

Virginia Hip Hop and Place

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(Abstract)

Despite its continued importance in the maintenance of black identity, hip hop has become a global phenomena popular among all races. In this age of mass cultural exchange, hip hop culture itself endures glocalization, that is it serves the global market, but becomes customized to suit the local culture. Where hip hop was originally confined to specific boroughs in New York, hip-hop artists are now composing from their own local thresholds in regions all over the United States and worldwide. Virginia USA is a region that is increasingly thriving in regards to hip hop artists, fan base, and lifestyles. The hip hop identities found in Virginia are a product of Virginia's situatedness in the broader hip hop landscape. This study will shed light on the connections among music, place, and identity and specifically delve into Virginia's situatedness between the East Coast and Southern rap sub-genres as they relate to Virginia's place based identity.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Despite its continued importance in the maintenance of black identity, hip hop has become a global phenomena popular among all races. In this age of mass cultural exchange, hip hop culture itself endures glocalization, that is it serves the global market, but becomes customized to suit the local culture (Robertson, 1995). Where hip hop was originally confined to specific boroughs in New York, hip-hop artist are now composing from their own local thresholds in regions all over the United States and worldwide. Virginia USA is a region that is increasingly thriving in regards to hip hop artists, fan base, and lifestyles (Gibbs et al, 2005). The hip hop identities found in Virginia are a product of Virginia's situatedness in the broader hip hop landscape (Green, 1999). This study will shed light on the connections between music, place, and identity and specifically delve into Virginia's situatedness between the East Coast and Southern rap sub-genres as they relate to Virginia's place based identity.

Chapter Two: The Current Study/ Statement Of The Problem

The current study examines how Virginia is situated within the landscape of hip hop music. The West Coast and Mid West may also be considered centers for hip hop production, but for this study I will be discussing how Virginia's situatedness is ideal in relaying some of hip hop's coastal tensions (Bracey and Sinha, 2005). Geographically, Virginia hip-hop is located between two key regional hip-hop sub genres, that is East Coast and the Southern hip hop. East Coast hip-hop is most specifically centered in the New York City area, radiating outward throughout the North Eastern region of the United States. Southern hip hop is most specifically connected to cities such as Atlanta, New Orleans, and "the deep South" in general (Harrison, 2005). Geographically, historically, and symbolically speaking, Virginia falls below the Mason-Dixon line that was established to separate the Northern states from the Southern states (Bracey and Sinha, 2005). However, within hip hop's culture, Virginia is imagined as an ally of these two regional forces, where artists from Virginia such as the Neptunes, Timberland, and Missy Elliot's artistry has been cohesive in East Coast, Southern, and even West Coast hip hop accord.

This study is important in helping us to develop a better understanding of the relationship among (hip hop) music, identity, and place, as well as illuminating on some ways in which music categories (such as East Coast and Southern) have been produced and promoted through cultural industries that come to shape local scenes. More people will continue to make and pursue music that makes Virginia unique (Harrison, 2005).

With all music, people start by imitating until they find something closer to home to model themselves after. Then when people get comfortable with the form of music it becomes a part of the individual or the state (Krim, 2000). Is Virginia at a stage of boasting its own hip hop identity or are residents subscribing to East Coast or Southern hip hop demeanors?

To employ the qualitative component of reflexivity, I should mention that I myself am a native of Virginia who undertook undergraduate and graduate studies in Virginia, Hampton University and Virginia Tech respectively, thus my focus is on Virginia hip hop most specifically. In college I have been exposed to people from all over Virginia, all over the nation, and all over the world. Our interest in hip hop culture and its application to everyday life was something most of us had in common, especially at Hampton, a historically black university, where the development of black identity was foremost. Most people clung to their regional identities anchored in hip hop antics and historically rooted claims of authenticity and these regional hip hop identities were even sometimes a source of tension and rivalry at HU. In this study I will explore Virginia's situatedness in hip hop's topography as it relates to the salience of particular regional identities and what informs those identities. Furthermore, I will examine if Virginia's hip hop is a unified or diversified front.

Chapter Three: Theory

With the rise of globalization, the wide range of once distinctive cultures have been brought into jeopardy by the homogenizing effects of mass culture, thus the study of the myriad of local cultures has become increasingly warranted (Bennett, 2000).

However, the same processes that contribute to one global culture, taken with the practice of active cultural selection, can reinvent the traditional culture's symbols and artifacts into new localized forms. Through this process an established culture is circulated, imitated, and multiplied (Bennett, 2000). People draw on local forms of knowledge to make sense of media messages and incorporate them into their everyday lives. Though we are exposed to the same global flow of commodities, highly distinctive meanings are ascribed to images and information based on our local sensibilities. The latent effects of mass culture are emancipatory in that the people will become conscious of new ways to navigate through systems that govern their lives (Bennett, 2000).

Music plays an important role in the way in which people define their relationships to their local everyday surroundings. Meanings attached to popular music are adapted to the specifications of a given locality (Toop, 1984). Musicians derive their music sounds from shared awareness in a local setting. The narratives one may present in relation to music spring from common, local, epistemologies. People cling to specific music as "symbolic anchors in regions, as signs of community and belonging, and a shared past" (Whiteley et al, 2003 p.3). The importance of space and place is

signified by the breadth of cultural and musical production in local settings, where music can be made to the sound of everyday life and furthermore diffuse different ideas of national identity (Whiteley et al, 2003).

Ideas of community are relative to the collective identity in a shared environment. Music plays a significant role in the way individuals fashion that environment. In other words, authors of collective identity are also the “authors of the spaces and places these identities are lived out” (Bennett, 2000 p.64). Within a musical work, the listener may find a synthesis of sentiment and shrewdness that is a collective representation of a local space. Place and place based identities begin by utilizing the common stock of understandings about a locality. Our local knowledge is further enhanced by our collective values when we are exposed to other introspective narratives like we find in music.

Groups map out cooperative zones to effectively cater to the collaborative needs of the community. People refer to information constructed from local resources to resolve problems that arise in these zones. As new people inhabit urban and rural zones, they become refined in regard to the social structure of the new habitat, however, they still shape “the day to day life of a particular place with aspects of their cultural reality” (Bennett, 2000 p.66). Music is a local resource that shapes cultural realities. Music influences the construction and ascertainment of divergent social boundaries (White, 1996). Audiences may relate to the same music, but use the knowledge they absorb from it in different ways. A series of competing local narratives are created, where different social groups have different definitions of a space. Urban and rural zones become increasingly contested terrains. Those who choose to participate in the culture negotiate the aspects

they find least appealing and at the same time fashion new forms of local identity that draw upon both the global and the local (White, 1996).

Whitley, Bennett, and Hawkins argue that “music, it has been illustrated, can bond displaced peoples, effectively bridging the geographic distance between them and providing a shared sense of collective identity articulated by a symbolic sense of community” (Whitley, et al, 2003 p.4). They go on to explain “as a highly visible and audible commodity, music comes to stand for the specificity of social experience in identifiable communities” (Whitley, et al, 2003 p.4). Music becomes globally acknowledged when it captures the attention and allegiance of people from different locations. Music is effective when it mobilizes people by creating a locality where cultural heritage is shared (White, 1996).

Chapter Four: Hip-Hop's Background

Hip-hop can be considered as both a deeply seeded African American culture and an itinerant culture, which has become re-rooted in sundry setting. Hip-hop has generated commercial viability world wide, but remains entrenched within the cultures that are largely depoliticized and/or alienated from the dominant culture, so providing a sense of group empowerment. Hip hop can be organized within a local and often racially oppressive context where hip hop has become central to identity formation within the circumstance of social resistance, as part of a process of communal self definition. Hip hop works socially and identity can be formed at a level of song, word, sound, and image. The local intersects into the developing history of hip-hop where “musical poetics change according to local requirements, intersecting with race, language, and musical style, while mediating the specifics of the locality” (Whiteley et al, 2003 p.10).

. Hip hop came upon the scene as urban black renewal in the context of postindustrial New York City. Hip hop can be contextualized into a specific time period, 1973, at a specific place, Bronx New York, with key individuals such as Kool Herk, Grand Master Flash, and Afrika Bambattaa, considered hip hop's pioneers (Toop, 1984). Hip hop faired resistant lifestyles that embraced the elements of djing, break dancing, graffiti, and mcing. Beat boxing, street entrepreneurialism, fashion, attitude, and language were all parts of hip hop culture as well (Fernando, 1995). Its emergence came out of what was going on in the world, not just in New York where it began (George, 1998). The forces of globalization and capitalism, migration to the land of opportunity,

technological advances changing transportation and communication, and multi-national corporations were some of the elements of post industrialization from which hip hop's movement emerged (Basu, 1992-1994).

Since rap music's initial development in 1970's New York City, it has been characterized by the consumption and production of place-based identities to the extent that "representing" one's town has become a defining element of hip-hop. This is related to the lack of adequate representation of marginalized communities in the mass media (Fernando, 1995). Hip hop has become a powerful vehicle for expression and transmission of place-based identities that are not static in character or number, but created and negotiated in response to changes within the field of rap music production as well as larger social forces (Miller, 2004). Initially limited to New York boroughs and neighborhoods, the geographic repertoire of rap has steadily expanded and evolved in order to accommodate artists from other cities. Hip-hop's movement radiated outward to other North Eastern regions such as Philadelphia where DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince hail (Basu, 1992-1994.). This created a cultural block called the East Coast. Though East Coast hip hop was dominant in the 1980s, hip hop jumped the continent to colonize southern California. N.W.A's *Straight Outta Compton* put West Coast hip hop on the map. By 1989, the West Coast began to establish its own hip-hop identity with its hardcore gangster rap. This marked the first challenge to East Coast hegemony. In 1992, Dr. Dre's solo debut launched the careers of G funk stars Warren G and Snoop Doggy Dogg. An East Coast versus West Coast rivalry, fanned in part by the music media, culminated in the murders of Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G in the mid 1990s. Meanwhile a new breed of East Coast rappers emerged (Basu,1992-1994). These

included Nas, Jay-Z, and the Wu-Tang Clan. West Coast rapper's Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre were still prominent though Snoop Dogg temporarily retreated to Southern hip-hop label *No Limit* in 1997 (Makoni, 2003).

Southern rap or Dirty South hip-hop is a type of hip-hop that emerged in the late 1980s with lucrative success out of Miami with the base heavy club and sexual call and response music of Luther Campbell. Southern based hip hop emerged out of Miami first, and then extended to New Orleans and Atlanta among other cities (Forman, 2002). Atlanta considered the capital of the South abets Jermaine Dupri who achieved enormous success with his So So Def label with 1991 teenage rap group Kris Kross. Arrested Development "put forth an early expression of self consciously southern identity in rap music...It was an antidote to the self- destructive tendencies of gangster rap" (Miller, 2004 p.180). They received two Grammys in 1992. They won audiences with songs like Tennessee that relayed the message that the ancestral homeland can be found in the South (Forman, 2002). However, they did not express an identity that encompassed the entire south. Complaints arose that the rap industry "could only imagine the South in terms of what it lacked in comparison to the more established centers of hip-hop production" (Miller, 2004 p.181). In the mid 1990's Southern hip hop loyalist began to dispel these perceptions and the Southern hip-hop industry was functioning on the same level as East and West Coast industries. Partisans were investing more in the Southern branch as other more established regions struggles with "creative stagnation". This gave way to new regionally based identities (Miller, 2004). The South showed its colors as the third coast within the landscape of hip hop, thriving on Atlanta based rap duo OutKast with their player style, Three Six Mafia of Tennessee, Scarface out of Houston, Trick daddy from

Miami, and Master P's No Limit squad competed with Cash Money Records in New Orleans (Forman, 2002). Today groups like the Ying Yang Twins demonstrate how southern rap styles have penetrated a culture. Currently a specific type of hip hop music based out of the Southern United States, particularly Atlanta Georgia, called *crunk*, is very prominent, with artist such as the Lil Jon and other kings of crunk are dominating the club scene and much of the mainstream airwaves (Liles, 2005).

Chapter Five: The South

Southern hip hop can be looked at in negation to East Coast hip hop and other established hip hop regions. Here I will further explore the development of Southern hip hop as it has impacted and helps us to situate regionally based identities. Interpretations of Southern history often break down along racial lines (White, 1996). The collective experience of blacks in the South is a cultural life saturated with racism, ignorance and violence. While whites romanticize the lost cause of the confederacy, debates of confederate symbolism perpetuate the racial tension between blacks and whites (Miller, 2004). At the same time blacks and whites with the same aspirations retreat to the South for vacation and retirement in order to escape the urban angst of the North (Finegan and Rickford, 2004). Southern hip-hop reflects all the anguish of old school racism as well as rustic paradise some may seek in the South (Light, 1999). When it comes to Southern hip hop “trying to draw an entire region under a single stylistic rubric” is strategically frightening (Light, 1999 p.226). Southern hip hop is bass, bounce, Arrested Development, Jermaine Dupri. “The most successful acts more often than not all looked and sounded like your crazy cousin from down the way (Light, 1999 p.267).” Southern hip hoppers have benefited from lessons from the North and have added their own zest to hip hop. At the same time Southern hip hop has precedents set in Southern blues (Finegan and Rickford, 2004). Then there was the surreal violence, misogyny, and “urban paranoia” portrayed by groups like the Geto Boys in the song “My Mind Is Playing Tricks On Me”, which “proved that southern artist were capable of producing music with as much thematic breadth as their northern counter parts, without resorting to

imitation” (Light, 1999 p.267). Ghetto boys and Scarface helped add stylistic authenticity to southern hip-hop’s “hard-core contingent”. Before these guys, everything coming out of the South sounded like it was from New York or L.A. (Light, 1999).

The Dirty South characterized a new aesthetic movement that embodied the racial injustice and the gangster culture (Forman, 2002). South of the Mason-Dixon line, audiences were introduced to the drug trade, repressive police tactics, and images of unfairness and injustice in the South. . The Dirty South identity has been shaped in reaction to the preconceived notions of outsiders. The nation inspired “timeworn stereotypes of the backwards good ole boys” of the old South and celebration of the rise of the new South (Miller, 2004 p.183). Southern hip hop lyrics critiqued issues of slavery and the implications it had for black identity. Even the educational system was censured for discounting the agency of blacks in history as it plays a role in diffusion of racialized identities. Where Southern hip hop informs identities, some Southern compositions maintain that if you were unfortunate enough to be born in the South with the racism and disparity it is fair to take the criminal route to materialism. A Southern rap song may effectively map out how to make drugs or sell them without getting caught by the police. This reinforces the idea that local knowledge is manifested in narratives used to further disperse common understandings and influence identities (Miller, 2004).

In the Deep South, criminal identities arose in resistance to the disparity, brutality, and racial inequality, reasons the South was deemed dirty (George, 1998.). Symbols of slavery such as the confederate flags in South Carolina and Georgia still stand in as evidence that the racist mentality is still alive today (George, 1998). Bill Clinton seemed to embody both the white and African American rudiments of Southern identity, that is

the corrupt and racist power structure of the old South intersected with the idea of “our first “black president”. The new South was dirty because of the thematic profanity violence, and sexual crudity. In southern hip hop the saying “the south will rise again” denotes an engagement with white ideals of the confederacy, but it has been used by southern hip hoppers to describe the Dirty South as “a violent revolutionary cleansing” (Miller, 2004 p.203).

However, the South has the legacy of the civil rights movement and black leaders. The South is the heartland, with Atlanta deemed the black Mecca. The East Coast and West Coast bias faded as they were beginning to appear too commercialized (Liles, 2005). Most HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) were in the South. The South swept the nation saying enough of the East Coast West Coast beef get on the Southern “elevators” (Miller, 2004 p.190). While everyone was consumed by the Biggie and Tupac’s East Coast/West Coast rivalry and Snoop Dogg’s murder case, Master P “wisely stayed below the scandal radar, cultivating a loyal fan base” (Light, 1999 p.270). Master P’s No Limit recording label was held in high esteem in the late 1990’s and such repute secured him four platinum and two gold albums. According to Light, P described the South to be like a reverse migration for at least black folks, cheaper rent, and a cool place to raise your kids (Light, 1999).

The geographic creation of the dirty South has been disputed. Its affirmation has been a “process that involved deep-rooted patterns of thinking about geography, race, and culture” (Miller, 2004 p.199). Southern artists were frustrated by the stereotypes embellished by their regional counterparts. More established hip-hop regions bought into

conceptions of a culturally backward South that lacked in commercial viability (Stavsky, 1995). At first Southern hip-hop was not acknowledged due to the industry structure and economics. A lot of stations would not play Southern rap because it was thought of as “country bamified hip hop”, but people started calling up the stations telling them to play it (Miller, 2004 p.195). The South has a different language with an accented Southern drawl, and they were misunderstood. Now these same idiosyncrasies have afforded Southern artist commercial success on the same level as prominent New York and L.A. artist. Southern artist were always ready to insure a new identity for the South, respected for its creativity, its wit, and its politics.

Food ways, humor, and soul are expressions of the south as well. Images of the South connected by country preachers and Sunday services served multiple purposes. The singing suggests authenticity like older soul styles including religious music (Miller, 2004). These images were genuinely southern and collectively defined as such. Constructions of collectivity are like marks of urbanness, which can guarantee some degree of authenticity in hip hop culture, where urbanness may even outweigh blackness. Goodie Mobb’s Soul food dealt with the day-to-day struggle and self-righteousness. Their Southerness enabled a critique of Master P’s Southerness, which talked about the drug hook up and even gave explicit directions on how to make crack. A broader category of representation divides them into the urban and the rural. Many of the identities forged by Southern artist may “fall into the nexus of rural representation” (Krim, 2000 p.146-147). Artist such as Atlanta’s own Ludacris are humorous, but he still retains the sex and violence that makes him a Dirty South icon. Each of these artist or groups has different stylistic techniques, but they all signify either an urban and/or

rural Southerness. A diverse array of Southern ideologies fit within the Dirty South paradigm. The South is now an accepted division within hip hops landscape. (Miller, 2004). The conception of the Dirty South may change over time. It is a backdrop for the development of careers and may grow to include other regional identities.

Hip hop “is mapped geographically and chronologically against dominant geographic locales” like New York “and against the ...techniques that mark... the (Southern) contemporary style” and work against the “hip hop sublime and the associated projection of post-industrial urban life” that once prevailed (Krims, 2000 p.134). Despite its slow economic start, Southern hip-hop reflected the growth in hip-hop material assets, from broken glass on New York ghetto streets to Bentleys, Hummers, and “bling bling” seen in Southern cities. Then there is also that “shocking contrast” between the “religious and communal life” versus the “fragmented urban life”, which may generate the impression of contradictory versions of hip hop (Krims, 2000 p.142). According to Krims, the “urban and the rural, the fragmented and communal”, wholeness and displacement, “fast food and soul food” are not “simply productive tension”, but markers of “geographic specificity”, where places are coded East Coast or South “in terms of an imaginative mapping of the United States” (Krims, 2000 p.143). It is important to recall how consistently geographic and localized notions of representing generally are the extent to which establishing an identity may become the process of negation (Watkins, 1998). The presence of New York often becomes a matter of the effects of its absence for artists who arose outside of the New York /LA axis. The local flavor of an artist is signified in song lyrics, album art, interviews, etc. What a non New York MC lacks in linkage to hip hops origins it receives through projection of local authenticity. Krims

points out that even the name of a group can reflect the absence of New York centrality (2000). The “poetics of locality” work through visual images, words, and media images together. A more global system of representation creates a “complex field of signification” where hip-hop artists become nationally and internationally known (Krim, 2000 p.124).

Chapter Six: Virginia Hip Hop

Within the global system of hip hop signification, there are centers of hip hop production that fall between peripheries of regional allegiance. For instance the state of Virginia harbors some of hip hop's most talented producers and is an important center of hip hop music in terms of the popularity of hip hop music and culture amongst the residents of the state and universally. Since the mid to late 90's, Timbaland and Missy Elliot have been two of the state Virginia's most visible artists and producers (Boyd, 2003). They have worked with artist such as Aaliyah, Ginuwine from Maryland, Tweet, and sidekick Magoo from Portsmouth. Timb also has artist on his label like Bubba Sparx from Atlanta. Timb's work with Petey Pablo from North Carolina may signal a new geographic power shift in the dirty south (Miller, 2004). Timbaland considers his creativity to be southern where he says, "Things are more creative in the South.... It's like southern cooking. You know how your grandmother will go to the kitchen and come up with some biscuits that you would never get from a store anywhere?" (Light, 1999). Most people can recall Missy's 1997 "I Can't Stand the Rain" and how the song and the video both demonstrated hallmark ingenuity from Virginia. Timbaland along with the Neptunes from Virginia, represent a new economic genre (Boyd, 2003). The Neptunes have produced hit singles for artist everywhere including Nelly's "Hot In Here", Kelis' "Milkshake", Britney Spears' "I'm A Slave 4 U", Jay-Z's "Give it 2 Me", Snoop Dogg's "Drop It Like It's Hot", and Gwen Stefani's "Holla Back Girl". Pharell Williams and Chad Hugo, the pair of producers who make up the Neptunes, have left their distinctive mark everywhere you can think of. Then even NBA star and Virginia native Allen

Iverson has tried his hand in hip hop (Boyd, 2003). Some may say his whole style is hip hop, but you only heard his skills on the air in the tidewater area where he is from. D'Angelo, Teddy Riley, Mad Skillz, Quam, and the Clipse are other hip-hop acts from Virginia. These artists have put Virginia on the map, marking a new zone for the fulfillment of hip hop cultural agendas. .

Chapter Seven: Methods

A qualitative methodology will be used for this study. Qualitative research produces insight from diverse experiences and legitimizes non-dominant epistemologies, often giving voice to those who have been silent and acknowledging the validity of their realities. The research questions for this study are (1) Is Virginia hip-hop primarily East Coast, Southern, or something else and what are some elements specific to East Coast and Southern hip-hop? (2) Does Virginia have a unified or diversified sense of hip-hop? (3) What are some elements of Virginia's hip hop identity and what informs that identity?

For this study I have observed various hip hop mediums including songs, videos, and magazines, thus coming up with my own list of East Coast and Southern hip hop taxonomies. For the other component of my methods I have administered a semi structured set of questions that probe open ended responses in order to discover what the subjects believe about Virginia hip hop's situation. Interviews are evaluated to discover themes and trends that support the literature and taxonomies I have generated. Area code, age, ethnicity, education, gender, and class are the variables for this study. Respondent were either questioned in person, via email, or via instant messenger about how Virginia is situated within the hip-hop landscape. Conveyance sampling was used to recruit respondents in that they were all close personal friends or friends on my instant messenger buddy list. I interviewed most of my friends, but not only friends, in person or via email if they where out of town. Most instant messenger interviews were with people I have not met before face to face. Drawbacks to these methods are I cannot see

expressions that coincide with respondent answers via email or IM. Also my role as the interviewer may play a role in how face to face interviews are under went due to nervousness of parties or tendency to seek my favor with answers.

. Furthermore, respondents are self identified hip-hop fans, mostly men, but not exclusively. Ethnicities were mostly African American but as well included two Caucasian Americans and one Dominican American. Respondents were from various Virginia area codes, primarily 540, 757, 804, 434, and 703. Ages ranged from 18 to 37 among respondents with a high school diploma, some college experience, or college graduates with associates or bachelor's degrees. The sampling frame is non-representative in that it does not include numbers of elements in the same proportions as they occur in the general population. Limitations to this study may include respondents' again, reluctance to respond sincerely, or the respondents misunderstanding of one or more of the interview questions. These shortcomings are over come by recognizing the limitations and accounting for potential and existing biases here. The use of fifteen interviews may eliminate the unreliability that may arise from the researcher's observations or the respondents' interpretations of the questions then if I had used fewer interviews. Thus, the use of fifteen interviews along with the index of taxonomies I have generated will partially resolve unreliability, where I have provided supplementation for the probable weakness that accompanies this type of questioning (Babbie 2001).

Chapter Eight: My Taxonomies

As I compiled my list of East Coast and Southern indicators, I sought intersubjective agreement on my observations. I watched videos on BET and MTV, listened to music on radio stations and cds, read magazines such as Vibe and XXL, and engaged in conversations with people from various locations, not just Virginia. After looking at an indicator for one region I would look for its equivalent in the other region. According to the literature the following indicators fell into categories of East Coast and Down South because of its origins. For instance East Coast hip-hop is out of New York and Philadelphia. Southern hip-hop is mainly out of Georgia, Tennessee, New Orleans, and Florida. East Coast fashion includes Roca Wear, Wu Wear, Sean Jean, and New York baseball caps, often oversized baseball caps (Liles, 2005). Down South you see Atlanta baseball caps. A lot of Michael Vick and Atlanta Falcon's jerseys on the streets and in videos. In New York men may wear pink shirts and furs and push a pink SUV, a style that is customary with artist such as Cam' Ron (Makoni, 2003). In the South they ride down the street in their Cadillacs and old school cars with their gold and platinum grills in their mouths and on their cars, both gleaming, with other accessories, diamonds in their mouths and on their necks, "twankies", "dubs", or "spinners" on their whips with the big wheels (Miller, 2004). Furthermore, the East coast represents their boroughs and projects. Similarly, the South represents its projects and neighborhoods in hip hop music, but also present other country imagery (Makoni, Smitherman, Ball, Spears, 2003). In southern hip hop they make frequent references to soul food, southern cooking, and

southern hospitality. The South has strip club music that you won't see on TV until 4:00 AM in the morning. Base intense music and crunk style music are signs that it is southern hip hop (Keisling and Paulston, 2004). On the East Coast they make state claims to their supremacy, originality and authenticity. East Coast hip hop artists and fans take an arrogant approach to the culture. The Southern hip hop scene is described as "dirty". The Dirty South is associated with confederacy and Jim Crow on one hand and humor, sexuality, and profanity on the other (Keisling and Paulston, 2004). Another facet of hip-hop culture that is regionally specific is the language. On the East coast they refer to people as dunn, ma, son, and b, where as in the South everyone is "shawty", "playa", whoodie, dirty, or cuz, all spoken with that southern drawl (Alim and Meghelli, 2006). Finally, each region can be noted for the dancing. New York coined the "Harlem shake" while in the South hip hoppers "throw them bows", "pop, lock, and drop it", "lean wit it rock wit it", "let their shoulder lean", "walk it out", "rock their hips", "two step" and do the "A-Town stomp", and back in the day they bank head bounced (Alim and Meghelli, 2006). My goal was that through systematic observation of various mediums I would arrive at taxonomy of prevalent East Coast and Southern elements that are exceptional to each region.

Model A: Make it Work

Region	East Coast	Down South	Virginia	Intersections
Indicator				
Geography	New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia	Georgia, Tennessee, New Orleans, and Florida	Virginia	540, 757, 804, 434, and 703
Artist	Nas, Jay-Z, BIG,	Ludacris, Trina, Trick Daddy	Quam, Missy, Nas, Neptunes, Timbaland, Chris Brown, Nicole Rae, Clipse, Magoo, Teddy Riley	Quam, Missy, Nas, Neptunes, Trina, Timbaland, Chris Brown.
Language	son, dun, ma, and b, fast slick talk	“shawty”, “playa”, whoodie, dirty, or cuz, slow southern drawl	stick man, stick girl, yo, crucial, use, u, stik, yezzir	Shawty, playa, whoodie, dirty, cuz, ma, b, stick man, stick girl, use, u, stik, yezzir
Fashion and Cars	Roca Wear, Wu Wear, Sean Jean, and New York baseball caps, often oversized baseball caps, pink shirts and furs pink SUV, Throw	Atlanta baseball caps. Michael Vick and Atlanta Falcon’s jersey’s, Cadillac’s and old school cars with their gold and platinum grills	Trucker caps, White Tee Shirts	Michael Vick jerseys, White Tee Shirts

	Backs	in their mouths and on their cars, both gleaming, with other accessories, diamonds in their mouths and on their necks		
Dance	Harlem shake	Throw them bows, A-Town stomp, bank head bounced, pop lock and drop, lean wit it rock wit it, shoulder lean, walk it out, rock your hips, two step		Throw them bows, A-Town stomp, bank head bounced, pop lock and drop, lean wit it rock wit it, shoulder lean, walk it out, rock your hips, two step, Harlem shake

Chapter Nine: Analysis and Findings

I used three interview methods; these were in person, instant messenger and via email. Each of these methods had its benefits that I will discuss here. First, the in person interviews allowed me to get a feel for the respondents fervor for hip hop. With most of these interviews they revealed to me how hip hop was a natural part of their everyday life and demeanor. For the instant messenger interviews, respondents contacted me at all times of the day whenever they thought of something new to say and stayed in contact with me about how I was coming along with my research. They were less influenced by my identity as a researcher and spoke freely in their native hip hop tongue, adding authenticity to my research. The email interviews were also beneficial because I got thorough essay answers from most of the respondents; therefore, I had a lot of quotes to pick from. Each approach was different, but I found no harm in using these different approaches. One interview method was used per person. The responses did not vary by approach, but more so by area code.

I wanted to find out how Virginia connected or identified with any region. Respondents were questioned to what degree Virginia hip hop is East Coast, Southern, or something else. Furthermore they were asked to identify some elements specific to each region, i.e., fashion, language, cars, etc. Fifteen people responded to this question. Six out of the fifteen respondents said that Virginia hip-hop is East Coast hip-hop. "I think we bite a lot off of NY," someone said. On the other hand, one respondent said that Virginia "is like a classic southern". Two of the respondents agreed that Virginia hip-hop was something else, "a style different from the rest". Three respondents believed

that Virginia hip hop was both East Coast and southern, that “Virginia has emerged with its edge and mix of both regions”. Finally, three respondents recognized Virginia hip hop as East Coast in the past, “but the southern movement is really starting to take over”. There was no significant correlation between any demographic category and the various responses.

To add to my working taxonomy of East Coast and Southern hip hop indicators I asked the respondents for their input without letting them see my list. Most of the respondents reinforced notions found in the literature and taxonomies of Southern slow speech, where I mentioned the southern drawl and then indicated that up North the speech is more effusive, “fast slick tongues”. A common thread I found in the interview was in regards to southern terminology and the use of the term “stick man” or “stick girl”. It is a term that refers to one’s sidekick or accomplice. I was actually surprised at how this term was consistently mentioned in my interviews and during casual discussion, thus I consider it a viable indicator. Many of the respondents said they noticed that up North, ¹Nike was the popular athletic shoe, where as down south you find people sporting Reeboks, Fila, and K Swiss. I covered other aspects of fashion, language, and culture in my inventory and the interview responses matched up exceptionally well.

Next, I would look into the question “does Virginia have a diversified or unified sense of hip hop?” First of all, there was lack of agreement on if Virginia was primarily East Coast, Southern, or something else. Where respondents were asked if they thought Virginia has a unified or diversified hip-hop scene, fifteen participants responded to the question. Two out of fifteen agreed that Virginia had a unified hip hop scene because of artist like Missy and Pharell who unite Virginia hip hop fans and hip hop enthusiast all

¹ Interviews were conducted as a part of a class project.

over the world. Eight out of fifteen respondents agreed that Virginia had a diversified hip hop front. One respondent said, “We are still divided on if we are North or South”. Other respondents talked about the different styles within Virginia. “ 703 (NOVA)”, which is Northern Virginia, “ (they) are richer and identify with the DC metropolitan area and their Go Go. Some of them dress NY and some of them dress DC. In the 804 (Richmond), they dress like DC with the tube socks and cornrows, but they are hard-core on being down south, and then the 757 don’t know what they are. They got fake up north heads and wannabe down south cats”. Another respondent from the south west part of Virginia or the 540 area code stated that “out here it’s like the south because you see rebel flags and a lot of people have country accents so we really vibe with the South and their hip hop because of the culture out here. Other places in Virginia are more urban”. “It depends on your relationship to the city and if your urban, rural, or suburban in Virginia. We may all process and use the hip hop scene differently”. The other five respondents alleged that Virginia is both unified and diversified. Two of the female respondents, one from the 540 (southwest Virginia) and one from the 757 had similar takes that Virginia was unified by its prevalent artist, but diversified by its growing hip hop scene. Like the South, it seems difficult to put Virginia’s style under one umbrella.

The final research question I wish to explore here is “what are some elements of Virginia’s hip hop identity and what informs that identity i.e. movies, videos, music, radio, newspaper, magazines, and/or everyday life?” Other questions of this nature that I used to probe respondents asked about Virginia’s hip hop emergence, prevalent artist, songs, and albums, characteristics of hip hop in their specific region of Virginia, questions about what other regions thought of VA hip hop and Virginia’s

influence on other hip hop scenes. The respondents also talked about how they participate in the hip hop cultural activities. Most of them (thirteen out of fifteen) agreed that Virginia does have a hip hop scene with dissent still reflected in perceptions of regional influence. Respondents claimed they buy CDs, wear hip hop fashion, go to concerts, watch videos, listen to the radio, and even eat food that is hip hop specific. The majority of respondents said hip-hop informs their everyday life. Some of the respondents made mention of the club scene where someone said, “it is a bounce around get crunk type scene in Richmond. It’s about getting hype with your boys and drinking and smoking. In Richmond hip hop heads get into fights.” Richmond radio stations often broadcast from the clubs. Respondents in the 540 also make note of their favorite radio station 102.1 (Jamz) that is actually out of North Carolina. The surveys say that in the 757 they tune in to 103 Jamz. These are a few of the hip-hop outlets they mentioned.

So to whom do Virginians tune into for their hip hop fashion sense? Some of the trends I recognized when questioning about Virginia’s hip hop identity was the mention of “Pharell look-a-like types with the short sleeve t-shirts, baggy pants, and trucker caps”. “Kind of a hip hop skate boarder meets rock n roll.” The name brand “Von Dutch is part of Virginia’s hip hop identity”, also a logo you may see Pharell wearing. Pharell mentions his ties to the skateboard culture in Snoop’s “Drop it Like it’s Hot”, where he calls himself a “skateboard b” (all music.com, 2005). He is also a member of the rock and roll band N.E.R.D (No One Ever Really Dies), which may account for his alternative threads. Michael Vick jerseys are also popular in all parts of Virginia because the Atlanta Falcon’s player is from New Port News Virginia and attended Virginia Tech. These

jerseys where also a down south indicator. Other respondents from the 804 and 757 talked about their DC metropolitan or New York fashion influence.

As far as prominent artist who shape Virginia's hip hop scene and identity there was no dissent on the view that Missy Elliot, Timbaland, and the Neptunes are the most prominent artist in the state. Missy and Timbaland's style and sound always takes you to the next level, just as the Neptunes who have the same name as the fictional rock band in Hanna-Barbera's 1976 Saturday morning cartoon, *Jabberjaw*, produce sounds that are ultramodern like the Jetsons space type feel. Respondents stated clearly that these artists are very influential and have collaborated with people from all hip-hop regions. "They changed the game" one respondent said. "The Neptunes touch everything," stated another. "All over the world people love Missy and the Neptunes" says one respondent. "Who could forget the song *Beautiful* by Snoop Dogg and Pharell (of the Neptunes)" says another? Pharell collaborated with Snoop on many of his songs for Snoop's latest album, the 2004 *Rhythm and Gangsta* (allumusic.com, 2005). This demonstrates that Virginia's hip-hop influence even stretches to the West Coast. "Virginia is known for its beats" reported a respondent.. Timbaland and the Neptunes have truly proved to be some of the world's most exciting producers.

Respondents really identified regional hip-hop through well-known artist. Interviewees agreed that Virginia's hip-hop scene emerged in the early 1990's and the album to really put VA on the map was Missy's 1997 *Supa Dupa Fly*. All of the respondents agree that Missy continues to come out with unheard of innovations in hip-hop music. Ten of the fifteen respondents believed that Virginia hip-hop has changed over time with hip-hop's movement in general. Among those who concurred some noted

that Missy had carried Virginia hip hop into the twenty first century with songs like the 2001 *One Minute Man* when she migrated south to collaborate with Ludacris and Trina, and the universal hit *Get Your Freak On* with Canadian Nelly Furtado, just as hip hop is expanding South and continually globalizing. Her 2002 song *Work It* retained her keen sense of creativity, where she scrambled and flipped phrases backwards. Most of her songs have a signature universal dance party appeal, which is continuing to cause global mania.

When it comes to Missy's music, people give a lot of credit to her beats, produced by Timbaland. One respondent said "Virginia is a growing area for talent in the hip hop industry" Another respondent said "VA is more respected for the beats than anything else but the artist are getting there" mentioning the rapper Quam. Quam came on the scene with Queens Bridge New York rapper Nas in the song "Just A Moment" on Nas' 2004 album "Street's Disciple". Nas deems Quam the savior of hip hop and with this collaboration came many people's first awareness of talent from a place nick named Bad News Virginia, or Newport News on a map (sonymusic.com, 2005). However there may be some bad news for Virginia hip hop fans. According to a hip hop forum at sonymusic.com, hip hoppers around the world are asking "Bad news" as in New Port News VA??? Didn't 50 cent dis or call out that city on a track?" (2005). What this quote is referring to is the upset of Newport News Virginia residents a few days before the Massacre album hit the streets, because of 50 cents portrayal of the town in the song "Ski Mask Way". 50 tells the story of a big city hustler who needs to escape New York for a while because it is getting too hot, so he sets up shop in Bad News (which many New Yorkers now believe is a term coined by 50 even though it is not). The New York rapper

sees it “easy pickings” for a hustler and mentions buying guns from Allen Iverson’s local crew. “People were really upset, especially in New Port News, about the situation,” said Mike Klein, music director for local station 104.5. During a promotional stop at Hampton Roads, 50 cent stated that his reference was blown out of proportion. He also said he was grateful towards New Port News because of the support they have shown him early on in his career and that he wouldn’t want beef with any town anywhere (sonymusic.com, 2004). 50’s portrayal of the Virginia city reminds me of a debate I had with a fellow Hamptonian (Hampton University student) from New York City. He blasphemed Virginia insisting that because we are a commonwealth we therefore “suck” and we are “poor” and we “will never be as good as New York”. However, Fairfax County in Northern Virginia is among the richest counties in the United States and has 10 more affluent counties in the top 100, more than any other state (Answers.com, 2005). Then my fellow collegian went on to say “look at your flag, it’s one of yall getting robbed probably by someone from New York”. Though it is apparent to me some outsiders are lax on the idea of Virginia having any sort of laudable enterprise, hip hop included, a few of Virginia’s own respondents expressed discontent with the strides made in Virginia hip hop. “Virginia doesn’t rep it self like Snoop does Cali or Jay-Z talks about New York,” says one respondent. “I think we believe we are more original than we are,” said another guy. People in Virginia “think it rates along with ATL or Cali when it doesn’t” said a man from the 804.

In conclusion, respondents were able to note anything else worth mentioning. Many concluded that they were proud of rising groups like the Clipse who had the hit song “Grinding”. A respondent seems enthusiastic where he says, “Virginia’s hip hop

scene will continue to grow and be innovative as new artist and new hits keep us on the map”. Overall, for most of the respondents, Virginia is “keeping the hip hop scene new and more entertaining”.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

As the processes of globalization set in, you have the issue of the homogenizing effect; however, with the pervasiveness of global mass media, and other communication mediums, instead of traditional and local cultures being wiped out by one universal ethos, people are using the media creatively to further advance existing cultural patterns and identities or reinvent them into hybrid forms, with both global and local characteristics (Gibbs, et al, 2005). Music is one example of this process of mixing the global and the local, what we can call glocalization (Robertson, 1995). This can be found specifically in hip-hop music and culture, one of music's most hybrid forms. Hip hop's emergence in 1970's New York signified a new black identity movement that would afford a cultural remedy for the ails associated with post-industrialization: the unemployment, the poverty, and the racism (Potter, 1995). Resistant music, entrepreneurialism, and having a good time in the face of desolation marked the success of this movement. Hip hop spread throughout the East Coast to create a regional force, then it jumped the continent to colonize the West Coast where hip hop bicoastal competition first began. Meanwhile, the third coast down south in Florida, Georgia, New Orleans, and Tennessee, began to utilize hip hop's empowering ideology. Now people all over the world have deciphered hip hop's original form and adapted it to recount for the everyday happenings in their specific regions. Hip hop scenes are emerging everywhere. One place that has shown that it can contend in the ranks with other established regions of hip hop is Virginia, USA. This study sought to explore Virginia's situatedness in the broader hip-hop landscape.

Through qualitative research, observation and interviews, I was able to reveal an understanding of Virginia's hip hop identity as related to geographical location. Virginia is located between the East coast and Southern hip hop regions. Through observations of various hip hop mediums, including music and music videos, I compiled taxonomy of East coast and Southern hip hop indicators. In my interviews, respondents were questioned to what extent they believed Virginia hip hop was East Coast or Southern and they were asked to come up with indicators of East Coast and Southernness in hip hop as well. Respondents were also asked if they thought Virginia was a unified or diversified hip hop region. Furthermore, respondents were asked to give their perceptions of Virginia's hip hop identity. This line of questioning included discussion of Virginia's hip hop emergence, prominent artists, and influence on other regions.

As expressed in my analysis and findings Virginia is a developing hip-hop scene. Originally influenced by New York's forms and acquiring some influence from the South's progressive movement, Virginia has managed to become the producer of some of the most cutting edge acts in hip hop. These acts include Timbaland, Missy Elliot, Magoo, The Neptunes, The Clipse, Quam, and Mad Skillz. Virginia is noted for its universally praised beats and is beginning to thrive more on the artistry front.

Virginia's hip hop influences are great, from the East Coast, Down South, DC Metropolitan, causing dissent on what Virginia hip hop truly is regionally. Loyalties to regionally specific hip-hop styles seem to be rooted in an area's rurality or urbanness (Miller, 2004). Virginia hip hop is definitely on the rise and it will be interesting to see what type of identity will foster. It is likely that other imagined regions will follow in its footsteps and the data in this study can be built upon. With the rise of glocalization,

individuals and states may find it more and more necessary to represent and make a distinct impression on the hip hop forefront (Robertson, 1995). Other studies of this nature should explore the impact of income and racial intergratedness on hip hop identity.

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