

True Revolutionary Thugism

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It is clear that the revolutionary is a lawless man. The outlaw and the lumpen will make the revolution. The people, the workers, will adopt it. – George Jackson, Blood in My Eye (1972)

Hip-Hop is in duress indicated by the vile maelstrom which constitutes its current state of affairs. Semantics aside, Hip-Hop is more than bitches, ho's, jewelry, death, and misogyny. To marginalize Hip-Hop as a licentious exposition of male aggression is to adopt the oppressor's grand vision of Hip-Hop demonization. Hip-Hop is the new Black power movement and is the last Black led movement which is attempting to reach out toward the lumpen-proletariat! We can simplify this by saying Hip-Hop is the "poor man's voice," while acknowledging nothing is ever truly that simple. Rap and the lumpen cannot be extirpated at any juncture; Hip-Hop is the expression of the lumpen. It is an insolent gesture to separate rap from the revolution, when rap is the last vestige of expression left for the lumpen-proletariat.

Revolution and Hip-Hop, the contention may perplex the reader. The instinctual response is all rappers talk about are the 3 M's- Murder, Misogyny and Money! How can rappers be politically conscious and aware when their lyrics primarily center on the 3m's? The answer is both shameful and distressing; some practitioners of Hip-Hop have sold out. Some rappers have sacrificed political consciousness and minimal record sales for the 3m's and the Billboard Top 100! Do not forget, however, that these "illegitimate capitalists," are only seeking economic refuge when they sell art.

Paulo Freire, author of Pedagogy of the Oppressed discusses the internal battle of the budding revolutionary, between self-liberation or continued subjugation of others when he states: "Almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or sub-oppressors... Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors." (Freire, 45) Hip-Hop has adopted the manic ideologies of Fascist-Imperialist. The vanguard of Hip-Hop has brutally and implacably limited the role and voice of women. They have raped and defiled the same urban communities which ushered them into stardom, and let us not forget that a majority of these "gangsta rappers" do not live in the "hood" anymore. Nevertheless, this Hip-Hop revolution has only been in existence for a quarter century and it seems Hip-Hop "can't stop and won't stop," anytime soon.

The Lumpen

I refer you again to Mao: when the revolution fails. It's the fault of the vanguard party. – George Jackson, Soledad Brothers: The Prison Letters of George Jackson (1970)

The lumpen-proletariat is the backbone of capitalist society. These people are the laborers, factory workers, minimum wage earners and countless masses who exist below the poverty line. The lumpen are the modern day equivalent to slaves forced to work for

sheer survival and sustenance. This maniacal cycle has become the framework of neoslavery. Comrade George Jackson states, "If you don't make anymore wages than you need to live you are a neoslave. You qualify if you cannot afford to leave California for New York, if you cannot visit Zanzibar, Havana, Peking, or even Paris when you get the urge you are a slave!" (Jackson, 191)

This is the definition of the neoslave; the modern day lumpen-proletariat! A prime example of this phenomenon recently occurred in New Orleans. As they say amongst Hip-Hop youth, "when shit hit the fan," the lumpen-proletariat of New Orleans was unable to escape Mother Nature. This example may be simplistic, but it is indicative of the monumental detriments faced by those mired in poverty, especially those of the Hip-Hop generation.

Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.
– Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963)

Hip-Hop has become the resurgence of the black power movement. From amongst the lumpen, the vanguard of the Hip-Hop movement has been formed. Hip-Hop has merged the gap between the disenfranchised and the upper social apparatus. Hip-Hop has transcended color barriers and even someone such as Eminem may find himself amongst the vanguard. Hip-Hop's prominence serves as an example of the dream created by the Black Panther Party, which would eventually encompass the entire proletariat in a mass movement; Hip-Hop has essentially achieved Huey P. Newton's vital goal.

The burden placed upon Hip-Hop has been unparalleled in the annals of African-American history. This unique cultural and artistic expression has been eschewed as disadvantageous to the advancement of Black people. Yet one must recognize that the lumpen are the uneducated, the hustlers, pimps, thieves, and gangsta's. These, the ostracized of society are regulated to obscurity due to the old vanguard's inability to appeal to them.

The Lumpen-Proletariat are all those who have no secure relationship or vested interest in the means of production and the institutions of a capitalist society. Also the so-called criminal element, those who live by their wits, existing off that which they rip off, who stick guns in the faces of business and say "stick `em up," or "give it up!" Those who don't even want to work and can't relate to punching some pig's time clock, who would rather punch a pig in the mouth and rob him than punch that same pig's time clock and work for him, those whom Huey P. Newton calls "the illegitimate capitalist." In short, all those who simply have been locked out of the economy and robbed of their rightful social heritage. (Booker, 345)

Abundant trepidation is aroused when drawing comparisons between the Black Panther Party and the Hip-Hop movement; but the intrinsic element that unites them is their relation and involvement with the lumpen-proletariat.

The Lumpen-Roots of Hip-Hop

Hip-Hop was created in the ghetto. Any superfluous denunciation of Hip-Hop's roots within the post-industrial urban landscape is "straight up blasphemy." "It is difficult to pin-point the birth date of the genre. Although historians and critics will likely quibble over the exact time, old-school masters like Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Kool Herc generally agree that rap was born in 1974 in the South Bronx." (Perkins, 5) People such as Afrika Bambaataa were ex-gang members "Bambaataa was a charismatic Bronx gang leader who used his organizational prowess and the ritual codes of the Zulu Nation to create one of Hip-Hop's most authentic sounds." (Perkins, 12) Other early Hip-Hop luminaries such as DJ Kool Herc were immigrants from the Caribbean. These lumpen visionaries converged in the ghettos of New York City and created Hip-Hop, hence, the lumpen-proletariat were the founders of the art of Hip-Hop. Rap artist Nas offers a glimpse of New York during this time period:

Broken glass in the hallway/ blood stained floors/
neighbors look at every bag you bring in through your
doors/ lock the top lock/ Momma should of cuffed me to
the radiator/ why not/ it might of saved me later from my
block/ and why cops/ hookers crawling off the stroll/
coughing/ stitches in their head/ stinking/ and I dread
thinking they be snitching/ but who else could it be/ sugar
D's/ unmarked vans parked in the dark/ Narcs/ where's
your heart/ hustlers starve/... see the sergeant and the
captain/ strangle men/ niggaz gasping for air/ till they move
no more/ and just stare with dead eyes... simple minded
fools/ infiltrate grimy crews/ overcrowded cribs/ uncles
home from bids/ sister is pregnant/ fathers on drugs/ moms
is smoking/ beds is piss infested/ -Nas – New York State of
Mind Pt.2. (1998)

The exact date and locale of Hip-Hop's birth is critical when associating it to the lumpen. Despite the fact that rap was not initially created to be utilized as a political tool for the benefit of the lumpen-proletariat it eventually became a staunch signifier of lumpen ideology. Lumpen ideology can be summarized as follows:

Huey wanted brothers off the block-brothers who had been out there robbing banks, brothers who had been pimping, brothers who had been peddling dope, brothers who ain't gonna take nothing, ,brothers who had been fighting pigs because he knew that once they get themselves together in the area of political education. Huey P Newton knew that once you organize the brothers he ran with, he fought with, he fought against, who he fought harder than they fought him, once you organize those brothers, you get niggers, you get black men, you get revolutionaries who are too much (Booker, 346).

These people described by comrade Huey P. Newton are the essence of the

lumpenproletariat, and once concomitant is achieved, their revolutionary potential is unbound. Comrade George Jackson adds, "I speak with some authority and people are listening. People like me are going to be shaping your tomorrows. So just sit back open your mind and watch, since you can't marshal the fundamentals to help me." (Jackson, 61) The refrain exhibited by traditional African-American organizations toward the lumpen-proletariat has delineated their relationship. The holdovers of the civil rights movement have refused to acknowledge the importance and prominence of Hip-Hop's stature and have failed to unite these two dynamic social movements, which both share a common goal: the empowerment of Black people.

Apparatus of Enslavement

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. – Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1993)

The lumpen-proletariat has faced cacophonous accusations toward its morality and true dedication to the movement. Many so-called "Activist," outside of the microcosm of Hip-Hop have shunned the lumpen and their role in the revolutionary structure. The asinine contention that the lumpen pose an immediate threat to the progress and advancement of Black people has been the central obstacle preventing the lumpen-proletariat from their rightful place in the revolution. "In a nonviolent movement there must be a latent threat of eruption, a dormant possibly of sudden and violent action concessions are to be won, respect gained, and the established order altered. A look at European history shows that anything of great value that ever changed hands was taken by force of arms!" (Jackson, 88) Let us keep it real, many of today's so-called activists are fearful of a finite revolution. These people have become comfortable existing amongst the capitalist mediocrity, which constitutes amerikkkan society.

As expressed by Freire, the oppressed have internalized the image of their oppressor consequently fueling the notion that the vanguard are above the lumpen. Many black people in "The movement" fear the possibility of revolution and do not understand the outlaw element, which is necessary for a physical revolution to manifest. For the past forty years, African-Americans have concentrated on electoral politics. While Hip-Hop has adopted a multi-faceted political doctrine broadening its scope, its agenda is similar to the Black Panther Party's 10-point program and corrects any misconception of revolutionary potential.

Lumpen Ideals of Hip-Hop

A terse examination of Hip-Hop's ideology reveals an unwritten doctrine of self and community empowerment reminiscent of the Black Panthers. Despite Hip-Hop's birth as a cultural art form, it has adopted political ideologies and an agenda to protect the lumpenproletariat who constitute its vanguard. Bakari Kitwana states,

Although it has yet to be articulated as such, Hip-Hop generationers do have a concrete agenda... Although this agenda has yet to be articulated holistically, it centers around seven main issues: education, employment, workers rights, reparations, economic infrastructure in urban communities,

youth poverty and disease, anti-youth legislation and foreign policy.
(Kitwana, 178)

Even the aforementioned agenda is too narrow to limit Hip-Hop's political ideology. Hip-Hop figures have lobbied against the death penalty, police brutality, and gang violence. A comparison to the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Platform offers an indication of how closely related the two movements are:

1) We want freedom...2) We want full employment for our people...3) We want an end to the robbery by white man of our black community...4) We want decent housing....5) We want education for our people...6) We want all black men to be exempt from military service...7) We want an immediate end to police brutality and the murder of Black people...8) We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prison and jails... 9) We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group...10) We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace... (Foner, 3)

A comparison between the two doctrines exposes several important commonalities. In particular similarities both experience repression from the political system. Repression abound, rap artists have learned from groups, such as the Black Panther Party that explicit and continuous exposure in politics can lead to perverse tactics from agents of oppression. Today the Hip-Hop police have replaced Cointelpro! Shyne, Black Rob, and Lil Kim have replaced Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, and Afeni Shakur. Martyrs Notorious B.I.G and Tupac Shakur can be juxtaposed with Bobby Huthenson and Fred Hampton.

Repression of Hip-Hop

The one facet which Hip-Hop and the Black Power movement share is a striking resemblance in the realm of suppression. The Hip-Hop police have replaced Cointelpro and the impudence of the law's contempt toward those of the Hip-Hop generation has reached frenzied levels. As Charles Garry states, "It should be clear, then that in the case of the Black Panthers the old rules simply don't apply. Any methods will be resorted to, in defiance of the constitutional rights of the panthers, in a drive to destroy the Black Panther Party." (Foner, 262) Meanwhile today "district attorney's across the country have built their careers on high profile cases, often sending young black and brown youth to prison- even when the evidence is weak." (Baker, 41) The repression faced by the Black Panther Party and Hip-Hop have had auspicious connotations upon their images. Many people have associated brazen lawlessness and violence to Hip-Hop and do not comprehend the full complexities of the lumpen-proletariats paradigm. Shyne, one of the numerous rappers who are currently confined behind bars brings the subject to fruition.

"I hear you muthafucka's talking/ complaining/ its too this/ its too dark/ its too violent/ well yeah, I'm what the fuck happened when the CIA conspired/ and distributed crack in my environment/ The roosters crowing/ Man Black people don't own no ports or boats/ so tell me how the fuck we

getting all this coke/ hoping the young future soldiers hear me/ dearly/

g.w. bush fear me/ they know/ I know/ they want to sweep us under rugs/ hoping we just keep killing/ shooting each other with slugs... How dare y'all point the finger at me/ cuz I'm a straight G/ ain't that what I'm suppose to be/ shy/ I'm just following the tradition of Joe Kennedy/ bootlegging/ ties with the mob and shy/ capitalism/ money and power... Nigga this shy been going on/ 300 years muthafucka's/ future too dark/ and hopeless/ for me to face it/ only god knows if I'll make it/ I'm walking through the depths of hell/ Its hard for me to smile/ when I'm innocent/ but I'm still facing trial/ God save me/ secret society manipulating the dumb, death and blind/ and yet they want to blame it on Shyne/ like I'm responsible for the country's murder rate/ responsible for babies being born off base/ this shy is bigger than me/ I told y'all/ I'm just a pawn/... Shyne

Shyne summarizes the discontent of the lumpen eloquently; the onus should not be placed on the rap artist but the apparatus of oppression, which they exist in.

Similar to the Black Panther Party, Hip-Hop is facing monumental opposition from amerikkka's agents of repression. The Hip-Hop police have become the greatest threat facing the movement. The tactics utilized by these counter revolutionaries have tarnished the image of Hip-Hop and sullied its reputation. Garry asserts, "In the over thirty years I have been practicing law, I have never experienced the type of persecution faced by the Black Panthers. The old rules don't apply to the Black Panther Party. There are new sets of rules, new requirements, new methods of harassment." (Foner, 259)

Despite the obvious, rap artists are being persecuted at an unprecedented level. The litany of rap artists who find themselves behind bars illustrate the foul instruments of subversion utilized by the oppressor. The situation faced by the Hip-Hop movement is very much comparable to the Black Panther Party. In actuality, Hip-Hop has replaced the BPP as the main object of the u.s. government's desire to stifle and control; the government and megalith corporations have become the pimps and some rap artist are now the faithful hoes! The old rules of engagement do not apply to the Hip-Hop movement either.

You Think Its Easy Being a Drug Dealer?

The vaunted occupations of dealing drug, thievery, and pimping have become indications of urban distress. You think its easy being a drug dealer? Participation in an alternate economy does not equate to financial viability. The likeliest results are jail, death, or self-destruction. For every Alfred Martinez and Richard Porter, two Harlem drug dealers who found fame during the 80's and were immortalized by the film Paid in Full; there are thousands of black and brown males entering prison cells. Over the past quarter century the prison industrial complex has flourished under this perverse mantra. Under the specter of Reaganism and influx of neoconservative ideology Hip-Hop has been under attack and not just from Republicans but the entire government. "More black

men were locked up under President Clinton than Bush 1 and Ronald Reagan combined. Under Clinton [an estimated] 200,000 more black men were incarcerated.” (Alluh, 62) As the popularity of Hip-Hop exploded so did the incarceration rate of the Hip-Hop generation and this is no coincidence.

The drug trade and the lumpen lifestyle is not simplistic. On the contrary, it exemplifies the dire economic situation facing the ghetto. To insinuate that there are more viable options for Black males is to belittle their struggle. The lumpen have learned how to exist outside the normal parameters of amerikkkan society. Their struggle is embodied in their deviant behavior; it is an individual act of rebellion. The Hip-Hop generation has discovered its freedom by existing outside of normality and have accepted the consequences warranted or unwarranted. Nas diagnosed the condition,

“I want to talk to the mayor/ to the governor/ to the muthafucka’s president/ I want to talk to the FBI and CIA/ and the muthafuckin congressmen... Dissin us/ discriminating different races/ taxpayers pay for jails/ for more black and Latin faces... I’m just a black man/ why y’all made it so hard/ damn nigga/ got to go create his own job/ Mr. Mayor/ Imagine its yo kids that starve/ Imagine your kids got to slang crack to survive/ swing a mack to be live/ ... it’s the ghetto life/ yeah I celebrate it/ I live it/ And all I got is what you left me with/ imam get it/ and y’all combining all the countries/ we gonna to the same/ combine all the cliques to make one gang/ It ain’t a black or white thing/ its to make a change...-Nas...

The ironic nature of Nas’ appeal to politicians demonstrates the limitations and internal struggle, which is faced by those who exist in the dregs of society. Nobody who is poor wants to be there and no one who is rich wants to be there either.

Emergence of a New Political Discourse in Hip-Hop

Hip-Hop is undeniably a mass cultural movement which embodies the essence of the lumpen-proletariat but where does it go from here? Rap has prospered in a climate designed to destroy and censor its growth and prominence but “it can’t and won’t stop rockin”- ya dig!

“No one method, and no one party is going to bring us what we need for true empowerment. Working inside the system is not enough, and working outside of it alone isn’t either. Combing these strategies is optimal. Internal infiltration coupled with external agitation. Just as our music is a collage of traditional sounds and a myriad of influences, so should our political strategy be.” (Allah, 62)

Rap possesses the ability to become the main signifier of black youth political ideology in the 21st century. The quandary of Hip-Hop is what role it will play in amerikkka’s political circus. “In his groundbreaking street anthem “Color Purple,” Saigon raps, “The

real gangs are the government/ The Democrats are Crips and the nigga's that's blooded in is the Republicans." (Baker, 60) If the aforementioned is true, where will Hip-Hop fit in? If politics is really a masquerade for gang culture, then Hip-Hop will eventually become the "Kings of the Street." The political agenda of Hip-Hop has been solidified and now it is up to the collective to take action, once this transpires as Huey P. Newton states you'll get "revolutionaries who are too much!"

It's a Rap

My name is Kalic Paul Anthony Chambers and I associate myself with the lumpen. I have participated in many aspects of the underground economy and have fervently defended the ethos, which constitutes my own morality. I have also created this piece of work while attending California State University, Northridge as a senior and student activist. At first appearances, many would conclude that someone of my nature would be incapable of such a task but here it is. If you do not believe that the lumpen-proletariat are the vanguards of the Hip-Hop movement, then you do not know where we're "coming from." If the thugs, pimps, and gangsta's are not the future of the revolution, then there will not be any revolution. Whom do black people expect to conduct the necessary actions to foment revolution? The answer lies in the lumpen; they are the soldiers of misfortune, the ghetto's Jihadists.

The vanguard of the Hip-Hop movement must now contend with destiny and understand their significance in this age of uncertainty for African Americans and the proletariat at large. The story of Hip-Hop is the story of amerikkka and its struggle to define its own political identity. Hip-Hop is not alone in this sea of ambiguity; amerikkka itself is at a crossroads and is attempting to formulate its own political identity internally and abroad, but hopefully Hip-Hop can beat them to the punch. One day in an idealistic world, Hip-Hop will not only be the signifier of Black youth political ideology but the entire masses of oppressed which populate amerikkka; the same amerikkka which has raped and defiled Hip-Hop for its own sadistic capitalistic purposes. Is Shyne or Nas the next Malcolm X or George Jackson? We should not forget that Malcolm Little was in the same position as Shyne at the same age. Only time will tell but I guarantee that we have only reached the tip of the iceberg. Hip-Hop is still growing up and it can't, it won't stop!

If anyone noticed, America spelled amerikkka it is not by accident but by design. It is spelled in such a manner to highlight the oppressive structure of amerikkkan history and society. Never forget that long before there was a Civil Rights march in Washington, D.C., there was a march on Washington by the KKK... PEACE.

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Study Questions

- 1 In contemporary America, does the acquisition of capital by Blacks necessarily denote an upgrade in class?
- 2 Aside from the profit motive, what other commonalities exist between the street drug dealer, and the corporate capitalist?
- 3 Is the successful drug selling urbanite more reflective of his traditional social environment or of the environment accompanying his financial worth?