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# Hegemonic Resistance in Hip-hop Music: A Gramscian Rhetorical Criticism of Tupac Shakur

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HEGEMONIC RESISTANCE IN HIP-HOP MUSIC:  
A GRAMSCIAN RHETORICAL CRITICISM  
OF TUPAC SHAKUR

Scott A. Mitchell

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This project examines the rhetorical elements in the work of Tupac Shakur that provide the capacity for resistance against hegemonic conditions of oppression. Shakur, a popular, socially conscious rapper of the 1980s and 1990s, created music not only for others to understand the social injustices facing Black Americans, but provided Blacks living in conditions of poverty and oppression with a voice in society. Using a Gramscian lens of rhetorical criticism, this study examines the neo-marxist elements of hegemonic structure present in select tracks produced during Shakur's lifetime. This analysis explores the rhetorical strategies deployed by Shakur to bring awareness to these hegemonic injustices as well as investigates the tactics offered by Shakur in his music to encourage a movement of social change. Moreover, this study discusses the influences of the hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur both during, and after his death along with develops an understanding for the use of hip-hop music as an effective method of communicating social conditions of a given community.

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A GRAMSCIAN RHETORICAL CRITICISM  
OF TUPAC SHAKUR

SCOTT A. MITCHELL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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2014

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OF TUPAC SHAKUR

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S.A.M.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is recognized as the land of opportunity. In many ways, opportunity is the motor that drives the faith of the American public and other groups of people wishing to succeed in America. As we examine the fabric of American culture though, we must question what comes of the disenfranchised publics who are unable to take advantage of these opportunities? This inquiry leads us to the power of social movements in the wake of conditions that are oppressive. Social movements, interwoven with the prospect of opportunity, are what have defined the America we know today. Integral historical moments like the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement all represent the influence that social movements have had in shaping modern society. These moments, driven by the protests of the oppressed, illustrate the power of social movements. As we struggle for progress toward a better social world, it is important to investigate the presence of oppression and how disenfranchised communities fight for their social advancement.

While most challenges to the status quo result in disappointment, there exists the possibility of a social movement bringing forth monumental change to society. The social conditions of Black Americans have long been a struggle in the American landscape. The issue of racial equality is multifaceted with conditions of economics, education, and

healthcare being tied to the racial identity of citizens. Through protest, social and political strides have been made in the struggle for Black Americans combating their oppressive conditions. Although racial progress can be observed in America's history, ranging from the abolishment of slavery to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, the struggle for racial equality must not be ignored in the United States. Although some will posit that electing a Black American as the President of the United States suggests that racial equality has been reached, various racial inequalities and oppressive conditions still hold influence. It is paramount we examine where these injustices exist and how they can be resisted.

Resistance to oppressive conditions can come in multiple forms. Hamlet (2011) and Tucker (2011) explain that one form of communicating messages of resistance throughout the Black community is through music. Therefore, in exploring resistance in the Black community, I will observe the degree to which the genre of hip-hop music possesses the capacity to mobilize and promote social resistance. As Hamlet (2011) concludes:

The emergence of hip-hop culture came about as the result of cultural exchange and larger social and political conditions of Black alienation and disillusionment. The African American, particularly the Black youth, sought identity and a way to stake a claim in his own culture. Hip-hop became that means, and a new system of values developed that allowed the African American an outlet for self-expression and creativity (p.28)

As we study the capacities of hip-hop music, it is critical to consider the functions the genre holds as a mode of social resistance.

Music as a form of expression has been used by various groups of people to illustrate frustration and anger within their culture. Black Americans have especially historically relied on music to communicate messages of resistance in their community. (Ferguson, 2008; Hamlet, 2011). This trend has not receded throughout the history of Black Americans, especially since the oppressive conditions plaguing the culture have never been totally eradicated. In observing the application of music as a form of opposition to the oppressive status quo, I will evaluate the rhetorical elements of hip-hop music to further recognize how the genre is an effective method of protest.

Observing an entire musical genre is too vast an undertaking for the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I have selected a well-recognized individual within the hip-hop community to analyze, Tupac Shakur. Shakur, a hip-hop artist originally from New York, was a vocal leader of resistance for Black Americans through his music until his untimely demise in 1996 (Dyson, 2006; McQuillar & Johnson, 2010). Since his death, Shakur's music has been the subject of many conversations concerning the conditions of Black Americans. Shakur's music has also served as inspiration for many later hip-hop artists who produce socially conscious and critical music (Dyson, 2006; Tucker, 2001). This thesis argues for Tupac Shakur as an intellectual and leader of resistance against oppression through his defiant works of music that inspire understanding of oppressive elements of society and strategies to overcome them. As such, I will rhetorically critique selections of Shakur's music and examine how they are indicative of resistance messages to hegemonic structures.

Advancing our understanding of hip-hop music as a mode of social resistance is necessary for a variety of reasons. Primarily, it is necessary to comprehend not only how

Shakur's music assisted the culture in resistance during the time of its release, but also in the time after his passing. Analyses such as this are vital, considering the maintained conditions of oppression faced by many Black Americans. This is significant, because if hip-hop music can be understood as a method of resistance, then individuals outside of the Black community can also comprehend the oppressive elements of society. Further, analyses such as these advance the acceptance of music in general as a mode of social resistance.

Prior to any analysis of these texts, it is first important to clarify key terms that will be utilized in this thesis. The first of these terms regards the specific culture that will be the subject I will be discussing, "Black Americans." The debate over the correct identification between "African-Americans," "Black Americans," or simply "Blacks" has been one that scholars have mulled over (Aldridge, 2005; Boyd, 2002; Dyson, 1993). While some argue the identification of "African-Americans" is the most politically correct term of reference, many contend that not all Americans of darker skin-tone are of African ancestry. Therefore, I have concluded that for the sake of a thesis grounded upon the analysis of Tupac Shakur and his music, I will apply the term with which he used to identify individuals within his own culture. As my forthcoming review of literature and analysis will show, in Shakur's musical works and interviews, he would often use the term "Blacks" or "Black people" to discuss his culture. For this reason, I too will employ the term "Black Americans," being that I am discussing musical works that act as forms of oppressive resistance for Black Americans.

Another term that will appear often in this thesis is that of the genre of music that will be analyzed, hip-hop. As I will offer in my review of literature, hip-hop has been

recognized not only as a genre of music, but also as a culture, art form, and style of dance (Rose, 1994). However, as suggested in my explanation of employing the phrase Black Americans, this thesis will focus on the form of hip-hop Shakur produced. Though Shakur assuredly is representative of several facets of the hip-hop culture, I will focus on his music and the rhetorical implications of his messages in these works. These rhetorical messages will be identified and analyzed through Shakur's spoken lyrics in his music. While a brief survey of influential musical elements will be included in certain texts where they influenced the meaning rhetorically, the analysis of this thesis will primarily focus on the uttered messages by Shakur in his music.

Moving from the vital terms of this thesis, the review of literature will delve into several areas of interest as they pertain to the music of Shakur and resistance to oppression. The review will begin with an understanding of the various social conditions that existed during the time Shakur produced much of his music. Following the discussion of oppression, I will review previous hegemonic analyses that have been conducted, supporting the method of rhetorical criticism I will employ for this analysis. I will then review work regarding the rhetorical characteristics of resistant texts and how they are successful in the Black community. A comprehensive discussion of hip-hop communication will then review how the genre can be utilized to convey various messages. Chapter Two will then conclude with a consideration of Shakur as an individual and previous research conducted on his music and the music of other prominent individuals of hip-hop music.

Chapter Three will begin with an explanation of the practice of rhetorical criticism as well as the Gramscian rhetorical method that I will use to investigate

Shakur's texts. This section will provide an explanation of key concepts of the Gramscian methodology that will be necessary for examining Shakur's songs. Chapter Three will also introduce the specific texts being considered, why they were chosen, and what purposes they serve in supporting my argument.

In Chapter Four, I will conduct the rhetorical analysis using a Gramscian method to explore how Shakur's songs serve to construct the message of oppressive resistance. Additionally, this section will include more information surrounding Shakur and the contexts in which these songs were created in order to establish the rhetorical situation of the marginalized conditions.

With Chapter Five, I will reflect on the analysis that I conducted and contend how the argument for this thesis has been supported. From this, I will also examine how this scholarship can be advanced in future study and what future works can offer in for comprehending surrounding societies and the cultures that inhabit them.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature regarding Shakur and the concepts necessary to comprehend his message of resistance spans many subjects. In this review of literature, I will illustrate several areas of study that aid my analysis of Shakur. It is first necessary to review the oppressive conditions that Shakur experienced and regularly depicted in his music. Although the focus of Shakur's music is on the conditions of Black Americans during the 1980s and 1990s, it is important to note that these conditions have plagued the Black community throughout history and in many ways, persist today. Following, I will review literature on social movement rhetoric. Exploring the resistance messages in Shakur's music, it is important to identify the effective rhetorical elements in protest movements. Additionally, I will discuss social movements, since many scholars frame hip-hop culture as a modern social movement and hip-hop music artists as contemporary agents of social change (Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994).

From social movements, I will review hegemonic analyses in the United States regarding racial oppression. This review will then move into a comprehensive evaluation of hip-hop music, the role it has played in history, and the communicative elements it possesses. Next, an observation of the communication in hip-hop music and its culture will lead to a summary of literature regarding Shakur and the role of the hip-hop artist.

To conclude, this review of literature will review scholarly literature regarding Tupac Shakur as past scholars have critically observed him and his music.

### **Oppressive Conditions**

Equality is a daily privilege that many Americans take for granted. Many Americans mistakenly perceive opportunities for a quality education, reliable healthcare, and stable employment to be birthrights. The truth, however, is that Black Americans face numerous forms of oppression that have inhibited their social progress. While progress has certainly been made in the advancement of opportunities for Black Americans, one would be misguided believing that all forms of oppression have been eliminated. Thus, it is imperative that we explore these oppressive conditions, specifically in the context of the era of Shakur's music to better understand the issues he so often spoke against.

Examining the history of civil rights, scholars observe moments like the abolition of slavery or the renowned Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have a Dream" speech as monumental progress for Black Americans (Marable, 2007). Granted, while these moments in time paved the way for Black Americans to gain constitutional rights, multiple stifling social conditions remain in effect (Manuel, Taylor, & Jackson, 2012). With sustained conditions of poverty in certain regions of American, Black Americans such as Shakur would continue to experience harsh social circumstances.

Poverty can have a dramatic impact on a variety of social elements for citizens. As Kain (1969) presents, conditions of poverty often form outside of rights and laws and are the byproduct of cultural beliefs. Kain claims that although Black Americans may have overcome the odds to achieve constitutional rights, many were unaware of the



cultural hurdles that lay ahead. Cultural impediments such as inadequate education, employment, and housing have shaped a community trapped in perpetual poverty. Additionally, while many perceive the outlawing of Jim Crow laws in the United States as a universal benefit to African-Americans, Marable (2007) claims otherwise. Marable posits that the effect of the outlawed Jim Crow laws created a geographical division of Blacks from their social class counterparts. Marable claims:

As the Black inner-city neighborhoods became less diverse in terms of socioeconomic groups, the level of capital investment, financial resources and professional contracts available to lower-income blacks declined sharply. In large cities, where ghetto life had always retained a degree of vitality and an atmosphere of extended family at the neighborhood level, the environment turned increasingly ugly and violent. (p. 188)

Despite being heralded for changes for Black Americans, the result for many was further subjugation into poverty-stricken ghettos and the crime-ridden streets.

Loury (2010) claims that the spread of poverty can foster hopelessness, which further leads to drug use and criminal means of employment in many impoverished communities. He argues that as economic conditions and opportunities decline for Black Americans, they have historically felt forced into the illicit drug trade. However, despite the stereotypical association of Black Americans as criminals, Staples (2011) offers that this is notion is untrue by stating, “Blacks are arrested more often simply because police selectively target the drugs black people sell and the areas in which they sell them” (p. 34). Moreover, poverty-stricken areas often suffer from an influx of drug abuse and dependence (Marable, 2007; Wacquant, 2010). Marable (2007) reports:

By the early 1980s, most researchers estimated the number of drug addicts in the United States at one-half million. As measured by a 1982 survey of more than 30,000 drug treatment centers across the country, over 40 percent were Black...Between 1986 and 1988, the number of newborn infants testing positive for drugs increased 400 percent; moreover, the reported incidence of congenital syphilis soared 500 percent, primarily because poor and minority women were engaging in prostitution to purchase drugs. (p. 189)

Byproducts of impoverished environments such as drug abuse and prostitution represent just two of the many consequences that exist in dilapidated communities.

To clarify, many of the aforementioned conditions of poverty do not solely result from segregation or disregard for Black Americans. Just as Dubois (2009) was highly critical of the oppressive economic conditions going into the twentieth century, many scholars have continued his resolve today. Bowser (2007) argues that these conditions not only exist, but that many Americans inadvertently overlook them. He explains, “Beneath the public image of equality and sameness, Blacks are still burdened by historically powerful disadvantages and present-day inequalities” (p.6). Bowser and Davenport (2010) offer that while the Civil Rights Movement saw success in achieving constitutional rights, its impact was limited in the economic sphere and caused many Whites to believe that employment competition had leveled. While White families in the middle-class were concerned with the chance at upward social mobility, Black families in familiar circumstances feared that they could lose everything (Bowser, 2007). Marable (2007) observes that following the Civil Rights Movement; many forms of federal support for Blacks were cut and re-allocated. From this, job opportunities sharply fell,

resulting in little to no health care, unstable incomes, and a poor housing market. Marable (2007) describes:

In 1980, the black suburban household's average of \$20,063 was appreciably higher than the average black city household's figure of \$13,362...In some cities, the exodus of the black middle class was partially the product of deliberate government policy. In Washington D.C., for instance, the share of federal government's contribution to the city's budget declined from 20 to barely 14 percent in the 1980s. (p. 207)

As these conditions grew in many Black communities, institutions of family and community suffered, giving way to the rise in crime. These conditions served as a catalyst to many hostile conditions that rose during this time (Bowser, 2007; Marable, 2007). Unable to see any opportunity for escape, many Blacks turned away from education and took part in crime in an effort to take their lives into their own hands.

As poverty remained rampant for the majority of Black Americans during this time, the environment for children was less than ideal. Social opportunity is examined in many facets, one being a quality education. Smith and Seltzer (1992) purport a statistic from a survey conducted in 1982, which showed Whites as being almost twice as likely to receive a college education (24% compared to 13%) and more likely to be employed (p. 13). Irvine (1995) adds that not only were Blacks less likely to receive an education, but the education available paled in comparison to that of Whites. Irvine asserts:

The difference between the school experiences and successes of the two groups is that the white students' culture is more likely to be compatible with the culture of the school. Unfortunately, black children's ways of doing and knowing often

conflict with and are antithetical to the ways in which schools do and know. The middle-class cultural norms and behaviors often result in cultural discontinuity or a lack of cultural synchronization among the student, his community, and the school. (p. 133)

With educational systems not aligning with the cultural and ideological foundations of Black Americans, students are less likely to learn. Following a weak and otherwise failed education system, individuals were more likely to be victims of oppressive conditions.

Just as Americans accepted education as a gateway toward social mobility, being a marginalized Black American without such an education resulted in a bleak outlook. Western and Pettit (2010) observe how oppression can lead Black Americans toward a path of crime and eventual incarceration. Correlating educational success and incarceration rates of Black Americans, these scholars argue that in the 1980s, Blacks who did not complete high school were incarcerated twice as often as those who did. The study continues with a more troubling statistic that this rate has since climbed sharply with 2008 seeing 35% of Black Americans who did not complete high school being incarcerated. Thomas (2013) suggests, “Racial disparities in education, jobs and social practices all add to African-Americans’ presence in America's booming prison population” (p. 180). Thomas adds:

This crisis continually threatens the very fabric of the black family contributing heavily to disproportionate numbers of black families headed by black females; skyrocketing rates of AIDS and HIV infection; disproportionate rates of poverty; juvenile delinquency; school dropout; other community ills (p.181).

Identifying these incarceration rates requires an analysis not only of the cultural standards of Black Americans, but also of the oppressive nature of the justice system.

Daunting as the incarceration rates may be, we must also consider the oppressive customs of the justice system rather than hastily forming conclusions about a community. While some claim that blaming the justice system and police is a weak excuse to justify criminal action, recognizing historical patterns of these systems can provide a different perspective on the nature of criminality. Analyzing racial discrimination in law enforcement, scholars suggest to look no further than the Rodney King incident of police brutality (Dyson, 1993; Rose, 2008; West 1993). Staples (2011) offers:

The best-known case [of discrimination] was when white police officers chased a black man, Rodney King, for speeding, caught him, then were filmed beating and kicking him. Despite the video of their actions, an all-white jury in Los Angeles County found four white police officers not guilty. That verdict ignited one of the biggest race riots in American history, leaving sixty people dead, 2,400 injuries, 16,000 arrests and almost a billion dollars in property damage. A second trial was held of the same four officers, with a more racially diverse jury on the federal charge of violating King's civil rights and ended with the conviction of two of the officers (p.35).

Cases such as this not only illuminate a system twisted by racism and racial discrimination, they also illustrate a community agitated with their oppressive conditions. “What we witnessed in Los Angeles was the consequence of a lethal linkage of economic decline, cultural decay, and political lethargy in American life” (West, 1993, p.1). With severe social decay within the education and justice system, many Blacks experienced

feelings of hopelessness and fear. As the 1992 riots of Los Angeles suggest, many were beginning to understand the need for social, political, and cultural change.

### **Hegemonic Study of Race in American Culture**

As groups and resistance movements rise to notoriety for their causes, they will eventually need to confront the social structure responsible for their oppression. Though it is difficult to pinpoint hegemonic structures, scholars have explored hegemony in the United States. Gramsci (1971) explains that the hegemony divides itself from the oppressed subaltern through cultural influences that create power disparity. He adds:

The hegemony of a directive centre route over the intellectuals asserts itself by two principal routes: 1. a general conception of life, a philosophy, which offers to its adherents an intellectual “dignity” providing a principle of differentiation from the old ideologies...2. a scholastic programme, an educative principle and original pedagogy which interests that fraction of the intellectuals (p.104).

Central to this conceptual understanding of power and influence is the capability to establish the social customs, such as norms and commonly accepted customs. Artz and Murphy (2000) add:

Hegemony addresses how social practices, relationships, and structures are negotiated among diverse social forces. Hegemony offers a template for understanding why women wear makeup, employees participate in actions to improve company profits, and homeowners and renters accept segregated housing patterns (p.3).

Hence, as scholars have studied oppressive hegemonic structures in America, it is necessary for critical analysis as to how social norms are preserved.

Hall (1982, 1986) argues for the importance of using the concept of hegemony to understand the social position of racial groups because of Gramsci's proposition that the division of social power and influence is culturally driven. Hall (1986) claims:

One might note the centrality which Gramsci's analysis always gives to the *cultural factor* in social development. By culture, here, I mean the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society. I also mean the contradictory forms of "common sense" which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life (p. 26).

Hall highlights the importance of applying the study of culturally hegemonic structures in regards to the analysis of race in the United States by expressing:

[Gramsci] thus helps us to understand one of the most common, least explained features of "racism": the "subjection" of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideologies which imprison and define them...This has the most profound importance for the analysis of racist ideologies and for the centrality, within that, of ideological struggle (p.27).

Evaluating the importance of Gramsci in rhetorical criticism, Hall argues that oppressive conditions can be uncovered by applying Gramscian theory.

Hall's pursuit toward a better understanding of the systems of thought that shape individual ways of thinking leads to a discussion of ideology. Hall (1988) expounds:

The circle of dominant ideas does accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others; its classifications do acquire not only the constraining power of dominance over other modes of thought but also the inertial authority of habit and instinct. It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted: what the world

is and how it works for all practical purposes (p.44).

Here, Hall provides a diagnosis of the hegemonic structures in a society, revealing ideology as an instrument for establishing power. Althusser (1971) aided in this understanding through his explanation of how cultures are interpellated and subjectified based on social position. Specifically, while individuals are members of certain large cultures, like a nation or a religion, they also hold membership in co-cultures. These co-cultures can be made into subjects of the hegemony, subjugating them along the margins of society (Althusser, 1971; Hall; 1988). Althusser's (1971) contributions indicate that oppression is a product of the ideological foundations in a state. The oppression of groups like Black Americans is rarely correlated to an ideological method of coercion. However, recognizing oppressive conditions calls for the consideration of latent ideological influences in the foundation of these circumstances.

Identifying specific strategies for hegemonic dominance calls for us to explore how hegemony shapes the social world of the subaltern. While some critics analyze the impacts of physical altercations or oppressive policies in the preservation of the hegemony, it is important to understand that hegemonies are most effective through the manipulation of social norms (Hall, 1988). One of the most effective methods employed by the hegemony is that of, "divide and conquer." Gramsci (1975) explains that "reality is the deep and bottomless abyss that capitalism has dug between proletariat and bourgeoisie and the ever growing antagonism between the two classes" (p. 134). Here, Gramsci explains that the hegemon creates antagonism between classes in order to shift the focus of the proletariat to a conflict between similar social groups. Expanding on this notion, scholars contend that the hegemony constructs conflict between the separate



classes of the subaltern in order to distract them from the oppressive forces that impact the subaltern as a whole (Gramsci, 1975, 2000; Alpers, 2013). As the classes of the subaltern are consumed by the individualistic concerns of their particular class or ideological group, they can effectively lose sight of the hegemony that is oppressing them to begin with.

Moving from the investigations on the role of ideology in establishing hegemonic structures, scholars such as Carley (2013), Hall (1988, 1986), and Ferguson (1998) draw a connection between hegemonic oppression and political action. Specifically, race has been a focal point, as many scholars have investigated the degree to which race is a focus of hegemonic oppression. Carley (2013) proclaims:

There is an explicit linkage between racial difference and real political action, a linkage that Hall is able to perceive and that, I believe, allows for Gramsci's work to fit both the spirit and the letter of Hall's perspective on Gramsci's theoretical importance for the study of race and ethnicity (p.21).

Adding to Carley's hegemonic linkages, Hall expands that these identifications go beyond simply observing politics. Hall (1986) argues the study of hegemony and race explains the causes of contemporary relationships between social class and race, the history behind these hegemonic influences, the role the state has had in establishing these conditions, and how ideology has served to perpetuate oppressive conditions (p.23-26).

Ferguson (1998) states that forms of social control are often based on "the lived relationship of people with commodities, people with 'knowledge', people with institutions, people and power" (p.32). These relationships develop in a variety of ways, most notably through media, television, and entertainment portrayals. As media function

as a tool for the powerful, the production of messages can alter perceptions of minorities. Thus, evaluating the use of mass media when analyzing social perceptions is vital, as hegemonic forces may utilize these message vehicles to influence the public. Price (2005) analyzed the perpetuation of stereotypes through the mainstream news' reporting of Black culture and hip-hop music. Further, as news sources continue to produce connections of crime and race, individuals resist social change out of a media-produced fear of the groups of people who would benefit from these changes (Lotz, 1979).

Although scholars have examined the hegemonic structures that inhibit social progress for Black Americans, minimal analysis has been offered to elucidate the methods of subjugation. For instance, although the depictions of crime and racial stereotyping by the media are problematic, hegemonic reframing of public perceptions held toward Blacks impedes the potential for overcoming oppressive conditions.

### **Protest Rhetoric**

The United States is no stranger to protests and social movements, as many of the country's most notable changes are a result of protest. In situations of oppression, citizens have shown the ability to rise together in order to enact the changes necessary for the progression for their community. Hall (2011) argues that protests are a part of the American fabric, given that the country established independence from a protest that evolved into the American Revolution in the 1700s. Reflecting on this historical pattern, it is important for us to understand the nature of protests, how they mobilize, and how Blacks have expressed social agitation through resistance.

No movement rises to prominence instantly. Rather, social movements germinate slowly and the process of establishing a strong following takes time (Jensen, 2006).

Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2012) reveal the stages by which social movements evolve in their progression and growth.

Any form of protest, regardless of size, is first predicated on a self-recognition of social injustices and their origin. Without widespread understanding of necessary changes, a social movement can suffer from a loss of momentum and eventually become stagnant. Stewart et al. (2012) argue that successful protests begin with a strong stage of genesis, where the prevalent issues are discovered and critically analyzed. In assessing the genesis stage of social movements, Stewart et al. state:

Social movements typically begin during relatively quiet times with respect to the issue that protestors are addressing. The people, media, and institutions may be unaware of a problem or see it as insignificant or of low priority. Other events in their environments...dominate their attention (p.90).

Stewart et al. conclude that as the conditions become more evident to those afflicted, as “restless individuals view an imperfection that will grow more severe unless institutions address it quickly and earnestly” (p.90). These groups of restless individuals begin as minorities, slowly conceptualizing a solution through their protest. As these individuals identify the circumstances surrounding their oppressive situations, leaders will engage in uniting discourse in order to strengthen the movement as a whole (Ferguson, 2008).

Once individuals along the social margins engage in discourse necessary to understand the need of social change, a period of social unrest and strife will follow. Stewart et al. (2012) explain, “Increasing numbers of people rise up and express their concerns and frustrations over issues. The struggle may become visible in the media for the first time as a movement” (p.93). As membership of a social movement begins to

grow, it is additionally imperative for the movement itself to be headed by clearly defined leaders and intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971; Simons, 1970; Stewart et al., 2012). Leadership is the key component of a social movement that often determines the success or failure of the movement overall. These leaders will then implement rhetorical messages and strategies to unify their community and establish momentum.

Certainly no social movement is based solely on the efforts of a single individual. However, it is paramount for resistances to have an established leader to define structure and strategy when aiming to enact change within a super-structure or state. Simons (1970) describes that, as social movements gain momentum, they will undergo ridicule, attacks, and resistance from the system they oppose. Following, movement leaders must respond, and rebut the claims in order to sustain the movement (Stewart et al., 2012).

Artz and Murphy (2000) argue the importance of leaders, stating:

Mostly, [the movement's success] depends on how well the "organic intellectuals"—the leaders of the working class, including its African American, female, and other socially subordinate members and allies—respond to the awakenings, desires, interests, and the needs of the subordinate majority (p. 301).

Hence, successful social movements are contingent upon the effectiveness and resilience of the leadership in place. Simons (1970) emphasizes the role leaders must maintain in employing rhetorical strategies and adapting to multiple audiences in the struggle for social change. Therefore, protest leaders are not solely the image of the movement, but the bearers of great responsibility through their employment of rhetorical strategies that strengthen their cause.

Rhetorical strategies of leaders are a key element to resistance movements, as leaders unify and reassure the members of their cause. These rhetorical messages by movement leaders are what mobilize a movement (Stewart et al., 2012). Bitzer (1968) explains that leaders utilizing rhetorical discourse must have an understanding of the contexts surrounding their messages. For example, conditions of racial oppression may inspire individuals to resist the state. Griffin (1952) adds that as circumstances change, leaders must adapt and adjust for the sake of the movement.

No social movement leader will succeed in challenging the status quo unless they first gain support of the marginalized community. Stewart et al. (2012) declare that, “leaders lead because they possess one or more of three critical attributes-charisma, prophecy, and pragmatism” (p.134). Leaders must have the ability to connect with the community of the social movement. One essential element for protesting groups is that leaders separate themselves as being different than other members of the movement (Ferguson, 2008). This again relates to the rhetorical strategies that are employed by leaders, being that it is critical to establish a unified front for the movement. Clifford and Nepstad (2007) postulate that leaders must convey the ideology of the movement as it pertains to the individuals being oppressed. These ideologies, as well as cultural values, are articulated through rhetorical messages that serve as the foundation of the movement (Ferguson, 2008; Moland, 2002). Clifford and Nepstad (2007) also contribute, “If a leader upholds an ideology of martyrdom or a movement operates in a society where martyrdom has deep cultural roots, the dead leader will more easily be converted into a martyr with mobilizing potential for the movement” (p. 1390).

It is important to take notice of not only the ways in which a leader projects the ideology of the movement, but also how a movement moves forward after events such as the loss of a leader. These moments have occurred throughout history, especially concerning resistant groups of Black Americans with the Civil Rights Movement post Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X (Clifford & Nepstad, 2007; Dyson, 2006; Ferguson, 2008).

### **Black Resistance**

Protests in defense of Black America have occurred at several points in history. As these movements pass, Ferguson (2008) argues that Black Americans have employed specific forms of resistance with particular rhetorical strategies from leaders. Regarding the resistance in the Black community, Ferguson states:

Resistance is a constant theme of the historiography of slavery, of black literature and cultural theory, and of social scientific theories of black subjectivity and collective life. It practically defines Cultural Studies and Critical Race Studies, as well as the long Marxist tradition in the analysis of race relations going back to the 1910s. It also dominates the periodization of black American history (p.8).

Resistance is engrained in much of the historical understanding of Black culture in the United States and because of this, we must examine the strategies used in these times of resistance and how they apply to contemporary moments of resistance.

Being that resistance requires those oppressed to illustrate their conditions, much of Black American resistance has been rooted in artistic melodrama (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Ferguson, 2008). Expressions such as this take on many forms, such as literature, poetry, or visual arts. However, it is important to identify the historical role of music in Black resistance. Through the use of music embedded with rhetorical messages

of opposition, Black Americans have mocked those in positions of power, evoked dissent, and aroused agitation (Beighey & Unnithan, 2006; Rose, 1994; 2008). Additionally, the use of music as a rhetorical form of resistance is exemplary of the civility upon which many forms of Black protest is predicated upon. This notion of civility has been seen through the non-violent protests of the Civil Rights Movement as well as times of slavery, when Black slaves would resort to folk song and music rather than physically combating their White oppressors (Ferguson, 2008; Moland, 2002).

Recognized as one of the more significant moments of Black resistance in the United States, the Black Panther movement of the 1960s is what many scholars refer to when analyzing successful rhetoric for Black resistance. hooks (1994) explains that the Black Panther party was an embodiment of frustration amongst Blacks, culminating in widespread unity for racial equality. Boyd (2002) adds that using messages of liberation and black power, the Black Panthers provided hope and inspired many influential Black figures moving into the twenty-first century. Further, the difference between the Black Panther party and earlier efforts of resistance was the militant nature of the group and the strength of their leadership. Boyd proposes that as the Black Panther party moved on the party and its leaders were instrumental in establishing the hip-hop movement of today.

As we analyze the elements of Black resistance, key rhetorical features are the content of the message and the medium of communication. Specifically, notions of unity and dedication are common proposals in resistant messages of Blacks. In an effort to rhetorically unite their community, leaders deploy familial terms such as “brother” and “sister” to establish a connection to the impacted community. In times of resistance, these

terms can be critical to communicate a leaders connection to the entire community (Boyd, 2008; Dyson; 2006; Hamlet, 2011; Marable 2007).

### **Hip-Hop Discourse**

As a genre of music, hip-hop has been a useful platform of criticism of the social world. The idea of hip-hop, though, is one that is more nuanced than a simple category of music. It is important to remember that although many scholars reference hip-hop as a cultural movement, the music is simply an element of that lifestyle. While the purposes of this thesis are to discuss the rhetorical elements in the music, many scholars proclaim hip-hop as the contemporary movement for civil rights (Boyd, 2002). Just as the civil rights era of the 1960s saw progress for Blacks in the form of rights and privileges, many see hip-hop as a movement that continues the fight for Black equality. Moreover, scholars argue that hip-hop is a culture within the Black community that has united a people and provide them a voice (hooks, 1994; Kitwana, 2002; Ogbar 2007; Rose 1994, 2008). Whether considering hip-hop as a cultural movement or music genre, many scholars agree that since its origin, hip-hop encompasses the agitations of Blacks struggling to overcome their oppressive conditions.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origins of hip-hop, most scholars agree that the mid-1970s brought the birth of hip-hop. Rose (1991) explains the dance, fashion, and culture of hip-hop allowed Blacks to express themselves more than ever before. Kitwana (2002) posits that as hip-hop became more accepted among Blacks, the 1980s saw hip-hop music as the new voice for Black America. Edmin and Lee (2012) add that through the synthesis of the many hip-hop elements of dance, culture, and lifestyle, hip-hop music was birthed. Wright (2012) explains that, “From society’s periphery, a



generation created a cultural medium, hip hop, that served as both an expression of and an alternative to urban woes plaguing their lives, namely underemployment, poverty, and racial discrimination” (p.1). Armed with a voice to express their pain, hip-hop artists began communicating their experiences, which related to the harsh realities of many Black Americans. Rose (1991) clarifies that in late 1980s, “The advent of the group Public Enemy marked the emergence of rap as a political cultural form; Political Enemy as a point of enlightenment, as it were” (p.276). Boyd (2002), Nuruddin (2004), and Alridge (2005) suggest that with the coming of the hip-hop movement in the 1970s and 1980s, a generational shift in racial resistance also began. Nuruddin (2004) proposes:

I see hip-hop as something that has connected a generation of people. Here's something that started as just music, but from that music it has grown to encompass a whole culture, a lifestyle, an ideology, a point of view, points of view, if you will. And so for that reason, when I look at the present, I see that hip-hop has much more influence now than does civil rights (p. 51)

As hip-hop has garnered attention in the Black community, it is important to critically analyze why the mode of communication is so effective and how it impacted Black culture. Ogbar (2007) identifies hip-hop music as being influential because it is music born from resistance with real Blacks telling real stories, from real struggles.

In order to comprehend the rhetorical strategies of hip-hop music, it is necessary to consider the foundations of the genre. Along with the message and artist being influential to the meaning of hip-hop, the principal factor of the music is the notion of “realness.” Hip-hop artists are accepted and respected based on their ability to be real and “keep it real” (Boyd, 2002; Dyson, 2006,2010; Hess, 2005; Kubrin, 2005; Rose, 1994,

2008; White, 2011). In rhetorical terms, the notion of realness is largely an appeal to the authenticity and *ethos* of the rhetor. The concept of realness is that of credibility, needing to be one with the oppressed communities described in the music. Ogbar (2007) clarifies:

At its most fundamental level, “realness” in hip-hop implies an intimate familiarity with the urban, working-class landscapes that gave rise to hip-hop in the 1970s...Implicit in this spatial notion is a class consciousness that is inextricably connected to race. It implies (somewhat narrowly) that black communities are synonymous with poor communities (p.39).

Therefore, in order for us to evaluate the rhetorical foundations of hip-hop, it is first necessary to understand the contexts of the artist and the degree to which they are authentic in the hip-hop community. While some argue that hip-hop songs of minimal authenticity may still focus on social justice, the likelihood of an artist’s message reaching a targeted audience is diminished if they are not perceived as authentic.

A characteristic of hip-hop music that supplements the “realness” of the music is the imagery present in the music. Kalyan (2006) suggests that imagery plays a critical role in the storytelling of hip-hop, as artists convey their experiences of struggle. Hip-hop artists employ imagery to illustrate their image as being unique, authentic, and above all, dominant. Hip-hop scholars argue an element of competition within hip-hop, as artists will contend themselves as the most “gangsta” or “thug” in an effort to claim authority in the community (Dyson, 2010; Hess 2005; White, 2011). Kubrin (2005) adds:

To be a “real nigga” is to be from the ghetto, and by linking their identity to the ghetto instead of just to skin color, gangsta rappers acknowledge the limitations of racial politics... Not surprisingly, gangsta rap is considered the most controversial

style of the rap genre. Critics and scholars raise issue with its misogyny, nihilism, and excessive use of profanity and despair (p. 435).

Just as scholars argue that messages of profanity, misogyny, and violence are problematic for the genre as a whole, it is important to consider meaning behind these messages. Used to establish authenticity, maintain supremacy, and tell their unique tale of struggle, the oft-criticized messages explain a great deal about the hip-hop community. With perception and image being central to the success of hip-hop artists, Ogbar (2007) explored how consumers have received non-conforming hip-hop artists. He explains:

Spokesman for The Roots, Questlove, explains that, despite the decade of critical praise the group has received, the media exposure, and work with giants like Jay-Z...the group lacks commercial success largely because it does not conform to dominant expectations of hip-hop. "We're not minstrel. We're not cartoony. We're not gangsta. We're not ambiguously sexual. We're not overtly sexual. We're none of those things." Still, one cannot ignore the fact that the audiences at Roots concerts are typically overwhelmingly white (p.33).

Although socially conscious artists such as The Roots, Common, and Talib Kweli receive praise for their socially critical messages, their absence of the prescribed image of hip-hop artists results in little commercial success or exposure.

Just as vivid narratives help artists establish realness among peers and audiences, they can also relate history. Campbell (2005) recognized that while Whites have historically utilized literature and poetry to explain the histories, stories, and major events of their culture, Blacks do the same with hip-hop music. Carlton Ridenhour, otherwise known as "Chuck D" of the prominent hip-hop group "Public Enemy," often argues for

the importance of hip-hop. Chuck D expressed, “Hip-hop is black people’s CNN...in an age of misinformation during what is supposedly the information age” (Ridenhour, 1998, p.81). Woldu (2010) adds that despite the controversy surrounding hip-hop artists such as Public Enemy, Run-DMC, Tupac Shakur, and other so-called “gangsta rappers,” the truth remains that these artists offer insight into a culture often overlooked and neglected. Many scholars have come to agree that what makes hip-hop so impactful is the degree to which it provides Blacks a platform to communicate their circumstances. Kalyan (2006) and Rose (1994) also discuss that hip-hop music is a tool for Blacks to express the rage the feel toward their urban oppressions, illustrate their struggles, and demand change.

### **The Word of the Streets**

With hip-hop music’s sudden rise in popularity, artists and their messages were fervently debated in the press. With the swift ascension, critics and popular media maligned the genre for its graphic images of prostitution, violence, and substance abuse (Beighey & Unnithan, 2006; Forman, 2002; Hibbard, 2013; Rose, 1994, 2008; Watkins, 2005; White, 2011). Rose and Ridenhour (1998) add that hip-hop’s rise in popularity signaled a shift in lyrical content by hip-hop artists from the original socially consciousness. As certain artists relate instances of sex, drug use, and murder, news media and critics alike were armed with support as to why the genre should be dismissed. Analyzing these messages provides a unique window into the conditions of millions of Americans and what injustices they experience.

Hip-hop is heavily rooted in the competition and “battling” of peers against one another. Rappers often engage in what is known as a “ciphers,” where artists would be in a group or circle and would take turns rapping (Lee, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Ridenhour,

1998). These raps often include disses and insults to the other artists in the cipher in order to establish dominance over the peers as to which artist was the best among them. Lee (2009) and Morgan (2009) argue that competition is integral to the genre and although many songs may seem extreme or violent, they are often employed to convey authenticity in the streets as well as assert the artist's position of dominance.

Upon listening to a rap album, it is not be uncommon to come across themes of drugs, gangs, sex, murder, and greed. In response, Americans have at times refused to critically observe what these songs express about the world of these artists. Instead, consumers and critics have pointed to these explicit lyrics as a reinforcement of stereotypes and a promotion of immoral lifestyles. Beighey and Unnithan (2006) respond by suggesting that one must listen to these works and try to understand the environments that foster these experiences. Regarding hip-hop analysis Rose (1991) states:

Rap's cultural politics lies not only in its lyrical expression but in the nature and character of its journey through the institutional and discursive territories of popular culture. As is the case for cultural production generally the politics of rap music involves the contestation over public space, expressive meaning, interpretation, and cultural capital. In short it is not just what one says, it is where one can say it, how others react to what one says (pp. 276-277).

Hence, consumers, critics, and scholars alike must evaluate hip-hop from a more critical perspective if the music's intended message is to be understood. It is important to explore the oft-debated themes of the genre and assess social implications of these portrayals.

While many consumers and news media criticize aspects of hip-hop, some scholars offer an opposite interpretation. In the case of substance abuse such as alcohol,

marijuana, and even crack, many scholars again emphasize the environmental conditions that cultivate such activities. Cummings (2010), Forman (2002), and Ogbar (2007) propose that these portrayals can again be related to authenticity. For example, being a drug leader in the ghettos is often equated to possessing power in the community. In these subjugated conditions, a severe lack in jobs results in many individuals turning to drug dealing as a way to make a living (Dyson, 1993; Kitwana, 2002; Marable, 2007). Sure to follow from a last resort of drug dealing is the subsequent use and abuse of the substances commonly seen in hip-hop music. Boyd (2002) and Dyson (2010) write, while prominent rappers such as Jay-Z and Notorious B.I.G. rapped about drug dealing, their stories speak more to the desperation many young Black males face in inner cities. The same contextual understanding needs to be applied to the drug allusions in many lyrics, especially in regards to Tupac Shakur. Scholars argue Shakur's copious use of marijuana was more of a coping mechanism for the depression, fear, and paranoia he suffered while feeling trapped in the ghetto (Dyson, 2006; Iwanoto, 2003; McQuillar & Johnson, 2010).

Violence, too, is a lyrical aspect of hip-hop music that is subject to much debate and criticism. With hip-hop serving as a window to the ghettos of the inner cities, many lyrics often contain messages of explicit violence and even death (Rose, 1994; Woldu, 2010; Wright, 2012). While instances of what appears to be outright threat may be troubling to many critics of hip-hop music, understanding hip-hop culture will explain the nature of such vulgarities. As explored earlier, scholars identify graphic illustrations of experiences in the ghetto or gang culture as being necessary to attaining authenticity in the hip-hop community.

Critics frequently cite messages of misogyny and female degradation in hip-hop as being most problematic. Ridenhour (1998) argued that this is where the focus of hip-hop had soured. He argues that many early sexual depictions of women in hip-hop are derived from the rise in prostitution in urban areas, again a last resort for money just as drug dealing is for many individuals stuck in conditions of poverty (see also Iwamoto, 2003). Many hip-hop artists would project these images as a way to illustrate the horrors of their conditions in an effort to explain the need for help in ghetto environments. Ridenhour (1998) and Rose (2008) observe, though, that as hip-hop rose to popularity, so too did the instances of music degrading women. Rose adds that although hip-hop pioneers such as Shakur, Nas, and Public Enemy sought to empower women, future artists degraded females in an effort to inflate their masculine image. Sexualized images of women are indeed disturbing; however, it is more problematic to generalize all of hip-hop as being misogynistic as many critics and news media have.

Undeniably, many messages produced within the hip-hop genre are immoral and appalling. This is why it is necessary to critically read a song's messages and contexts rather than simply focus on profane language or imagery deployed on the surface. Scholars of the genre conclude that typical messages such as those of drugs, sex, and violence are not necessarily endorsements for partaking in illegal activity. Rather, these depictions are efforts to explain the world of the artist. Along with a critical reading of hip-hop lyrics, considering the context in which the music was created is crucial when exposing a text's meaning. In order to understand why many hip-hop artists adopted more criticized messages over time, it is essential to discuss the process of commodification.

## **Commodifying the Hood**

Analysts examine the 1990s and the commodification of hip-hop as the origins of hip-hop's content shift. Beginning as a musical platform of oppressive resistance, the focus of hip-hop gradually altered as record companies and businesses started to see the hip-hop genre as an opportunity. Wright (2012) assesses:

With its commodification, the social structure that produced black rage, namely the 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' became its chief controller and profiteer. Once seen as a threat to the status quo, black rage is ironically appropriated and controlled by the very power structure that produced it. (p.520)

Investigating circumstances such as these affords the understanding of how and why messages within a musical genre change. Additionally, evaluating the influences of commodification allows for an illustration of a text's intended message before control of its production was assumed. Occurrences of commodification appeared after hip-hop began to establish itself as a prominent cultural phenomenon.

Marx (1906) explains commodification as the process by which some entity that does not have any economic value assigned to it is given an economic value and utilized in the means of production. Various elements of society can be commodified, starting as a social value or cultural feature and being transformed into a commodity.

Commodification is often seen in social movements, artistic forms of expression, and methods of cultural resistance. Smith (2009) outlines that values, beliefs, and cultures may seem unpolluted by aspects of commodification, but in actuality once these discursive elements are afforded an economic value, they are essentially commodified.

Although hip-hop music was born the resistance toward primarily White dominance, the



genre in large part has been turned into a revenue-generating commodity for many White male-led record companies (Basu, 1998; Ridenhour, 1998).

Ridenhour (1998) extends that through the profiteering of hip-hop in the 1990s, music industry executives began to have control in the messages and lyrics of music produced. He contends:

Black culture became more marketable during the eighties, and white corporations found that they could make big bucks off of it. An example is the rise of Public Enemy, Rap Music, and Black male celebrities like Mike Tyson, Michael Jordan (pp. 1-2).

As hip-hop gained recognition as a potentially significant revenue generator for music executives, both the music and culture were commodified and the message of hip-hop was thus tainted (Badu, 1998; Rose, 2008). With hip-hop receiving more exposure and recognition than ever before in the early 1990s, scholarly debate ensued over the benefits and drawbacks that hip-hop experienced from the increase in publicity.

As rappers originally produced songs illustrating a group of people thirsting for a voice in society, many initially perceived the jump in popularity as the change many artists desired. It is easy to surmise that with a boost in exposure, hip-hop would generally benefit from the increase in viewership. However, hip-hop scholars identify the commodification influences on the content and identity of hip-hop as disastrous in the 1990s (Dyson, 2010; 2006; Ogbar 2007; Ridenhour, 1998; Rose, 1994; 2008). Evaluating the condition of hip-hop, Rose (2008) criticized contemporary hip-hop artists and their works that carry the commercialized messages of a changed genre. She claims:

Hip hop is not dead, but it is gravely ill. The beauty and life force of hip hop have been squeezed out, wrung nearly dry by compounding factors of commercialism, distorted racial and sexual fantasy, oppression, and alienation...I remember when hip hop was a locally inspired explosion of exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating community (pp.ix)

Rose's evaluation is not an uncommon one, as many hip-hop scholars place responsibility of the shifted hip-hop image and attention on the shoulders of capitalist executives who have seized control. This then begs the question of how hip-hop artists could be manipulated by the influences of predominantly White male executives that largely represent the oppressive conditions of the Black community. Analysts of hip-hop suggest that through manipulation and exploitation of the aforementioned notion of authenticity, record companies began to successfully take control of the music's direction.

As I posited earlier, the notion of authenticity is critical to an artist's acceptance in the hip-hop community. The authenticity and realness of a hip-hop artist also influences consumer perception of the artist. Where some speculate that authenticity is the first of many significant building blocks of rapper acceptance, the same notion has arguably been used in commodifying the genre to profit off of exploited artists (Dyson, 2010; Mcleod, 1999; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). Mcleod (1999) studies themes of authenticity in hip-hop lyrics and finds that artists will attempt to convey a sense of individuality over mass trends, being Black as opposed to White, being underground rather than commercial in politico-economic beliefs, carrying a "hard" emotional demeanor in gender-sexual relationships rather than being soft, locating home within the urban streets in contrast to the suburbs, and finally culturally identifying as old school

and diverging from being mainstream (p.139). McLeod's discussion of what makes a real artist versus a fake, or a "sell-out" is consistent with other explanations of hip-hop authenticity. However, he and other analysts conclude that these same elements have been alternatively interpreted and used against hip-hop artists (See Basu, 1998).

Hip-hop's foundation of authenticity was seen as a hindrance for the genre in the 1990s as media exploitations of artists deployed skewed images of rappers (Ogbar, 2007; Ridenhour, 1998). Where being from the streets and ghettos was once seen as an enhancement of credibility and authenticity, consumers began to condemn the menacing messages and images in hip-hop music. With record companies providing more exposure to hip-hop artists than ever before, media coverage of the songs and artists created a stir of fear and criticism in consumers. (Basu, 1998; Dyson, 2010; Jeffries, 2011). Moreover, as consumers harbored apprehension toward the genre's explicit lyrics and graphic narratives of crime, artists began to shift their personal image in an effort to gain more attention and consequently, more wealth. Ridenhour (1998) states:

Many in the world of hip-hop have begun to believe that the only way to blow up and become megastars is by presenting themselves in a negative light...The media just doesn't focus on those positive songs, they'd rather dwell on the negative.

That's what I feel happened with Tupac. Tupac had a loyalty to Black people no doubt...Tupac found that when he said things that were pro-Black and militant, people were not paying attention to what he was saying so he decided to go more and more into the side of darkness (p.3).

Ridenhour's critique of hip-hop's transformation during the 1990s reflects the impacts of commodification. With the dramatic and sudden rise to stardom for many of these artists,

they determined their socially critical lyrical content would not sell records. Basu (1998), Dyson (2010), and Rose (2008) conclude that company executives support the production of negatively stereotypical images because the violent, criminal, and sexually driven music is far more profitable than political criticisms.

With an overhaul in the image and message of the hip-hop community, many songs of the 1990s impeded consumer acceptance of hip-hop music. This turn was problematic since many artists did not particularly care about how the change in content would negatively impact the hip-hop genre. As McLeod (1999) and Rose (2008) advance, musicians not only were getting attention, but also were acquiring fame, accumulating wealth, and most importantly, were leaving the ghettos. However, in order to achieve these new heights of success, artists radically intensified their portrayals of urban life for the sake of authenticity and swift notoriety. Where artists once illustrated the presence of violence or street gangs, they were now touting themselves as murderers and gang leaders (Basu, 1998; Dyson, 2010; Jeffries, 2010; 2011; Hess, 2005; Rose, 2008).

Likewise, although the foundations of hip-hop illustrated the importance of love and female relationships, the 1990s saw rappers constructing songs of overt misogyny and female mistreatment and abuse. Hip-hop ultimately began to lose its focus during the 1990s with musical texts of social consciousness being a thing of the past (Dyson, 2006, 2010; Ridenhour, 1998). Artists began to shy away from utilizing their artistic capacities to critique the social world around them for fear of losing their “hard” emotional demeanor (Basu, 1998; Marshall, 1997; Tucker, 2001). McLeod (1999) explains the trait of being a hard, tough, or rugged individual as vital to authenticity. Although hip-hop was born through resistance to political oppressions, the 1990s hip-hop community

experienced a trend in boastfulness, fame ascension, and misogynistic dominance, and those who partook in continuing the politically charged content risked being considered weak and/or unauthentic.

In sum, the commodification of hip-hop for the benefit of corporations and record companies created a weakened state for hip-hop in terms of the capabilities to resist and influence society. Many artists began to bask in the spoils of what 1990s commercialized rap afforded them, although some artists stayed true to their resolve. Ridenhour (1998) specifies that while many artists were enamored with sex, money, and fame once they achieved success, the corporate expansion of hip-hop exposure offered a wider audience base for artists like Tupac, Ice Cube, and Nas. Dyson (2006), Forman (2002), and Ogbar (2007) provide that while many artists completely disregarded the social awareness and criticism of hip-hop, those who maintained them were not only effective, but often were the most censured and criticized by popular media as being dangerous or criminal.

As Ridenhour (1998) reflects, artists like Tupac did indeed change to a more explicit tone, but did so in order to take advantage of consumer thirsts for entertaining violence. Dyson (2006) adds that Tupac's bitterness toward the poverty-stricken conditions of his people was only fueled further through witnessing his peers indulge in the cheap exploitation of their musical craft. Dyson continues that while there are certainly changes in Tupac's works toward a more consumer-friendly viewership with more commercialized production elements; his messages largely remained heavily critical and even saw instances of a more aggressive and hostile Tupac Shakur. Thus, it is important to grasp the cultural shift of the hip-hop community as a result of the hegemonic strategy of commodifying the musical genre during this era.

## **Strategies of Hip-Hop Resistance**

Investigating the history of resistance in which hip-hop was conceived; it is apparent how the genre possesses the capacities for resistance. While some will claim that hip-hop does not have a clear target in songs of rage and despair, many of the artists themselves are clear in whom they aim to target. Frustrated with the image of Blacks in America, Chuck D (1998) states:

Hollywood's dishonesty, distortions, myths, and misconceptions about black people as nothing but watermelon stealin', chicken eatin', knee knockin', eye poppin', lazy, crazy, dancin', submissive, "Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks," ever since D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), all the way up to the 1950s—which is a forty-year period of straight up lies, propaganda, derogatory images, and bullshit—have been spread across not only the United States, but the entire world. That has had a major effect, not only on how society looks at us, but how we look at ourselves (Ridenhour, 1998, p.52)

Here, the rapper is critical of multiple entities that have come to negatively portray and impact his culture, notably Hollywood. More importantly, the rapper calls upon fellow Blacks to understand how they are being portrayed, how they comprehend the world around them, and how they continue to perpetuate these stereotypes.

Chuck D's irritation encompasses three of the significant issues confronted by artists in their efforts of resistance. First, these artists address the perpetuated stereotypes of Blacks in popular media in an effort to provide a more accurate representation of the misunderstood and oppressed community. Secondly, rappers will directly address the Black community, allowing individuals to recognize their own role in reinforcing and

potentially resisting oppressive conditions. While these subjects allow artists to directly address audiences in their own community and counter typecasting of Blacks, a third issue is also traditionally opposed: politics. Beighey and Unnithan (2006) relate, “Political rap is oppositional as it questions hegemonic forces and resists domination by producing alternative knowledge” (p.135). The notion of “forces” may be a vague term, but Price (2005) and Rose (1991) clarify these forces as the state political structures that have facilitated the oppressive conditions, and the instruments used to support them.

Wright (2012) articulates, “Not only was rap music a Black expressive cultural phenomenon, it was also a discourse of resistance, a set of communicative practices that constitute a text of resistance against white America’s racism” (p.518). While these engagements in discourse and criticism will vary between artists, the themes of their resistant texts are generally consistent. Beighey and Unnithan (2006) explain eight general foci of politically charged hip-hop music as the family/community, economic opportunity, education, health care, criminal justice, police brutality, mass media misinterpretations, and conspiracy of racial genocide (pp. 135-136). These focal points as Beighey and Unnithan explain, lead many artists recognize the coercive powers of the government as the sources of struggle. Potter (1995) explains:

Through its mythic representations, hip-hop offers both a critique and an alternative worldview to the assumed ideological grounds of the dominant, first by making the unarticulated assumptions *evident*, and second by setting these assumptions into play with counter-myths of its own (p.132).

These counter-myths, solutions, or propositions of change artists present in hip-hop music are critical to the mobilization against the hegemony.

Many factors are central to the message of change and resistance within hip-hop. The Black community must first accept the messages articulated by artists and the resistance methods outlined if they are to achieve social change (Hall, 1986; Stewart et al., 2012) This in many ways is contingent upon the characteristics, background, and leadership of the artist. Leadership characteristics are rarely seen in hip-hop artists. However, in times when hip-hop leaders do emerge, their influences are instrumental in mobilizing social change (Boyd, 2002; Hibbard, 2013).

As the hip-hop genre endures criticism and dismissals as a phase through which young people passed, society began to comprehend the magnitude of influence hip-hop held in the Black community. Cummings (2010) identifies that:

Despite a period of intense criticism and attempts to discredit and eradicate hip hop, including aggressive attacks by the FBI, CIA, local law enforcement across the United States, Tipper Gore, and C, Delores Tucker, hip hop has not just survived, but has influenced and dominated a generation (p.515).

Cummings (2010, p.511) additionally explains, “To many, hip hop spelled liberation,” and thus for a genre of music and form of Black subculture, hip-hop became a prominent movement of social justice. As Blacks accepted the hip-hop movement as an effort towards equality and social justice from their oppressive conditions, individuals have been significant in the mobilization of these resistant efforts. Producing texts that express the struggles of the Black community, these artists not only challenge the status quo, but also embody the resolve needed to overcome conditions of oppression.



## **The Voices of Change**

As is the case with the various forms of art, hip-hop artists carry their own unique techniques, styles, and messages (Ogbar, 2007; Ridenhour 1998; Rose, 1994). As these artists differ from one another, so too do their messages and subsequent influences they will have within the Black community and hip-hop consumers in general. Ogbar (2007) contends that while some artists produce powerful lyrics of social justice such as The Roots, Common, or Talib Kweli, this will not necessarily equate to the artist being accepted as an agent of change. Boyd (2002) and Dyson (2010) attribute this to the charisma and attitude many conscious rappers lack. Despite the meaningful songs these artists may produce, without a spirit of conviction from the rapper themselves, their message will fall short on the ears of consumers. Conversely, artists possessing high degrees of charisma and confidence experience commercial success, but will not be taken seriously as representatives of change (Forman, 2008; Hibbard, 2013; Dyson, 2010). This applicable to the Stewart et al. (2012) contention that:

Charismatic leaders have a sense of timing and the rhetorical skills to articulate what others can as yet only feel, strive toward, and imagine but cannot put into words or translate explicitly into action...Charisma enables persons to lead fellow activists in direct actions that stir things up, supply vigor to movements, and make people believe in the impossible (p. 123).

Dyson (2006) postulates that where prominent rappers such as Notorious B.I.G., Snoop Dogg, and Lil' Wayne experienced colossal attention and notoriety for their catchy songs and memorable tunes, their lack of content depth in songs and reliance on stereotypical portrayals impeded any societal influence they would have. Dyson adds that, in addition

to the minimal social criticism in their party image songs, many of these artists possessed little to no charisma necessary to be an agent of social action.

Undeniably, these artists and others like them not only made their mark on the genre of hip-hop, but on millions of fans with their music. However, leaders in hip-hop reach beyond commercial success, as artists must retain traits that allow them to be persuasive in the Black community, while also staying true to the foundations of the genre. While many artists insert politically charged messages in their works, they must do so in a compelling manner. In addition, the artists must be recognized as an authentic member of the community if they are to be accepted as agents of change.

Having ascertained the requisite characteristics of a leader in the hip-hop community we can investigate artists who assumed the role in hip-hop as a rhetorical agent of resistance. The first such artists are known as the pioneers of hip-hop, as they not only laid the groundwork for what is known today as hip-hop music, but also established the genre's resistance qualities (Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). They are the hip-hop collectives of Public Enemy, Run DMC, as well as N.W.A. These hip-hop collaborations changed society and hip-hop during the 1980s, during what many consider as the Golden Era of Hip-hop (Dyson, 2006, 2010; Tucker, 2001). Ogbar (2007) explains:

Public Enemy's Black Nationalist style and sensibility pulled from the black radical tradition, making conscious references to icons of black militancy, while N.W.A. adhered to a caustic style of street-level violence and pathos. For both groups, prisons were anathema, as a form of political repression and as a threat to street-level enterprise for the other. Subsequent hip-hop artists through the first

decade of the twenty-first century would express influences from one or both of these camps (p. 147).

Unique in their individual styles and messages, these groups employed rhetorical messages that evoked critical thought towards society in the Black community. In addition to these innovative groups, Run DMC produced politically aggressive music that established them as leaders in the Black community (Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1991). Thanks to the critically acclaimed hegemonic criticisms such as 1989's "Fight the Power" and 1988's "Fuck the Police," these hip-hop groups positioned hip-hop as a platform for political discourse (Boyd, 2002; Cummings, 2010; Dyson, 1994; Kalyan, 2006; Ridenhour, 1998). From these groups, the hip-hop music scene introduced key individual rappers who profoundly influenced society with their more aggressive social criticisms.

Following the earliest incarnations of hip-hop, where bands would use their unique sound and groove to critique the world around them, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the introduction of figures such as Nas, Jay-Z, and Tupac Shakur. Kalyan (2006) adds that Nas, armed with an aggressive tone and comprehensive knowledge of the historical roots of Black oppression, was able to expose the deficiencies of American politics as inner cities continued to experience neglect. Jay-Z, a New York native like Nas, quickly earned the approval of the Black and hip-hop communities through his account of life in the Marcy ghettos (White, 2011). Conveying the experiences of a Black man struggling to make ends meet, Jay-Z's music demonstrates a modern day rags-to-riches narrative that Blacks aspired to. Kubrin (2005) expands that with tracks like, "Hard Knock Life" (1998), "Where I'm From" (1997), and others, Jay-Z painted the realities of the ghetto in a way that provided Black audiences with hope of escaping poverty. Nas

and Jay-Z introduced unique styles of rapping while affirming the genre as a mode of social resistance (Dyson, 2010; Woldu; 2010). Although these two and other rappers of the 1990s influenced the progress of hip-hop, many scholars agree that no individual had a more profound influence than Tupac Shakur.

### **Tupac Shakur: Rap Revolutionary**

A human embodiment of Black experience, frustration, and hope, Tupac Shakur profoundly touched the lives of many Black Americans. Kitwana (2002) declares:

Ask any young black American born between 1965 and 1984 where they were on September 13, 1996, and most can tell you...you'll get recollections as crystal clear as a baby boomer reminiscing on his or her whereabouts upon hearing of the assassinations of Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., or Malcolm X" (pp. 3-4).

Shakur's death was an unforgettable one within the Black community because of the message for which he stood and the justice he sought to achieve. Unlike the hip-hop groups that preceded him with their clever jabs at the establishment and society, Shakur used the hip-hop platform to carry out an overtly aggressive verbal and musical assault on what he saw wrong with the world. As Dyson (2006) explains:

Tupac is perhaps the representative figure of his generation. In his haunting voice can be heard the buoyant hopefulness and desperate hopefulness that mark the outer perimeters of the hip-hop culture he eagerly embraced, as well as the lives of millions of youth who admired and adored him (p.13).

Harnessing the frustrations of his past and connecting with fellow Blacks around America, Shakur was the seminal figure of resistance in the early 1990s. Pinn and

Easterling (2009) assess that Shakur was revered as a prophetic leader of Blacks, with an enormous following devoted to him as he was devoted to fighting for their well-being.

Shakur's unique style of communicating the experiences of the ghettos in his music allowed him to form a powerful connection with Black audiences. Tucker (2001) suggests that Shakur's raps and poetry were direct criticisms of the dominant and overall hegemonic marginalization of Blacks in the United States. Keeling (2003) explains that the rhetorical strategies of Shakur criticized political establishments in addition to Blacks in the streets, condemning the self-destructive aspects of Black culture that inhibit social progress. Shakur's music at times served as a recounting of Black history, allowing others to critically understand and sympathize with the oppressive conditions Blacks experience. Dyson (2006) and Jeffries (2010) present Shakur as an artist whose anger towards oppression and passion for a better world rhetorically unify Blacks. Although Shakur was lambasted by popular news media for his messages and vulgarity, his music uniquely illustrated societal ills with a conviction that separated him as a influential leader. Perry (2005) adds that Tupac not only served as a proponent for social justice politically, but also depicted the need for changes in the Black community in an effort to promote unity and critique the inherent issues in the Black community that limit the potential for social change.

As scholars recognize the progress Tupac Shakur fought for with his music, many overlook or have disregarded the role he played as the leader of Blacks as a whole. As Stewart et al. (2012) express, while social movements may be the work of large groups of individuals, the success of the movement can hinge upon the work of very few or even one individual. Additionally, Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony emphasizes the

importance the individual and his or her influence in promoting awareness and consciousness of a given issue. While scholars praise Shakur's lyrics for their social consciousness and vivid portrayal of experiences in poverty, many overlook Shakur's efforts in advancing social change. Therefore, I feel it is necessary to further analyze the rhetorical functions of Shakur's music produced during his life and discover how these works served as a catalyst toward social change and recognition of hegemonic conditions.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the previous academic literature that serves as the foundation for this thesis. Determining the oppressive conditions of Black Americans during the time of Shakur's life elicits an understanding of the experiences that guided his musical productions. These conditions provide an understanding of what Bitzer (1968) argues is the rhetorical situation for the messages that Shakur would create. Next, investigating literature of resistance rhetoric demonstrates how hip-hop can function rhetorically as a method of resistance. Additionally, utilizing previous studies of hegemonic structures in the U.S. serves a foundation of conducting a gramscian criticism. From this, I discuss hip-hop's communicative elements in promoting social change. I outline the various capacities of hip-hop music and eventually introduce how hip-hop has previously been employed as a medium of resistance. Ultimately, reviewing the literature pertinent to this thesis uncover the previous academic assessments of Shakur and highlight weaknesses in the literature in viewing him as a leader of hegemonic resistance.

Given the commercial success of Shakur as well as the recognized messages of political criticism and resistance discourse in which he engages, it is critical to investigate his work as a potential influence on others. With social oppression still being felt, it is essential to investigate the origins of these conditions and how marginalized communities

contest them. Aforementioned scholarly research conjectures that cultures along these oppressed peripheries of society engage in resistance through the use of art and music, being that their opportunities for discourse are limited. While hip-hop has been established as a means of critical discourse for Black Americans, there has been little study examining how the genre can be used in resisting hegemonic conditions.

Therefore, in this thesis I will make the argument for Tupac Shakur as an intellectual of progressive change through his use of resistant hip-hop music. In order to explore this, I will engage in a rhetorical analysis to inquire as to what elements of hegemonic criticism exist within Shakur's lyrics. Following this, it will be necessary to determine the rhetorical foundations of resistance that are present within Shakur's lyrics. Considering these, I will explore why Shakur's works are successful in rhetorically resisting these hegemonic apparatuses and how they function in providing resistance even after his untimely death. I will use this criticism to ascertain the capabilities of hip-hop music in enabling resistance for cultures against hegemonic states. Along these lines, I wish to utilize the present study to understand what forms of cultural resistance are effective in opposing oppressive conditions.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

To explore the resistance messages in Shakur's music, it is essential to determine a method of analysis in investigating these texts. Rhetorical analysis of songs exposes subtle meanings in the musical texts that suggest a particular message. Beyond merely selecting the proper method of analysis is the careful selection and understanding of the texts that will be analyzed in this thesis. These texts that I have selected are laden with Shakur's experiences in conditions of poverty and demands for change. Further, by investigating these texts through rhetorical criticism, they serve as a window into a condition of society that may otherwise be misunderstood.

Selecting an appropriate method of analysis, we must consider the specific portions of Shakur's texts to which I will be applying the method. Exposing lyrical notions of social conditions and poverty are two essential aspects of the songs that are critical to the forthcoming analysis. Additionally, beyond the identification of these notions, the analysis will allow for the application of the music and its messages to a larger understanding of society as a whole.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will engage in a rhetorical criticism of Tupac Shakur's songs as they promote resistance against the hegemonic structures of society. This technique will require a comprehensive investigation into the rhetorical messages of



the texts and consequently critique the messages as they serve the purposes of social resistance. The theoretical criticism I will be applying to the lyrics of Tupac Shakur is a Gramscian rhetorical lens. This method allows for the unearthing of characteristics of society that are depicted in the songs that are used as utilities of hegemonic dominance. Before an explanation of the way in which the Gramscian method will be applied and the concepts that will be central to the analysis, it is first important to define the concept of rhetoric and what it means to critique the rhetorical aspects to a text.

### **Elements of Rhetoric**

Rhetoric as a term and a discipline has been both debated and misunderstood by countless groups of people throughout time. While many scholars will harken back to the Aristotelian conception of the term as a means of persuasion, Campbell (1972) offers:

Rhetoric is the study of man's symbolic attempts to make order of his world, to discover who he is, and to interact with others in ways that make his life more satisfying. In this sense rhetoric includes the study of the persuasive dimension of all language (p.11).

Campbell offers key aspects to consider when defining how rhetoric functions in shaping an individual's social world. The first of these is "symbolic attempts," which additionally relates to another vital rhetorical term of "language." Sillars (1991) explains these attempts as messages and texts that are embedded with meaning. Sillars explicates that these messages are more than simple, "raw verbal and visual texts which exist in books, speeches, video(s), or record," being that they offer meaning about the world (p. 17). Hence, while the notion of rhetoric is grounded in persuasion, it is important to also view rhetoric as a process through which meaning is embedded in messages. Sillars and

Gronbeck (2001) advance that these meanings can be abstract, being that many aspects of the world are textualized. They posit that textualizations of the world such as experienced events or memories are woven into a text, which in turn inserts a rhetorical meaning (2001, p.9). Scholars such as Campbell (1972) and McKerrow (1989) agree that through the investigation of these rhetorical meanings, understandings of our world are revealed.

Moving from an understanding of rhetoric as a tool for understanding persuasive elements and meanings in texts, the process investigating these artifacts for their rhetorical meanings is a principal feature of this thesis. These investigations, known as rhetorical criticisms, provide an analysis of selected texts as they rhetorically possess meaning. Rhetorical criticism is the process by which carefully observing a rhetorical act reveals underlying intentions of the rhetor (Sillars, 1964). Sillars and Campbell (1972) profess that rhetorical criticism is the process of exposing the meaning of a rhetorical act. These exposed meanings can enhance the understanding of society and explain notions of the social world that may be misunderstood, such as instances of social oppression.

One such application of rhetorical criticism that allows for a critic to investigate the separation of influence and power within a given rhetorical text is that of critical rhetorical criticism. McKerrow (1989) elucidates, “As theory, critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as they are exercised in a relativized world...In practice, a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power” (p.91). These practices of critical rhetoric and the analysis of critical texts can uncover power dimensions in various facets. For instance, Ono and Sloop (1995) expand that critical analysis of vernacular discourses such as songs, speeches, and written works offer a unique insight to the divisions of power within historically oppressed

communities. Applying critical rhetoric to diverse texts, notions of dominance can be revealed as they influence specific groups. Hence, through the use of the Gramscian lens, one can discover where power lies, as well as how it is attained and challenged.

### **Gramscian Theory**

The theoretical concepts of Antonio Gramsci have been utilized in the works of many cultural and critical scholars since his presentation of cultural hegemony. However, Zompetti (1997) notes that few such scholars have applied these works to the practices of critical rhetoric and often when scholars utilize the concepts of Gramsci, they fail to recognize the multitude of conceptual facets that produce hegemonic structures. Overlooking these concepts not only impedes the understanding of hegemony, but also serves to weaken a critic's application of Gramscian analysis as a critical lens for exposing hegemony. Therefore, in this justification of the method of this thesis, I will clarify hegemonic concepts and explain how they are exposed through rhetorical analysis.

In an effort to fully comprehend the Gramscian lens, one must first delve into the historical underpinnings, studying Gramsci himself and the influence he possessed in explicating hegemonic aspects of the state. An Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci produced many political works while incarcerated that critiqued and explained the conditions of Italian politics and how certain social groups were marginalized while others rose to authority. Buttigieg (1991), Green and Ives (2009), Ives (2004), Kang (2013), and Zompetti (1997, 2012) explain that through Gramsci's emphasis on historical factors, discursive cultures, and language, he was able to identify ways in which hegemonic powers achieve dominance, maintain control, and resist opposing movements. Conceptual evaluations of power were innovative during this time and allowed for

individuals to critically perceive the world around them to understand how society came to be. From this, theorists and scholars began applying these Gramscian concepts to various structures of society, discerning the hegemonic elements they possessed.

### **Gramsci and Hegemony**

Many Gramscian scholars and critical theorists contend the notion of hegemony is perhaps the most significant theoretical contribution of Gramsci. From his renowned *Prison Notebooks* and other essays, Gramsci (1971) reshaped the conversation of critical discourse through an insertion of cultural dynamics into considerations of notions of power. Specifically, Gramsci advanced beyond the traditional views of Marxism when discussing critical rhetoric to include divisions of power determined by cultural elements. Specifically, as Marxist frames of thought discussed social concepts as being economically determinant, Gramsci emphasized the importance of culture in determining social constructs. While McKerrow (1989) argues that critical rhetoric involves critiques of dominion and freedom in a culture, Gramsci's notion of hegemony establishes the tactics and elements that serve to produce such divisions and preserve them. Gramsci (1971) defined hegemony as the dominant group in a state in terms of cultural and political dominance that rise to power through the consent of its people (p.12). Zompetti (1997) adds, "Hegemony is a type of power relationship between the dominant center of power and its subaltern periphery [oppressed communities]" (p.72). While some scholars debate the moral nature of hegemonic forces, it is important to note that Gramsci neither categorized hegemony as good or bad, but rather, defined it in terms of power dynamic and control. Sassoon (1980) claims that although Gramsci developed many of his premises from Marxism, a major aspect of difference between the two perspectives was

Gramsci's emphasis on the discursive cultures that construct hegemonic relations.

Discursive cultures are the various social groups and cultures to which an individual belongs, which form the discursive formation of an individual's social position.

While Gramsci established the understanding of hegemony as the power relationships and divisions within a state, his critical theory was not limited solely to the largest systems of domination and their subalterns. Gramsci explains that while super structures of hegemony such as the state exist, smaller forms of hegemony also exist in opposition to the super-structures or just along the subaltern. Gramsci (1920) suggests:

They arise, develop, decline and renew themselves as the various strata of the social classes locked in struggle undergo shifts in their real historical significance, find their conditions of existence and development rapidly altered, and acquire a greater and more lucid awareness of themselves and their own vital interests (p.334).

Forces of hegemony are thus present not only in the super-structural sense of the government and major corporations, but also among the masses and along the societal peripheries. Emergent hegemony can then come to mobilize against the overall superstructure that maintains dominance over the masses or also attempt to attain power over sectors along the peripheries of society.

Resistance and protest against hegemony in the contexts of Gramscian theory can be explained as instances of smaller scale formations of hegemonic mobilization against the super-structures like the state. Kang (2013) contends that social movements are in essence efforts to overthrow the currently existing structures of hegemony in order to assert their own dominance. Gramsci (1971) adds:

These disorderly and chaotic energies must be given a permanent form and discipline. They must be absorbed, organized and strengthened. The proletarian and semi-proletarian class must be transformed into an organized society that can educate itself, gain experience and acquire a responsible consciousness (p.66)

Here Gramsci is offering that as time passes, the agitations of the oppressed subaltern must be harnessed, organized, and fostered in order to fashion a resistance. Gramsci concludes that these subaltern resistances to the hegemony transform into a larger entity such as a political party or movement that seek to establish its own hegemony.

### **Gramsci and Common/Good Sense**

Following the principles of hegemony as a relationship of powers in a social setting, it is essential to consider the communication methods that establish *how* hegemony attains and preserves control. Gramsci (1971) first explains the maintenance of power through the following:

The spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence), which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 12)

As Gramsci and many scholars of hegemonic theory stipulate, the strength of hegemony is rooted in the degree to which subjects and citizens consent and accept the social standards that the hegemony projects. Bates (1975) explains that hegemony “means political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (p.52). Bates and

Germino (1990) further offer that this “spontaneous consent,” as Gramsci described, lauded the works of the hegemonic state in power, promoted the state of the status quo, and justified the conditions of the subaltern. Zompetti (1997) adds that the consent of the subaltern is certainly helpful in reinforcing hegemony, but their desire for it is what truly empowers the hegemony. Zompetti adds that such strengthened hegemonies will then “co-opt any resistance or incorporate the resistance into part of the overarching universal, or hegemonic, philosophy through the use of common sense” (p.73).

Impulsive acceptance of the values laid out by the hegemony not only bolsters hegemonic strength but likewise generates common sense amongst the masses. Common sense, as Gramsci expressed, is the unquestioned customs and cultural values that the subaltern believe as these have been rhetorically explained to them (1971, p.419).

Zompetti (1997) writes:

Through the use of articulating practices, hegemony works to construct cultural perceptions so the subaltern feel they are included in the superstructure.

Conceptions that justify the existing order and the subaltern’s location within the discourse are products of common sense (p.73).

Gramsci presented the notion of common sense to explain the tactics in which the hegemony will justify their perpetuation of supremacy. Additionally, along with the justification of the current positions of power dynamics, Gramsci’s concept of common sense illustrates the societal norms and traditions to which many within the subaltern subscribe. Artz and Murphy (2000) for example explicate that conventional practices such as higher education, establishing financial credit, and certain political participation

may be accepted by the masses but can arguably be asserted as common sense notions that have come to fortify the hegemonic control of the state.

As the hegemony continues to benefit from the acceptance of the subaltern and thus promote common sense standard, hope for reform within such hegemonies looks bleak. However, Gramsci assessed that as individuals within the subaltern continue to be critically aware and self-reflexive of their societal position, the attainment of what can be understood as “good sense” is made possible (1971, p.346). Good sense and the concept of self-reflexivity are depicted by Gramsci (1971) as a:

Struggle of political “hegemonies” and of opposing directions...in order to arrive at the working out of one’s own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one (p.333)

Gramsci reasons that in this moment of self-reflexivity and awareness, the opportunity arises for “becoming a culture, a form of good sense” that comes to articulate the concern for the well-being of the collective. Smith (2010) contributes that through self-reflexivity and consciousness of being subjected under the hegemony, individuals and groups can work toward a collective will that benefits the masses of subaltern populaces.

### **Gramsci and Intellectuals**

As Gramsci presents the dynamics of hegemonic relationships and the strategies in which these relationships are maintained and challenged, so too does he articulate the role of leadership and self-reflexivity. Gramsci proclaims that all people are intellectuals in some fashion of the hegemonic structure, given those along the subaltern offer intellectual worth through their labor and the individual hegemons possess intellectual



value in their designs of supremacy (1971, pp.9-10). Zompetti (1997) too assesses Gramsci's expression of intellectuals and advances, "Gramsci distinguishes between different types of intellectuals...What is important for the critique of freedom, however, is the organic intellectual who overcomes the dominant forces within the discourse in order to accomplish criticism" (p.76).

Smith (2010) posits that Gramscian "intellectuals represent the conditions and aspirations of the subaltern" (p.45). Therefore in understanding the function of the intellectual, it is important to note that they not only initiate the self-reflexive process of establishing good sense, but also are recognized as beacons of change. While Gramsci may have explicated the belief that every individual is an intellectual to some degree for his or her biological capacity to think, the function of intellectuals in the scope of hegemony is unique. These intellectuals of the subaltern as well as the hegemony possess a consciousness of their social location, while also serving organizational functions in fostering their respective hegemonies (Gramsci, 1971, p.12). Gramsci (1971) continues:

It can be observed that the 'organic' intellectuals which every new class creates alongside itself...in the course of its development, are for most part 'specializations' of particular aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence (p.6).

These organic intellectuals serve a critical purpose in developing and supporting the hegemony, firstly through their engagement of criticism and critical discourse. Zompetti (1997) argues that these intellectuals become "keystone figures for the development of a solid resistance" (p.76), while Germino (1990) and Smith (2010) contribute that these individuals serve as the leaders of not only criticism, but of the movements themselves.

## **Tupac Shakur's Texts**

Next, it is important to identify and justify the use of the specific artist and texts being analyzed in this thesis that call for the use of the Gramscian rhetorical criticism. Tupac Shakur was selected primarily for the thematic propensities of his music. A hip-hop artist known for his talent, conviction, and heart, Shakur's works often focus on social commentary and address various ills of society. While Shakur was not the only socially conscious rapper of his time, what made Shakur rise above and beyond other rappers of the era was the intelligence, passion, and subaltern experiences that can be clearly seen in the lyrics in his songs. As a son of a former Black Panther Party member, Shakur's recognition of Gramscian common and good sense ways of thinking was strengthened by an upbringing of political, social, and economic discourses between Shakur, his mother Afeni, and other prominent Black Panthers (Dyson, 2006; Rose, 1994). While his music was critically acclaimed and recognized during his lifetime, his untimely demise has served to turn Shakur into a martyr of sorts within the Black community, further placing an aura of mysticism on the rapper with conspiracies and controversy surrounding his murder (Rose, 2008; Tucker, 2001). Murdered during a time where his popularity was at an all-time high, many Blacks speculate that Shakur's outspoken music played a role in his death (McQuillar & Johnson, 2010).

Prior to selecting the specific songs for analysis in this thesis, I first determined the studio albums Shakur released that I would consider analyzing. Given that this thesis is arguing for the impacts Shakur made for the works *he* produced and released during his lifetime, I narrowed the selection of albums to those released prior to Shakur's death. While this may have cut my library selection of texts virtually in half considering

Shakur's estate released six studio albums after his 1996 death in addition to the four he released while alive, it is important as a critic to consider these musical works that he was purposive in releasing to the world (McQuillar & Johnson, 2010). Specifically, the intentional and deliberate release of these texts rather than the posthumous releases may suggest an overarching message by the rhetor, Shakur. In addition, I will only analyze Shakur as the rhetor in these musical works rather than the other featured artists in any song. From these four albums, *2Pacalypse Now* (1991), *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* (1993), *Me against the World* (1995), and *All Eyez on Me* (1996), I chose not to select musical texts from the 1996 release *All Eyez on Me*.

My rationale behind not considering any works from Shakur's 1996 release *All Eyez on Me* is because of the context surrounding the album. As Dyson (2006) and McQuillar and Johnson (2010) provide, prior to this album's writing, recording, and production, Shakur was in prison for 11 months before Death Row Records executive Marion Knight had posted the \$1.4 million dollar bond under the condition that Shakur would release three albums under the label. The 1996 album marked a much different tone and content focus for Shakur, moving from the introspective illustrations of life in the marginalized ghettos to a focus on attractive sounds in the music with songs lauding the spoils of fame and fortune. Understandably, some will contend that this album was a release of Shakur's and he purposively changed his direction of lyrical content. However, critical scholars claim, studying the pressures, expectations, and conditions surrounding Shakur during his time on Death Row Records reveals a major influence label executives had in dictating the lyrics and musical production for the songs on 1996's *All Eyez on Me* (Dyson, 2006; Kitwana, 2002; Ogbar, 2007; Pinn & Easterling, 2009; Rose, 2008;

Tucker, 2001; Wright, 2012). Lazin, Holmes, and Ali (2003), and Pinn and Easterling (2009) add that Shakur's time as an artist for Death Row Records was spent secluded in studios working in paranoia of what consequences might come if record executives were not satisfied with his production. Given these external influences and circumstances surrounding the 1996 album, I will forego selecting texts from that album in favor of his first three studio releases.

From his most politically and socially critical debut release, *2Pacalypse Now* (1991), I have selected the following five tracks to explore: "Trapped," "I Don't Give A Fuck," "Words of Wisdom," and "Brenda's got a Baby." Of the available 13 tracks from the 1991 release, these four were selected for their socially, politically, and economically charged messages as Shakur lambasts the oppressive powers present in society. While many tracks from this album are laden with meaning regarding the progress of Black Americans, these four had diverse messages touching on police brutality, teenage pregnancy, female mistreatment in Black communities, and drug dealing.

Moving to Tupac Shakur's second major album release, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* (1993), the following tracks were chosen: "Holler if You Hear Me," "Something 2 Die 4," "Keep ya Head Up," and "Papa'z Song." The rationale for investigating these four songs over the other 12 songs on the album was the shift in tone and message behind their production. As the forthcoming analysis will express, just as Shakur's first studio release was grounded upon frustration, hopelessness, and anger for his conditions, his second studio album continued these themes in an effort to build a more socially conscious Black community.

To conclude these analyses of Shakur's music, from the *Me against the World*

(1995) album, I will be assessing the title track, “Me against the World” to illustrate the final components to the analysis that support the overall argument of this thesis. I only selected one of 15 possible tracks was intentional for a few reasons. This is the first such track that was utilized as an overall album title, arguably establishing it as encompassing the overall message of the album itself. While his debut release illustrated a vivid and troubling illustration of a man fed up with the world around him, his second release is builds off of these frustrations, culminating in the 1995 track that positions for change.

In his third release, the lone track that was selected is reminiscent of Shakur’s origins as a socially conscious rapper who sought to expose the truth surrounding society. The *Me Against The World* track though additionally allows the audience to see the toll that leadership and resistance had taken on Shakur. As the text’s lyrics suggest, the title track from the 1995 release is a window into the paranoia, stress, and mental strain Shakur experienced as he continued to resist the sources of oppression in the United States. Thus, not selecting additional tracks from the 1996 album despite its commercial success is also based on Shakur’s shift in content focus as a result of the influences of external entities. As Dyson (2006) and Edwards (2002) postulate, Tupac’s rise to fame in order to reach a wider range of audiences in order to help them meant that he had to also cater to the commercial demands of contemporary hip-hop. These demands were often seen in the lyrical content for which hip-hop is often criticized for, such as the promotion of drug use, violence, and sex. Therefore, despite the 1996 album’s immense financial success and even the inclusion of profound tracks such as *Dear Mama*, since the album is more commercially accommodating and mostly possesses tracks that are not pertinent to the hegemonic resistance for Blacks, this thesis will only analyze the title track from the

album. Further, in selecting the precise songs and albums that will serve as the texts of criticism for the thesis, I have undergone the necessary processes to obtain copyright permissions for each of the songs given their property to the estate of Shakur.

### **Process of Analysis**

Since the analysis of this thesis will include several texts as well as multiple theoretical applications, the procedure for investigating these texts will need to be methodical. First, when investigating the texts of the analysis, it is important that a clear distinction be made as to what exactly this process encompasses. This rhetorical investigation will be derived from close textual analysis of the musical lyrics. As earlier notations of Sillars and Gronbeck's (2001) assessment of textual analysis expressed, textual analysis of the works in question will possibly express subtle cultural meanings of the work as a whole. This requires not just inspecting the lyrics for their surface statements, regardless if they may have societal implications in the basic reading of the lyrics. Instead, Sillars and Gronbeck explain that exhaustive analyses such as these require not only taking a reading of the text, but also using deeper critical analysis to exhume the concealed meaning in order to craft a conclusion about society. As such, I will carefully comb through the content of these songs and examine their meaning through the Gramscian rhetorical criticism. Additionally, this comprehensive examination will require taking into consideration the contexts of the songs and deriving what possible historical aspects may be present.

While applying a Gramscian criticism of these songs, I will organize the study through the prevalent themes that emerge from the examination process. The songs will be analyzed and evaluated for its rhetorical components individually to examine how they

relate the message of Shakur's respective albums. Once the selected songs from each album are explored, I will ascertain the messages evoked from the texts and the albums as a whole as they relate the social inadequacies stemming from hegemonic conditions. Because the texts are being critically evaluated through the Gramscian lens, I expect that the culminating conclusion will express and support a resistance to hegemonic conditions presented by the resistance leader, Shakur.

The justification of ordering the analysis based on emergent themes from the songs is central to formulating the argument of Shakur as an individual leader of oppressive resistance. I contend that Shakur's ascension to his role as a chief leader for resistance and social justice was not one that immediately developed simply from his entry into the hip-hop music scene. Instead, I intend to illustrate through this thesis that Shakur's progression as a leader can be followed through the music he published as his career blossomed. With each of Shakur's releases, varying messages can be seen through rhetorical analysis of these songs. Therefore, I will organize the analysis through the use of emergent themes. Following the identification of these common themes within the texts, their connection to hegemonic structures will be assessed in the explication of the Gramscian resistance aspects in Shakur's music.

### **Textual Themes**

With the application of the Gramscian method to these nine songs, it is necessary to identify the themes, motifs, and instances within the compositions that will be crucial to the assessment of hegemonic conditions. As Perry (2005), Ridenhour (1998), and Rose (1994; 2008) describe, hip-hop artists illustrate moments of police brutality, corruption, hopelessness, and a feeling of being trapped in the inner-city ghettos through their lyrics.

Rose (1994) and Woldu (2010) add that these portrayals offer a window for understanding the social injustices that may otherwise be overlooked. Boyd (2002), Dyson (2006) Edwards (2002), and Iwamoto (2003) offer that Shakur frequently called attention to the atrocities against Black people through his discussions on police corruption and illustrations of extreme poverty.

Rhetorically identifying the cultural themes present in the rhetor's contentions is essential to the eventual evaluation of the hegemonic resistance in the music. First, once an assessment of a song has been completed, I will subsequently identify these themes code them for their application to the criticism. To be clear, the assessments of the individual songs will aim to critique the texts for their effectiveness in regards to rhetoric, as well as evaluate their role in depicting the hegemonic conditions and to discern how they serve Shakur's rise as a leader. I will pay particular attention to specific themes, such as police brutality, instances of prejudice, the perceived necessity for gang affiliation, and drug distribution as a sole means of income. Additionally, motifs of street life being equated with war or battle along with outcries about the role of the representatives in government will play a key role in unveiling some of the deeper meanings.

### **Applying Gramscian Criticism**

From the thematic categorization of the selected texts, I will engage in a close textual analysis of the lyrics themselves. To begin, each text's lyrical content will be studied for the aspects of hegemony that Gramsci theorized. From this, links will be drawn between the hegemonic messages within the song to conditions that were present during the historical moments that fostered these messages.



While many of the texts will expectedly contain depictions of hegemonic dominance and oppressive conditions, they too will be surveyed for common sense notions of the overall culture and how these notions may be reinforcing hegemonic oppressions. Critical messages in this stage of analysis will be actions, beliefs, and standards of Black culture that Tupac Shakur illustrates and in certain cases, criticizes for the burden they present to progression of the community. This interpretation will require a deeper level of analysis, given that notions of common sense are often not explicit and will require sophisticated interpretation in relation to Gramscian theory.

In addition to uncovering the aspects of common sense and consent within the works, I will explore the instances of self-reflexivity and promotion of good sense recognition in Shakur's lyrics. This Gramscian notion I expect will require the most intricate of examination in order to understand what they express toward Shakur as a rhetor and as a leader. Much of the examination of Shakur as a Gramscian intellectual and good sense proponent will be dependent on a fusion of the arguments derived from the analysis as a whole. However, if the texts possess moments of Shakur attempting to promote a realization among his peers and promoting messages of lifestyle transformation, they would be essential to fortifying the overall conclusion.

As hegemony is revealed through the close textual analysis of the hip-hop music of Shakur, the analysis will move to an assessment of Tupac Shakur's role as an organic intellectual of resistance to hegemonic structures. Arguing for Shakur as an organic intellectual will largely depend on the revelations from the analysis and application to the Gramscian method of criticism. As for specific instances within the texts that will serve to strengthen this claim, themes of community union, political and social resistance, and

speaking directly to the audience or citizens in subjugated conditions will represent thematic notions for the analysis on Shakur as an intellectual.

In evaluating Tupac Shakur as an organic intellectual, it is important to exercise self-reflexivity as the critic discussing these texts. While I certainly have been a fan of Shakur's music, partaking in a criticism of his work will require discipline both as a scholar and as a fan. Remaining self-reflexive when conducting this analysis will ensure that I remain aware of the biases that may color my evaluations. While hip-hop receives a large degree of criticism from popular news media for its images and graphic narratives, I will contend for the genre offering a unique perspective into a social group suffers from hegemonic oppression.

Overall, this analysis is diving into musical texts that are rich with illustrations of oppressive conditions. While a surface reading of these texts will express many emotions, hardships, and frustrations from Shakur and the people he represents, the use of the Gramscian critical lens will expose rhetorical messages that are expressive of a hegemonic structure in the United States. From this analysis, I expect the criticism of the messages of Shakur to illuminate the hegemonic elements of society. Furthermore, as these investigations are performed through emergent thematic interpretation, I anticipate the conclusion of Tupac Shakur as an intellectual of self-reflexive awareness and hegemonic resistance will be revealed.

In this chapter, I detailed the method of analysis for this thesis and the manner in which it will be applied. Being that this method of analysis is a rhetorical criticism of critical nature, I began with a scholarly overview of the principal concepts of rhetoric, rhetorical criticism, and critical rhetoric in order to clarify the exact nature of what I hope

to achieve through the forthcoming analysis. Developing from the clarification of critical rhetoric as the examination of societal aspects of dominion and freedom, the lens of Gramscian theory was introduced, as it will be the primary tool of analysis for the textual interpretation for concealed rhetorical messages of the texts in question. From this, an explanation of the relevant Gramscian concepts that will be necessary for the analysis was provided. In explaining the Gramscian theory, I expressed how the broad structure of hegemony can be derived from the more specific common sense standards of culture and then introduced the role of intellectuals in maintaining, establishing, and overcoming hegemony. Once the theoretical concepts were illustrated, I introduced the texts selected for the analysis with justifications both for why they were selected and why other texts were not. I then offered an explanation of the intended organization of the analysis explaining how each text will be assessed, how the Gramscian theory will be applied, and the expected outcomes the analysis of Tupac Shakur and his texts will provide.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

By explicating the hegemonic conditions of society that are suggested by Shakur in his music, we can determine how the rapper has asserted himself as an influential member of Black resistance. In order to develop an understanding of Shakur's specific role in the resistance for his community, I analyzed the lyrics of the songs released during his lifetime. From this array of music, I selected nine specific songs that represent the aspects of hegemonic influence in society that Shakur sought to resist in his body of work. Through the process of listening to and reading the lyrics of the selected songs by Shakur, I discovered several themes that were reflective of repressive conditions and strategies of resistance. As I reflected upon these themes, it became apparent that of the several themes that recurred throughout the selected works, they could be categorized into two emergent overarching threads: hegemonic illustrations and hegemonic resistance.

Using a Gramscian method of rhetorical analysis, this study will analyze the hegemonic themes present in Tupac Shakur's lyrics. As these themes reveal Shakur's notions about the oppressive conditions experienced by Black Americans, I will examine the capacity for resistance present in the beliefs he held. During the selection process of listening to songs released by Shakur during his lifetime, I determined several rhetorical themes intertwined in the music that formed Shakur's notions of oppression. Hence, this

chapter will be organized in such a way as to reflect how these themes weave together, and eventually reveal Shakur's role as a leader of resistance. Overall, I examined nine songs that were released while Shakur was still alive for the purposes of this analysis.

The selected songs are:

- "Trapped" (Shakur, 1991)
- "I Don't Give a Fuck" (Shakur, 1991)
- "Words of Wisdom" (Shakur, 1991)
- "Brenda's Got a Baby" (Shakur, 1991)
- "Holler If Ya' Hear Me" (Shakur, 1993)
- "Something 2 Die 4" (Shakur, 1993)
- "Keep Ya Head Up" (Shakur, 1993)
- "Papa'z Song" (Shakur, 1993)
- "Me Against The World" (Shakur, 1995)

By exploring each of these nine songs, this chapter will begin with the identification of emergent themes of hegemonic conditions of oppression suggested in the music. These themes emerged through reappearing illustrations of Shakur's, that when more closely studied, contained notions of hegemonic oppression as well as resistance. From these themes, the Gramscian notion of common sense will be exposed. While Shakur identifies and criticizes these oppressive conditions, he also points out the need for Blacks to engage in the practice of good sense if they ever are to overcome the hegemonic oppression they experience. Therefore, following the analysis of the several themes of hegemonic oppression, I will present the themes of good sense and resistance. Fusing these themes together will allow for a more complete understanding of Shakur as

a seminal figure of hegemonic resistance. Consequently, this analysis will conclude with the consideration of each of these emergent themes as they build off of one another to suggest that Tupac Shakur was an organic intellectual.

### **Hegemonic Illustrations**

Hegemonic forces assert dominance in a society through various means that ultimately enable a tight grip of influence by one group over others. While some instances of hegemony can be recognized through the systematic reproduction of cultural norms and standards of thinking, other hegemonic entities can wield more destructive methods of attaining control.

Offering his music as a method of understanding social injustices and seeking to unify the Black community, Shakur identifies several forms of hegemonic control prominent in society. As Shakur criticizes the multitude of oppressive conditions that plague Black Americans and the lack of effort to combat them, three specific themes emerge to suggest a structure of hegemony in America. These recurrent themes in Shakur's texts that I will discuss in this chapter are:

- Systematic Marginalization
- Criminal Economic Alternatives
- Hegemonic Reproduction of Oppression

First, Shakur explains the idea of social class immobility for Black Americans in the ghettos, as many Blacks feel trapped without any hope of escaping their present circumstances. Secondly, the theme of resorting to illegal means of earning a living can be seen through Shakur's frequent portrayals of drug dealing and prostitution. Next, a recurring theme within Shakur's lyrics is how he called out the role of social leaders in

fostering and reinforcing these conditions of oppression. Therefore, the third prevalent theme that I will discuss is the role of the hegemony in reproducing these hegemonic conditions.

These themes coalesce to form the common sense ways of understanding the social world for Black Americans. The instances of hegemonic influence and control illustrated by Shakur come to mold the way Blacks understand their community as well as comprehend their methods of escaping the oppressive conditions inhibiting them. Viewing society and the prospects for change in such a negative light is problematic, as it prevents the prospects for social change. Rapping about these hegemonic themes, Shakur posits that the Black community must not fall prey to these problematic ways of thinking.

### **Systematic Marginalization**

The prospect of social class mobility is the central motivating factor of those in pursuit of the American Dream. The hope of someday, being able to live more comfortably than the previous generation and provide the opportunity for our offspring to advance even further drives the American people. However, how does a community suffer when opportunity disappears? Shakur argues that Black Americans are not fortunate enough to experience opportunity. Shakur, hindered by the presence of extreme poverty, illustrates the effects being “trapped” in the ghetto has on the Black community.

Contending that an entire community is trapped and unable to escape their present conditions is a lofty claim that Shakur approaches through two aspects. First, Shakur identifies how the mainstream American perception of Black people has had a detrimental impact on the conditions of Blacks. Suggesting that Black Americans are largely believed to be inferior and dangerous, Shakur demonstrates how social

apparatuses reinforce their marginalization. The second primary notion that relates to the social immobility of Blacks is economic opportunity, or lack thereof. Discussing the scarcity of employment for Blacks, Shakur explains the ripple effect that minimal economic opportunity has in maintaining subjugated conditions. Relating the cultural and economic influences that damage the potential for social class mobility, Shakur determines that Black Americans are in large part trapped in the impoverished ghettos.

Perception plays a large part in how different cultures are understood and received by the dominant social population. While perceptions are certainly shaped by experiences, unfounded stereotyping and popular media portrayals can easily mold one's beliefs toward unknown cultures or communities. In the case of analyzing the perceptions held toward Black Americans, the influences on these systems of understanding are far more nuanced and complex. As scholars suggest, feelings toward Blacks have taken many sharp turns given their ancestral position as slaves and eventually struggling during the Civil Rights Movement for equality (Hall, 2011; Kain, 1969). From these significant historical eras, dominant Whites have at times maintained the belief that Blacks are racially inferior and in some cases may view the Black community as militant or potentially dangerous. While this certainly did not pertain to all Whites, it is important to consider that when examining the popular perception of Black Americans in the 1980s and 1990s, many were cautious in their acceptance of their fellow Black citizens.

The rise of the hip-hop culture did little to ease the trepidation of Whites. As lyrics of resistance, violence, and "fighting the power" hit the media airwaves, the feeling of caution evolved to a prominent fear for many Americans (Hall, 2011). Shakur argues that the fear towards Blacks fostered an apprehension to accept Blacks into important



social apparatuses such as schools, occupations, and living communities. Hence, Shakur illustrates how the social misconception of the Black community trapped these already marginalized citizens in their conditions of poverty.

A common feature within much of Shakur's music is his belief that not only are Blacks forced to live in the ghettos, but also that the possibility of escape is hopeless. Examining how their own cultural misconceptions reinforce Blacks' position in the ghetto, Shakur identifies aspects of discrimination, segregation, and misplaced fear. In "I Don't Give A Fuck," Shakur (1991) explains, "The way they see it, we was meant to be kept down/ Just cant understand why we gettin' respect now/ Mama told me there'd be days like this/ But I'm pissed cause it stays like this." Here, two important notions are introduced: being kept down and the suggestion of "they" in society. Shakur first claims that Black Americans are being "kept down" and thus, marginalized in society. Along with his notion though is his explanation that, "I'm pissed cause it stays like this." In this moment, the presence of hegemonic illustrations in Shakur's music can be seen through the agitation he feels due to the social maintenance of Black Americans along the margins of society. By suggesting that Blacks are being kept within their current poverty-stricken conditions by some external force, Shakur introduces that not only does some sort of hegemon exist within society, but that they are asserting their power over Blacks.

While Shakur's claim of Blacks being kept down is significant to understanding the hegemonic notions within his music, the introduction of opposing forces "they" and "we" also is of importance. Shakur often employs the term "we" in an effort to identify himself as one within the Black American community. As he utilizes the unifying "we" to address the Black community, he also strategically uses the term "they" in an effort to

identify the individuals causing his community harm. Certainly, “they” is an ambiguous term that can be in reference to multitudes of groups that may be hindering the progress of Black Americans in Shakur’s eyes. However, as many of the musical works being investigated in this analysis suggest, “they” can be understood as White Americans and more specifically, those in positions of power. For example, in “I Don’t Give a Fuck,” Shakur (1991) claims,

They act like they never seen a mother fucker wearing black/ following a nigga  
and shit/ aint this a bitch/ all I wanted was some chips/ I wanna take my business  
elsewhere, but where?/ cause who in the hell cares/ about a black man with a  
black need/ they wanna jack me like some kind of crack fiend.

Shakur clarifies the identity to whom exactly “they” refers by including the element of racial demographic and stereotyping. Arguing that White individuals observe Blacks with an air of apprehension based on skin tone and clothing, Shakur establishes that the subjugation of the Black community is due in part, because of cultural perceptions. Additionally, Shakur illustrates that the individuals in power that he refers to as “they” are White, as evidenced by his claim that “they” do not care about the Black community or the needs of Blacks (Shakur, 1991).

As we study the elements of society that result in the conditions faced by communities in the United States, it is important to begin with an understanding of how external communities perceive and feel toward cultures different from their own. In Shakur’s music, he addresses this by contending that those outside the Black community often hold feelings of fear, trepidation, and caution when observing Blacks in America. Because of these feelings, Shakur explains that Blacks are in many ways trapped within

the ghettos of inner cities, forced to struggle with the conditions of poverty each day. As Shakur (1991) relates in "Trapped," "You know they got me trapped in this prison of seclusion/ happiness living on the streets is a delusion." Shakur argues that not only are Black Americans trapped in a social prison of sorts by being stuck in the ghetto, but also they are secluded from other communities such as the White community that would perhaps allow them to work together in order to escape these living conditions. Therefore, in Shakur's eyes, happiness is nothing more than a delusion as Blacks are denied the opportunities and resources necessary to move forward in society. In works such as "Trapped," "I Don't Give a Fuck," and "Words of Wisdom," Shakur (1991) relates that cultural misunderstandings have had resounding impacts on economic circumstances for Black Americans, which leaves them with a feeling of hopelessness as they struggle to advance.

While Shakur argues that Blacks have been trapped along the margins of society by way of cultural misperceptions, he adds that an additional social aspect that holds the Black community down is the lack of economic opportunity. Since the notion of social class position and mobility is predicated upon the accumulation of sustained wealth, the issue is largely economic. It would be foolhardy though to simply dismiss the deplorable conditions of Blacks as a result economic deficiencies, as we have already seen how the notions of culture and perception can lead to a lack of openness within a society. Shakur recognizes that these conditions are nuanced and as such, confronts both the impacts of cultural perceptions in addition to lacking economic opportunity.

It is no secret that when examining how a group of people, whether it be a family or entire community, has come to live in the decaying conditions of poverty, it is

important to consider their opportunities for occupation. Though some may question the conditions of a struggling economy as primary reason for these conditions, Shakur instead questions why Blacks are not allowed any opportunity at all, regardless of society's economic health. Specifically, in "Words of Wisdom," Shakur (1991) states, "This one is for the masses/the lower classes/the ones you left out/jobs were given, better livin'/but we were kept out." In this instance we see Shakur address the Black community and suggest that they have been kept away from the chance to earn a better living. Additionally, Shakur's verse states that despite the fact that jobs were being created and better lives were being experienced by many, it was the Black community that was neglected and refused this opportunity.

Following from Shakur's depictions of the minimal opportunities afforded to Blacks in their efforts to achieve economic stability, he also explains to listeners the lengths to which the Black community is forced to go in order to earn a living. In "Brenda's Got a Baby," Shakur (1991) relates the story of a teenaged single mother who resorts to prostitution in order to support her and her child. Additionally, songs such as "Trapped" and "Holler if Ya Hear Me" relate the efforts of Black males being forced into the drug distribution ring in order to support themselves and their families.

As we investigate the purposes of Shakur's music, it is clear that he is attempting to convey the reality that Blacks face daily in their conditions of poverty across America. Shakur explains that many of the injustices faced by the Black community originate with the fact that most marginalized Blacks experience a feeling of being trapped in the inner-city ghettos. Arguing that forces such as "fat cats" and "the man" perpetuate these cultural and economic injustices, Shakur (1991, 1993) relates the effects that the

hegemony has in its control over the Black community. At only 20 years of age when his first album, *2Pacalypse Now* (1991) was released, Shakur himself was a victim of the same subjugating circumstances that he includes in his lyrics (Dyson, 2006). Born in the ghettos of Harlem, New York and constantly moving until making his way to California, Shakur experienced firsthand the array of Black communities suffering from the lack of escape from their deprived conditions (Dyson, 2006; McQuillar & Johnson, 2010).

Fed up with life in the ghetto and not knowing when economic help would arrive, Shakur utilized music to call attention to these injustices. Articulating the great lengths to which Blacks resort to in order to get by, the second major theme of Shakur's hegemonic illustrates emerges. Relating tales of prostitution, drug dealing, and theft, Shakur expresses how the byproduct of crime serves as an additional form of hegemonic control over Black Americans.

### **Criminal Economic Alternatives**

Feeling imprisoned in the violent and unforgiving ghettos of inner-cities, many families suffer from the daily struggle of how they will feed, clothe, and house their loved ones. Shakur commonly explores this notion of what extremes an individual will go in their efforts to provide for their loved ones. Shakur explains that the luxury of choice is often not available for many Black families living in poverty. As Shakur describes, many of these families have little to no legal means of working left, so they resort to crime as a way to provide. Scholars have suggested that narratives of criminal means of employment are common to the genre of hip-hop music (Hall, 2011; Rose, 1994). However, what differentiates Shakur from his musical peers is the reasoning behind his depictions of crime in his music. Shakur often places male posturing and ego aside in

order to use his musical platform for a more meaningful purpose. Instead, we see Shakur depict the frequency of crime in his community in an effort to bring awareness to the desperation many Blacks face.

The terms desperation, hopelessness, and fear are commonly seen not only in the nine selected songs of this analysis, but throughout Shakur's *oeuvre*. Shakur utilizes these terms in order to convey the bleakness of many aspects of life in the margins, especially concerning jobs. Describing just how much of an uphill economic battle many Blacks experience, Shakur (1993) claims, "I'm tryin' to make a dollar out of fifteen cents/ Its hard to be legit and still pay the rent." In this excerpt of "Keep ya' Head Up," we see Shakur describing that the amount of earnings for Blacks cannot afford necessities such as housing. Further, the suggestion of being "legit," or "legitimate," in terms of occupation is reflective of criminal behavior. Specifically, Shakur explains that for Black Americans in poverty, the legitimate and legal job opportunities are simply not enough to provide for needs such as housing, food, or even education. Because of this bleak reality, Shakur displays that Black Americans are faced with a critical choice: have a legitimate job and struggle or enter the life of crime and make ends meet.

For many, the decision of crime versus an honest living is already made for them as we have discovered with the absence of job growth and legitimate opportunity. While crime is certainly not the path chosen by all Black Americans stuck in the vice grip of poverty, it is common enough for many communities to experience a vicious circle of crime which sometimes leads to arrests and even death. Survival in the streets is priority number one for these individuals as they desperately work to keep themselves and their loved ones from homelessness. In "Holler if Ya Hear Me," Shakur (1993) describes, "I

make rhyme pay, others make crime pay/ whatever it takes to live and stand/ cause nobody else will give a damn/so we live like caged beasts.”

The “whatever it takes” mentality is often what allows Blacks such as Shakur to survive in their world of limited opportunity and escape. In tracks such as “Words of Wisdom,” “Holler if Ya Hear Me,” and “Papa’z Song,” Shakur communicates the reality that many males succumb to the benefits of drug dealing in order to survive. As Shakur (1993; 1995) describes, lifestyles of “livin’ fast” and “hustlin” often are more lucrative means of making a wage as opposed to the limited minimum wage jobs that are available. Scholars identify that suggestions of these lifestyles and illustrations of gang and drug life are artists’ attempts to convey the presence of drug dealing and gang rivalry in their communities (Boyd, 2002; Dyson, 2006; Hall, 2011; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). In addition to the presence of illicit drug distribution as a means of earning wealth, Shakur also explains the unfortunate truth of young women feeling compelled into the world of prostitution.

When it comes to understanding the role of drug dealing and gang activity in the marginalized Black communities, there is no doubt that danger exists for the various males who often partake in these activities. Illustrating the various effects of injustice, Shakur is conscious that males are not the only group of Blacks who feel the effects of a hurting economy and a society that seemingly turns a blind eye to their predicament. Rather, Shakur describes how prostitution becomes the primary means of making a living for many young women in the streets. Shakur’s primary text for addressing the plight of young Black women is “Brenda’s Got a Baby” (1991). Focused on the life of a 12-year-old girl named Brenda, Shakur’s narrative relates the series of events that befall Brenda

following her unplanned pregnancy. Before relating the tale of Brenda, Shakur (1991) states, “Well let me show ya how it affects the whole community...Cause I bet Brenda doesn’t even know/just cause you’re in the ghetto doesn’t mean ya can’t grow/but oh that’s a thought, my own revelation.” Shakur addresses two important lessons about Brenda’s story. First, Shakur prefaces Brenda’s dilemma by explaining that the effects of a single individual such as Brenda can significantly impact the community at large, a notion I will analyze later. Second, Shakur offers that despite her humble beginnings in the ghetto, she does not have to settle for staying in these conditions. Instead, Shakur implied that a young woman such as Brenda can grow and move forward if they adopt the necessary mindset. Sadly, Shakur explains that this is not the case for Brenda and he deploys a sad tale that is common in the Black communities along society’s margins.

Immediately following Shakur’s proclamation that Brenda’s story does not necessarily have to ring true for every young woman in the ghetto, he weaves a troubling tale for audiences. Shakur (1991) explains that Brenda’s downfall resulted from a relationship with a molester, which culminated in a pregnancy for pre-teen Brenda and a subsequent abandonment by the father of the child. Next, Shakur (1991) adds, “He left her and she had the baby solo/ she had it on the bathroom floor...she didn’t know what to throw away and what to keep/she wrapped the baby up and threw him in the trash heap.” Following the birth of the child, the song goes on to express how Brenda is turned away from loved ones and forced to live on the streets. Shakur (1991) concludes by stating:

Now Brenda’s gotta make her own way/ can’t go to her family, they won’t let her stay/ No money, no babysitter, she couldn’t keep a job/ she tried to sell crack, but ended up getting robbed/ so now what’s next, there aint nothing left to sell/ So she



sees sex as a way of leaving hell/ It's paying the rent so she cant really complain/  
Prostitute, found slain, and Brenda's her name.

The tale of Brenda represents several disturbing aspects of the contemporary Black community that Shakur hopes to illuminate and combat. Although the origins of her relationship, the abandonment of the child's father, and lack of education about sex and childbirth reveal significant deficiencies in the Black community, the focus of the text is on the all-too-common quandary of Black women in these marginalized conditions. Shakur reveals that instances of women being abandoned and left to fend for themselves and their children often lead them to a turn to illegal occupations. Further, Shakur conveys that the turn to prostitution can be a dangerous one, which in Brenda's case resulted in death.

"Brenda's Got a Baby" is an illustrative text of the conditions of Blacks along the social margins both because of Brenda's tragic tale, but also through the song's representation of the reproductive cycle of these conditions. As noted earlier, Shakur begins the work by expressing how tales such as these impact the entire Black community. While some consumers will hear the song and think to themselves how unfortunate it is that young Brenda lost her life, it is important to consider that there is more than one victim in Shakur's story. Hearing the tragic circumstances of Brenda and her fight to survive, it is easy to overlook the fact that two individuals are suffering throughout the song, Brenda, and her baby. Following the death of Brenda, the audience may be quick to forget that in this story, there is now an infant with no parents to take care of and provide for him. Therefore, Shakur uses "Brenda's Got a Baby" not only to illustrate the overlooked hardships of Black women, but to also introduce how these

hegemonic conditions are reproduced and maintained. The depiction of the cyclical conditions of Blacks and how they are reproduced and reinforced is the next theme that emerges within the selected Shakur texts. However, though Shakur describes these reproductive cycles of oppression in his music, he also identifies the role of hegemonic forces and entities that ensure the continuation of oppression against Blacks.

### **Hegemonic Reproduction of Oppression**

As Shakur continued to use his musical platform to reveal the hardships and tragedies he and his community experienced in the peripheries in society, he also began to question how and why these oppressive conditions continued to recycle and maintain a hold as time passed. Troubled by the lack of effort from American leaders to provide aid for the millions of Blacks facing poverty, Tupac began inquiring about the genesis of these conditions and how they continued their stranglehold on the Black communities. As Shakur's lyrics reference, the blame was to be placed on the shoulders of "the man" and other White American leaders who essentially possessed the power to dispel the conditions of poverty, but chose otherwise. Reflecting on the proliferation of gang violence and drug distribution, Shakur argues that the presence of crime, violence, and death are strategies to maintain the hell-like chaos in the ghettos. Additionally, Shakur's lyrics attempt to illuminate the social institutions that are utilized to maintain the reproductive cycle of oppression experienced by Shakur and other Black communities.

As I discussed earlier, the absence of legitimate occupations in Black communities often led to many desperate individuals and families turning to drug dealing and theft to provide for their own. The business of drug dealing is not uncommon in hip-hop lyrics, as earlier scholars have discussed the frequent reference of the activity as a

reason for which many hip-hop critics dismiss the relevance of the genre (Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). Complete dismissals of a musical text simply for the inclusion of a criminal act are problematic though, given that artists such as Shakur refer to drug dealing and gang activity in an attempt to portray the harsh realities of Black culture to those who may be unaware. Additionally, Shakur portrays the aspects of gangs and drugs in an effort to identify a correlation between the criminal activities of Black Americans and the systems of control that perpetuate and even encourage these acts of deviance.

When Shakur raps about the presence of violence and homicide resulting from the struggle between drug dealers and gangs over territory, the scene he depicts is not too different from one of war. For example, Shakur offers, “I see no justice/ all I see is niggas dying fast/the sound of a gun blast/ then watch the hearse pass/ just another day in the life of a G” (“I Don’t Give a Fuck,” 1991). In this moment, Shakur explains that not only is death, gunfire, and injustice present in the conditions of oppression that Blacks such as him experience, but they are typical. Next, in “Trapped,” Shakur (1991) claims, “They never talk peace in the Black community/all we know is violence/ do the job in silence.” In this occurrence, Shakur not only dismisses the notion of peace, but he is also reflecting on the culture of the Black community and criminal livelihood of the peers he is addressing. Regarding the culture of Black males, Shakur describes that as a result of their upbringing and present conditions, violence as a means of accomplishing their desires is all these young men understand. As we consider the impact Shakur’s notions of gang activity, drug dealing, and violence can have on a given community, it becomes clear how these byproducts of poverty can be utilized for the purposes of hegemonic oppression.

As scholars have analyzed the effective methods of maintaining control by a dominant hegemony, one prominent technique is social class division, or “divide and conquer” (Hall, 1986). With this method of subjugating lower classes, strategies can be employed to pit a given social class or social community against a group in similar circumstances. Through this, the lower class community is more concerned with achieving dominance over their fellow subjugated group, rather than focusing their attention on the hegemonic force that holds control over the entire social system. This same method of “divide and conquer” can be seen in oppressed Black communities where criminal activity is a primary means of earning a living. In these instances, conflicting drug distributors or gangs will be more concerned with their competition against each other than they are dealing with true injustice: the policies and accepted social conditions that have led to their reliance on crime in the first place. In “Words of Wisdom,” Shakur (1991) reflects on this aspect in his community by arguing, “There are lies that we have all accepted/say no to drugs but the governments kept it/ running through our community, killing the unity/ the war on drugs is a war on you and me.” This technique is especially effective at maintaining the Black community along the social periphery because, not only does the proliferation of criminal activity lead to a spike in arrests in the community, but the very nature drug dealing and gangs leads to a higher rate of homicide for these Black communities.

Expanding on the hegemonic technique of divide and conquer, the excerpt from “Words of Wisdom” reveals a secondary aspect that the division creates. Shakur’s (1991) statement that, “say no to drugs but the government’s kept it running through the community, killing the unity/the war on drugs is a war on you and me” reflects two major

consequences from the hegemonic promotion of dividing the lower classes. First, as discussed earlier, the government endorsement of drugs in the marginalized communities results in the destruction of Black unity. Following the loss of unity is the presence of death and violence as criminals battle to gain control of the lucrative drug trade. Second, Shakur's claim that the war on drugs is in fact a war on the Black community has a potentially monumental effect on the perception and beliefs held by others. Shakur claims that the war on drugs is essentially a way to further marginalize the Black community. With the promotion and acceptance of the United States' "War on Drugs," citizens will demand that illicit substances be eradicated completely. This war on drugs is thus problematic for Black communities that in many cases, use the sale and distribution of drugs as their way to make ends meet economically. Therefore, as American citizens demand to see results of this war on drugs, the group of people they will undoubtedly associate with drug dealing are Black Americans since many of the reported arrests and incarcerations will be Black men living in inner cities (Lotz, 1979; Lowry, 2010). Shakur recognized that the public outcry for ridding American streets of drugs would lead to a heightened attention toward Black communities. Hence, the rapper began using his music to call attention to the second hegemonic tool of oppressive reproduction: law enforcement.

Tension between hip-hop music and law enforcement existed long before Tupac Shakur entered the music scene. As I referenced in Chapter Two, the 1980s was filled with hip-hop artists who were anything but shy with their claims of police corruption, biased lawmaking, and law enforcement brutality. Shakur carried the tradition forward as he entered hip-hop, relating his experiences of being followed, harassed, and wrongfully

apprehended by police officers during his upbringing (McQuillar & Johnson, 2010). Shakur separates himself from his musical compatriots as he not only verbally berates law enforcement, but also claims that they are a primary reason that Blacks are incapable of advancing beyond the peripheries of society. For example, in “Trapped,” Shakur describes how he “can barely walk the streets without a cop harassing me/ they asking for my identity/ Hands up, throw me against the wall/ didn’t do a thing at all/ Im telling you one day these suckers gonna fall” and follows the description with “coppers try to kill me.” Shakur uses these anecdotes involving the police to communicate to the audience that not only are the streets filled with police who are looking to incriminate Blacks, but they are also wrongfully apprehending and questioning Blacks without reason. Another instance of this is in “Holler if Ya’ Hear Me,” where Shakur (1993) states, “To my homies on the block getting dropped by cops.” With this excerpt, Shakur explains that not only are officers being deployed to apprehend and imprison Blacks, but they are also killing them during these occurrences.

In addition to the conflict-laden nature of the relationship between police officers and Black Americans living in the projects, another dominant aspect of hegemonic reinforcement resulting from the institution of law enforcement is the prison system. Throughout Shakur’s *corpus*, prison is discussed and analyzed by Shakur in an effort to inform the American public on how prison is being harnessed as a tool for the hegemony. Following from the increased presence of police officers in the ghettos in concurrence with the heightened demand for drug enforcement resulting from the “War on Drugs,” Black Americans were being incarcerated more than ever before (Ogbar, 2007; Pettit, 2010; Thomas, 2013). In Shakur’s music, he addresses the role of the prison system in the

Black community in two primary facets. In the first component, Shakur explains to his audience that there is an overrepresentation of Blacks in prison, and in many cases they have been wrongfully placed there. Shakur himself was a victim of misguided criminal allegations, as charges against him were dropped in court on two separate occasions (Dyson, 2006;McQuillar & Johnson, 2011). Through the second feature of the prison system in his music, Shakur considers how the federal prison system is doing more harm than good for the Black community and society as a whole. Regarding the nine songs selected for this analysis, seven include references to being imprisoned or criticize the presence of jail/prison in Black communities across the United States. For example, in “Trapped,” Shakur (1991) criticizes that “too many brothers daily heading for the big pen/ niggas coming out worse off than when they went in.” This line explains that despite the dependence on what is supposed to be a rehabilitating institution, prison is only serving to make criminals more dangerous or likely to commit further crime. This functions as a form maintaining a cycle of subjugating Blacks first through the likely result that if criminals are finishing their sentences worse than when they entered, they are very likely to recommit crimes and be arrested in what will be a potentially continuous cycle of crime and incarceration. Second, as Blacks exit these penitentiaries with a worse disposition than before, their chances of obtaining an honest living drop dramatically because of a lengthening criminal record.

Moving beyond the exposure of divide-and-conquer methods of maintaining hegemonic structures of oppression, Shakur advances to the role of the federal government in constructing this method of oppression. Characterizing the American government as a group of hypocrites, liars, murderers, crooks, and rapists, Shakur (1991;

1993) argues that the oppression of the Black community begins and ends from the individuals who hold the most political and social influence. In “Words of Wisdom,” Shakur decrees:

America! I charge you with the crime of rape, murder, and assault/For  
suppressing and punishing my people/ I charge you with robbery for robbing me  
of my history/ I charge you with false imprisonment for keeping me trapped in the  
projects (1991).

Interestingly, in this moment Shakur not only seems to be placing blame on the shoulders of the larger government, but also possibly indicting Whites and other non-Blacks who may have played a role in the continued suppression of the Black community.

Considering his “charging” of those responsible for history and imprisonment, he is arguably placing a majority of the blame on those individuals who wield the ability to influence those aspects of society, the government. Additionally, in “Trapped,” Shakur (1991) angrily concludes the composition by asserting, “Fuck you” to groups such as the San Francisco Police Department, Marin County Sheriff Department, the FBI, the CIA, and President George H.W. Bush, who was in office during the time of the song’s 1991 release.

As we have seen, the Black community is one that has largely been unable to progress from the dilapidated conditions of the projects and ghettos of inner cities (Loury, 2010; Marable, 2007; Staples, 2011). Although some scholars offer differing opinions as to why the Black community is seemingly unable to take the social leap from the margins of society, Tupac Shakur has a critical theory of his own that is reflected in his music. Raised by a mother who was a Black Panther during an era that saw Shakur move from



ghetto to ghetto in a search for a home, the rapper began to think more critically about the nature of his current conditions. As his music exhibits, Shakur believed that the origins of the oppressive conditions plaguing Blacks around the country stem from a government and influential leaders who desire to maintain the oppressive state for Blacks. As my exploration of the musical texts suggests, Shakur recognized that through the tools of law enforcement and public perception gathered from a social “War on Drugs,” support by the American public to maintain the Black position along the rim of society was accomplished. Moreover, the strategy of dividing the lower classes against Black citizens fostered a stronger apprehension and fear among whites toward the group while also disrupting the unity of Black citizens by igniting a violent and sometimes deadly struggle in the illicit drug trade.

Shakur began recognizing these hegemonic systems of control and using his music not just as a platform of entertainment, but also of education. Understanding the injustices levied against his community, Shakur wanted to use the ability he had to reach millions of viewers to inform that about these social atrocities, in hopes that they would rally behind him and demand change. First though, Shakur needed to identify and explain the social norms of the Black culture that allow groups of power and influence to take advantage of the group and control their social position. Many of these cultural standards may seem harmless and/or useless in regards to their utility in constructing divisions of power. However, what imbeds these social standards with power is the widespread acceptance and lack of critical inquiry that the prescribed group holds towards these ways of life. Because of this, these norms can be manipulated and shifted by effective hegemonies in such a way that oppressed groups of people may not even recognize that the

norm may in actuality be problematic. As we have seen through the cultural perpetuation of hyper-masculinity or misogyny in order to reinforce Black authenticity, the hegemony has reshaped these norms for their own purposes. Once individuals blindly accept these problematic standards without considering their detrimental impacts, they have effectively become a tool of the hegemony.

### **Hegemonic Resistance**

As we have explored, Shakur's work is replete with illustrations of multiple problematic aspects of social life that inhibit the growth of the Black community. Illustrated in these texts, it is clear that the Black community on the periphery of society experiences feelings of being trapped in their present state. These feelings result from minimal opportunities, decaying education, and a government seemingly unwilling to alleviate their plight. Because of these conditions, many resort to a life of crime in order to get by, which substantially inflates the risk of being incarcerated, thus pushing them further along the social margins.

Being a victim of several of the impacts of oppression that he identifies in his music, Shakur explores how and why these conditions have come to be and seem never to be resolved. Shakur's explorations identify a primary culprit of hegemonic preservation as the United States government. Shakur, when discussing the tools of popular media, legislation, and law enforcement, claims that the dominant hegemony has constructed several systems of oppression and control to ensure the social position of Black communities along the edges of society. Additionally, Shakur suggests a phenomenon of divide and conquer has been toward the Black community itself, resulting in divided groups of Blacks who compete, fight, and even kill each other in their efforts to survive.

Including these social atrocities and systems of manipulation in his lyrics, an agitated Shakur was well aware that if Blacks are ever going to achieve equality and experience the same opportunities afforded to all Americans, they must fight for them. However, rapping about atrocities and social injustices is not the method with which an individual organizes and arranges a social movement against a force of hegemony. As other Gramscian scholars suggest, the identification of hegemonic exploitation and oppression is one of several necessary components to mobilizing a hegemonic resistance (Zompetti, 1997). Therefore, Shakur's identification of current social atrocities is the first step he takes as a leader of social resistance in his efforts to construct a social movement. For Shakur to be an organic intellectual of hegemonic resistance, certain elements must be present within his texts. Prior to considering Shakur as the leader of social change against the hegemonic conditions of society, he must first move forward from the acceptance of common sense to identifying and accepting good sense.

In order to determine the degree to which Shakur moves the collective of the Black community from common sense to good sense, I examined the lyrics of the selected texts that have been used for this analysis up to this point. Upon more thorough examination of the nine musical texts, the following three themes emerged:

- Common Sense in Black Culture
- The Consent of Oppression
- Good Sense: Innovative Perspective

To begin, Shakur begins a lengthy criticism and identification of the problematic customs of Black culture that exist and subsequently inhibit social progress. Following, Shakur includes a lyrical analysis of not only the oppressions that exist in contemporary

society, but how the Black community has consented to and accepted oppression. Finally, I will conclude this portion of the analysis with a discussion of the good sense alternatives to the social world that Shakur discusses. In addition to these critical notions of good sense, Shakur positions that in order for the Blacks to realize their desires for a better future, there must first be a united social movement by the collective Black community.

### **Common Sense in Black Culture**

The acceptance of the norms, standards, and social ways of thinking is what is understood as “Common Sense.” As discussed in Chapter Two, scholars explain the common sense as the cultural values, beliefs, and customs that are unquestioned and adopted by the masses (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1986; Zompetti, 2012). These common sense customs are effective tools for the hegemony because they are not forced upon the population, but are instead consented to and even desired.

Tupac Shakur, fed up and frustrated with the injustices facing the Black community, recognized that if Blacks were ever to move forward socially, politically, and economically, they would need to ignite a movement for change. Shakur also recognized that although many Blacks shared in his misery over the multitude of oppressive circumstances, they also did not completely comprehend the elements of the contemporary Black culture that had a role to play in these conditions. Therefore, in addition to Shakur’s musical critique of the forces at fault for the oppressive conditions of Blacks, the artist exposes the problematic common sense notions held by many Blacks.

Quick to criticize the efforts of political leaders and other influential members of society, Shakur was equally as likely to condemn his own community for their role in the

current social conditions. An educated man who frequently read the philosophical works of Machiavelli, Plato, and Sun Tzu, Tupac Shakur was naturally critical of the world around him and the systems of influence that establish current conditions of society. Therefore, while Shakur's lyrics are riddled with assessments of the aspects of society that marginalize the Black community, so too do they contain reflections on the aspects of Black culture that do little to improve the well-being of Black Americans overall. As Shakur's lyrics express, if Blacks are ever to progress from their current state of oppression and poverty, they must first look within their own culture to improve the many problematic customs that inhibit the community at large. Beginning with common sense notions of the Black culture, Shakur addresses the needs for change in the dynamics of Black families, discusses the drawbacks of the current mentality of Black youth, and follows up with an assessment of Blacks in urban settings.

Familial influence and guidance are monumentally important for young people, especially those living in the projects of inner cities and other poverty-stricken areas. As conditions of poverty and oppression spread across a community, a common casualty is the strength of the family. Not uncommon in many Black families living in poverty is the potential abandonment of the father figure, leaving young men to learn the progression of childhood to manhood from a mother who is left to raise the family herself. As a child, Shakur's own father abandoned the family, which eventually resulted in an inconsistent presence of male influences on a younger Shakur (Dyson, 2006). Reflecting on his own experiences as well as the common resort for men to leave their families, Shakur produced "Papa'z Song" in 1993. The song is Shakur's reflection on the absence of a father throughout his life and how his own father's abandonment shaped his way of

thinking. In the work, Shakur first asserts, “Had to play catch by myself, what a sorry sight/A pitiful plight, so I pray for a starry night/Please send me a pops before puberty/the things I wouldn't do to see a piece of family unity.” This moment exhibits both the detrimental effects father abandonment has on a young boy’s upbringing as well as how the absence of a father figure impacts a child’s learning of developments like puberty. Through the text, Shakur argues that the betterment of the Black community is dependent upon the presence of simple childhood needs, such as adequate parenting.

Undoubtedly, a father choosing to abandon his child and its mother can have potentially catastrophic effects on the child’s understandings of true relationships, and family. A second impact that must be considered when a father chooses to forego their responsibility and leave is the well-being of the mother. Shakur (1993) describes:

A different father every weekend/  
Before we get to meet him they break up before  
the week ends/  
I'm getting sick of all the friendships/  
As soon as we kick it he  
done split and the whole shit ends quick/  
How can I be a man if there's no role  
model?

Despite many single mothers’ attempts to move forward in these relationships, Shakur explains that many instances result in an inconsistent and unpredictable family life. From these failed relationships, the mother certainly undergoes a degree of suffering because their search for a companion results in continued failure and potential loneliness.

Additionally, as the previous analysis of “Brenda’s Got a Baby” established, some of these single mothers partake in sexual activity with these men as a way of prostitution. Engaging in prostitution not only potentially yields danger for the mother, but also continues the cycle of crime I previously discussed, and can again misshape a child’s

frame of understanding relationships moving forward. These inconsistencies are also detrimental for a child, since their hopes that a stable father figure to take care of them is continually met with disappointment. Shakur moves along in the text to discuss the long-term effects of the repeated cycle of potential parental figures that are met with disappointment.

Following from a childhood that is continually filled with expectation and subsequent disappointment, the young adult that emerges from this environment can potentially hold a very negative and resentful perspective toward others (West, 1993). In “Papa’z Song,” Shakur declares the following:

You think I'm blind but this time I see you comin, Jack/You grabbed your coat,  
left us broke, now ain't no runnin back/ Ask about my moms like you loved her  
from the start/ Left her in the dark, she fell apart from a broken heart/ So don't  
even start with that "wanna be your father" shit/ Don't even bother with your  
dollars I don't need it/ I'll bury moms like you left me all alone G/ Now that that I  
finally found you, stay the Fuck away from me

Here, the child addresses the returning father, causing a high degree of resentment and anger is exhibited toward his father. While this position is certainly understandable from the young man’s perspective, it illustrates a problematic cycle of resentment and solitude that can culminate from the absence of a parent. Fascinatingly, Shakur concludes the text with a verse performed in a way to present the audience with the father’s perspective in the song. Relating his criminal behavior as a reason for leaving, Shakur expresses the “father’s” apparent regret at having left his son. “Papa’z Song” is a work that expresses the significant impact a broken family can have on the not just one child, but the entire

community. With vivid depictions of disappointment, sadness, and anger, Shakur relates a tale of fatherly abandonment that is common in Black families in poverty. The focus of the narrative exhibits that the actions of one family member can have a resounding effect on all others within the family unit.

Similar to the narrative presented in “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” it is important to consider how the story of “Papa’z Song” impacts the Black community as a whole. Shakur illuminates how the actions of one man’s selfish decision to run from his responsibility as a father had ripple effects occur throughout the Black community. First, a mother is left to provide for her family alone, which forces her into prostitution. Second and perhaps most importantly, a child is left to grow without a father and as a result, holds a level of resentment that he will potentially carry with him throughout his life into future relationships. Shakur’s text addresses a very common and problematic notion held by many young Black males of not accepting their responsibilities as a father and running from their family. Though these same young men may experience the hardships of oppression and poverty, Shakur explains that prior to any consideration of fighting against oppressive hegemonic forces, the family foundation of Blacks must first be amended and corrected for the sake of the youth.

When discussions concerning the future of society arise, invariably most individuals will turn to the importance of children. The same can be said for the future of the Black community, as children will hopefully take on the role of responsibility in enacting the changes necessary to move Black Americans further. However, with many children in the projects being raised in broken homes and entering the cycle of hegemonic oppression, one must question what changes to the current trajectory of Black youth will



overcome these deterrent paths. Shakur addresses this issue in his music, identifying two areas of Black youth that have been accepted as standards that must change if the Black community is ever to escape their oppressive predicament. First, the role of education is explored in the texts, as the diminishing influence of education produces a growing population of uneducated and critically unaware youth. Next, the glorification of violence is a problematic element of youth culture in the Black community, which Shakur determined must change for the good of their people.

While the importance of education may seem like an obvious step in the right direction for marginalized cultures, the truth is that in many Black communities stuck in a cycle of oppression, schooling is often recognized as a waste of time and money (Marable, 2007). Scholars have examined that a common viewpoint adopted by many young Blacks is to forego their education for a life of criminal activity such as drug dealing, theft, or prostitution in order to provide for their family (Marable, 2007). In his younger years, Shakur confronted these same decisions as the unpredictable economic nature of his family life forced him to decide between schooling or a life of drug dealing (McQuillar & Johnson, 2010). However, raised by a former Black Panther mother and family friends who also took part in the Panther movement, Shakur's role models instilled the importance of knowledge if he were to ever see a better life. Therefore, although Shakur's unpredictable family life and finances would at times leave him without the resources of a classroom, he continued to push his mind through the various works of literature he could get his hands on (Dyson, 2006; McQuillar & Johnson, 2010).

As Shakur calls for the youth to begin taking their education more seriously, he also stresses the importance of parents and guardians to educate their children. In this

sense, the role of education that Shakur hopes to see adopted is not only in the classroom, but in the home as well. In “Words of Wisdom,” Shakur (1991) declares, “Conquer the enemy on with education/ protect yourself, reach for what you wanna do/ know thy self, teach about what we been through/ armed with the knowledge of the places we’ve been/ no one will ever oppress this race again.” Addressing the importance of knowledge in the struggle for equality, Shakur explains that the hegemonic oppressor can be conquered through education. The influence of education is not only through the knowledge gained in the traditional classroom, but also the education of experiences of the Black community’s past. In this moment, we see Shakur expressing that the community as a whole can move forward if Black youths learn from their ancestors’ experiences of oppression. Continuing with the message of education in the Black community, Shakur explains that each individual plays the role in helping the community as a whole recognize that the time to resist is approaching. In “Something 2 Die 4,” Shakur (1993) commands, “One nigga, teach two niggas/ four niggas, teach more niggas/ all the poor niggas/ the pen niggas/ the rich niggas/ the strong niggas/ unite.” Here, the Shakur reveals that in the struggle for equality, education plays two roles. First, he determines that if every member of the Black community takes the responsibility to educate their fellow Blacks about the atrocities of contemporary society, the understanding of an improved future can be understood. Second, Shakur offers that teaching one another will aid in the unification for a social movement for the betterment of Blacks across the nation. In these instances in his music, Shakur determines that if the Black community will ever accomplish their goals of equality and social class mobility, they must re-think the customary dismissal of education in the Black culture. Articulating the effects that

education will have on both the youth and adult members of the Black community, Shakur hopes to alter the cultural perceptions many Blacks hold toward the classroom. In order for this widespread change to happen though, Shakur identifies certain accepted notions of Black culture that must be eradicated beforehand.

It is not uncommon to view several unbecoming characteristics of Blacks that are perpetuated in multiple forms of media. The roles of pimps, gang bangers, hoes, drug dealers, and thugs have become all too synonymous with the Black American community. What is worse, is not only are these perceptions held toward Blacks by other cultures, but also the Black community in many ways has accepted these common sense customs of their own people. In many of Shakur's music, he challenges and criticizes his own community for allowing others to shape the perceptions of their own people. Critiquing how these consented notions of violence and drugs inhibit the advancement of Blacks, Shakur again addresses their effect on Black youth. Specifically, in "Me Against the World," Shakur (1995) opines, "Can't raise the children because they're illing/ addicted to killing and the appeal from the cap peeling/ without feeling, but will they last or be blasted? / hard headed bastard/ maybe he'll listen in his casket." Again referring the problematic occurrences of violence that seem to be routine on the streets, Shakur identifies how the accepted violence of the Black culture twists the mindsets of young people. Shakur critiques his own community, expressing that young people's addiction to killing one another in the streets deters them from any productive future and only leads them to an early death. Again in "Trapped," Shakur (1991) claims that no peace will be achieved on the streets anytime soon, given that all Blacks know is a world of violence. In both of these moments, Shakur hopes to convey that a necessary step toward changing

their oppressive conditions is to move past the widespread acceptance of violence and crime within their own culture.

Utilizing his music to illustrate the problematic aspects of the Black culture, Shakur identifies that the community as a whole must take a look in the cultural mirror if they are ever to progress. Evaluating the culture's beliefs toward parenthood, education, and crime, Shakur reveals that the Black community possesses multiple elements that play a role in their oppression. These beliefs have largely come to be common sense for the Black community, as many individuals adopt these notions as a natural aspect of their culture. However, as Shakur's lyrics unveil, these consented customs play a role in the maintenance and preservation of oppressive conditions that most Blacks work so ardently to overcome. Therefore, in his conquest to promote social change for the well-being of Black Americans, Shakur explores several customs of the Black culture that must be challenged and revised as the first step toward resistance.

### **The Consent of Oppression**

Scholars have examined that the component of a hegemonic structure that makes the hegemony so influential is that the oppressed communities consent to and accept their position of subjugation (Gramsci, 1971; Sassoon, 1980). Applying this concept to the oppressed Black community, Blacks would in effect accept their position of oppression and inequality in the United States. While this proposition may seem irrational, since no group of people will willingly desire to be oppressed, these conditions are consented to in many ways subtle and indirect. The consent of oppression in a community is often experienced through the acceptance of a social institution that would seemingly have the best interests of a group as their primary concern. In practice, these same institutions

deploy strategies that ensure that the oppressed community remains in their social position. Consequently, as groups of citizens support social entities such as churches, schools, or the police in faith that they will improve the well-being of their people, they are in effect unknowingly supporting the force that is constructing their oppressive state.

One of the common features in the work of Shakur was his propensity to criticize the federal government for their neglect of the Black community. Through his lyrics, Shakur often provided scathing criticisms of the policies and laws enacted by the government that would allegedly improve the country but in fact, only served to further divide the American people. Additionally, Shakur addressed his Black audience in an effort to expose the atrocities that had occurred and continued to happen at the hands of the United States government. Shakur's lyrics make it evident that he identifies the federal government as the dominant hegemony that continues to marginalize the Black community. Although Shakur's music also includes contemptuous remarks towards popular media, law enforcement, and the education system, no entity draws more scorn from the rapper than the American federal government. Shakur posits that while these secondary forms of hegemonic control are indeed problematic, they are tools utilized by the hegemony to ensure that the oppressive conditions experienced by the Black community remain in place. For the Black community to resist these oppressive structures, Shakur explains that the collective community must recognize the elements of the American government that construct their conditions.

The first aspect of the Government that Shakur hopes to expose as oppressive is their innate contempt for Blacks in general. As Shakur suggests in his music, the

Government views the Black Community with disdain and hopes to eradicate Blacks from the American population. In “Words of Wisdom,” Shakur (1991) claims:

Killing us one by one/ In one way or another/ America will find a way to eliminate the problem/ one by one/ the problem is the troublesome black youth of the ghettos/ and one by one/ we are being wiped off the face of this earth at an extremely alarming rate/ and even more alarming is the fact/ that we are not fighting back.

In this opening, Shakur explains that Blacks must understand that the American government has identified Blacks in the ghettos as a problem and is, therefore, attempting to eliminate them. In addition to revealing the intentions of the American hegemony, this excerpt exposes a significant issue within the Black community. Pointing out how Blacks are not fighting against the alleged oppression of the government, Shakur declares that the community is only aiding the marginalizing efforts of the hegemony. In order for the collective Black community to oppose these conditions, Shakur explains in the opening of “Words of Wisdom” that the group as a whole must recognize that the leadership of the American is effectively trying to keep Blacks in society’s margins. Another moment in Shakur’s music where the rapper declares the hegemonic force of society is in 1991’s “I Don’t Give a Fuck.” To finish out the composition, Shakur calls attention to President Bush, the CIA, FBI, and America in general. Claiming these entities to be prejudiced, Shakur plays off of the spelling of “America,” repeating the “C” three times to insinuate the country’s ideological alignment with the Ku Klux Klan. These emotional and aggressive instances in Shakur’s work are his attempts to raise the consciousness of Blacks so that they can finally come to realize the groups at fault for the marginalization.

Continuing his efforts to expose the hegemonic efforts of the American government, Shakur resumes his scornful remarks towards American leadership. In “Me Against the World,” Shakur (1995) contends, “politicians and hypocrites, they don’t wanna listen.” Drawing a connection between American politicians and hypocrites, Shakur argues that these people do not wish to listen or help overcome Black oppressive conditions. In this same song, Shakur (1995) ponders, “The question I wonder is after death, after my least breath/ when will I finally get to rest through this suppression/ they punish people that’s asking questions/ and those that possess, steal from the ones without possessions.” Reflecting on his own experiences of suppression and control at the hands of the hegemonic government, Shakur wonders if there will ever be a time that he can live outside the confines of poverty. Further, Shakur adds that Blacks who have been critical of their social predicament (such as rappers like himself) are punished and criticized for their inquiries. Therefore, Shakur is again communicating the oppressive efforts that have been waged against the Black community. What is most troubling about Shakur’s depiction is his claim that when individuals in the Black community work up the courage to ask questions or demand change, they are reprimanded.

Despite the bleak possibilities of resistance in the United States, Shakur affirms that Blacks can realize change in society if they first acknowledge their misguided consent to oppressive structures. In “Something 2 Die 4,” Shakur (1993) begins to call for unification and resistance since “there’s more of us than there is of them.” Beginning to appeal to the notion of social change, Shakur explains that if Blacks recognize the oppressive structures of society and unify, they can accomplish any goal. Earlier in this same track, Shakur reflects on the deaths of Latasha Harlins and Qa’id Teal, two Black

youths who lost their lives to the violent conditions of the ghetto (McQuillar & Johnson, 2011). Including these two deaths that heavily influenced Shakur's resolve, the rapper declares that the community should think of these two young people and the pointlessness of their deaths when considering resistance of the government.

In addition to the oppressive actions exercised by the American government, Shakur adds that this systematic oppression exists in all phases of life. Specifically, Shakur illustrates how oppressive conditions are learned for many Black Americans through their upbringings and education. In order for the Black community to overcome these conditions, they must understand where these conditions originate and how the community as a whole has consented to them. Relating the typical acceptance of American culture, Shakur (1991) states:

They say this is the home of the free/ but if you ask me, its all about hypocrisy/  
the constitution yo, it don't apply to me/ Lady Liberty? Stupid bitch lied to me/  
this made me strong and no ones gonna like what I'm pumpin'/ but its wrong to  
keep someone from learning something/ so get up, its time to start nation  
building/ I'm fed up, we gotta start to teach the children/ That they can be all they  
wanna be/ there's more to life than just poverty ("Words of Wisdom").

In this verse, Shakur critically addresses several key aspects of hegemonic structure that plague the Black community. First, Shakur confronts the misguided myths that surround American culture. Arguing that the glorified land of freedom is in fact hypocrisy and that the deified Lady Liberty is a farce, Shakur utilizes this moment to impart these same contentions to his audience. Next, Shakur discusses how the barrage of lies that are propagated to Blacks has made him stronger and hungrier to unveil the truth. Finally,



Shakur again considers the role of education or lack thereof for Blacks. Connecting the lack of education in Black communities to the proliferation of poverty, Shakur postulates that Black youth are raised with the belief that poverty will always be their way of life. With this belief, Shakur illustrates that the genesis of Black oppression begins at a young age, with unaware youths accepting their condition of poverty as normalcy. If the community is ever to resist the oppressive nature of the hegemonic government, Shakur concluded that they must first comprehend the misunderstood origins of these conditions and how marginalized Blacks have in large part accepted these notions.

As we have seen in the songs written by Shakur, he clearly makes a vigilant effort to elicit awareness in the Black community of the oppressive elements of their realities and the common sense frameworks of viewing the social world that have enabled this oppression. In each of the nine songs selected for this analysis, Shakur makes an effort to highlight the problematic qualities of contemporary Black culture that reinforce their marginalized position in the hegemonic structure. Rapping about the effects of broken homes, minimal education, and negative cultural perceptions, Shakur illustrates the customs of Blacks that thwart their struggles to move forward. As previous scholars have argued, the acceptance of these concerning customs is an example of common sense notions held by the oppressed (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 2011; Zompetti, 2012). Employing common sense frames of understanding is a tactic used by the hegemony to preserve the positions of power over the community under consideration. Shakur recognized this disturbing trend and illustrated how the Black community unknowingly reinforces their own position by adopting these customs and also supporting the hegemonic force at fault for their oppression. Focusing much of his work on the common issues of the Black

community and the role of the American government in manufacturing oppressive conditions, Shakur declares that Blacks must understand the roots of their predicament if they are ever to overcome the hegemony. With this resolve, Shakur attempts to use his lyrics to move his community away from the common sense notions that have led to their oppression and embrace the notions of good sense he illustrates.

### **Good Sense: Innovative Perspective**

If members of the hegemonic subaltern wish to move forward from their subjugated position, the first necessary step is to distinguish the common sense customs that have led to their oppression. Simply identifying the problematic aspects of society, however, is not enough for a resistance movement to develop. In order for a communal resistance effort to take root, these common sense notions must be replaced or supplanted by more critical views of good sense. As I explained in Chapters Two and Three, good sense is the Gramscian principle of an individual or group moving from the spontaneous consent of common sense to a more critical and self-aware perspective. As individuals critically examine the common sense notions they had accepted, they will hopefully alter them in a way that can reform their social position. In order for good sense to be articulated, leaders within the marginalized community must expose the common sense beliefs that are present and suggest an innovative perspective that can aid in the formation of a resistance movement. As we consider the oppressed Black American population of the 1980s and 1990s and the effort to steer the community toward good sense, Tupac Shakur establishes himself as a critical trailblazer of society.

What differentiates Shakur from many of his musical peers is not an elevated lyrical wit or revolutionary style, but rather a passion to produce art meant to better the

Black community. Where other artists would only address the oppressive government or police brutality, Shakur spoke on a range of topics that hindered the Black community, including the community itself. More importantly, Shakur not only identified the injustices of society, he would explain and propose alternative lifestyle choices and perspectives that he believed would advance the Black population further. As Shakur fought to create a smarter, stronger, more unified Black community, his lyrics advanced the good sense in his audience in two capacities. First, Shakur discussed the flaws in the culture of Black Americans. Speaking on adverse cultural customs like relationship dynamics, in-group perceptions, and cultural elements, Shakur contended that the potential for a unified movement was bleaker with the community disorganized and misguided. Next, Shakur, with a more unified Black party, advanced good sense perspectives toward the hegemonic structures that demanded resistance.

As I explored above, Shakur's lyrics were highly critical of the cultural problems faced by Black Americans. Focusing on the common familial defects seen in the Black community, Shakur argued that the common sense perspective of what it meant to be a Black man in America was wholly detrimental. During an era where young Black men idolized the gangster, pimp culture often purported in popular media, Shakur showed how this stereotypical mentality affected the entire community in several ways. Growing up without a steady father figure and witnessing the effects this abandonment had on his mother, Shakur was sensitive to the topic of relationship dynamics and the treatment of females by Black men (Dyson, 2006; McQuillar & Johnson, 2011). Shakur's song, "Keep ya Head Up" is a track entirely dedicated to females in an effort to provide support for

Black women as well as illustrate to males the importance of female treatment. In the song, Shakur (1993) declares:

You know what makes me unhappy/ when brothers make babies, and leave a  
young mother to be a pappy/ and since we all came from a woman/ got our name  
from a woman and our game from a woman/ I wonder why we take from our  
women/ why we rape our women, do we hate our women?

Communicating his disapproval of male irresponsibility and actions in relationships, Shakur expresses that the treatment of women by Black males is absurd considering the importance of female figures in men's lives. Shakur (1993) proclaims:

I think its time we kill for our women/ time to heal our women, be real to our  
women/ and if we don't we'll have a race of babies/ that will hate the ladies that  
make the babies/ and since a man can't make one/ he has no right to tell a woman  
when and where to create one/ so will the real men get up

Here, Shakur begins to promote a changed good sense social viewpoint that will play a role in the concretization of a resistance movement. Shakur first does this by following his inquiry of the harmful treatment of women in Black communities with his argument that men should be more respectful and caring to the female figures of their lives. He then bolsters this argument by illustrating the consequences that a continued cycle of female mistreatment will have on Black youths, flooding them with hate and resentment.

The most significant proposition of good sense in this excerpt of "Keep ya Head Up" though is Shakur's challenge of Black manhood. After Shakur argues for a new culture of Black men who respect, love, and appreciate women, Shakur then calls for the emergence of "real men" to take on his request. Effectively declaring the men who

mistreat their women as inferior to those who instead accept their responsibility as a male in a relationship, Shakur challenges the aforementioned common sense cultural notion of manhood. Redefining a real Black man as someone who accepts responsibility and leads a life of respect, Shakur takes a step toward eradicating troublesome common sense beliefs and reshaping them. With this cultural revision of in-group perceptions of manhood, Shakur positions a necessary step in the effort to unify the Black Americans.

Continuing his efforts to reshape the perspectives of other Blacks towards their own people, Shakur attempts to re-appropriate the meaning of the term “nigga” in the Black community. The term nigga is one shrouded in controversy and dispute across the United States population (Kennedy, 2002). Given the term’s origins from a word that is associated with racism, hate, and shame in America, many scholars argue the very existence of nigga in any discourse is problematic (Marable, 2007; Morgan, 2009). Shakur however, recognized that the understanding of the term was ambiguous among different populations. With nigga having differing meanings grounded in fear, unity, and racism, Shakur (1991) sought to reshape the Black understanding of the term in “Words of Wisdom.” In the track, Shakur suggests, “Brothers, sisters, niggas/ when I say ‘nigga’ it is not the nigga we have grown to fear/ it is not the nigga we say as if it has no meaning/ but to me it means, Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished, nigga.”

By re-articulating the meaning behind a term that is common in the Black community, Shakur places a heightened significance on an aspect of Black culture that may otherwise be overlooked. In addition, not only does Shakur include how the term has become commonplace in the Black community, he discusses the fear behind the term that reminds others of the injustices of slavery and segregation in Black history (Kennedy,

2002). Discussing the previous understandings of fear and meaningless reference to other Blacks, Shakur infuses the term with two new notions that are more positive. First, the suggestion that the term includes an element of never being ignorant implies that the community as a whole be more cognizant of their conditions and surroundings and work to be more educated. Secondly, including the aspect of goals and accomplishments reflects Shakur's belief that the community must adjust their current cultural trajectory to one that achieves goals rather than continuing to spiral into poverty. Attempts to shift the meanings of terms such as nigga in the Black community were not uncommon in Shakur's efforts to move the community from common sense to good sense. Scholars point to instances such as a 1992 "truce picnic" held by Shakur to gather groups of Crips and Blood gang members to discuss the direction of gang culture (Dyson, 2006, 2010; Iwamoto, 2003). At this gathering, Shakur explained his definition of the phrase "thug life" as, "the hate u (you) give little infants fucks everyone." This effort is much like his 1993 re-appropriation of nigga, as Shakur attempts to shift the meaning to a more positive concept. Recognizing the negative perceptions of customs such as gang culture and terms like nigga and thug, Shakur used his music to propose an innovative conception of these concepts to provide them more positivity. Through these efforts, Shakur strove to move the Black community from the common sense customs of the past to an acceptance of good sense that would move Blacks forward.

Following Shakur's confrontation and revision of common sense cultural norms of Black communities, his work additionally advanced the good sense of comprehending the hegemony. Having already identified the common sense notions of American society that were inhibiting the progress of Blacks, Shakur began to advance the possibility for

resistance through two necessary conditions in order for social change to begin, the first of which is the presence of knowledge and critical thinking. Again referencing the importance of the youth and questioning social conditions, Shakur explained that healthy skepticism would lead the Black community to the source of hegemonic power that needed reform. Next and perhaps more importantly, was the necessity of unity of the oppressed Blacks across the nation. As Shakur illuminates the importance of these two influential conditions within the Black community, his role as a leader of the social movement thus emerges.

“They punish the people that’s asking questions” (Shakur, 1995). This statement in “Me Against the World” encompasses Shakur’s argument for skepticism in the Black community. In several of his songs, Shakur explains how his skepticism and critical inquiry of society led to his stance against an American hegemony. Again in “Me Against the World,” Shakur (1995) proposes, “The message I stress: to make it, stop, study your lessons/ don’t settle for less, even a genius asks questions/ don’t ever change, keep your essence/ the power is in the people and the politics we address.” This message of Shakur’s is wholly important for two major reasons. First, it is important to consider that this is the most recent of the nine songs released that I have examined in this analysis. The chronology of this message is important because with Shakur articulating his message to Blacks, we can see that this message has resulted from the experiences he has endured that have led up to this track’s release. This means that through all of the oppression, suffering, and personal accounts included in the other eight tracks I have analyzed, he has formulated this premise as a result of these experiences. Second, this

excerpt contains his emphasis on knowledge and education that leads to critical thought of the social world, concluding with the importance of the people and addressing politics.

While Shakur's message of critical thought is indeed significant in regards to its importance in the movement for social change, other instances of inquiry reinforce the need for skepticism among the Black community. In "Words of Wisdom" for example, Shakur wonders:

No Malcolm X in my history text, Why is that? / Cause he tried to educate and liberate all blacks/ why is Martin Luther King in my book each week? / He told blacks, if they get smacked, turn the other cheek/ I don't get it, so many questions went through my mind/ I get sweated, they act as if asking questions is a crime.

Once again, we can see Shakur emphasizing the importance of skepticism regarding society and education, as Shakur reflects on his lessons that glorified Martin Luther King, Jr. and seemed to demonize Malcolm X. Additionally, Shakur addresses the instance of hegemony through the oppositional term "they," and how individuals in power discourage historical skepticism. With Shakur's skeptical contemplations of the hegemony, as well as aforementioned critical examinations of Black culture and society, he establishes the need for critical thinking in order for social change to occur. He illustrates that the practice of critical thinking yields a public that is more aware of the injustices that occur and more importantly, who is at fault for these injustices.

Although promoting the population's critical awareness and identifying the hegemonic forces behind oppression is a step in the right direction, Shakur's music is also significant in its explanation of a solution to these social conditions. As previous scholars suggest, a successful social movement is predicated upon the union and cohesion



of the oppressed community (Griffin, 1952; Jensen, 2006; Stuart et. al, 2012). In his quest to overcome the oppressive conditions facing Black Americans, Shakur recognized that this was a fight he could not confront alone. As such, much of Shakur's music is pervaded with the rapper's call for unification in the Black community.

The task of unifying the oppressed Black communities is certainly a lofty one for many reasons. As the proliferation of oppression brought on the presence of gangs, drug dealings, and violence, the hope for a unified Black community seemed bleak in the 1990s. Shakur however was able to pierce through the divisive elements of the ghettos because of his ability to relate to the people along with his clear illustration of the injustices of the social world. At several points in "Something 2 Die 4," Shakur (1993) calls for a community that must be united if they are ever to achieve the social change that many of them would be willing to die for. Also in this track, Shakur appeals to the unity of Blacks by claiming that Blacks outnumber the hegemony. Doing so, Shakur again stresses that Blacks must work in unison in their efforts to resist their oppressive conditions.

In addition to Shakur arguing for the unification of the Black community for social change, he also explains how the aforementioned common sense notions of the hegemony disrupt the efforts of resistance. In "Papa'z Song" for instance, Shakur (1993) illustrates how a Black child's thirst for familial unity is instead met with another typical instance of parental abandonment. As I have discussed, these occurrences of broken homes often lead to a child that fosters feelings of resentment and will possibly fall in line with the trend of crime in the streets. Another instance of Shakur's appeal to unity is in "Words of Wisdom," where he (1991) determines that the expansion of illicit drug

sales in the ghettos serves to split the Black community. In these instances of reflecting on the problematic cultural customs of the Black population, Shakur reinforces his emphasis on the unified front of Black Americans. Although the concept of unification is wholly important when considering the consolidation of a social movement, Shakur also addresses how unity can be splintered by the customs of the Black community.

The subject of unity is one that Shakur addresses through describing its importance for the future of Black Americans. Through tracks such as “Something 2 Die 4” and “Words of Wisdom,” he implores Blacks to understand that nothing in society will change unless the community as a whole works together to resist their conditions. Shakur’s music also discusses unity from the perspective of the disturbing cultural trends that only serve to fragment the union of Blacks. Referencing the conditions of the Black family and drugs in the oppressed ghettos, Shakur includes how these norms continue to marginalize the Black community. Shakur not only confronted these issues in his music, but also through actions like his assembly of rival gangs to invoke truces for the sake of Black American progress (Dyson, 2006). As a burgeoning leader of social change for the justice of Black Americans, Shakur recognized and illustrated the need for Black unity in his conquest to overcome the American hegemony.

As we examine the music of Tupac Shakur through the critical Gramscian lens, it is clear that Shakur utilized his music in an effort to confront and resist a hegemonic entity that oppressed Blacks. Throughout the texts I have observed, Shakur lyrics about oppressive conditions that hinder the progress of the Black population. Reading further into the meanings of these songs though, it becomes evident that Shakur’s illustrations of oppression illustrate the concepts of hegemonic dominance. Following Shakur’s

identification of the social elements of hegemonic marginalization facing Blacks, he moves on to introduce a resistance of these conditions. Challenging the hegemonic common sense in Black culture and shifting the culture's understanding towards good sense, Shakur works to unite and mobilize an effort of resistance against the hegemony. Because of Shakur's efforts to address the dominance of the hegemony and organize a resistance to these oppressive conditions, we can then observe the rapper as an organic intellectual of hegemonic opposition.

### **Tupac Shakur: Organic Intellectual**

Gramsci (1971) describing a leader's rise from the conditions of oppression and hegemonic domination, introduced the notion of an "organic intellectual." While Gramsci argued that all individuals are intellectuals on some level, he explains organic intellectuals are unique because of their role in resistance. Zompetti (1997) explains that organic intellectuals are those who overcome the dominant forces of hegemony through criticism and self-awareness. Gramscian scholars suggest that the role of the organic intellectual is to be critically skeptical and self-reflexive in order to develop a moment of resistance (Gramsci, 1971, 1975; Zompetti, 1997). During these periods of skepticism in the hegemonic landscape, organic intellectuals promote a notion of self-reflexivity and social awareness in the minds of the marginalized community. Organic intellectuals in effect, are those along the subaltern who naturally ascend to a role of leadership through their movement against common sense for the sake of good sense and social justice.

In order for us to observe Tupac Shakur as an organic intellectual, it is important to examine the efforts of the rapper in his conquest to combat hegemony. Certainly, identifying the elements of hegemonic oppression and prospects for resistance in

Shakur's work aids in our understanding of his music as being conscious of hegemonic forces in the United States. However, in order for Shakur to be recognized as an organic intellectual, he must exhibit the aspects of self-reflexivity and hegemonic critique that attempt to counter oppressive social conditions. Therefore, by arguing that for Shakur is an organic intellectual, I will examine how his music expresses three central characteristics. First, Shakur's recognition of self and self-reflexivity along the terrain of the subaltern will be a critical factor in his efforts to promote social change in the Black community. Next, after having recognized his position, Shakur expresses a re-articulation of common sense for the purposes of making the community more self-aware as a whole. Finally, Shakur's lyrics fervently critique the hegemony as he hopes to arouse social agitation and protest in his community.

Examining the instances of hegemony and counter-hegemonic efforts throughout history, practicing self-reflexivity is a primary catalyst to mobilize social change. Scholars explain that an individual's marginalization can bring about a natural moment in time for them to recognize their social position in regards to the hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 1993; Zompetti, 1997). These moments allow the individual to distinguish his or her social location in contrast to the hegemony and comprehend how the hegemony may hold dominance. Shakur's lyrics represent several moments of self-reflexivity, as his continued oppression led him to recognize his own position and how the conditions of Black Americans were a result of hegemonic dominance. In the tracks, "Trapped," "Words of Wisdom," and "Holler if Ya' Hear me," Shakur includes illustrations that demonstrate his recognition of the injustices that limit the progress of Blacks. More importantly, these depictions are presented in a way that exhibit Shakur's recognition that

the social world around him has been influenced by forces of hegemonic domination. In “Trapped” for example, Shakur (1991) describes himself “Trapped in my own community/ one day I’m gonna bust/ blow up on this society/ why did you lie to me? / I couldn't find a trace of equality/ work me like a slave while they laid back.” Identifying that those in power are systematically trapping him, Shakur portrays how he has been taken advantage of by the hegemony.

Frustrated after becoming aware of his position in society, Shakur writes lyrics that also express his self-reflexivity in a way that begins to suggest that Blacks struggle against their oppression. In “I Don’t Give a Fuck,” Shakur (1991) motions, “The way they see it, we was meant to be down...mama told me there’d be days like this/ but I’m pissed cause it stays like this...this is the day we make them pay.” Arguing that the hegemony prescribes the notion that Blacks are inferior, Shakur goes on to voice his frustration that nothing is being done to remedy the predicament of Blacks in poverty. Moments such as these and others throughout the texts explore a man who is frustrated and fed up with being stuck in a continuous cycle of oppression. Fueling Shakur’s irritation is his recognition that Blacks as a whole are being exploited and marginalized by a hegemonic structure in the United States. Coming to the realization of his position in society, Shakur takes on the task of illuminating this same recognition in his community. Therefore, following Shakur’s self-reflexivity in relation to the hegemony, he begins to utilize his music to reshape and rearticulate the consented logics of the Black community.

As I explored above, Shakur’s lyrics often confronted the common sense beliefs of society in his journey to form a more critically aware and self-reflexive Black community. Using his lyrics to confront the state of Black culture, the contemporary

social world, and the perceptions that Blacks hold toward the hegemonic structures themselves, Shakur rearticulates the hegemonic common sense on multiple levels. Following his self-reflexive moment of recognizing the social position of Black Americans, Shakur sought to reshape the views of his community in a way that would lead to their own moment of self-reflexivity. Not only did Shakur rearticulate the perceptions held toward the culture or the cultural hegemony, Shakur also confronted the fear many Blacks held in regards to the prospect of resistance. He understood that while the rearticulation of common sense was beneficial, true social change would not be realized unless the Black community was receptive to a movement against the hegemony. Therefore, in tracks such as “Words of Wisdom,” “Holler if Ya Hear Me,” and “Something 2 Die 4,” Shakur illustrates the need for Blacks to fight back against their oppression. Specifically, Shakur (1993) calls upon the Black community to begin “swinging back” if they too are fed up with their oppressive state. Further, Shakur (1991) goes on to identify himself as America’s nightmare in “Words of Wisdom,” claiming that as a result of his newfound understanding of the hegemony’s inner workings, he will mobilize a resistance. In addition to the common sense notions discussed previously, these declarations serve to overcome the common sense of social suppression felt by many Blacks who are apprehensive toward the prospect of a social movement. In addition to Shakur’s lyrical reshaping of common sense, he used his music to critique the hegemony and mobilize the social movement he desired.

Once organic intellectuals become self-aware of their position and rearticulate the common sense dictated to them by the hegemonic social structure, they also engage in the active criticism of the hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, 2000). Driven by his frustrations and

suffering at the hands of the hegemony, Shakur criticized the dominant forces in society and called for social change. Critiquing the customs of society for their role in Black oppression, Shakur questioned the American government, education system, law enforcement, and American elites. Exposing the oppressive nature of social institutions against the Black community, Shakur called upon the Black population to become more aware of their marginalization and fight back. Calling for a more aware and unified Black community, Shakur used his music to reveal that aspects of society that were problematic and more importantly, oppressive. While Shakur is neither the first, nor the only intellectual of this time to demand counter-movement against the hegemony, it is important to comprehend how his music exemplifies his standing as an organic intellectual. Experiencing the continued oppression of the ghetto in urban America, Shakur was able to take advantage of a moment that allowed him to be self-reflexive of his position in the subaltern. More significant were his actions following this point of self-awareness, as Shakur communicated through music, the common sense notions inhibiting Blacks and reshaped them toward the ideas of good sense. While doing so, Shakur was also highly critical of the dominant hegemony and used his music to illuminate the injustices imposed by hegemony. A musician, a leader, and ultimately an organic intellectual, Tupac Shakur naturally ascended to an influential role of leadership in an effort to mobilize a social movement that would reshape the social conditions of the United States.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The vivid tales of poverty and oppression woven into Tupac Shakur's music illustrate the rapper's understandings of a world inundated with injustices that need reform. Beyond their depiction of the poverty-stricken conditions of urban America, these texts demonstrate Shakur's efforts to redesign the culture of Black Americans and resist the oppressive forces in America that sustain the marginalization of Blacks. Listening to these tracks and the stories communicated in them, we see a musician whose self-reflexivity allowed him to take on a leadership role in the early stages of a counter-hegemonic movement. In music like Shakur's, we can examine the capacities of resistance and promoting social-awareness that his music uniquely offers.

In this project, I have presented the characteristics of hegemonic dominance and oppression against Black Americans that are intertwined in the lyrics of Tupac Shakur. These same conditions of oppression are not a thing of the past or an aspect of society that has been remedied, as they still exist in modern America. Harnessing his artistic platform, Shakur rapped about the injustices in America to communicate the presence of a hegemony that was perpetually subjugating a specific community of the American people. Outlining the consequences of oppression and propositioning the possibilities for social change, Shakur organically rises to a position of influence and leadership in the initial stages of a new form of social resistance following the previous efforts of Black



protest. Shakur's music embodied the injustices of Black America and through his unique mode of discourse, revealed a great deal about the communicative nature of hip-hop and how the genre functions as a potential vessel of social resistance.

### **The Legacy of Tupac Shakur**

Despite the conspiracy theories and beliefs surrounding the production of posthumous records, Tupac Shakur died at the young age of 25 on September 13, 1996. In a case that remains unsolved, the American public met Shakur's murder with a great deal of speculation and heartache. Since then, he has been revered by many as the greatest hip-hop artist of all time and, in some cases, is recognized as a martyr for Black America, since his death came at a time when his fame was at its highest. Adding to Shakur's mystique is the shift in his lyrical content leading up to his death, as he often mused upon his paranoia of dying in a way that some claim predicted the time and manner in which he would be killed (Dyson, 2006; Edwards, 2002). Regardless of the speculation, mystery, and theory surrounding the death of the hip-hop icon, the one constant of Shakur's legacy is his devotion to the social progress of Black Americans.

However, as fans and critics alike work to construct an understanding of Shakur's legacy, we cannot simply dismiss the rapper's faults just because he fought for social justice. Studying the good, bad, and ugly of Tupac Shakur's life, it is apparent that he was a living, breathing contradiction. While tracks such as "Keep ya Head Up" and "Dear Mama" exhibit the soft side of Shakur and the respect, admiration and chivalry he held towards women, contradictory messages in works such as "I Get Around" and "Rather Be ya Nigga" communicate the problematic elements of misogyny and female objectification often criticized in hip-hop (Dyson, 2006; Iwamoto, 2003). Similarly, while many

scholars, including myself, argue that Shakur opposed the greedy, violent, and criminal stereotype of hip-hop artists, tracks such as “Hit em Up,” and “2 of Americaz Most Wanted” tarnish these sentiments (Iwamoto, 2003). While many supporters point to Shakur’s warmth toward the youth and his passion for knowledge and education, many critics counter that this is the same Tupac Shakur who was imprisoned for his involvement in a sexual assault case.

The discussion of how we will remember Tupac Shakur is a contentious one. Following this project and my experiences with Shakur’s music and studying his life, I posit that Shakur was a well-intentioned individual whose passions at times made him reckless. Because of his recklessness, many critics will regard Shakur as an enigma, and some go so far as to argue that his actions hampered the progress for Black Americans (Keeling, 2003). Looking past Shakur’s legacy in terms of his public persona, the mark Shakur left on hip-hop is irrefutable. As many hip-hop critics have determined, Shakur ushered in a period of hip-hop artists who were critical of society and unafraid to infuse their emotions in their music (Dyson, 2006; Edwards, 2002; Iwamoto, 2003; McQuillar & Johnson, 2011). Evidencing Shakur’s contributions to hip-hop, artists such as Eminem, Jay-Z, and Kendrick Lamar often reference Shakur as a major influence on their messages and styles (Carter, 2011; Tardio, 2013). Although Shakur died before he could concretize the social movement against the hegemony, his life’s work shifted the foundation of hip-hop and many contemporary artists carry his cause of promoting a more critical American public.

## **Rhetoric and Music**

In this project, I wanted to examine the influence of Tupac Shakur and in effect, the resistance capacities of the hip-hop genre. As a result, we have a deeper understanding of the intersection of the hip-hop genre and the field of rhetoric. Following my examination and application of the Gramscian lens to these nine songs, it is clear that music is exceptionally rich with the elements of culture and power present in our society. Music lyrics possess the capacity to communicate rhetorical messages regarding the surrounding environment in a way that differentiates these texts from those more commonly examined by rhetorical critics. Regarding the rhetorical tradition and engaging in rhetorical criticism, we must continue to push our recognition of rhetorically rich texts such as musical lyrics that may enable a deeper knowledge of the elements that shape our social world. By recognizing a broader range of cultural texts that should be investigated, we can more effectively examine the texts that illustrate the conditions of modern society.

## **The Power of Hip-Hop**

A genre marred by the ire of music critics who dismiss hip-hop artists as social deviants, it is important that hip-hop be more carefully and critically observed. Just as music plays a dual role of an art form and a culturally rich text, hip-hop is unique in the audiences that the genre represents. Born from the frustrations of the Black communities living along society's margins, hip-hop provides a voice to a population that has been historically voiceless. Hip-hop provides a window to observe a community that is largely misunderstood or ignored by the general public. With popular media films and television programs serving as a primary method of illustrating the conditions of the streets, the public may adopt misguided or stereotypical views towards these communities. This is

obviously problematic, given that the adoption of such narrow perspectives will only serve to further divide the American public.

Thus, hip-hop inserts itself as a musical genre and cultural movement in society, providing oppressed communities a platform to communicate the injustices of their conditions. Agitation and resistance is at the heart of what differentiates hip-hop from all other forms of music. Hip-hop's genesis began with aggravated artists voicing their displeasure towards their conditions and has evolved into an artistic expression that can unite, educate, and reshape society. Artists like Tupac Shakur, Nas, and Run-DMC moved the hip-hop genre from merely being recognized as a form of release for Blacks to now being a unifying element for the struggle against Black oppression. Present day hip-hop is more diverse than ever before, with several sub-genres that appeal to a wide consumer base. Despite the turns and variations that hip-hop has experienced since the loss of Tupac Shakur, the importance of communicating the experiences of the oppressed remains a staple of the genre.

Hip-hop also offers audiences the chance to experience the conditions of a community that may otherwise be unknown to the listener. Despite the public's initial criticism, hip-hop is here to stay in the musical landscape. Just as the Grammy awards have finally come to recognize the legitimacy of hip-hop in the context of music, it is important for rhetorical critics and communication scholars to acknowledge hip-hop's academic capacities. Hip-hop is a form of expression that allows the rare opportunity for critical scholars to hear the voices of the powerless. Although hip-hop music, like many other genres, may exhibit instances of resoundingly problematic messages, it is important

for these messages to be dissected and analyzed for the meaning they may possess towards our social world.

### **A Hegemonic America**

The primary theoretical concept I sought to analyze in this work was the presence and prominence of a dominant hegemony in the United States. As Shakur ardently declared throughout his lyrics, the Black community suffers from a systematic oppression that has inhibited the possibility for social progress. In addition to this presence of oppression, the Gramscian analysis exposed Shakur's belief that a central hegemony as responsible for the conditions of oppression Hegemonic strategies of common sense, divide and conquer, and spontaneous consent to cultural oppression are employed by the hegemony in order to further subjugate the Black community, while also maintaining their position of dominance. Shakur discusses these tactics and through the Gramscian lens, a critic can expose how the hegemony benefits from the perpetuation of these ways of understanding. While Shakur's music effectively communicates the hegemonic oppression of Blacks, the effects of the hegemony, and the notions of common sense in America, his lyrics only identify the hegemony in a broad and sometimes vague manner. Although he exposes the social institutions that are utilized as tools of the hegemony, like law enforcement and news media, he is only able to broadly claim the dominant hegemony as the government. This is of little surprise, as effective hegemonies are able to maintain their position by subtly shifting social norms and remaining relatively obscure to public perceptions.

Moving forward, scholars should continue applying the Gramscian rhetorical criticism to relevant social texts. So long as the majority of society's resources and

influences are controlled by a select few, the need for critics to examine the presence of hegemonic structures will remain a priority. Phrases like “the system,” “the one-percent,” and “the man” are commonly thrown about in discussions where individuals yearn to understand the nature of their oppression or the reason for their social-class immobility (Carley, 2013; Hibbard, 2013). As critics move to analyze the origins of these oppressive conditions, the Gramscian method of rhetorical criticism reveals the subtle discourses that maintain them. As we consider the nature of power in society, Gramscian analyses explicate how influence is distributed in a population along with the cultural strategies employed to sustain dominance over certain populations.

### **Study Limitations and Future Research**

With this study, it is important to remember that my application of the Gramscian criticism was restricted to the lyrics uttered by Shakur in his songs. Therefore, as we look ahead to possible studies of similar direction, it may behoove us to include the musicological aspects of the songs rather than narrowly focusing on the lyrics. The musicological aspects of hip-hop are important elements to consider because they too are carefully produced and selected for the artist’s message. For example, the beat production, song tempo, and sound effects are essential elements of a song that may possess a level of meaning that is complementary to, or deeper than, the lyrics. In this study, the only musicological element that I examined in consideration to its contribution to the song’s meaning was in the track “Papa’z Song.” In this track, the final verse performed by Shakur is an impersonation of a father who apparently left his family. This musical element of impersonation greatly shifts the meaning of the verse, since the verse is supposed to offer the perspective of the Black fathers who abandon their families. By

shifting the tone and pitch of his voice in the track, Shakur clearly conveys that he was intending to offer the perspective of the Black fathers that the track focuses on overall. While this was a musicological element of the track, it pales in comparison to the multitude of other musicological elements that influence the meaning of a hip-hop song. Though many recognize hip-hop as a modern form of poetry, the verses are only one of many foundations of what conveys meaning in hip-hop (Ogbar, 2007). These musicological elements can arguably illustrate the emotions, culture, or intentions of the rapper. Though examining their rhetorical functions may be methodologically unorthodox in comparison to my textual interpretations, they present a deeper level of meaning for the study of hip-hop's meaning. Therefore, in future studies, in order for a critic to analyze the entirety of a song's meaning, it is important that all elements of production, sound effects, sampling, and others be included in the analysis.

Another restrictive aspect of this study was the texts that I could have selected more songs produced while Shakur was alive from the beginning rather than narrowing my consideration to nine tracks. While I find value in the succinctness of selecting nine representative texts rather than an entire library of music, some may argue that all of Shakur's works should have been included in the analysis. Looking ahead, if rhetorical critics hope to argue that an artist's work represents a social movement, they should consider the notion that all texts should be observed rather than a representative sample.

Another element of my text selection that may arguably diminish my argument that Tupac Shakur is an organic intellectual was my deliberate exclusion of certain music released in Tupac Shakur's name. Although almost half of Shakur's discography was removed from consideration because of their posthumous release, I argue that this

exclusion was justified, given Shakur's lack of input regarding its distribution. Still, one can argue that these tracks represent Shakur's beliefs and as such, should be examined in a project that argues his historical understanding. The final aspect of examined texts that could be considered a limitation to this study was my choice to ignore any texts from Shakur's 1996 album, *All Eyez on Me*. Despite being Shakur's most commercially successful album, I chose not to include any of its tracks because of its release during Shakur's time as an artist on Death Row Records (Dyson, 2006; Keeling, 2003). While many hip-hop critics argue that much of the album's content was manipulated by the control of the record company that posted bail for Shakur in 1996, the fact remains that the album was released while Shakur was alive. Despite my claims that the album's content is in stark contrast to Shakur's earlier work of social consciousness, future work could analyze the rhetorical implications of this shift. Though I may have dismissed these tracks, the rhetorical meaning of this overt shift could further the recognition of hegemony in Shakur's music or suggest elements of corporate co-option in the hip-hop genre as a whole.

Additionally, an aspect that could limit studies such as this one is the racial foundation of hip-hop music as a whole. In my argument for hip-hop as a vessel for social movement mobilization and resistance, scholars should consider the possibility that hip-hop is tied so deeply to Black culture that the genre's utility only influences Blacks. Or, the converse possibility exists that as hip-hop's popularity continues to soar in America, the genre may one day be co-opted or commodified as some scholars have suggested (Ogbar, 2007). If scholars choose to analyze hip-hop's racial transcendence to



issues of feminism or the conditions of other racial communities, the genre's racial roots and reluctance to accept White performers may inhibit its use as a main text.

Future studies should not only contemplate the racial foundations of the genre and the inclusion of an artist's entire musical catalogue, but also how a comparative analysis of hip-hop artists furthers the understanding of both artists and the genre. As previous literature suggests, there have been several hip-hop artists who have represented social change for Black Americans (Dyson, 2010; Ogbar, 2007; Rose, 1994). If future critics of the genre resolve to analyze the role of an individual artist, they should consider the benefits of examining artists in comparison to their peers.

### **Where Next?**

As a scholar, critic, and avid listener of hip-hop music, I felt it was important that I attempt to observe hip-hop from an academic perspective so the perception surrounding the genre can be expanded. Although hip-hop has seen a great deal of pushback by the American public, the genre has persevered through the times of heavy criticism and concretized itself as a staple of American music. Today, hip-hop is recognized by popular culture award ceremonies like the Grammys and Academy Awards and even is starting to be included in the curricula of schools around the world (Ogbar, 2007; Perry, 2005; Wright, 2012). As the genre garners more critical respect, it is important that others consider how the genre can represent so much more than just an entertainment outlet. While I argue that Tupac Shakur is an organic intellectual of hegemonic resistance, critics moving forward should consider how other music artists (not exclusively in hip-hop) might be leaders of social change. As I alluded to earlier, the current hip-hop scene is now populated by the likes of Drake, Lupe Fiasco, and Kendrick Lamar. These artists,

influenced by the performers of Shakur's era, lead the charge of challenging social norms and pushing for change. Moreover, as critics seek to understand the diverse methods in which social movements are organized, the consideration of other genres of music and other forms of art in general can further our understanding of how individuals call for action in society.

With studies such as this one, we learn a great deal not only about the hip-hop genre of music, but about rhetorical criticism and the presence of Gramscian theory in contemporary culture. I chose an academic endeavor that was rhetorical in nature because as we more closely examine prominent social texts, both problematic and constructive, it is clear that rhetoric plays a key role in their preservation. As I have shown, rhetoric exists not only in public speech acts and popular written works, but also in forms of art like hip-hop music. Consequently, scholars should expand their rhetorical critiques to more diverse texts that are loaded with meaning. Whether it is controversial music, provocative images, or polemic films, rhetorical critics need to apply their practice to any and all texts that may lead to a better understanding of where true power and supremacy lays in society. Additionally, as scholars continue to examine critically the conditions of social power, my application of Gramscian criticism illuminates the importance of continuing the use of this theory moving forward. With Gramscian criticism, we can examine how social classes are constructed, where oppression exists, and how cultural norms detrimentally inhibit social progress. Gramscian criticism affords rhetorical critics the ability to unveil the problematic structures of oppression today and how rhetoric plays a role in their maintenance. Hence, as individuals clamor over questions concerning

power and the origins of their struggle, it is important that Gramsci's notions of hegemonic theory continue to be practiced in rhetorical criticism.

How exactly Tupac Shakur will be remembered in two or three decades, I cannot say. However, as we look back on his life, it is apparent that his influence is different than that of other legendary artists like Run-DMC, Jay-Z, or Notorious B.I.G. Shakur's music, his outspoken nature, and his untimely death profoundly influenced hip-hop and Black culture to the degree that he is still being discussed 15 years after his death. I will not make the outlandish claim that Tupac Shakur should be held in the same regard as leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, or Malcolm X; however, as we consider the history of Black social progress in the United States and the role of rhetoric in that progress, Shakur must be a part of the conversation. Furthermore, as rhetorical scholars continue their understanding of the rich cultural texts that shape society, it is important that music and more importantly, hip-hop, be at the forefront of this discussion. More specifically, as critical scholars work to unearth the critical discourses that expose the presence of problematic conditions of oppression, hip-hop culture and music must be considered for its connections to Black America. Hip-hop possesses a power that is unique in its ability to captivate audiences and illustrate the experiences of an artist. This inherent power is one that continues to shape society in various capacities and as such, we must include hip-hop in our academic conversations aimed at improving our social world.

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## APPENDIX

### SELECTED TUPAC SHAKUR SONGS

Shakur, T. (1991). Trapped. On 2Pacalypse Now (Music Album). Richmond, CA:

Interscope Records

You know they got me trapped in this prison of seclusion  
Happiness, living on the streets is a delusion  
Even a smooth criminal one day must get caught  
Shot up or shot down with the bullet that he bought  
Nine millimeter kickin' thinking about what tha streets do to me  
Cause they never talk peace in the black community  
All we know is violence do the job in silence  
Walk the city streets like a rat pack of tyrants  
Too many brothers daily heading for the big pen  
Niggas comin' out worse off than when they went in  
Over tha years I done a lot of growin' up  
Getten drunk throw'n up cuffed up  
Then I said I had enough  
There must be another route, way out  
To money and fame, I changed my name  
And played a different game  
Tired of being trapped in this vicious cycle  
If one more cop harasses me I just might go psycho  
And when I get em'  
I'll hit em' with the bum rush  
Only a lunatic would like to see his skull crushed  
Yo, if your smart you'll really let me go 'G'  
But keep me cooped up in this ghetto and catch the uzi  
They got me trapped....

[Chorus]

(Uh uh, they can't keep tha black man down)  
They got me trapped  
(Naw, they can't keep tha black man down)  
Trapped

(Naw, they can't keep tha black man down)

They got me trapped  
Can barely walk the city streets  
Without a cop harassing me, searching me  
Then asking my identity  
Hands up, throw me up against the wall  
Didn't do a thing at all  
I'm tellin' you one day these suckers gotta fall  
Cuffed up throw me on the concrete  
Coppers try to kill me  
But they didn't know this was the wrong street  
Bang bang, down another casualty  
But it's a cop who's shot there's brutality  
Who do you blame?  
It's a shame because the mans slain  
He got caught in the chains of his own game  
How can I feel guilty after all the things they did to me  
Sweated me, hunted me  
Trapped in my own community  
One day I'm gonna bust  
Blow up on this society  
Why did ya lie to me?  
I couldn't find a trace of equality  
Work me like a slave while they laid back  
Homie don't play that  
It's time I let em suffer the payback  
I'm tryin to avoid physical contact  
I can't hold back, it's time to attack jack  
They got me trapped

[Chorus]

Now i'm trapped and want to find a getaway  
All I need is a 'G' and somewhere safe to stay  
Can't use the phone  
Cause i'm sure someone is tappin in  
Did it before  
Ain't scared to use my gat again  
I look back at hindsight the fight was irrelevant  
But now he's thae devils friend  
Too late to be tellin' him  
He shot first and i'll be damned if I run away  
Homie is done away I should of put my gun away  
I wasn't thinkin' all I heard was the ridicule

Girlies was laughin', Tup sayin "Damn homies is dissin you"  
I fired my weapon  
Started steppin' in the hurricane  
I got shot so I dropped  
Feelin' a burst of pain  
Got to my feet  
Couldn't see nothin' but bloody blood  
Now i'm a fugitive to be hunted like a murderer  
Ran through an alley  
Still lookin' for my getaway  
Coppers said Freeze, or you'll be dead today  
Trapped in a corner  
Dark and I couldn't see the light  
Thoughts in my mind was the nine and a better life  
What do I do? Live my life in a prison cell  
I'd rather die than be trapped in a living hell  
They got me trapped

[Chorus]

Shakur, T. (1991). I Don't Give a Fuck. On 2Pacalypse Now (Music Album). Richmond, CA: Interscope Records

I don't give a fuck  
They done push me to the limit I'm all in  
I might blow up any minute, did it again  
Now I'm in the back of the paddy wagon  
While this cops bragging about the nigga he's jackin  
I see no justice all I see is niggas dying fast  
The sound of a gun blast  
Then watch the Hurst past  
Just another day in the life 'G'  
Gotta step lightly cause cops tried to snipe me  
The catch, they don't wanna stop at the brother man  
But then they'll have an accident and pick up another man  
I went to the bank to cash my check  
I get more respect from the mother-fuckin' dope man  
The Grammy's and the American music shows pimp us like hoes  
They got dough but they hate us though  
You better keep your mind on the real shit  
And fuck trying to get with these crooked ass hypocrites  
They way they see it, we was meant to be keep down  
Just can't understand why we getting respect now  
Mama told me they're be days like this  
But I'm pissed cause it stays like this  
And now they trying to send me off to Kuwait  
Gimme a break, how much shit can a nigga take  
I ain't goin' nowhere no how  
What you wanna throw down  
Better bring your guns pal  
Cause this is the day we make 'em pay  
Fuck bailin' hate I bail and spray with my A-K  
And even if they shoot me down  
There'll be another nigga bigger  
from the mother-fuckin' underground  
So step but you better step quick  
Cause the clocks goin' tick and I'm sick of the bullshit  
You're watching the makings of a physcopath  
The truth didn't last  
Before the wrath and aftermath  
Who's that behind the trigger?  
Who'd do your figure?  
A mother-fuckin night nigga  
Ready to buck and rip shit up  
I had enough and I don't give a fuck

Niggas!, isn't just the blacks  
also a gang of mother-fuckers dressed in blue slacks  
They say niggas hang in packs and their attitude is shitty  
Tell me, who's the biggest gang of niggas in the city  
They say niggas like to do niggas,  
Throw me in the cuffs with just two niggas  
A street walkin' nigga and a beat walkin' nigga with a badge  
I had to shoot you and the pass for the blast take his cash  
And bash his head in dump him at the dead in  
And that's just his luck  
Cause a nigga like me  
don't really give a fuck

Walked in the store what's everybody staring at  
They act like they never seen a mother fucker wearing black  
Following a nigga and shit  
Ain't this a bitch all I wanted was some chips  
I wanna take my business else where  
But where?  
Cause who in the hell cares  
About a black man with a black need  
They wanna jack me like some kind of crack fiend  
I wonder if knows that my income is more than  
His pension, salary and then some  
Your daughter is my number one fan  
And your trife ass wife wants a life with a black man  
So who's the mac in fact who's the black jack  
Sit back and get fat off the fat cat  
while he thinks that he's getting over  
I bust a move as smooth as Casanova  
And count another quick meal  
I'm getting paid for my trade but its still real  
And if you look between the lines you'll find a rhyme  
AS strong as a fuckin' nine  
Mail stacked up niggas wanna act up  
Let's put the gats up and throw your backs up  
But the cops getting dropped by the gun shot  
Used to come but he's done, now we run the block  
To my brothers stay strong keep your heads up  
They know we fed up  
They just don't give a fuck

I gotta give my fuck offs  
Fuck you to the San Francisco police department Fuck you to the Marin County Sheriff  
department



Fuck you to the F.B.I fuck you to the C.I.A  
Fuck you to the B-u-s-h fuck you to the America  
Fuck you to all you redneck prejudice mother fuckers  
And fuck you, fuck Y'all  
Punk gay sensitive little dick bastards  
2pacalypse mother fuckin' know  
Y'all can kiss my ass and suck my dick dnd my uncle Tommy's balls  
Fuck Y'all  
Punks, punks, punks, punks, punks

Shakur, T. (1991). Words of Wisdom. On 2Pacalypse Now (Music Album). Richmond, CA: Interscope Records

Killing us one by one  
In one way or another  
America will find a way to eliminate the problem  
One by one  
The problem is the troubles in the black youth of the ghettos  
And one by one  
We are being wiped off the face of this earth at an extremely alarming rate  
And even more alarming is the fact that we are not fighting back  
Brothers, sisters, niggas  
When I say niggas it is not the nigga we are grown to fear  
It is not the nigga we say as if it has no meaning  
But to me it means Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished, nigga  
Niggas what are we going to do?  
Walk blind into a line? Or fight?  
Fight and die if we must like niggas

This is for the masses, the lower classes  
The ones you left out, jobs were givin', better livin'  
But we were kept out  
Made to feel inferior, but we're superior  
Break the chains in our brains that made us fear yah  
Pledge allegiance to a flag that neglects us  
Honor a man that who refuses to respect us  
Emancipation, proclamation, Please!  
Lincoln just said that to save the nation  
These are lies that we all accepted  
Say no to drugs but the government's kept it  
Running through our community, killing the unity  
The war on drugs is a war on you and me  
And yet they say this is the Home of The Free  
But if you ask me it's all about hypocrisy  
The constitution, Yo, it don't apply to me  
And Lady Liberty still the bitch lied to me  
Steady strong nobody's gonna like what I pumpin'  
But it's wrong to keeping someone from learning something  
So get up, it's time to start nation building  
I'm fed up, we gotta start teaching children  
That they can be all that they want to be  
There's much more to life than just poverty

This is definitely words of wisdom  
America!, America!, America-ca-ca

I charge you with the crime of rape, murder, and assault  
For suppressing and punishing my people  
I charge you with robbery for robbing me of my history  
I charge you with false imprisonment for keeping me  
Trapped in the projects  
And the jury finds you guilty on all accounts  
And you are to serve the consequences of your evil schemes  
Prosecutor do you have any more evidence?

Words of Wisdom

They shine upon the strength of a nation  
Conquer the enemy on with education  
Protect yourself, reach for what you wanna do  
Know thy self, teach what we been through  
On with the knowledge of the place, then  
No one will ever oppress this race again  
No Malcolm X in my history text, why is that?  
'Cause he tried to educate and liberate all blacks  
Why is Martin Luther King in my book each week?  
He told blacks, if they get smacked, turn the other cheek  
I don't get it, so many questions went through my mind  
I get sweated, They act as if asking questions is a crime  
But forget it, one day I'm gonna prove them wrong  
Now every brother had to smother on the welfare line  
The American dream, though it like it's attainable  
They're pulling your sleeve, don't believe Cause it will strangle ya  
Pulling the life of your brain, I can't explain  
Beg as you can obtain from which you came  
Swear that your mother is living in equality  
Forgetting your brother that's living her apology  
Thought they had us beaten when they took out King  
But the battle ain't over till the black man sings  
Words of Wisdom

NIGHTMARE that's what I am  
America's nightmare I am what you made me  
The hate and evil that you gave me  
I shine of a reminder of what you have done to my people  
For Four hundred plus years  
You should be scared  
You should be running  
You should be trying to silence me  
But you cannot escape fate  
Well it is my turn to come  
Just as you rose you shall fall by my hands America

You reap what you sow  
2pacalypse America's Nightmare  
Ice Cube and Da Lench Mob America's Nightmare  
Above the Law America's Nightmare  
Paris America's Nightmare  
Public Enemy America's Nightmare  
Krs-One America's Nightmare  
Mutulu Shakur America's Nightmare  
Geronimo Pratt America's Nightmare  
Assada Shakur America's Nightmare

Shakur, T. (1991). Brenda's Got a Baby. On 2Pacalypse Now (Music Album).  
Richmond, CA: Interscope Records

I hear Brenda's got a baby  
But, Brenda's barely got a brain  
A damn shame  
The girl can hardly spell her name  
(That's not our problem, that's up to Brenda's family)  
Well let me show ya how it affects the whole community  
Now Brenda really never knew her moms and her dad was a junky  
Went in death to his arms, it's sad  
Cause I bet Brenda doesn't even know  
Just cause your in the ghetto doesn't mean ya can't grow  
But oh, that's a thought, my own revelation  
Do whatever it takes to resist the temptation  
Brenda got herself a boyfriend  
Her boyfriend was her cousin, now lets watch the joy end  
She tried to hide her pregnancy from her family  
Who didn't really care to see, or give a damn if she  
Went out and had a church of kids  
As long as when the check came they got first dibs  
Now Brenda's belly is gettin bigger  
But no one seems to notice any change in her figure  
She's 12 years old and she's having a baby  
In love with the molester, who's sexing her crazy  
And yet she thinks that he'll be with her forever  
And dreams of a world with the two of them are together, whatever  
He left her and she had the baby solo, she had it on the bathroom floor  
And didn't know so, she didn't know, what to throw away and what to keep  
She wrapped the baby up and threw him in the trash heap  
I guess she thought she'd get away and wouldn't hear the cries  
She didn't realize  
How much the little baby had her eyes  
Now the baby's in the trash heap balling  
Momma can't help her, but it hurts to hear her calling  
Brenda wants to run away  
Momma say, you makin' me lose pay, the social workers here everyday  
Now Brenda's gotta make her own way  
Can't go to her family, they won't let her stay  
No money no babysitter, she couldn't keep a job  
She tried to sell crack, but end up getting robbed  
So now what's next, there ain't nothing left to sell  
So she sees sex as a way of leaving hell  
It's paying the rent, so she really can't complain  
Prostitute, found slain, and Brenda's her name, she's got a baby

Shakur, S. (1993). Holler if Ya Hear Me. On Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z. (CD). Los Angeles, CA: Interscope Records

Aww yeah  
Holla if ya hear me, yeah!

Here we go, turn it up, let's start  
From block to block we snatchin hearts and jackin marks  
And the punk police can't fade me, and maybe  
We can have peace someday G  
But right now I got my mind set up  
Lookin down the barrel of my nine, get up  
Cause it's time to make the payback fat  
To my brothers on the block better stay strapped, black  
And accept no substitutes  
I bring truth to the youth tear the roof off the whole school  
Oh no, I won't turn the other cheek  
In case ya can't see us while we burn the other week  
Now we got him in a smash, blast  
How long will it last 'til the po' gettin mo' cash  
Until then, raise up!  
Tell my young black males, blaze up!  
Life's a mess don't stress, test  
I'm givin but be thankful that you're livin, blessed  
Much love to my brothers in the pen  
See ya when they free ya if not when they shut me in  
Once again it's an all out scrap  
Keep your hands on ya gat, and now ya boys watch ya back  
Cause in the alleys out in Cali I'mma tell ya  
Mess with the best and the vest couldn't help ya  
Scream, if ya feel me; see it clearly?  
You're too near me -

[Chorus x 3]  
Holla if ya hear me!  
Hard! Tellin you to hear it, the rebel  
Tellin you to hear it

Pump ya fists like this  
Holla if ya hear me – Pump pump if you're pissed  
To the sell-outs, livin it up  
One way or another you'll be givin it up, huh  
I guess cause I'm black born  
I'm supposed to say peace, sing songs, and get capped on  
But it's time for a new plan, Bam!

I'll be swingin' like a one man, clan  
Here we go, turn it up, don't stop  
To my homies on the block gettin' dropped by cops  
I'm still around for ya  
Keepin' my sound underground for ya  
And Imma throw a change up  
Quayle, like you never brought my name up  
Now my homies in the backstreets, the black streets  
They feel me when they rollin in they fat jeeps  
This ain't just a rap song, a black song  
Tellin all my brothers, get they strap on  
And look for me in the struggle  
Hustlin 'til other brothers bubble -

[Chorus x 3]

Will I quit, will I quit?  
They claim that I'm violent, but still I keep  
Representin, never give up, on a good thing  
Wouldn't stop it if we could it's a hood thing  
And now I'm like a major threat  
Cause I remind you of the things you were made to forget  
Bring the noise, to all my boys  
Know the real from the bustas and the decoys  
And if ya hustle like a real G  
Pump ya fists if ya feel me, holla if ya hear me  
Learn to survive in the nine-tre'  
I make rhyme pay, others make crime pay  
Whatever it takes to live and stand  
Cause nobody else'll give a damn  
So we live like caged beasts  
Waitin for the day to let the rage free  
Still me, till they kill me  
I love it when they fear me -

[Chorus x 3]

Shakur, S. (1993). Something 2 Die 4. On Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z. (CD). Los Angeles, CA: Interscope Records

I've changed...  
You mothafuckas kill me  
I've changed...  
It ain't that i've changed  
But it's strange how you mothafuckas rearrange when I found fame  
Point ya finger at tha bad guy  
You know what my momma used to tell me  
If ya can't find something ta live 4  
Then you best find something ta die 4

La'tasha Hardings  
Remember that name  
Cause a bottle of juice  
Is not something 2 die 4

Young Quaid  
Remember that name  
Cause all you mothafuckas  
That go to your grave with that name on your brain  
Cause jealousy and recklessness  
Is not something 2 die 4

All you Niggas out there  
Got a crack that crumbles  
When I say all you Niggas (all you niggas)  
Unite  
One nigga, teach 2 niggas teach  
4 niggas teach more niggas  
All the poor niggas  
The penn niggas  
The rich niggas  
The strong niggas  
UNITE

There's more of us than there is of them  
Look around  
Check your strip  
That's something 2 die 4  
Black  
That's something 2 live 4  
What do I know?



Shakur, S. (1993). Keep Ya Head Up. On Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z. (CD). Los Angeles, CA: Interscope Records

Little something for my godson Elijah and a little girl named Corinne

Some say the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice  
I say the darker the flesh then the deeper the roots  
I give a holler to my sisters on welfare  
Tupac cares, and don't nobody else care  
And uh, I know they like to beat ya down a lot  
When you come around the block brothas clown a lot  
But please don't cry, dry your eyes, never let up  
Forgive but don't forget girl, keep your head up  
And when he tells you you ain't nothing don't believe him  
And if he can't learn to love you, you should leave him  
Cause sista you don't need him  
And I ain't tryin to gas ya up, I just call em how I see em  
You know it makes me unhappy  
When brothas make babies, and leave a young mother to be a pappy  
And since we all came from a woman  
Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman  
I wonder why we take from our women  
Why we rape our women, do we hate our women?  
I think it's time to kill for our women  
Time to heal our women, be real to our women  
And if we don't we'll have a race of babies  
That will hate the ladies that make the babies  
And since a man can't make one  
He has no right to tell a woman when and where to create one  
So will the real men get up?  
I know you're fed up ladies, but keep your head up

[Chorus x 2]

Keep ya head up, oooo child things are gonna get easier  
ooooo child things are gonna get brighter

Ayo, I remember Marvin Gaye, used to sing to me  
He had me feeling like black was the thing to be  
And suddenly the ghetto didn't seem so tough  
And though we had it rough, we always had enough  
I huffed and puffed about my curfew and broke the rules  
Ran with the local crew, and had a smoke or two  
And I realize momma really paid the price  
She nearly gave her life, to raise me right

And all I had ta give her was my pipe dream  
Of how I'd rock the mic, and make it to the bright screen  
I'm tryin to make a dollar out of fifteen cents  
It's hard to be legit and still pay the rent  
And in the end it seems I'm headin for the pen  
I try and find my friends, but they're blowin in the wind  
Last night my buddy lost his whole family  
It's gonna take the man in me to conquer this insanity  
It seems the rain will never let up  
I try to keep my head up, and still keep from gettin wet up  
You know it's funny when it rains it pours  
They got money for wars, but can't feed the poor  
Say there ain't no hope for the youth and the truth is  
It ain't no hope for the future  
And then they wonder why we crazy  
I blame my mother, for turning my brother into a crack baby  
We ain't meant to survive, cause it's a setup  
And even though you're fed up  
Huh, ya got to keep your head up

[Chorus]

And uhh  
To all the ladies havin babies on they own  
I know it's kinda rough and you're feelin all alone  
Daddy's long gone and he left you by ya lonesome  
Thank the Lord for my kids, even if don't nobody else want em  
Cause I think we can make it, in fact, I'm sure  
And if you fall, stand tall and comeback for more  
Cause ain't nothing worse than when your son wants to know  
Why his daddy don't love him no mo'  
You can't complain, you was dealt this hell of a hand  
Without a man, feelin helpless  
Because there's too many things for you to deal with  
Dying inside, but outside you're looking fearless  
While tears is rollin down your cheeks  
Ya steady hoping things don't fall down this week  
Cause if it did, you couldn't take it, and don't blame me  
I was given this world I didn't make it  
And now my son's gotten older and older and cold  
From havin the world on his shoulders  
While the rich kids is drivin Benz  
I'm still tryin to hold on to my survivin friends  
And it's crazy, it seems it'll never let up, but please  
You got to keep your head up

Shakur, S. (1993). Papa'z Song. On Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z. (CD). Los Angeles, CA:  
Interscope Records

Daddy's home...

Heh, so?

You say that like that means something to me  
You've been gone a mighty long motherfucking time  
For you to be coming home talking that "daddy's home" shit nigga  
We been getting along fine just without you  
Me, my brother, and my mother  
So if you don't mind, you can step the fuck off, pops. Fuck you!

Had to play catch by myself, what a sorry sight  
A pitiful plight, so I pray for a starry night  
Please send me a pops before puberty  
the things I wouldn't do to see a piece of family unity  
Moms always work, I barely see her  
I'm startin to get worried without a pops I'll grow to be her  
It's a wonder they don't understand kids today  
So when I pray, I pray I'll never grow to be that way  
And I hope that he answers me  
I heard God don't like ugly well take a look at my family  
A different father every weekend  
Before we get to meet him they break up before the week ends  
I'm gettin sick of all the friendships  
As soon as we kick it he done split and the whole shit ends quick  
How can I be a man if there's no role model?  
Strivin to save my soul I stay cold drinkin a forty bottle

[Chorus]

I'm so sorry  
for all this time (I'm so sorry)  
for all this time  
for all this time (don't lie)  
I'm so sorry  
for all this time (so, sorry)  
for all this time  
for all this time, so sorry baby!

[Verse performed by 'Wyked']

Moms had to entertain many men  
Didn't wanna do it but it's time to pay the rent again  
I'm gettin a bit older and I'm startin to be a bother  
Moms can't stand me cause I'm lookin like my father

Should I stay or run away, tell me the answer  
Moms ignores me and avoids me like cancer  
Grow up rough and it's hard to understand stuff  
Moms was tough cause his poppa wasn't man enough  
Couldn't stand up to his own responsibilities  
Instead of takin care of me, he'd rather live lavishly  
That's why I'll never be a father;  
unless you got the time it's a crime don't even bother  
(That's when I started hatin the phony smiles  
Said I was an only child)  
Look at mama's lonely smile  
It's hard for a son to see his mother cry  
She only loves you, but has to fuck with these other guys

[Chorus]

Man-child in the promised land couldn't afford many heroes  
Moms was the only one there, my pops was a no-show  
And oh, I guess ya didn't know  
That I would grow to be so strong  
Looking kinda pale, was it the ale oh pops was wrong  
Where was the money that you said, you would send me  
talked on the phone and you sounded so friendly  
Ask about school and my welfare  
But it's clear, you ain't sincere  
Hey who the hell cares  
You think I'm blind but this time I see you comin, Jack  
You grabbed your coat, left us broke, now ain't no runnin back  
Ask about my moms like you loved her from the start  
Left her in the dark, she fell apart from a broken heart  
So don't even start with that "wanna be your father" shit  
Don't even bother with your dollars I don't need it  
I'll bury moms like you left me all alone G  
Now that that I finally found you, stay the Fuck away from me

[Chorus]

[Tupac - impersonating his father]

I never meant to leave but I was wanted  
Crossed too many people every house I touched was haunted  
Had to watch the strangers every brother was in danger  
If I was to keep you breathin, had to be out of range  
Had to move, one to lost my name and pick the number  
Made me watch my back I had no happy home to run to  
Maybe it's my fault for being a father livin fast

But livin slow, mean half the dough, and won't get you no ass  
Hindsight shows me it was wrong all along  
I wanted to make some dough so you would grow to be so strong  
It took a little longer than I thought  
I slipped, got caught, and sent to jail by the courts  
Now I'm doin time and I wish you'd understand  
All I ever wanted was for you to be a man  
And grow to be the type you was meant to be  
Keep the war fightin by the writings that you sent to me  
I'm so sorry...

Shakur, S. (1995). *Me Against The World. On Me Against The World.* (CD). Los Angeles, CA: Interscope Records

[Intro performed by 2Pac and Female performer]

Can you picture my prophecy?  
Stress in the city, the cops is hot for me  
The projects is full of bullets, the bodies is droppin there ain't no stoppin me  
Constantly moving while making millions  
Witnessin killings, leaving dead bodies in abandoned buildings  
Can't raise the children cause they're illin  
Addicted to killin and the appeal from the cap peelin  
Without feelin, but will they last or be blasted?  
Hard headed bastard  
Maybe you'll listen in this casket - the aftermath  
More bodies being buried  
I'm losing my homies in a hurry  
They're relocating to the cemetery  
Got me worried, stressin, my vision's blurry  
The question is will I live? No one in the world loves me  
I'm headed for danger, don't trust strangers  
Put one in the chamber whenever I'm feelin this anger  
Don't wanna make excuses, cause this is how it is  
What's the use unless we're shootin no one notices the youth  
It's just me against the world baby

[Chorus]

Me against the world  
It's just me against the world  
It's just me against the world  
Me against the world  
Cause it's just me against the world baby  
Me against the world  
I got nothing to lose  
It's just me against the world baby  
I got nothing to lose

[Verse performed by 'Dramacydal']

Could somebody help me? I'm out here all by myself  
See ladies in stores, Baby Capone's, livin wealthy  
Pictures of my birth on this Earth is what I'm dreamin  
Seeing Daddy's semen, full of crooked demons, already crazy  
And screaming I guess them nightmares as a child  
Had me scared, but left me prepared for a while  
Is there another route? For a crooked Outlaw

Veteran, a villain, a young thug, who one day shall fall

[Verse performed by 'Puff Johnson']

Everday there's mo' death, and plus I'm dough-less  
I'm seein mo' reasons for me to proceed with thievin  
Scheme on the scheming and leave they peeps grieving  
Cause ain't no bucks to stack up, my nuts is backed up  
I'm bout to act up, go load the mac up, now watch me klack up  
Tried making fat cuts, but yo it ain't working  
And Evil's lurking I can see him smirking  
When I gets to pervin, so what?  
Go put some work in, and make my mail, makin sales  
Risking 25 with an 'L' but oh well

[Chorus]

With all this extra stressin  
The question I wonder is after death, after my last breath  
When will I finally get to rest? Through this suppression  
They punish the people that's asking questions  
And those that possess steal from the ones without possessions  
The message I stress: to make it stop study your lessons  
Don't settle for less, even a genius asks questions  
Be grateful for blessings  
Don't ever change, keep your essence  
The power is in the people and politics we address  
Always do your best, don't let the pressure make you panic  
And when you get stranded and things don't go the way you planned it  
Dreaming of riches, in a position of making a difference  
Politicians and hypocrites, they don't wanna listen  
If I'm insane, it's the fame made a brother change  
It wasn't nothing like the game  
It's just me against the world

[Chorus]

[Outro]

That's right  
I know it seem hard sometimes but uh  
Remember one thing  
Through every dark night, there's a bright day after that  
So no matter how hard it gets, stick your chest out  
Keep your head up, and handle it