior in today's world and rap music is but one of his weapons. He describes his music as soul-foul, passionate, melodic, conscious, gutter, street, cultural, religious and just a 'gumbo stew' of various places he has been throughout America. He raps about love, political issues and how he grew up from the country to the big city. His music is also a reflection of his life from him shooting pool, how he hustled, sold drugs in the city and how he got his heart broke. He says that he communicates to the creator through his music and hopes to bridge gaps between people in the world.

Ahjah Afrika is a 29-year old African American female originally from Kingston, New York. Her occupation is a hairstylist, rapper and vocalist. She says that she began making music because music chose her. She remembers as a young girl she sang in the hallways of her school with no one around and heard how good she sang and was inspired to become a musician. She describes her music as uplifting, inspirational, fun, and sometimes serious. She raps about the matters of the soul and hopes to reach all types of people not just African Americans. She enjoys creating music that reflects matters of the heart and things that people go through everyday and ways that people can make it through daily situations

Nyo Smash is a 23 year old African American male from Atlanta, Georgia. He too says that music chose him and was born with the gift of gab. He describes his music as personal, well-rounded, conscious and fun, and is similar to a melting pot. He raps about whatever is going on in his life and his experiences. He also raps about current events and says that this is one of his strengths. He prefers not to rap about fantasies and material things but prefers rather to rap about his life.

Ash Smash also from Atlanta, Georgia is a 24-year old African American. She says she raps because she loves it and that it allows her to always do new things and be creative. She also raps in honor of a friend and fellow rapper John "Veezy" Cunnigham. Both Ash Smash and Nyo Smash are apart of a local rap group that goes by the name of the Smasherz. She describes her music as diverse because she

likes techno beats, reggae and rock and is not limited to one type of sound. She raps about personal things, hard times, good times and past relationships. She also talks about what it means to be a sexual black woman

Malik Kill-I-Am says his age is wisdom whose race is original man from Planet Malik and transcended to earth in Miami,, Florida. His occupation is Black Nationalist, musician, revolutionary, activist and chief in the village or black community. He says he raps because of his children and offers a balance to music provided by the music industry and radio station programs. He criticizes radio programs because they disrupt the youth and results in them being 'programmed' to do things that are not real and not true. He describes his music as music for the soul, for the youth and the old and those people who walk around with the 'eyes wide shut'. He raps about the deception of black people by the U.S. government and wants listeners to realize that 'we the people' did not include people who look like him and wants to enlighten people to what is really going on in the world around them.

Ife Jie, is a 29 year old African American female or New African female originally from South Central Los Angeles. Her occupation is a mother and grad student at Georgia State University and musician. She currently have a bachelor's degree in African American Studies from Georgia State University. She raps because it's the music of her generation. It's the music she grew up listening to, it's the music that she love. Her music is a mixture of South LA but also having a level of knowledge because she as been educated. She was raised in an environment where she went to an all black elementary school and witnessed the LA riots. She also remembered going to the U.S. (United Slaves) center on 54th street and was always around black centered things. Her music is a reflection of her being female and her experiences growing up in L.A. She raps about topics that give her an opportunity to state her perspective. What would a woman in her position say about the current political elections, or what's going on in her community, how we live and how we eat, etc. The topics that she raps about are everyday things that she observes.

4.2 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The purpose of this study is to explore how conscious rap is used as a form of activism. Interviews were taken from ten Atlanta, GA based conscious rappers who responded to questions investigating the relationship between rap music and activism. Analysis of interview transcriptions and field notes provided themes and sub-themes that addressed the research question and supporting ideals. Gathering an understanding of rappers intentions and personal understanding of the concept of conscious rap music further explored the relationship between rap music and activism.

Table 1.1

Research Question / Interview Questions	Themes and Sub-themes
How do rappers use conscious rap music as a form of activism?	Theme I: A Tool to Educate, Empower and Inspire
What is conscious rap?	Theme 2: Everybody's Music has energy Theme 3: I want to teach without you knowing I'm teaching Sub-theme 1: The indirectness of conscious messages Theme 4: Political rap concerns the representation of the people Theme 5: New Afrikan-It's in my blood
What behaviors does conscious music encourage its listeners to adopt?	Theme 6: The Music is for Everyone Theme 7: I want to change the world
Do you consider yourself a socially or politically critical artist?	Theme 8: I have to tell our story Theme 9: Important for us to make good music
What are the costs/benefits of conscious rap music?	Theme 10: Don't expect to be the next Beyonce' Theme 11: Being able to be myself

4.3 A TOOL TO EDUCATE, EMPOWER AND INSPIRE

The research question that drives this study sought to understand how conscious rap artist use rap music in order to encourage forms of political activism. Analysis of the transcribed interviews suggests that the majority of the participants understood rap music to be a tool in which alternative messages can be relayed to a wide audience. Many of the artists reported that due to rap music's popularity and

acceptance among young audiences, communicating ideals via the genre serves as the best contemporary form to relay any type of message. Queen Nef best summarizes this ideal when saying " It's [rap] a form of expression, I use it as a tool to educate, empower and inspire others." Ash Smash offers:

> "I hope I inspire people, that would be the main benefit. Showing people its okay to be different, you don't have to rap about the same old thing. Its okay to let your own creative juices flow as oppose to doing what someone else has already done."

Ahjah Afrika continues, "My purpose is to initially inspire people. If I make music that lifts me up then hopefully it can lift someone else up." King Malachi also describes conscious rap music as a tool. He describes "When I make music, I look at it like an art-form of war. When I go to war, I need to be able to reach the people. Once I've reached the people, I've won the war. I just look at my rapping/singing as more than one tool for me to use to get the job done." Other participants, particularly Ester King, suggest that rap music allows for the audience to absorb alternative messages that are sometimes unconventional in a non-confrontational manner. The music allows for artists to be themselves and say their ideals under the guise of music and artistry, a venue that is void of expectation and in some arenas accountability. In other words, those artist who are authentically conscious do not have to cater or suppress their radical ideals to conform to audiences preferences or opinions, an artist can be himself or herself. Ester King and artist Big N.E.L. describe conscious rap music:

> Ester King: "it's a better way to show people who I am without having to go through a whole explanation, it puts it up front like yea I'm a musician and these are the types of things I think about.. I think differently than most people, so I can just put that in a medium that's digestible."
>
> Big N.E.L.:"I don't have to be cordial or cater to what someone else thinks I should be saying."

Considering the notions that rap music is a tool, emphasis on what that tool is being used to promote becomes significantly critical. Rap music has been accepted by many youth around the world Chang (2005) and because of its influence; the types of messages in rap become extremely significant (Rose, 2008). Three main genres of rap music have emerged that are gangsta, party and political or conscious rap music (Newman, 2007). Although these rap genres differ in content, the participants for this study have suggested that all rap music, no matter what the message has derived from a sense of consciousness. In some cases, the rap artist is conscious of what ideals they are promoting ignoring the

impact these messages may have on its listeners. Other situations have been co-opted by industry executives who may be conscious of the financial potential of a particular rap genre. In sum, the question of consciousness and the ideal that all rap music is in some fashion 'conscious' surfaced as the next major theme.

4.4 EVERYBODY'S MUSIC HAS ENERGY

Despite the content of rap messages, participants in the study identified that all rap music is created with some level of conscious intent. Ahjah Afrika acknowledges, "There are different frequencies that you feel when you create music, whether it makes you want to party, make love, or bash somebody's car in." King Malachi states that:

> "I feel like all rap and all music is conscious. There's a difference between a wicked conscious or and a good conscious. If you're living in the gutter and you hustling and that's what you know than that's what your music is going to reflect. Same as if you had a good life, you're music would reflect that. If you listen to music and its talking about a life harsher than your own and that makes you feel that you can make it because there's others out there who have harder lives than yours, then that artist is doing their job."

The intent may differ from genre to genre, presumably as the content differs between genres like conscious and gangsta rap music. Malik Kill-I-Am sums the concept up by stating:

> "We have a lot of conscious rap music but I'm gonna call it con-science everybody's music has an energy. It could be positive or negative energy but the energy is a part of science. You can either be a conscious rapper or a con-science rapper."

The focus should perhaps be placed on the intent of the individual or artist, a notion Big N.E.L. furthers by explaining that sometimes the record executive identifies the intent that may differ from the artists' intentions. He explains, "I believe the music we listen to on the radio is political because somebody decided to put it out there was a reason."

The underlying idea of consciousness is therefore understood as awareness. Awareness of how the music will impact the listening audience. Awareness also implies a level of control that allows the artist to create a song with conscious intention and distribute that song knowing its impact on audiences. As detailed by Big N.E.L., the artist is in some cases without control of how their music will be distributed and received; however the artist can control the conscious creation of a song. Within the

discourse of rap music and the impact of gangsta and party rap music is the idea of artist accountability. Using the argument that all music is in ways conscious, the accountability of rap content is placed in the hands of the artist and does not solely accuse the music industry and consumers for the permeation of gangsta and party rap messages. Underground conscious rap artist in this study recognize their positions as unsigned artist and capitalize this by perpetuating the messages they deem positively impacts audiences.

4.5 I WANT TO TEACH WITHOUT YOU KNOWING IM TEACHING

The message of conscious rap music differs from artist to artist. The political intentions also differ from artist to artist as Oliver and Marwell (1992) predicted, as political goals may differ according to what an individual finds politically important and what resources that will allow individuals to execute those political goals. Collectively, participants in the study embrace a level of conscious intention and accountability and create music that in some ways will enhance the life chances and experiences of its audience. Artist Zayd Malik explains that the difference between his conscious rap music and that of others is his approach to positive content. He explains:

> " I rap about things that's going on in the hood, things that are important to black life like police brutality, I talk about community organizing a lil bit, I talk about a lot of regular stuff you might hear other rappers talk about but I feel as though I do it in a principled way."

Many of the artist also used words like "inspirational, thought provoking, about looking within first, about letting things go, and truthful" when describing their music. These are characteristics that rap audiences would assume conscious rap music to support and is reflected in the music of the participants in the study. Another assumption of conscious rap music is its political criticisms. The artists explained that in some ways political and societal criticisms are a reflection of an individual who is already political and socially critical. Queen Nef and Big N.E.L. both describe this as they proclaim:

> Queen Nef: "because I use hip hop as my tool I have to look at all perspectives so I think that I am critical of what's going on in society when the basis in not for the people."
>
> Big N.E.L: "you might call the music conscious because I'm a conscious person."
> "I rap about life, I'm politically critical and socially critical in life."

The content within conscious rap music is sometimes specifically politically and socially critical and discusses these issues indirectly. Participants describe a negative impact on audiences when a song is too political. This directness differs among artist for instance Zayd Malik has created a political persona and following that expects highly political music while others such as King Malachi prefer to create music that has multiple purposes in addition to politics. King Malachi explains that his music has transformed over the years and has been a process of learning his audience. He explains this transformation as:

> "I did go through a stage of criticism but I more subtly integrate my criticisms in my music. I strove not to be overbearing so that I can reach more people. I have a lot of knowledge but I do exercise a lot of wisdom because I feed my family with my music so I try to be politically correct. Now I'm a different type of weapon of war. Musically, there may be brothers and sisters that come with that upfront way of their message but at the end of the day I want to teach the listener without them realizing it. I want to teach without you knowing I'm teaching."

4.6 POLITICAL RAP CONCERNS THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

The participants were asked to not only describe their music but also to describe their thoughts of how political or conscious rap music can be defined. Many of their remarks suggest elements of political and social awareness that focuses on empowering or increasing the life chances of its listeners. Big N.E.L. argues:

> "political rap music is music that is concerning the representation of people. You're rapping about the things that are going to represent the best or not the best interest of the people depending on your political slant."

The 'people' can be ambiguous when describing the rap listener although Nyo Smash specifies that political rap needs address the needs of African Americans, he explains that "when I think of a political or conscious rapper, I think of someone who is dedicated to uplifting the Black community, shedding light to what's going on in our communities." The black community is not the only community to benefit from conscious or political rap however, Ash Smash describes that political rap is also "speaking against what you feel is holding us back as a people and what it is that's holding us back as human beings." Ultimately, Queen Nef argues that political rap music is music that "Politically and

conscious music brings awareness to societal issues or music that promotes or creates social or political initiatives."

Although the artist understood the term conscious rap, many of them did not identify themselves as conscious rappers. They did however identify themselves as socially or politically critical at times, suggesting that these criticisms may vary. Zayd Malik offers:

> "I try not to be too critical or excessively critical to the point where I'm sounding like a History class or a Political Science class. Politics and social issues come out in the music if you're talking about real issues that affect the people. The natural things that go on in your community are evident in the music you create."

Ester King continues:

> "what I'm doing now I'm taking situations and looking at them and asking why is that like that. I have faith that things can change but I do look at social situations and critique them in my music."

King Malachi surmises:

> " If you're living in the gutter and you hustling and that's what you know than that's what your music is going to reflect. Same as if you had a good life, you're music would reflect that. If you listen to music and its talking about a life harsher than your own and that makes you feel that you can make it because there's others out there who have harder lives than yours, then that artist is doing their job. Typical consciousness would be Common, myself, The Roots, Talib Kweli, KRS-One."

Life experience determines the content of these underground conscious rappers. Based on the descriptions of conscious rap, artists did not reject the term or its associations but interestingly failed to label their music as solely conscious. Instead participants described their music as being politically and socially critical as well as "fun, soulful, passionate, street, cultural and religious". One specific element of conscious rap music emerged among those participants who were associated with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. These artists described their content to be influenced by the organization and reflect the concept of New Afrika and a New Afrikan consciousness within their music.

4.7 NEW AFRIKAN – ITS IN MY BLOOD

The concept of New Afrika derives from the New Afrikan People's Organization in which peoples of Afrikan descent proclaimed the five southern states as land belonging to the descendants of

enslaved Afrikans. These five states, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina are referred to New Afrika. The concept is that enslaved Afrikans worked and cultivated these lands and although descendants of Afrika, due to the Maafa and lost of identify and association with Afrika, should reclaim this part of the United States as their home. The New Afrikan People's Organization produced the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement that is responsible for outreach to the masses of New Afrikans living in the United States. As a national organization with a base here in Atlanta, GA, MXGM is responsible for hosting annual events such as the Malcolm X Festival, the Mutulu Shakur Benefit Concert and Sistas for Assata a tribute to female freedom fighters Assata Shakur and Nehanda Abiodun. Many of the artists in this study have participated in one if not all of these events. Four participants are members of MXGM or have parents and family members who are members of NAPO, that are Zayd Malik, Big N.E.L., Ester King and myself, Ife Jie.

This unique way of thinking has spawned a specific type of consciousness, labeled New Afrikan consciousness for the purpose of this study. To be New Afrikan means to have an identity separate from that of the mainstream and to understand oneself as first an Afrikan and then as a person who is interested in exposing others to this way of thinking. Ester King describes New Afrikan:

> "It's basically a way of life that claims nationality separate than American nationality…it's an identity that African Americans should have.. I think that New Afrikan is our attempt to reclaim our African roots while still living here in America…it was how I was born, it was how I was raised…it's in my blood."

New Afrikans have also identified a culture that coincides with a New Afrikan nation, for instance taking on Afrikan names or honoring revolutionaries associated with NAPO such as Mutulu Shakur become simple but impact elements of New Afrikan culture.

As New Afrikan consciousness is translated into rap music, the utility of rap music as a tool becomes essential. Zayd Malik describes that:

> " My parents were co-founders of NAPO, the New Afrikan Peoples Organization and I think I'm unique because I grew up this way but I didn't grow out of it… I stuck to the script… and I definitely carry on the struggle in my own way… conceptually I think of my self as a sect of the Malcolm X Grassroots movement.. I think of my music as an extension of that for people that might not want to got to a meeting and do the average organizational thing, everybody doesn't

> play that role...I think of my music and my movement as an opportunity for the average street nigga to get down."

Zayd Malik is an example of how conscious rap artists can be presumed to be apart of a legacy of music and movement. Because of his upbringing as a New Afrikan and his position as an underground conscious rap artist, Zayd Malik has created a movement aligned with the principles and goals of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. He has named this movement based on affiliations with pre-existing conscious rap concepts such as RBG or Revolutionary but Gangsta initiated by rap group Dead Prez and Outlaw culture initiated by the late Tupac Shakur and continued which the rap group the Outlawz in which Tupac founded. The movement that Zayd Malik has created is therefore named Outlaw-RBG and has become popularized on the Internet and through the release of the albums, Outlaw RBG in tha Flesh and The South iz New Afrika Vol. 1. The artists with a New Afrkan consciousness have recognized their music as apart of a greater political movement that Big N.E. L. admits:

> "I'm apart of a movement of people who consider themselves New Afrikan instead of African American because when you acknowledge that they emancipated or so called emancipated Afrikan people we never had the opportunity to make a decision for ourselves as to whether or not we wanted to be citizens of this country, we were told we were going to be citizens based on a constitutional amendment and even in the constitutional amendment they're wasn't any assurances for our reparations or the work that we did as non-citizens of this country."

As a member of the New Afrikan community and the underground conscious rap community, I have witnessed the role conscious rap music has played in the creation of a political awareness among listeners. When someone buys a Zayd Malik album for instance they are buying MXGM and New Afrikan consciousness and become instantly aware of what we feel politically and what our goals are as New Afrikan people. Some fans embrace the message whole heartedly and eventually begins to adopt the culture, specifically the colors of red, black and green. Big N.E.L., Zayd Malik and I all participated in a Mutulu Shakur Benefit Concert and I noticed how it was cool to wear these colors and shout them out as we each performed our set. RBG is indeed a sub-culture of rap but has impacted the conscious community in Atlanta, GA a great deal. Without the tool of conscious rap music, one wonders if young audiences would be exposed to this specific type of consciousness and the goals of independence and self-determination.

New Afrikan consciousness is but one type of consciousness represented in the content of conscious rap music. Conscious messages do not have to be as specific as New Afrikan consciousness but does have the goal to encourage a sense of political and social change in its listening audience. Messages are sometimes subtle within conscious rap music reaching wider audiences and more diverse interpretations of conscious rap messages. Despite the approach, the content of conscious rap music seeks to influence others who are sometimes like-minded or otherwise unaware of alternative messages presented within rap music.

4.8 THE MUSIC IS FOR EVERYONE

When drafting the questions for this study, I presumed that a question regarding the audience of conscious rap music would be obvious. That much of the conscious rap community would be African American and members of the black community would be the targeted listeners of conscious rap music. This assumption was made due to the racial make-up of the rappers, and the political and social commentary of rappers who often spoke to those members of society who are voiceless or disenfranchised. Ahjah Afrika disregarded this assumption with the comment that those who enjoy her music, "Whoever that is, they don't have to black they only have to be a listener." Ester King who explained why she creates music confirmed one assumption:

> "I make music for anybody who thinks that they can't do it. Those who've been oppressed, those who've been told they're less than they are."

The content is significant in the description of the conscious rap audience, for many of the artist suggested they are targeting those rap listeners who are conscious individuals or who are familiar and agree with the messages of conscious rap music. The diversity of messages within conscious rap music thus creates a diverse and therefore non-specific audience targeted by conscious rap artists. King Malachi, Queen Nef and Big N.E.L., each describe this with their remarks:

> Queen Nef: "Of course, you want to reach out to the people who can relate to me and the stories I'm telling. As I get older I realize that the music is for everyone."
>
> Big N.E.L: "There isn't like a clear audience it's not a clear demographic to aim for it's just people who are like minded that relate to it, I have people in the streets that relate to it, I have

> people on the college campuses that relate to it, white people relate to it, so its not made for a particular group, there is just a group that form that likes it."
>
> King Malachi: "All my songs are not for everyone but if I direct a song at a particular group and people outside of that group feel it, then great...beautiful but if they don't that's cool cause I didn't make it for them. I have certain songs that might be just for my gutta-heads or my lovers, or the ones that just wanna be happy. My songs vary with the audience I intend to reach."
>
> Nyo Smash: "Again since I'm writing off incidents then my music is targeting different audiences. I may have just gotten into with the police and I write a song about it and I may want the police officer to hear that song, you know. It just depends on the song but I try to make music for everybody."

To further this thought, although the audience is non-specific and embraces those members who can relate to the messages within conscious rap music, artists admit the desire to reach those members of the rap community that are unaware or unexposed to the messages offered by conscious rap. For instance, Queen Nef:

> "I want to invoke consciousness in those who are not aware and not awake too… not just those who know what I know because then I would be just leading people who are already led who are already aware, I want to lead those who are blind. Let me awake them because they need me more than those who know."

For the purpose of this study, five women and five men who considered their music conscious were interviewed. Four of the women interviewed expressed a desire to reach the female audience of rap listeners. The leading rationale for targeting to the female rap listeners was to expose women to other ways of being defined as a female within Hip Hop culture and within society. Ester King "I write music that inspires women I write my music for anybody that has a soul and has had a brush with losing that soul and anybody who thinks they can't do it."

> Queen Nef:…."I want to create paths were young women or older women can see that there are positive ways to do what we do .. " I want to create opportunity for others, I want to create to create paths were young women or older women can see that there are positive ways to do what we do there are positive ways to be emcees and to be in hip hop music and to be leaders in that way."

Women are a general audience that the female participants wished to reach, Ash Smash said simply "Of course, I want to reach those that look like me, talk like me, act like me but why not get everybody." The specific type of woman sought with conscious rap music I described, was the black

female community, similar to Ash Smash I seek out to inspire those women who look like me and share a common background, I suggest that:

> Subconsciously though, I'm targeting that black female that's just like me. The girl that grew up the way that I did but didn't necessarily have the opportunities I had. Subconsciously I'm rapping for her and I want her to think that I'm hard. I want her to think that I'm worth listening to and following and mimicking my ideas or my style, my words, and my ways.

Several of the artists, despite their acknowledgement of the qualities many of their listeners may posses, in summary remarked they make music for everyone. One of the ways artist use conscious rap music to influence activism is by using it as a tool. That tool informs, educates and inspires listeners to be critical and in many ways become exposed to alternative identities and concepts that are otherwise marginalized within mainstream society. The ultimate goal described by many participants when creating their music is to encourage unity among the diverse members of our community.

4.9 I WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD

King Malachi specifically says:

> "I want my music to bridge the gap between those things that keep us a part, economically, racially, etc. To actually save lives with my music by elevating their thought process and I want to feed my family. I want to save lives genuinely, I want somebody to listen to my record and change their mind from something negative to positive. I'm striving not to glorify foolishness, I want conscious to be cool."

Many of the artists described their music to seek out all listeners, no matter the race. Despite my interest to draw in the black female audience, I explain that I want whoever hears me to like what they hear so that could be a Black person, a White person, or a Chinese person. Many of the artists thought it to be cliché but acknowledged that much of their music seeks to create unity amongst all peoples. Queen Nef summed this sentiment up with the comment that:

> "Ultimately I want to change the world. I want to go back to Africa and build and rebuild and provide opportunities. Knowledge of where I've from and the ills of the world fuel my passion for creating a better life for those who don't have. I've also seen those who've come before me to make a way for me, so I have to make a way for someone else."

Zayd Malik shares this unifying goal within the content of conscious rap music. He remarks,

> "I try to bring people together, as cliché as it might sound my music is about unity. My intention is to try and make these issues matter to the regular listener. Make the revolution matter to the average listener, try to think a little more deeply than the average rapper would."

Nyo Smash states:

> "My main goal is to create a love for each other again. I want to create music that creates a movement similar to the 60's when we loved each other and loved being Black. That's my main goal. I just want to see a lot of black love. I do want to stop the violence, which I've been seeing so much of lately. We have to create more love for each other."

Ash Smash comments, "There's a lot I want to do for my people. If the music goes well then everything else will fall into place. I'll be able to do important things like buy some land, build some schools...all of my creative outlets are catalysts to do bigger things." Ester King continues that she "definitely wants to bring people together and show people that everybody is the same… also to inspire people to do what they were born to do… to inspire people to be unified."

4.10 I HAVE TO TELL OUR STORY

One of the underlining elements to being a conscious rapper is being a conscious individual. Big N.E.L. responds when asked if he was a political and socially critical artist that:

> "You can't be a conscious rapper unless you're conscious, Criticizing those who are mainstream doesn't automatically make you a conscious rapper. I want people to see through my music that you don't have to be a certain way just because you came or grew up in the hood. My music shows that you don't have to be a hood-rat, marry a hood-rat, you don't have to be an athlete or even a musician, you don't have to be what someone else says you should you just have to be yourself."

Malik Kill-I-Am recounts:

> "I used to be with 2 Live Crew and I would be doing the raunchy shit on stage and you can't tell me that the music doesn't affect the people and that change doesn't affect the people. It was little girls who wanted to do "Doo Doo Brown" and "Face down, ass up"...its really in the music. Even with Beyonce, she has these little girls dancing and knowing all the dance moves to "Single Ladies" and their bodies are too young to be aware that they're putting out certain vibrations that are way too young for them. A lot of these artists are devils advocates and many of them don't even know it. It's not their fault. My job is to make music that tames the wild in the music business."

Authenticity is critical within Hip Hop culture and audiences expect a level of reality or truth in the stories and messages of rappers. Those who create conscious rap music are therefore expected to posses some level of consciousness within their personal lives. Zayd Malik inspires this connection when

describing his reasons for creating conscious rap music. He describes, "I speak in those terms its my language and how I was breed so like any person or any real rapper I speak on what my life is about." Accountability is also an element of conscious rappers, as Ester King describes what makes an artist conscious. She comments that "A conscious rapper can look at what they've written as an artist and say okay am I going to be responsible for what I say, am I going to be responsible for even being allowed to hold this microphone and be amplified over an audience of people." In reference to the position of current conscious rappers continuing the legacy of music and political movement and activism, Queen Nef asserts that:

> " I am a voice of my generation and as a historian I have to tell our story. As Hip-Hop activists, we have a responsibility to the people. You weren't blessed so that you could be selfish but rather be a vessel so that you could give to others. Hip-Hop is the music of the global masses, and the revolution is independent first. Each individual has to play their part and that's what that means to me."

4.11 IMPORTANT FOR US TO MAKE GOOD MUSIC

When describing the importance of being a conscious individual and using conscious rap music as an extension of that consciousness that ultimately exposes and encourages change among all listeners, participants explain that those goals are undermined if the quality of the music isn't taken into consideration. Creating 'good' music becomes an essential component to conscious rap music. Big N.E. L. says that when compared to gangsta rap music, "You can't tell a youth to not listen to Gucci Mane who has the hardest beats in the game and you have an unknown artist who has sub par beats or his beats are alright and his lyrics mediocre but you're trying to push his music because he's considered conscious." Ash Smash continues that:

> "It's a lot of great artists out here and if people would just take the time to listen to what these artists out here have to say. I'm just gone put it out there, Roscoe Dash, Wacka Flocka that is not the end all be all of music. It's hot right now but in 5 years it won't be because it has no substance. It doesn't touch your heart,.it doesn't touch your spirit or your soul. I'm not knocking them at all because they are doing their thing but I just want people to know that when you listen to artists like Zayd Malik, Nayo Smash, VIP Smash, artists like Dolla. Dolla became mainstream but he continued to speak on what was real and never gave them false hope. Keep in mind that certain artists don't make music for you, so find music that does speak to you and let that inspire you."

An assumption within this statement is that conscious rap music is thought to be unappealing to rap audiences perhaps primary due to its content but also due to its quality. Many of the participants described that they rap because they feel they are talented musicians. The importance of being a good musician therefore becomes crucial in the utility of conscious rap music as a tool. Zayd Malik further describes that "I'm an artist and I try to make good music that's just as important as what I'm talking about because as revolutionaries it's important for us to make good music."

4.12 DON'T EXPECT TO BE THE NEXT BEYONCE'

In comparison to other genres of rap music, participants were asked if they experience specific costs and benefits in creating conscious rap music. Some of the artists for instance Zayd Malik did not differentiate between benefits and costs of conscious rap as compared to other genres. He asserts that like the pursuit of any dream, costs may include "sacrifice, time, wanting to give up many times, lost friends over it, money was spent, hotel rooms, studio time, getting cd's printing up… it's the cost of a dream and I don't' see it any different because its revolutionary…I look at the cost as a step to greatness or as a step to achieving that which is attainable." Due to the expectations of being an authentic conscious rapper, Ester King remarks that costs could include " time just because your going to take a second to look at what your putting out there to people, I feel like I have the respect of my peers who may not consider themselves conscious but I don't feel like I always have their attention as much as I would like… and also finding an audience and hoping they stay consistent with you." Nyo Smash also described the aspect of gaining respects of peers, who may listen to other rap genres:

> "The cost is you distance yourself from your peers. My male and female peers don't want to hear politically conscious music. So the cost is you might lose listeners. Everybody wasn't raised the way I was and we (black people) are so brainwashed they don't understand that type of music at all. What we don't understand, we tend to stay away from. So the biggest cost is losing listeners even though I do try to make my music relatable and cool."

Interestingly, many of the participants were aware of the uniqueness of conscious rap music and how their peers and audiences may not receive the messages presented in conscious rap music. Choosing to create conscious rap music, is in many ways choosing to stand outside of the mainstream of rap which is dominated by other rap genres particularly gangsta and party rap. Because of this Queen Nef describes

that the cost "could be criticized because of my non-conformity… the main costs will be putting your life on the line you putting a face out there and saying your for the revolution… but the main cost is yourself." The price of conscious rap music is great, as an artist it means choosing a lifestyle and career that may not be recognized and awarded the same as other rappers. I too acknowledge the commitment to conscious rap music as I admit that:

> I don't expect to be the next Beyonce' with my music all over the world, even though that would be wonderful, a conscious rapper knows that their content may not always be popular which affects the amount of money they make from their music. I do have something that I can stand by that I'm proud of, a product that I'm proud of and because I've made this choice I know that universe will bless me with different kinds of wealth and income.

Many of the participants described the benefits of conscious rap music that outweigh the costs of being a conscious rap artist.

4.13 BEING ABLE TO BE MYSELF

Despite the many costs of creating conscious rap music, participants assert the benefits of conscious rap music are far greater. Many of the artists suggested a sense of pride and satisfaction that the music they created has the potential to positively influence its listeners and change lives. The participants when describing conscious rap benefits mentioned children often. Big N.E.L. states that " my children have something to listen to down the road, and the youth I come into contact with have something to listen to that's not whack…I also feel like I'm apart of history, the music that we making comes out of a movement.. im around real folks and I know the movement is real." One question that was not asked during the demographic portion of the interview was whether or not the participants were parents. Although this question was not asked, because of my personal relationship to the artists, I know that many of them have children. As a parent and a musician, one of the goals and benefits of conscious rap music described providing an alternative for children and music suitable to play in front of children. A sense of pride emerged as the messages of conscious rap music are suitable for child audiences. Ahjah Afrika, a mother of five children states:

> "Before I had children, as I child I used to ask a lot of questions of those around me about the world. The questions I had were the ones that most adults don't answer truthfully. It really came at an overload when I began to have my own children and realizing that I was being lied to. Once

> I knew the truth, I knew I was being lied to as a child. I made it a point to not lie to my children even if it was a question I felt I wasn't ready to answer for them. I look at it like, the Most High gave me this knowledge at the time that he did so I should answer the questions I know the answer to. This approach to the truth is definitely reflected in my music."

As artists, participants relay that self-expression and freedom of expression is a benefit of conscious rap music. That freedom as described by Nyo Smash affirms that as an artist a benefit is "Just knowing I stayed true to myself, knowing that I didn't have to sell my soul." Other artist, such as Ester King also mentioned a sentiment of staying true to oneself as she too recognizes a benefit of conscious rap that allows her to "always being able to be myself, also being able to be creative… I can just go and be overboard with it…. It can just be who I am…."

Because conscious rap music provides alternative messages to describing politics, society and seeks to benefit the world community, one of the biggest benefits is its ability to positively reach the masses. The underlying intention of conscious rap music is to unify its listeners and provide images and messages that can positively change the world. By using conscious rap music as a tool, Queen Nef describes that " Reaching people, and being able to effect one person if I effect one person and they effect one person then I've created a domino affect even if I'm eliminated then my legacy still continues and the message still continues through the people." This can be understood as the ultimate benefit, reaching people and changing the lives of many one song at a time. Malik Kill-I-Am defines "My intentions are to keep that realness in it, like 2Pac who said he probably live to see it change but he did light a spark and that spark got onto me and hopefully mine would get onto someone else. Pretty soon we're gonna have flame and that's when fire will burn."

4.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Several themes surfaced during the analysis of participant interviews gathered for this study. The purpose focused on understanding how rap artists used conscious rap as a form of activism. While conducting this study I began to realize that many of the participants have understood conscious rap music as a tool in which their individual ideals of revolution, movement, politics and society can be communicated. Many of these participants are considered young people and because of their desire to

reach the masses and those members of society within their generation, conscious rap music becomes extremely viable due to its popularity among young audiences.

The audience however is not limited to just those members of the rap community that are young people but embraces all ages of listeners and all races and genders. It is important to recognize that the goal of conscious rap music is revolutionary, in that the goal can simply be described as change. That change can differ from artist to artist however all believe that the conditions upon which many are living and exposed to everyday causes for some sense of change. That change could lead to unity, and understood as unity first with self, then reaching out into the community and ultimately the world.

One of the questions I considered when reflecting on the field notes and interviews were if we as artists were in a different generation or a different time, what would be our tool? I began to think that many of the participants understood themselves to be conscious individuals and that the messages within their music reflected that consciousness. Perhaps many of us would use the most effective 'tool' of our time, perhaps the tool of the pulpit or some other effective way to reach a mass group of society. Interestingly, many of the participants in this study are familiar with one another but do not have the opportunity to reflect and discuss the topics presented by the interview questions for this study. Despite this, participants shared a common sense of intent, purpose and choice to make conscious rap music. All recognized their unique positions within society and the rap community and have consciously made a commitment to positively influence the lives of others.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The following chapter will provide an overview of the study inclusive of the implications of study results, theoretical framework, brief description of participants and qualitative approach and analysis. The themes resulting from participant interviews as they relate to current literature and discourse on conscious rap music will also be included within the chapter. Finally, suggestions for future research on conscious rap music will be given.

The purpose of this study was to understand how rappers use conscious rap music as a form of activism. After reviewing the results of the study and determining that conscious rap music is used as a tool or vehicle to express issues and political or social goals of individual rappers, I was left with one major thought. If the artists interviewed were apart of another generation, what would be our tool. If we were apart of the Civil Rights Era, would our message best be served from a pulpit? If we came of age during any other period, would we use the tools of that generation to reach the masses and communicate our message of unity? This thought leads me to realize that the message of music in the African American community often speaks to our reality. As Maultsby (1992) has described, rap music like several other genres of music produced by African Americans, derives from a West African musical tradition. Throughout our legacy of music, genres have changed from spirituals to R&B and more. Although the genres have change, the messages continue to describe the life experiences of African American people. The message has some sense of consistency; as long as there are impoverished conditions and oppression felt within the African American and minority communities, there will be a song to describe that feeling.

During the enslavement of Africans, spirituals described the reality of bondage and the circumstances of plantation life. These songs have been described as helping those enslaved endure long working hours as well as celebrate their humanity. As described in the previous chapters, the music of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements often described the effects of racist whites under a Jim Crow

Era and help to relay the conditions African Americans faced during segregation. The musical genres that emerged during these time periods embodied the 'soul' of the African American community.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS AND STUDY RESULTS

As a generation now heavily influenced by rap music, it is no surprise that a form of rap would continue in the legacy of speaking about the lives of African American and minority people. Within rap music, three popular genres have emerged that are gangsta rap, party rap and conscious rap music. Due to conscious rap music's "overtly political" content, this study presumed the genre to speak more towards the experience of African Americans and minorities living in marginalized sectors of American society. It was this presumption that lead to the investigation of conscious rap music. The study proved to be significant in that many of the conscious rap artists suggested their music to be a reflection of their life and lived experiences. All of the participants are African American or identify as a subset of African American culture and therefore have a shared experience. The inspiration and content of conscious rap music details the reality of the rappers lives and provides a level of authenticity that seeks understanding of a collective experience and at times offers a solution to oppressive conditions. The results suggest that despite the accomplishments of previous movements, the lives of African Americans and minorities remain in need of political and social change. In order to articulate this need for change, current rap artists have adopted the medium of conscious rap music to relate issues affecting them individually as well as affecting the larger African American and minority communities. The issues and solutions differ from artist to artist and in many ways reflect the theory of activism provided by Oliver and Marwell (1992).

5.2 THEORY

Activism changes during 'normal' times of political behavior according to Oliver and Marwell (1992). The Civil Rights and Black Power eras both describe a heightened sense of political activity and much of the activists behavior was to harness the interest and motivation of the people rather than encourage political activity. These circumstances were unique as political activities during average

political climates are less sensational. In those 'normal' times of political activity, activists set forth individual goals and issues that reflect their abilities to commit time and money towards supporting said goals. Because the focus is on individual abilities, goals may differ from activist to activist.

Rappers, like those activist described by Oliver and Marwell (1992), define goals and issues based on their ability to reach audiences and effect listeners. Goals are also determined by rappers intent. The participants of this study made a purposeful decision to become conscious rap artists as opposed to gangsta or party rappers. In that primary decision, they are committed to using rap music to positively affect listeners and diversify their messages. During this study however, rappers shared the conviction of being conscious rap artists and although their goals and issues may differ a collective charge of encouraging unity within society remained constant. All of the artists felt a commitment towards authenticity and due to the racial, social and economic commonalities of each artists, a overarching collective experience was described in their content. The theory of activism accurately describes how rappers discerned issues and goals, however the consistency of shared individual experiences was not considered. When a generation of youth comes of age being exposed to similar realities despite differences in location, class, and education, shared interest in rap music creates a unifying bridge. For example, Queen Nef is African by way of Eritrea and Ester King is from Atlanta. Both share a pride of their African heritage, both embody that pride in their music. Their shared experience of being African and African American women has leaded them to speak towards similar issues in their music. They have individually chosen their intent as artists but their goals are ultimately the same.

5.3 PARTICIPANTS AND APPROACH

In order to understand how rappers use conscious rap music as a form of activism, a qualitative approach was used for this study. Rappers were given a voice and allowed to detail their personal understanding of conscious rap music and activism. This approach was inspired by the works of authors such as Bernice Reagan Johnson who wrote of the music during the Civil Rights Movement and also participated as a singer and leader within the movement. My personal affiliation with the conscious rap

community as an artist and my position as an African American Studies scholar has shaped my interest in the topic of music and activism. The approach has therefore been qualitative with analysis based in reflexive writing and the narrative of self.

For the purpose of this study interviews were conducted with ten participants regarding their understanding of conscious rap music and activism. Each interview was transcribed and quoted within study results to ensure the goal of providing artists with a voice during this investigation. As aforementioned all of the participants were of African descent, five were male and five female all with varying educational backgrounds and incomes. Several themes were drawn from the interviews. The following section describes those themes as they relate to the discourse and literature on conscious rap music.

5.4 THEMES

Conscious rap has been distinguished by its "politically progressive and racially conscious lyrical content- conscious rappers rap about racist hypocrisies, Black Nationalism, black solidarity, gender, politics in the black community, and African American history and culture" (McCorkel & Rodriquez, 2009, p. 367). The primary theme that offers a resolve to the research question that asks how rappers use conscious rap music as a form of activism suggests that rappers use conscious rap music as a tool to educate, empower and inspire. Considering the definition provided by McCorkek and Rodriquez (2009) regarding conscious rap, the responses of the participants reinforce ideas that many of the messages within conscious rap music has the potential to educate listeners about issues relevant to the black community. This consistency suggests that many of the artists in this study embrace the ideas represented within conscious rap music and are unafraid to adopt the tile and responsibility of a conscious rapper. In fact many have been charged with the task of being a conscious rapper and express awareness that no matter what genre of rap they may have chosen, they are conscious that all music has energy. The energy represented in gangsta has been defined as violent, criminogenic, misogynistic, homophobic, immature and self-destructive (Gordon, 2005). The choice of being a conscious rapper as opposed to a gangsta rap

or party rap artists becomes an indicator of the type of energy the artists wishes to embody and encourage amongst listeners.

Due to the political and social potency of conscious rap lyrics, participants described using a covert approach when creating conscious rap lyrics. They described an attempt to teach audiences without knowing that the music they are listening to has empowering and educating content. The indirectness of conscious rap lyrics becomes crucial as audiences are offered a variety of rap genres, many of which tend to be more commercially successful. In fact within the discourse of conscious rap music, resentment of the term 'conscious rapper' has been noted to effect artist who create music with political and social criticisms. An artist for instance may embrace the topics of conscious rap, but refuse to identify themselves as a conscious rapper because of its associations. When artists label themselves or are labeled a conscious rapper, associations are made regarding the profitability of conscious music leaving artist such as Kweli to regard the label as a "death trap" (Chang, 2005, p. 43). None of the participants in this study shared this sentiment of rejecting the term of conscious rapper; in fact many seemed clear about their decision to create conscious rap music embracing not only the term but also its associations.

The intentions of the participants creating conscious rap music reflected their understanding of what constitutes political rap. Although several definitions were offered for political rap, one of the most convicting was the role political rap music has in speaking for the members of society who are marginalized. Fraley (2009) argues that rap fans expect a sense of "authenticity" that links rappers to the "lived experiences that reach back to cultural origins of predominately Black urban neighborhoods" (p. 43). Additionally, the understanding of political rap was said to also offer an alternative to the ideals and messages in other genres of rap music. Krohn and Suazo (1995) suggests rappers are "viewed as role models" by young rap fans who identify with the "underprivileged conditions" within American society. Cummings and Roy (2002) define conscious or political rap as offering an Afrocentric alternative to the

types of messages in popular rap music. Henderson (1996) suggests that Afrocentricity in rap music provides a:

> "standard of behavior and a new rites of passage away from guns, dope, sexism, and violence, and toward more African centered definitions of manhood and womanhood rooted in righteous behavior, support for liberation struggles and political prisoners, Afrocentric community building, and good entertainment"(p. 308).

Despite these intentions, conscious rap music has said to be ignored by African American rap fans that presumably are uninterested in conscious rap messages. Kitwana (2005) reiterates an interview with rap group The Coup about the racial make-up of their concert audiences. They remark that there are some "thugged-out crowds where our message [conscious rap message] doesn't resonate, and Black folks will say that they aren't trying to hear hip hop artists remind them of their problems," suggesting that African American rap fans have been bombarded with negative messages and they "don't want to hear uplifting messages" (Kitwana, 2005, p. 4- 5). On one hand, conscious rap music provides a voice to an otherwise voiceless community but on the other it is criticized as being unappealing to the community that it attempts to represent. Perhaps the participants for this study are aware of this concern and have expanded their target audience beyond the African American community. The message of unity is a universal message and can be adopted by people of all walks of life. Many participants desired that their music reach all listeners and fans of diverse racial backgrounds. This is reflected with the theme that suggests conscious rap music is for everyone.

The artists in this study offered a unifying intention for conscious rap music. Although they acknowledge the content of conscious rap music as being focused on the lived experiences of African American and minority communities, many desired that all members of the rap community be inspired to embrace a sense of unity among a global community. This unity is thought to be achieved first individually, and has fueled many participants to feel compelled to tell the story of their generation. Because many of the participants saw themselves as activists, staying true to oneself and true to the role of a conscious rapper superseded the idea of fortune and fame. Instead, artist felt gratified by knowing they maintained the potential to influence listeners to demand some form of change within society. It is

this idea of global unity and political and social change that may lead researchers of conscious rap music to assume the potential of conscious rap music as a vehicle for social movement and revolution.

According to Brennan (1994), Greg Tate suggests rap music will "never lead a revolution" because of its lack of self-criticism" (p. 685). However according to McCorkel and Rodriquez (2009) social movements are dependent upon a collective identity. Hip Hop culture and rap music are suggested to be focal points in which values, aesthetics and identity are shared. The notion that conscious rap music through its lyrical content invokes a collective identity or social movement may be grandiose. Gordon (2005) suggests that art is not responsible for invoking social movement and that "those who speak of the revolutionary potential of art without thinking of art in artistic terms may face contradictions" (p. 357). However, he concludes that "art does not have to change the world, but it always plays a role in how we live" (Gordon, 2005, p. 387).

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

The results suggest that conscious rap artists are eager, dedicated and determined to perpetuate their message of unity found in conscious rap music. Future research should explore how these artist promote this message. In order to investigate the perpetuation of conscious rap lyrics, the use of the Internet and the appeal of conscious rap messages on a global level should be explored. Based on this study, conscious rap music can be used as a form of activism by educating empowering and inspiring listeners to become aware of political and social issues relevant to the African American and minority community. The overarching goal is to create a sense of unity among rap fans. The international potential of rap music due to its global popularity may encourage future research to investigate how conscious rap music is understood around the world. For the purpose of this study, conscious rappers based in Atlanta, GA were interviewed. Other urban areas with thriving conscious rap communities should be explored. The suggestion of exploring conscious rap music on an international level is also inspired by the description of rap music in the country of Tanzania.

When exploring possible international potential of conscious rap messages, and how other communities that embrace rap music use rap to educate, empower and inspire, the concept of "ujumbe

mkali" or strong messages described by the Tanzanian Hip Hop community is used to educate young rap audiences about the impact of HIV and AIDS (Perullo, 2003). Interestingly, Tanzania has a history of using music to communicate political and social issues particularly in the 1960's. During this time artist referred to as "dansi" or "tarrah" wrote songs about the conditions of urban life being impacted by British colonialism (Perullo, 2003). Exploring the role of rap music and activism in other countries may expand the discourse on rap music's political potential. This discussion may also encourage the examination of conscious rap music being understood as a global modern movement.

Research on the role of the Internet and rap music should also be explored to better gage the impact of rap music and activism. Social networking sites such as Facebook.com, MySpace.com, Bandcamp.com and similar sites are available to anyone with Internet access, allowing rap artist and rap fans to interact for free. The IFPI (International Federal of the Phonographic Industry) Digital Music Report of 2010 suggest that music fans do exercise a number of ways to access music including buying tracks a-la-carte, buying albums, buying mobile apps, listening to music and streaming for free (p. 4).

Digital sales reports provide a basis to understand the positive relationship between music and the Internet. The diversity of rap music genres on the Internet comes from the diversity in websites. Some music websites are managed by media conglomerates others are available to independent music groups and individual Internet users. The amount of digital sales reported by the Vivendi Annual Report 2009 for Universal Music Group increased by 7.8% as compared to a decrease in physical sales of -13.7%. In the United States and Japan alone, digital sales increased on an international level by 8.4%. Reports assert that for the "first time, more than one quarter of record companies' revenues came from digital sales" (IFPI Music Report 2009, p. 3). The Internet may serve as an outlet for those rap music genres that do not find success in mainstream music markets. . In addition listeners can take advantage of sites that allow them to share information like pictures, YouTube clips, music and other types of information. Users can also listen to online radio stations such as Sirius XM and Pandora.com in which they set their preferences or find stations that appeal to their musical taste. Given the discourse by rap scholars regarding the content of commercial rap music and gangsta rap, conscious rap music has been proposed

as an alternative to gangsta rap messages. Although mainstream markets have essentially omitted the presence of conscious rap music on major radio airwaves, the Internet has embraced the conscious rap genre in addition to other genres and sub-genres that rap fans support. The use of the Internet to promote conscious rap music should therefore also be explored.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Many critiques of rap music assume that rap music would be unable to garner a revolution or promote revolutionary ideals that could impact the world. With this study the discourse on rap music may be encouraged to broaden its understanding of the variety within rap genres and begin to acknowledge the political potency of conscious rap messages. In addition, the field of African American studies may embrace the notion that conscious rap music is apart of a longstanding tradition of African peoples using music as a form of activism. The problem with the relationship of rap music and activism is that it is often overlooked. Perhaps this assumption is due to the lack of data that explores the role of rap music, particularly conscious rap music and activism. Surely the popularity of gangsta and party rap would lead scholars to make such an assertion about raps political potential. According to Neilson Sound Scan and Billboard charts at the onset of 1991, gangsta rap was the most consumed rap genre within the United States (Former, 2000). Conscious rap music with its "overtly political" messages however has a potential to effect forms of activism both nationally and internationally. Ester King raps in her song "Give me my Peace":

> "I hear gun shots, bomb treats..
> In my school, throw up your deuce
> Is it really worth it
> Don't judge me don't bother me
> Look me in my eye, I don't want to fight
> Just give me my peace".

In my song, "In the beginning" I write:

> We losing lives to a fight that ain't our war to win
> The more we invest in their lives the more we wrestle with sin
> Call it a hint in your soul or better yet internal contradiction
> Should we survive in these conditions but are we living
> I'm breaking free from the binds that hold me back
> Living free in my mind until my realities can match.

One of my favorite songs by Zayd Malik best epitomizes the political potential found in conscious rap music with his song entitled "Sam Cooke (Outro)". He raps:

> "I got to ride for my older g's
> Lets bridge the gap organize the facts
> They took your land lets get it back
> Looking at my partner like nigga hold on
> We gone change the hood and all that bullshit that goes on
> Im the vanguard never been a follower
> They say that man hard I hope that he don't plot on us
> I'm just fulfilling my purpose until my time is up
> Making that movement music them soildas and the ridas bump"…

The participants in this study are apart of a viable conscious rap community within the Atlanta area. Perhaps they are but a microcosm that reflects the larger role conscious rap music may serve in the rap community and in the world. As a tool of education, empowerment and inspiration that hopes to lead into a more unified world, conscious rap music has the potential to be considered the next phase of social and political movements for a new generation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.Age: _____

2.Race: 1.[ ]African/Black 2.[ ]Latino 3. [ ]Asian
4. [ ]White 5.[ ]Other (specify) _____

3.Gender: 1.[ ]Male 2.[ ]Female

4.Hometown: _____

7. Occupation: _____

8. Income: _____

9. Education: 1.[ ]Less than high school 2.[ ] High School graduate/GED
3.[ ]Some College 4.[ ]College graduate 5.[ ]Grad School

Degrees Earned_____

10. Why do you rap?

11. How would you describe your music?

12. What types of topics do you rap about?

13. Why do you rap about these topics?

14. Do you consider yourself a socially or politically critical artist?

15. What inspires your social and/or political criticisms?

a. What personal experiences have led you to align yourself with a politically and socially critical organization?

b. What attracted you to this (these) particularly organizations?

c. Would you consider your music consistent with the goals and objectives of the organization you are a member of?

16. What are your intentions for your music?

17. How would you describe your lyrical content?

18. Is there an audience you create your music for?

19. If so, what specific behaviors does your music encourage listeners to adopt?

20. What is your definition of political or conscious rap music?

21. What are some of the costs of making conscious rap music?

22. Considering the cost, what are some of the benefits of creating conscious rap music?

23. What are some of the goals you wish to achieve with the creation of your music?

APPENDIX :B PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Race	Age	Hometown	Education	Income
Ahjah	F	African-American	29	Kingston, NY	High School	Income from hairstyling
Ash Smash	F	African-American	24	Atlanta, GA	High School/Some college	"Depends on the hustle"
Ester King	F	New Afrikan	25	Los Angeles, CA	Some college	"It comes in when it comes in"
Ife Jie	F	New Afrikan	29	South Central Los Angeles	BA/ working on MA	Varies
King Malachi	M	Hebrew	"I'm Infinite"	South Carolina	High School	Disclosed
Malik Kill-I-Am	M	Original Man	"Wisdom"	Miami, FL	6th grade	"Whatever comes in"
Nyo Smash	M	African-American	23	Atlanta, GA	High School	Confidential
Queen Nef	F	Eritrean	27	Atlanta, GA	High School/Some college	Indefinite
Big Nel	M	New Afrikan	30	Chicago, IL	BA/ working on MA	$20k
Zayd Malik	M	New Afrikan	30	Los Angeles	Some college	"I don't know"

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Georgia State University
Department of African American Studies

Informed Consent

Title: Conscious Rap: Movement Music Revisited

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sarita K. Davis
Student Investigator: Ife J. Mohammed

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study will be to ask conscious rap artist how their music can be used as activism. This question may describe the use of music and politics. You are invited to participate because you have labeled yourself as a conscious rapper. A total of seven participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require 1-3 hours of your time one day only.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a screening form along with participating in a recorded interview. You will be interviewed by the student P.I. at a location in the Atlanta, GA or the home of the student P.I. The interview will be one time only, for one to three hours. Compensation will not be given for your participation in this study.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally, by providing recognition to your status as a conscious rapper. Overall, we hope to gain information about how you use conscious rap music to encourage political activity.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Sarita K. Davis and Ife J. Mohammed will have access to the information you provide. We will use your stage or performance name or a name you choose, rather than your real name in the study. Everything you provide will be stored on a protected file on the computer of the student P.I. Your interview will also be kept in a locked box in the Department of African American Studies. Any information that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or its results. The findings will be written in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Sarita K. Davis or Ife J. Mohammed at 404 413- 5134; email address saritakaya.davis@gmail.com or saritakaya.davis@gmail.com if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu" svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded please sign below.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date