"The Beats Have No Color Lines": An Exploration of White Consumption of Rap Music

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between White consumption of politically conscious rap music and the political beliefs of White rap music consumers. The guiding research questions included an exploration of why Whites with little prior concern about racism consume rap music with politically conscious antiracist messages; if Whites who consume this music believe the messages spoken are an accurate depiction of reality; and if a relationship exists between consumption of politically conscious rap music and an individual's political beliefs. Through interviews of White fans at politically conscious rap shows it was found that many individuals do not understand the music they are consuming is political in intent. Individuals highlighted themes that they could identify with, namely the need for unity and love, while ignoring others, such as the need to fight against injustice and racism. While independently individuals may have liberal political beliefs and consume politically conscious rap music, there appears to be no indication that consumption of rap music alters political beliefs.

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Statement of the Problem

Charles Kiel's (1966) assertion that as long as there is Black music there will be a White audience is deserving of exploration and explanation. Despite the complex history of race relations in America, White consumption of African American music has endured. Today, the genre of choice is hip hop, and the primary audience, White suburban youth (see Aaron 1998; Chideya 1999; Sullivan 2003).

Although numerous individuals have commented on the large White consumer base of rap music, none have been able to adequately describe this phenomenon. Rachel Sullivan (2003) conducted one of few studies addressing this issue. However, the survey methodology of her study did not provide the opportunity for individuals to further elaborate on particular questions or their rationale for listening to rap music. Furthermore, Sullivan's study focused on the broad scope of rap music, and not one specific sub-genre within rap music. Since the appeal of rap music is primarily mass marketed through outlets such as MTV, BET, and commercial radio, the possibility exists for noticeable differences in perceptions or political beliefs amongst Whites who choose to listen to "politically conscious" or non-mass mediated rap music within a local scene. Through talking with these White rap music fans, an understanding of how rap music consumption shapes identity and beliefs can be further explained.

It is also important to understand how, and if, consumption of music corresponds with an individual's personal beliefs and actions. Critiques waged against the sub-genre of gangsta rap (see Potter 1995) have emphasized that consumption of violent messages leads to violent behavior. If this is the case, we can then also assume that consumption of

politically conscious rap music would result in direct action or altered beliefs on behalf of those consumers. No simple model of direct and uniform effects will suffice. The belief in the passive audience has been replaced by the notion of an active and autonomous one (see Croteau & Hoynes 2000). This study specifically addresses how personal demographics and biographies affect the interpretations of active audience members.

This study focuses on the mainly White audience members who attend the shows of a local politically conscious hip hop group, True Sound. Although prior literature has independently addressed the values of understanding the role of music in our daily lives (see DeNora 2000; Frith 2003), patterns of musical identity and consumption (see Gans 1974; Peterson & Simkus 1992; Peterson & Kern 1996) and a history of White consumption (see Jones 1963; Kiel 1966), the interplays between all three directed towards White consumption of hip hop music has not been measured. While there are many theories and opinions of scholars, both within and outside the hip hop community, studies to substantiate these claims have been extremely limited. This research provides the opportunity to conduct a study within this emerging field of scholarship.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"You *like* rap music?" Nikki, an African American from a rural part of the state and my college freshman roommate was shocked that I, her White roommate, liked rap music. Nikki admitted her surprise was based upon a stereotypical belief that because I was White I would not like rap music. However, individuals who look like me now constitute the majority of mainstream rap consumers (Lusane 1993; Sullivan 2003). Understanding this phenomenon is valuable in the quest for answers to understand the dynamic interplays between musical preferences, identity, and the history of White consumption.

Chapter Two begins setting the stage for White rap music fans. Explained within a historical framework, a review of the literature of musical tastes, personal and collective identities, notions of cultural and subcultural capital, as well as the relationship between politics and music are explored.

Chapter Three contextualizes the field where this research was conducted. An overview of the town, White rap music fans within this university town, the venue where this research was conducted, as well as a detailed explanation of the hip hop band, True Sound, is provided. It is my hope that providing a context will help to better situate this research and its participants.

Chapter Four is comprised of the methodology employed in this research. In the spirit of qualitative research, a personal reflexive piece begins and ends the chapter. Further explanations as to why certain methodologies were used as well as the phases of collection and interviews are outlined here.

Chapter Five is situated around the response trends of individuals interviewed. These trends emerged and could not be neatly categorized within the responses to the research questions. I found them highly important and illuminating regarding the conclusions of this research.

Chapter Six provides the answers to the research questions. Individual responses are given as representative responses to interview questions which aided in ascertaining the answers to the guiding questions of this thesis.

Chapter Seven includes final thoughts on this research, limitations of this project, as well as some questions and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

Understanding White rap music fans today requires historical, personal, and cultural reflection. Through reflection what is found is that this is nothing new. White consumption of African American influenced musical traditions has long existed. However, what have arguably changed are the historical and social conditions surrounding these forms.[1] Through an examination of the complex historical relationship between African American music and White consumption, from slave songs to modern day rap music, a framework for the analyses of understanding how musical taste, individual and collective identities, and politics influence our daily lives is established.

(African) American Culture

"American Culture is inconceivable without African American life"- Michael Eric Dyson (1996)

Throughout United States history, Whites have consistently used African American culture as a radical negative from which to define their own culture. Such bifurcation has resulted in the polarization of "White culture" as the antithesis of African American culture (West 1990; Agwu 2003; Gibbs 2003). If there has consistently been one area of commonality, it has been within the domain of music. However, this shared interest has not come without contestation. White consumption and appropriation of African American musical and cultural traditions have further intensified the debate surrounding cultural territories of race (Gibbs 2003). Who, if anyone, has ownership rites to particular genres of music remains a forefront topic for debate, today most notably within hip hop (Samuels 1991; Rose 1994; McCleod 1999).

[1] I am not suggesting a value stance on whether or not I believe the lives of African Americans have improved or worsened in recent years. Rather, a consideration of specific conditions of an era may provide greater insight into the origins and messages of a specific musical form.

Music and Our Daily Lives

"At the level of daily life, music has power"- Tia DeNora (2000)

Whether through active or passive consumption, music plays a fundamental role in our daily lives. From the background music constantly playing in department stores to the mobile walkman, in the words of Simon Frith (2003), "music is the soundtrack of our daily lives" (p. 93). The functions of music are as wide-ranging as its scope. Music serves multiple functions in the lives of its listeners, contributing to identity formation (Frith 1996), cognitive, emotional and social functioning (Hargreaves & North 1999; Finnegan 2003), and also serves as an avenue for rebellious youthful expression (Hargreaves & North 1999; Hesmondhalgh 2002b). For some, music's appeal is its ability to function as an escape from the realities and social constraints of everyday life (Hesmondhalgh 2002b). For others, music serves as a vicarious medium by which listeners are given the opportunity to experience a "reality" through music they would not experience in their everyday lives (Portnoy 1963).

In one of the first sociological articles written on music, Georg Simmel remarked that the functionality of music rested in its ability for certain social groups to communicate human emotions not adequately represented by speech. Simmel's treatment of music as a medium of communication is subsumed within his broader assessment of music as an aspect of social relationships which continually structure and restructure societal relations (Etzkorn 1964). Simmel understood what Tia DeNora (2000) later reiterated; "music is much more than a decorative art, it is a powerful medium of social order."

DeNora (2000) furthers her case of sociological inquiry into the functionality of music in *Music and Everyday Life*. DeNora argues that musical consumption is a phenomenon worthy of examination because of its ability to construct social reality. Music's ability to be used as a "resource of social agency" merits further investigation due to its ability to shape individual, collective, social, and political identities. I would add that studying popular music of specific eras, and amongst particular demographics, further contributes to an understanding of the social realities of that given time for that certain faction of society.

The impact of music on an individual's identity is further shaped by the cognitive, emotional, and social functions of music. An individual's response to music can be viewed as both a product of the combination of their sociocultural identities and the social context where they experienced the musical text (Hargreaves & North 1999; Born & Hesmondhalgh 2000; Finnegan 2003). Thus, while individuals may consume music within the same physical space, no two individuals experience the same musical text in the same fashion (Finnegan 2003).

Adolescents, in particular, commonly regard their musical tastes as "badges of identity" by which to identify themselves and others. Frequently listening to specific genres of music is employed as a means of identification with a particular subculture, lifestyle, ethnic group or social class (Hargreaves & North 1999). Consuming specific genres of music may be attempt by some, particularly adolescents, to obtain a certain level of what Sarah Thornton (1996) terms subcultural capital: a non-class restrictive embodiment or objectification of what defines "hip."

The ability of music to define so much of our daily lives makes inquiry into its political, social, personal, and collective meanings and uses valuable. Today, no genre of music defines the source of "hip" (specifically for White adolescents) more than hip hop (Aaron 1998; Bynoe 2000).

What's Your Preference? Musical Taste in Popular Culture

While most all of us have defined musical tastes, the articulation of why we prefer certain musical genres, as opposed to others, is often a more daunting task. In his landmark text, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* Pierre Bourdieu (1979) posits that aesthetic taste and cultural consumption are closely linked to an individual's educational level and social origin. Commonly, bourgeois adolescents, in an attempt to separate themselves from bourgeois culture, will associate with an aesthetic outside the realm of their given cultural boundaries. This distinction is manifest through different cultural goods consumed, as well as the amount of capital placed on each of these preferences. Cultural capital, regarded as being synonymous with having good taste, manners, intellectual sophistication, and consumption of legitimate cultural products (Van Eijck 1997) may manifest itself within an individual's musical preferences or specific taste cultures (Bourdieu 1979; Hakanen & Wells 1993).

Herbert Gans (1974) coined the term *taste cultures* which he believes function both as visual enhancement and entertainment while also expressing values and standards of taste and aesthetics. Gans's assessment of taste cultures differs from prior assessments of mass culture (such as those of Karl Manheim and Ortega y Gasset) because he does not view audiences as a unitary mass, but rather, comprised of multiple taste cultures. Gans believes that taste cultures serve the specific needs of different groups within

society and places less of a premium on the taste cultures (and thus, cultural capital) of high culture from that of low and middlebrow cultures. According to Gans, the partitioning of high culture from popular culture has been overstated. Just as high culture serves the needs for a segment of the population, so too does popular culture. In this respect, popular culture should also be viewed as a source of cultural capital.

In an attempt to further test the theoretical assumptions of Bourdieu and theories of musical preferences, Peterson and Simkus (1992) explored the possible relationship between musical tastes and occupational status groups. Results indicated that in post-industrial societies, such as the United States, there no longer exists a one-to-one correspondence between taste and status group membership. However, a significant relationship was found between a respondent's race, occupational status group and musical preference. African Americans were more likely than Whites to prefer jazz, and African Americans within lower status occupational groups were much more likely to prefer jazz and blues than their White peers.

In later studies, Peterson and Kern (1996) examined the shifting trend in musical consumption among high status Americans. Whereas highbrows (high status Americans) used to be exclusive in their musical tastes, high status Americans were now more likely than others to be consumers of lowbrow (socially marginalized groups) activities and cultural forms.[2] This shift, from snob to omnivore, may be the result of geographic migration and influences from the mass media. Peterson and Kern concluded that this shift further indicated not only an alteration in musical taste, but also within social power relationships.

[2] According to Peterson and Kern (1996), highbrows are more likely to be White and more likely to be female.

With an increasing trend towards omnivorous consumption of music among elites, do cultural boundaries within music still remain? Furthermore, is cross-cultural understanding through music ultimately possible (Walker 1996; Agawu 2003)? There is no empirical evidence from biology, anthropology, or psychology that humans are predetermined to prefer specific cultural activities over others. Musical behaviors and preferences instead arise as the product of an individual's interaction amid a given social group within a specified environment. There is no human behavior that is devoid of culture, including musical consumption. Therefore, in order to understand the music of another culture, one must have an understanding towards the assimilation of influences affecting musical behavior as much as of the resultant musical products (Walker 1996). This understanding is necessary because it is often our structural position within society that affects our perceptions and interpretations of others (Croteau & Hoynes 2000).

Ecological theory attempts to provide such a context through an examination of the relationship between social structure and culture. According to Noah Mark (1998), ecological theory argues that musical forms compete for the time, energy, and preferences of individuals and that similar people interact with one another and develop similar musical tastes. Underlying ecological theory is the notion of homophily: individuals who are similar in demographic characteristics are more likely to interact than those who are dissimilar. Ecological theory does not discount the presence of cultural omnivores, but rather, asserts that those who are omnivorous have overlapping musical niches and more musical preferences.

However, in the examination and application of ecological theory to the diverse audience of hip hop, such claims become increasingly more difficult to declare.

Depending on the locale, often individuals who are dissimilar may interact more than or equally as much as those who are similar. Ecological theory's somewhat simplistic assumption and characterization that those who are demographically similar will also have similar musical preferences may not account for the actual breadth of cultural omnivores. No longer may omnivores be members of the social elite, but all strata of society. The heterogeneity of omnivores subsequently infiltrates all spheres of musical consumption. Particularly within hip hop, the mass marketing and comodification of this genre makes it increasingly difficult to delineate precise boundaries of consumption.

Legitimate Culture: Cultural and Subcultural Capital

The definition of "legitimate" culture was initially premised on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. However, with the emergence of subcultures, another form of capital, what Sarah Thornton terms, subcultural capital, has arisen.

Subcultures have long been conceptualized as more homogenous, distinctive entities separate from larger society (Fine & Kleinman 1979). In an attempt to broaden this characterization, Fine and Kleinman (1979) redefined subcultures within an interactionist paradigm as a "set of understandings, behaviors, and artifacts used by particular groups and diffused through interlocking group networks" (p. 18). This view of subculture highlights Manheim's idea that youth cultures comprise a generational unit of individuals who create new and distinctive perspectives and cultural patterns, later disseminated to other groups. The value of this interlocking paradigm, along with multiple group membership, is the availability for rapid spread of cultural items. The rethinking of subcultures as fluid entities transmitted through cultural networks is particularly valuable when thinking about the diffusion of musical forms across racial

boundaries or specified geographic locations. This theory may provide explanation as to the cultural transmission of products emergent from a specified situation or group of people but consumed primarily amongst another (i.e. hip hop).

Sarah Thornton (1996) further explores subcultures in her book, *Club Cultures.* Thornton identifies club cultures as taste cultures commonly designated by the media as "hip" spaces. What is "hip" is frequently defined in opposition what is considered "mainstream." Often contextualized as a binary, subcultural capital and hipness are associated with being "underground" and "authentic" versus mainstream characterizations being infiltrated by the media and thus, "phony." Premised on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Thornton contends that these hip spaces provide the opportunities for individuals to obtain subcultural capital. Nothing can deplete hipness, this source of subcultural capital, more than an individual who attempts to learn to be hip.

Debates surrounding authenticity and appropriation within club cultures are similar to those occurring within hip hop. Participation within club cultures serves as an assertion of individuality and distinctive character for many youth. Although many African American and White youth cultures share similar attitudes and musical preferences, Thornton contends that race still remains a prominent divider among youth cultures.

Thornton's research has also delved into the relationship between the fluid boundaries existing between subcultures and the mainstream. Individuals who participate within club cultures self-identify as outside of, and in opposition to, the mainstream. Fully embracing subcultural ideologies, clubbers define themselves by what they ardently are not (Thornton 1996). Through Thornton's examination of club cultures, it appears

ironic that the mainstream (commonly associated with the dominant classes of society) initially determines what is seen as "legitimate" culture, and then, in an attempt to become "hip," consumes that which is not legitimate.

Lamont and Lareau (1988) highlight this paradox in their examination of the continued applicability of cultural capital in everyday life. They contend the power of cultural capital resides in the power of legitimating specific cultural norms and practices. This privilege resides with the dominant class as they are able to determine what is substantiated as legitimate culture. With increasing "hipness" being associated with consuming cultures, what Tricia Rose (1994) identifies as "voices from the margins,"[3] it appears as if the mainstream defines legitimate culture out of necessity to then be able to obtain a degree of subcultural capital by consuming cultures outside of the mainstream.

With increased attention and focus being paid to subcultures, it may no longer be appropriate to conceive of certain forms of cultural capital without also thinking of the accompaniment of subcultural capital. The shifting trend towards being associated with what is considered "hip," consumption of subcultural products may actually further to legitimate an individual's cultural capital.

Music and Identity

"I can hardly think of a subject more strained by confusion and bitterness than the relation of race to identity"- Michael Eric Dyson (1996)

In a post-modern world, our belief that we can shape, and subsequently reshape, who we are contributes vastly to how we regard our individual and collective identities. However, conceptualization of our individual and collective identities as "mutable

[3] For Rose, such identification is within the context of hip hop.

selves" can often paralyze change. While living in a time when such change is possible, we are often resistant to change out of fear that such change will result in nothing "authentic" remaining in the core of our being (Goldstein & Rayner 1994; Negus 1996).

In order to understand identity, post-modern theorists have articulated the need for reflexivity. Anthony Giddens argues that reflexive self awareness provides individuals with the opportunity to construct a self-identity apart from the rigid bounds of tradition and culture (Adams 2003). Free from the shackles of tradition and culture, individuals are faced with both the burden and the freedom of constructing their own identities. These identities, according to Giddens, are undertaken through the "reflexive project of the self," through which our conscious choices shape our individual identities. Reflexivity, similar to all other dimensions of our lives, is somewhat bound, if not exhausted by, the culture and society which we are a part of (Adams 2003). Perhaps in no greater areas, than those we are privileged, is it most difficult to be reflexive.

In race-centered societies such as the United States the separation of our racial experiences from our personal identity is seldom ever possible (Stanfield 1993). For some, this relationship seems obvious, while for others, such an assertion seems questionable. Whiteness is everywhere in American culture but yet, remains very hard to see (Lipsitz 1995). The privileged identity of Whiteness, or the disadvantaged identity of "otherness," shapes both individual and collective experiences and identities (Sacks & Lindholm 2002).

Kendall Clark (2003) defines White privilege as, "a right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by White persons beyond the common advantage of all others; a privileged position." Whiteness, and the power and privilege that accompany it, are most

visible to the individuals and communities it excludes. The catch-all of racial privilege is that it's often concealed or normalized from the perspective of its beneficiaries. Such normalization and invisibility further contributes to the difficulty of individuals recognizing their racial privilege or their Whiteness (Frankenberg 1993). The privilege of Whiteness ultimately is that Whiteness never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations (Lipsitz 1995).

A lack of racial recognition is not confined merely to those situations in which an individual's race is explicitly brought into question, but through all experiences and patterns of consumption. Alan Warde (1994), highlighting the social theories of Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Zygmunt Bauman noted, "today, people define themselves through the messages they transmit to others through the goods and practices they possess and display" (p. 878). Warde, similar to Giddens, stresses that identities are not randomly constructed, but rather, the result of personal selection. The consequence of the freedom to construct one's own narrative is the subsequent need to engage in self monitoring, in a Foucaultian sense, in order for individual's to determine whether their behavior is congruent with their projected identity (Warde 1994). Perhaps the need for self monitoring is no greater than amongst the most privileged individuals in American society.

Identity patterns of the triply privileged, White, upper-middle-class men, revolve around their privileged status. For many of these individuals, college is the most diverse environment they will experience. Studies conducted by Sacks and Lindholm (2002) of college-aged males revealed that these persons who racially identify as White actually know very little about their ethnic identity. In fact, many of the men interviewed were

more likely to view their identity as being a part of a specific sports team or group, rather than embedded within their race or gender: those constructions of identity were deemed "counterproductive." Participants' acknowledgement of the American Dream as a viable reality for all exemplified their privileged identity and its separation from social structure. The men interviewed had no conception of why someone would not be able to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," and failed to acknowledge that not everyone even had boots.

The belief in the ideology of the American Dream also exemplifies the effects of possessive investment in Whiteness and modern racism. These men believed that their experience typified the "American experience" and had no conception of the structural barriers others may have to cross in order to even have a chance at the living (and I would argue, even having the desire to live) the American Dream (Sacks & Lindholm 2002). While all Whites do not benefit from their possessive investment in Whiteness in the same fashion (namely, such an "investment" is often amplified by a privileged sexual orientation, social class, and/or gender), it always affects individual and collective life chances and opportunities. As Russell Potter (1995) aptly summarizes, "the central trope of 'White' is, I think, the luxury *not* to think doubly, to see the world through the one-eyed vistas of privilege, rather than having to account for one's own identity within and against a fundamentally multiple culture" (p. 20).

Modern racism highlights the institutionalization and normalization of racism and challenges the common belief that racism is defined strictly as conscious and deliberate individual acts (Lipsitz 1995). Modern racists are commonly unaware of their racist feelings and also do not challenge their ascribed privileged status. As such, modern

racism lies at the heart of disjunction between philosophy and action. These individuals do not recognize the disparity between their privilege and another's oppression, and consequently, often remain neutral in both ideology and action (Sacks & Lindholm 2002).

Modern racism and privileged identities also manifest themselves within musical genres and preferences. Music is deeply involved in the proliferation of dominant classifications of race, class and gender (Lipsitz 1995; Born & Hesmondhalgh 2000; Krims 2000). Musical preferences also articulate an individual's need for distinction, particularly among those of a privileged racial status. In *Black and White* (1999),[4] a James Toback film, when asked about her consumption of hip hop, Charlie commented:

> I'm a little kid. Little kids go through phases. I mean, I like it now. I'm gonna stand up for it and be like yeah I'm into hip hop. But you know, when it comes down to it, I'll be over it soon…I can do whatever I want. I'm a kid in America.

Responding to the same question, Kim answered:

> You don't want to be what people expect of your race. You know, like people say, okay you're White, you have to be this way. You can't walk around and talk whatever, Ebonics. I don't know. Sometimes you don't want to be what your race is supposed to be.

What is stressed through both Kim and Charlie's comments, and those of many White consumers of hip hop, is this ability to choose. An ability to choose to consume music while, as Sacks and Lindholm (2002) state, to remain neutral in ideology and action, are recurrent examples of modern racism. Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) call such disjuncture a musical imagination: the possibility for music to create a purely imaginary identification with no intent to actualize such identities.

[4] *Black and White* is a movie, not a documentary. However, I believe that the responses here are characteristic responses of many Whites and fans of hip hop.

However, not all forms of musically articulated identity are the same for every individual (Born & Hesmondhalgh 2000). An individual's race commonly serves as a mediator between musical and cultural identities. Accordingly, culture can either serve as an avenue for domestication of music or as a source of domination (Bohlman 2003). However, "musical diversity as an inalienable right seems to belong generally to those with the most power and status" (Nexica 1997:67).

Simon Frith (1996) further assesses the relationship between music and culture in his appraisal of popular music and identity. Firth asserts that popular music is the result of social conditioning and commercial manipulation. Consuming popular music is an experience of identity but answers as to how multiple webs of identities are constructed through popular music consumption remains unclear. Keith Negus (1996) chimes into this discussion, arriving at a similar conclusion as Frith. However, Negus does not consider it problematic that he does not find an intrinsic link between the lives of fans, meanings of musical texts, and lives of audience members and musicians. Instead, he believes that "identity is created out of and across the processes whereby people are connected together through and with music" (p. 133).

As questions of identity are intermingled with preferences in musical tastes, the blurred line between consumption and appropriation becomes more vivid. What remains consistent is the role popular music has played in disseminating African American culture (Hosokawa 2002). White consumption of African American musical forms as a source of alternative identity formation has long existed (Jones 1963; Kiel 1966). The failure of individuals to recognize their privileged identities may contribute to listeners not fully comprehending the social and historical contexts from which their musical selection

emerged. Furthermore, while Whites are increasingly identifying with black musical forms, this increase in consumption has not led to a decrease in racism. Even as Whites consume traditionally African American musical genres, failure to recognize the conditions from which it emerged (see Allinson 1994), as well as a failure by Whites to recognize their own racial privilege (see Lipsitz 1995) may be one explanation as to why increased musical consumption has not led to a change in racial attitudes.

A History of White Consumption

"True racial engagement is meaningful interaction, not buying a hip hop CD." -Yvonne Bynoe (2000)

Music plays a vital role in our daily lives while functioning differently in accordance with different individuals and cultures. From slave songs to modern day rap, music has served as an expression of cultural truths and as a medium in which individuals can express their views of what it means to be Black in America. It is the deeply imbedded cultural roots and history within music of the African Diaspora that makes it difficult for individuals who are not African American to fully comprehend the meaning and purpose behind its musical traditions (Jones 1963; Kiel 1966).

LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* (1963), one of the most significant texts addressing the complex historical relationship between predominately White audiences and traditional African American music, postulates that any valuable popular music in America is of African derivation. He provides a historical account of White consumption of African American music, noting that African American music was not considered "American music" until the advent of jazz: the first genre of African American music that could successfully be imitated by Whites (see Kohl 1997). As African Americans were

increasingly attempting to separate themselves from White mainstream culture, White appropriation was on the rise. White musicians and others regarded consumption of African American music as a means to separate themselves from mainstream culture (Jones 1963). Jones calls this process double assimilation. While Whites were being "mainstreamed," simultaneously, this difference was seen as enriching.

Joel Rudinow (1994) dubs White appropriation, "the great musical robbery." Rudinow echoes the perspective of Jones and Kiel, contending that unless one is African American, they cannot fully understand, nor be able to authentically express themselves, through consumption of the blues.[5] This does not mean that Whites are not able to take interest in, or even empathize with messages in the music. However, Whites will never be able to fully comprehend the messages of the music since they have not personally experienced them.

In a similar fashion to *Blues People*, Charles Kiel's *Urban Blues* (1966) documents the history of White consumption and appropriation of African American musical forms. Kiel's primary focus resides with the dilution of African American musical texts once appropriated within White musical forms. Once African American music is consumed by Whites, the unintended audience of some African American music, the specific role and intent of the music no longer transcends in applicability to the White audience.[6] Kiel challenges Whites to not only consume African American music, but to make a concerted effort to understand the complexities of African American life and then incorporate those insights into their own lives.

[5] By extension, I believe that the argument surrounding blues music can also be applied to hip hop.
[6] Keil's concern hailed primarily from his belief that Blacks were the only substantial "minority group" in America who had a culture to "guard and protect" (p. 191).

Further discussion by Perry Hall (1997) delves deeper into Kiel's ideological concerns regarding White consumption, appropriation, and assimilation of African American music. Hall contextualizes the issue within the complex web of a love-hate relationship between mainstream (i.e. White) society and African American culture. An important concern of many scholars that Hall addresses is that while Whites are quick to embrace African American music, they are frequently not as eager to embrace African Americans or their culture on a humane level (see Allinson 1994). Greg Tate (2003) aptly summarizes Hall's concerns when posing the question, "why does everyone love Black music but nobody loves Black people?"

In a further attempt to explain White fascination and consumption with African American culture, Norman Mailer's seminal essay, "The White Negro" (1959) asserts that the source of "Hip" resides with African Americans, and in an attempt to also become Hip, Whites frequently associate themselves with African American culture. The Hipster, the White Negro, is a product of rebellion. In an effort to separate themselves from the mainstream, the existence of White Negroes is contingent upon their remaining on the fringes of American society. However, at the end of the day, the White Negro has the luxury of "returning to being White" (Rux 2003).

Modern Day White Negroes

"Because they love Puff, or they love Ice Cube, or they love Tupac, that ain't gonna make them love Black people"- Sean "Puffy" Combs (quoted in Chideya 1999)

White consumption of African American music has become more popular than ever with the entrance of rap music into mainstream America. White consumers, and in particular White, middle class adolescents, constitute over seventy percent of rap record

sales (Aaron 1998). A study conducted by Teenage Research Limited found that 58% of those younger than 18, 59% of those 18 to 20, and 40% of individuals 21-24 reported liking or strongly liking rap music (Spiegler 1996; Sullivan 2003). However, a reported 74% of rap record sales are to non-Blacks (Lusane 1993). In 1998, for the first time ever, rap surpassed country as the greatest selling musical genre (Farley 1999). Rap's popularity has consistently been on the rise, with 21 rap albums included on Billboard's Top 100 Albums of 2001 (Sullivan 2003). The continual rise and popularity of rap music, particularly among those outside of the African American community, has intrigued many scholars and individuals within the hip hop community to more closely examine the success of rap music's crossover appeal.[7]

Black Noise, Tricia Rose's (1994) seminal text regarding the emergence and politics of rap music, contextualizes hip hop as a derivation of African American experience within the post-industrial conditions of the South Bronx in the 1970s. Rose defines hip hop as a cultural form that attempts to "negotiate the experience of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African American and Caribbean history, identity, and community" (p. 21). Implicit throughout Rose's text is the specificity of hip hop strictly as an African American art form, which has subsequently undergone a process of appropriation, similar to prior African American musical genres. Rose recognizes that hip hop now contributes to the continual Afro-Americanization of mainstream culture and has arisen as an identifiable source of rebellion for White teenagers.

[7] It should be noted that these statistics are of mainstream rap music consumption and do not account for albums sold on the street or at shows.

Despite the increasing popularity of rap within popular music, very few studies have been conducted giving these individual audience members a voice (Hesmondhalgh 2002b). The question as to why rap music's primary audience is White and lives in the suburbs begs an answer.

Even the most racially isolated teenager will experience hip hop and racial diversity vicariously through music, television, and clothing (Chideya 1999; Farley 1999). Thus, it was not a surprise for Farai Chideya to stumble across B.J., an 18 year old avid hip hop fan from the predominately White down of Delphi, Indiana. When asked why he listens to rap music, B.J. replied it's "cool." B.J. is upset with the notion that Whites are ruining hip hop because he believes "the beats have no color lines" (p. 96). Chideya associates this colorblind ideology B.J. and other White hip hop fans express with White privilege. Whites who consume rap music may often do so in an attempt to reject their racial privilege. However, as a result of their privilege, White consumers of rap music risk very little when consuming the music and culture of African Americans.

Similar to Chideya, Rachel Sullivan (2003) has also sought to understand how rap music satisfies White curiosities concerning African American life. In "Rap and Race: It's Got a Nice Beat, but What About the Message?" Sullivan reminds readers that rap music and hip hop culture have always been viewed in the public eye through a racist lens. Assertions by politicians and others that rap music contributes to the moral degradation of America serves backhandedly serves as a catalyst for "rebellious" White youth to consume this music and culture.[8] Sullivan's study of 51 adolescents,

[8] See Potter (1995) Chapter 3, for a discussion of Tipper Gore and the Parent's Music Resource Center's critique of rap music.

comprisedof rap and non rap fans, and African American and Whites, yielded promising results in understanding the impact of rap music on the lives of its listeners.

Results indicated that there was not a significant racial difference among respondents agreeing that "rap is a truthful reflection of society." However, individuals who were rap music fans were more likely to agree rap was a truthful reflection of society than those who were not fans. These results pose further questions into whether those individuals that believe rap is a truthful reflection of society also then value the opinions of rappers on life issues regarding gender, sexuality, racism, poverty, and police brutality. White rap fans were more likely than blacks to report that listening to rap music had affected their opinions regarding racism. Finally, when asked to explain why they listened to rap music, Whites were more likely to report that they listened to rap because it had a "nice beat" and Blacks were more likely to report they listened to rap because it served as an affirmation of their experiences. This last finding is perhaps most significant as Sullivan's study reveals that the message is not as important as the sound to White listeners and thus, White and Black listeners may be receiving different messages from the same musical text.

The Politics and Culture of Rap Music

"Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that is essentially political"- Jacques Attali (quoted in Nexica 1997)

Imbedded within the debate over White consumption of rap music is the concern that as the White fan base grows, the cultural and political origins from which rap music emerged will subside. Does White participation within hip hop threaten the authenticity and cultural politics of rap music from being fully actualized?

The immense White fan base of rap music has threatened the authenticity of hip hop according to Kembrew McCleod (1999). His definition of authentic "real" hip hop includes being African American, underground, hard, street, old school and remaining true to self whereas "fake" hip hop is associated with being White, commercial, soft, suburbs, and inclusion within the mainstream. Authenticity is viewed as a key cultural symbol of hip hop, similar to other cultures threatened with assimilation. McCleod contends that cultural symbols are often used to maintain a "pure identity," or to "keep it real." The debate over claims to authenticity remains a salient one which is indicative that assimilation remains a real threat to rap music and hip hop culture.

Threats of authenticity are intertwined with the cultural politics of rap music. As rap music and the culture from which it emerged are becoming more disconnected in the minds of White fans, the messages behind the music are also becoming separated from the music itself. This results in the increase in consumption of rap music coinciding with decreased need for human contact between the Whites and African Americans (Samuels 1991).

This problem is magnified as many Whites only contact with African Americans is experienced vicariously through rap music. This not only provides a simplistic view of African American life, but also allows Whites to consume a musical tradition of a culture they are not interacting with or paying homage to (Samuels 1991; Hall 1993; Akil 2003b). As Clarence Lusane (1993) cautions us, while rap music tells us much about the state of current Black America, we must be careful not to reduce Black culture to the commodities of hip hop. Furthermore, Whites who consume rap music may begin to believe that "hip hop's gansgsta fairytales" are synonymous with all of African American

life. Thus, White consumption is *not* cultural understanding but, according to Russell Potter (1995), "a studied avoidance of understanding" (p. 104).

David Samuels's controversial piece, "The Rap on Rap: The 'Black Music' that Isn't Either" (1991), critiques the direction of rap music as its politics and messages are increasingly influenced by White America. White participation within African American musical forms usually predates the mainstreaming of that musical genre, however, with rap music, White demand actually began to determine the direction of rap music. Samuels attributes White fascination with rap music as a progressive stage of consumption stemming from the jazz era. Critical of Whites who buy rap records and believe this gives them insight into an "authentic Black experience," Samuels concludes that "what Whites wanted was not music, but black music, which as a result stopped really being either" (p. 28).

Further discussions regarding the mainstreaming of hip hop and its political implications have been explored by many scholars from various viewpoints. As opposed to Samuels, Katina Stapleton (1998) sees positive aspects emerging from the crossover appeal of rap music into White America. Stapleton argues that political and cultural information is successfully transmitted to youth through rap music because it is relayed in a musical tradition listeners enjoy. The disparity in reasoning for listening to rap music, with Whites tending to consume rap music because of aesthetic reasons and African Americans consuming rap music for its lyrical content, is not of primary concern. Stapelton sees the transmission of cultural and political messages, regardless of the intent of listeners, as most significant.

Of greatest concern is the increasing separation of rap music from African American culture in the minds of White listeners. There appears to be a general consensus among many within the hip hop community and scholars that rap music cannot be separated from African American culture (Rose 1994; Neal 1999; Black 2000; Akil 2003a). However, in an attempt to make rap music and its messages acceptable to themselves, individuals within the mainstream frequently separate the message and the culture from the music (Akil 2003b). This separation is the crux of White privilege, as individuals are consuming what is desirable to them and are eliminating messages they deem undesirable (Stephens 1991). While it may be argued that we are all prone to tune out messages that challenge our identity or beliefs, often the pronouncement that rap music is "just music" or solely for entertainment purposes adds greater complexity to this argument. Individuals are not screening out merely screening out messages that they do not wish to hear, but frequently dismissing the messages all together (see Chapters 5 & 6).

Amongst politically and socially conscious hip hop,[9] the dismissal and separation of messages is of greater concern. Jeffrey Ogbar (1999) posits that rap songs that grapple with societal issues call listeners to a higher state of moral and spiritual consciousness, as well as heightened social responsibility (see Rose 1991). In a similar light, Michael Dawson (1999) views politically oriented rap as a "contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless" and Christopher Farley (1999) regards hip hop as the vehicle for "giving the invisible a voice." These scholars seem to believe that the recognition of messages is enough. Russell Potter (1995) disagrees. He extends the conservation commenting that

[9] I believe, that to a certain extent, all hip hop is political because of its origins. Within this context, "politically and socially conscious" hip hop is music that forwards a "conscious" message, emphasizes gaining knowledge and promotes Afrocentric values and artistic traditions (see Krims 2000, Chapter 3).

even if Whites do take the political messages of rap seriously, there is a danger that Whites will do no more than listen to the "feel good" politics of the music. For Potter, passive consumption without an active response is objectionable.

Why hip hop?

"Hip hop is the only popular culture that takes seriously the relationship between race and democracy in America"- Henry Giroux (quoted in Aaron 1998)

Hip hop has become another aspect of growing up for America's youth (Chideya 1999; Farley 1999; Ogbar 1999). Hip hop commentators assert that not only has hip hop become an American institution, but also has been adopted by White, suburban teenagers as the unofficial language of rebellion (Spiegler 1996; George 1998; Adkins 2001). As the monotony of middle class life and values leads many adolescents to boredom, one alternative is the embrace of the "exciting life" rap music and hip hop culture offers (Epstein 1994; Adkins 2001). Melvin Gibbs (2003) attributes White America's battle against its own nihilism as the driving force for adolescent embrace of hip hop culture. Russell Potter (1995) explains it this way: "Somewhere deep down in the ethos of bourgeois culture is an insatiable thirst for the different, the dangerous, the dislocated, and hip hop located that nerve" (p. 51).

However, the most frequently cited reason for White adolescent consumption and appropriation of rap music is rebellion (Spiegler 1996; Hall 1997; George 1998; Chideya 1999; Neal 1999; Bynoe 2000; Adkins 2001). While rebellion may be one of the reasons White adolescents consume rap music, this explanation alone does not suffice. Given the mainstream (i.e. White) consumption and popularization of rap music, it appears incongruous that teenagers who are attempting to rebel are in actuality, conforming to

popular culture. It is this paradox which poses new questions and new alternatives to White consumption of rap music. If rebellion is actually an altered type of conformity, what then is the motive for these White adolescents?

The best way to resolve this tension would be to ask these rap fans themselves. However, very few researchers have directly spoken to rap fans to ask them how they feel about rap music and its impact on their daily lives (Hesmondhalgh 2002b; Sullivan 2003). Interviewing these rap fans will provide a greater level of understanding of the applicability of the theoretical arguments in the personal lives of individuals. Do White rap fans regard their consumption of rap music as an act of rebellion? Or, does it really just have a good beat?

The beauty of music lies in its potential to bring about change. It has the potential to shape and re-shape identities, political beliefs, legitimate culture, and even what is considered to be "American culture." Consumption of hip hop music holds the same potential. The question is if that potential is being actualized.

Research Hypotheses

Derived from the literature, there are four hypotheses guiding this research. Based upon the work of Mailer (1959), Jones (1963), and Rose (1994), we can expect to find that Whites who attend rap concerts (for this research, True Sound concerts) do so in an attempt to express alienation from mainstream culture. The work of Charles Kiel (1966) and Farai Chideya (1999) suggests that Whites who attend True Sound concerts do not interpret the messages in the same way that African Americans interpret the messages. Perry Hall's (1997) and Greg Tate's (2003) suggests for Whites who attend True Sound concerts, their attitudes on race and race relations will be more like other

Whites than African Americans. Based upon the work of Chideya (1999) we expect that Whites attend True Sound concerts in order to appear "cool" and, as Sullivan (2003) found, their primary attraction to the music is the beat.

Chapter 3: Context

Where Are We?

This study was conducted in a small college town in the Southeastern part of the United States. The university and local surrounding communities are located within a relatively rural landscape. Despite its rural and mountainous location, this state university attracts many students from the suburbs of major metropolitan areas. Even with the suburban metropolitan influx of students, the university and surrounding community are predominately White. This college town retains within it a liberal facet of the community that is absent from the larger surrounding area. This liberal dimension is further diversified by the influx of young students, scholars, and international students who may not have chosen to reside in the town without the strong presence of the university.

The racially homogenous climate and student body provides an interesting dynamic from which the sample of this research is drawn. As Andy Bennett (1999) notes, Whites consume Black music and Black culture even in the absence of Black presence. Due to the predominately White demographic of the university and community, how is the music of an almost all Black band perceived by its White audience? In addition, how are White students who choose to attend the shows of a predominately African American politically conscious rap group, or students with liberal political views, perceived by their peers? Even within a moderately liberal community, are students too far left ever considered "too liberal," and thus, their political views and opinions overlooked because they are perceived as too extreme or idealistic?

White Rap Fans Here

Similar to many other college towns across the United States, there is a small, but vibrant, local hip hop scene. Both Black and White students and community members play active roles in creating this local hip hop scene. The scene, however, remains small in comparison to those in larger cities. For students who enjoy attending live rap music shows, the opportunity to attend shows is quite limited. Furthermore, the limited opportunity of hip hop shows and venues within this community may contribute to an interesting dynamic for those who attend shows. Due to the limited availability to hear live hip hop individuals who, given another context or more options for hip hop shows, would not end up at the same venue, find themselves together at a show. Despite the relatively limited number of venues and opportunities to hear live hip hop, there remains a subset of the population who not only consume rap music in their private lives, but avidly seek out a limited number of live shows. These individuals do not merely leave on BET (Black Entertainment Television) or MTV (Music Television) as their source of rap music consumption, but go to hip hop shows and engage in its culture to an extent others do not. This may contribute to these individuals considering themselves the "real" fans of hip hop music and culture whereas they may view others as mainstream or bandwagon fans of hip hop.

There is no single description of who could be considered a "typical" White rap music fan in this community. Individuals differ in their appearance, their rationales for listening to rap music, and may in fact, even differ on what they believe comprises "good" rap music. Outside of the local hip hop scene and limited rap music airplay on college radio programs, there is no local rap music radio station, hardly any clubs, and

few opportunities to hear live hip hop.[10] Thus, other mass media commercialized rap music outlets such as MTV and BET may become prominent filters by which students gain access to rap music and contribute to their perceptions of what they deem to be "good" rap music or what they expect to hear when going to a hip hop show.[11]

The venues that draw live hip hop in this community also draw a multitude of different social groups. This conglomeration of people is confounded by the limited selection and opportunities individuals have to attend live hip hop shows. There are individuals in the audience who could be typified as "preppy," those labeled as "sorority or fraternity" men and women, "hippies," and virtually every combination in between. These characterizations and stereotypes are solely based off of visual appearances, hairstyles, and casual observations of behavior. While the markers of these groups are crude, it is important to note that such generalizations are markers of perceived identities that individuals have attempted to establish (Hargreaves & North 1999). In an increasingly visually judgmental society, the choices of individuals to portray their identity as being affiliated with a certain persona or group may not be arbitrary.

Of all the numerous different types of people present, what is particularly interesting is that the popular stereotypical depiction of the White male or female who likes rap music is not present. The "wigger," the male or female who attempts to act, dress, and talk "Black" is not seen at True Sound shows. However, "wiggers" are present within the university community and are also present at the shows of more mainstream,

[10] In addition to hearing True Sound perform once a month at Arnold's, there are only two to three other opportunities per month to hear live hip hop.
[11] In the late 1990s, African Americans comprised only 13 percent of MTV viewers although Black artists can be seen consistently on MTV (Chideya 1999).

national hip hop acts that come to the university.[12] This apparent inconsistency reaffirms Rose's (1994) notion of the continual Afro-Americanization of mainstream culture, as well as to the broadening White fan base of rap music. This further suggests that one can no longer judge someone's musical preferences based on their appearance.

The Venue

True Sound plays monthly shows at a local restaurant and bar, Arnold's. Arnold's is a quaint brick building located on the main street of the town. On the outside of Arnold's is a marquee that publicizes the musical lineup for the week. In addition, Arnold's also has an online musical calendar where individuals can see the musical line-up for the month, as well as a brief picture and description of the bands. Arnold's website is captioned by their pronunciation as "the hottest music scene in the 'town'." Many local bands who play at Arnold's advertise heavily within the community. The multiple marketing tactics of Arnold's provides the opportunities for individuals to know, prior to walking through the door, what type of band will be performing at Arnold's on a given evening. As well as these advertisements, Arnold's location within a relatively remote section of downtown actually allows individuals to hear the music outside prior to entering the bar. Thus, there is ample opportunity for most individuals to have some idea of what musical acts or what genre of music is being played that night at Arnold's. Further, due to its more remote location one block further removed from the mainstay of bars downtown, it is less likely that individuals who are bar hopping will end up at Arnold's. Individuals who end up at Arnolds on any given night more than likely realize

[12] For instance, there was a strong presence of "wiggers" (particularly men) at the March 16, 2004 Kanye West concert.

that music will be played, and due to the cover charges, are also more likely to only attend those shows they are interested in.[13]

The general audience and ambiance of Arnold's differs from those of other local bars. The relaxed and inclusive atmosphere of Arnold's allows individual to feel as if they can "come as they are," without having to change clothes to fit a specified image.[14] The lack of pressure to conform to a particular image contributes to the assembly of different social groups at Arnold's. The variety of different genres of musical acts that play at Arnold's further contributes to inclusiveness of the environment.

Arnold's is host to a multitude of wide-ranging genres of music from hip hop to bluegrass, as well as deejay parties for Black fraternities and sororities. The willingness of Arnold's to offer a variety of musical acts, as well as to provide the locale for Black fraternities and sororities, attests to Arnold's desire to be a place where all within the community feel welcome. However, aside from the Black fraternity and sorority parties, the racial composition of the audience most evenings Arnold's is predominately White, as are the town and university on the whole.

When you enter Arnold's there is a real sense of locality and a relatively non-commercialized atmosphere. On display throughout Arnolds are flyers of past musical acts which reinforces a sense of localness. Although Arnold's is host to numerous local bands, it has also hosted more nationally renowned bands such as The Wailers and Carbon Leaf. The Wailers flyer, decorated with the Afrocentric colors of red, yellow, and green, is noticeably displayed on the front wall of Arnold's. The decision of

[13] These claims were confirmed by informants during interviews.
[14] Many other downtown bars have both official and unofficial dress codes.

Arnold's to display this Wailers poster at the front of their establishment suggests that they are proud to be associated with a band descending from Bob Marley.

A sense of locality is further maintained by the display of local artwork throughout Arnold's. The other two downtown vendors that also display local artwork are a coffee shop and vegetarian restaurant commonly associated with attracting the liberal facets of the university community. The same individuals who frequent these two localities can often be seen at Arnold's as well. The willingness of Arnold's to display local artwork attests to its support of local artists and community members.

Walking into Arnold's you immediately face the stage and the large speakers covering the whole front portion of establishment. While Arnold's is a relatively small space, the focal point of the venue is oriented towards the stage. Towards the left side of Arnold's there is a staircase leading up to a balcony where patrons are given an overhead view of the audience and performers on stage. Upstairs on the balcony the visible presence of the soundboard cannot be missed. During the course of a performance, the sound technician and True Sound regularly communicate with one another which further cultivates a non-commercial locality and environment. The direct and visible communication of band members to their sound technician contributes to the unpolished aspect of "underground" music reinforcing the local feel True Sound strives for.

Beyond its local ambiance, Arnold's could also be perceived as a bar with a specific political affiliation. Located behind the bar is a highly visible red, White, and blue bumper sticker that reads "Liberal." The patriotic colors of this bumper sticker speak to the allegations that individuals who consider themselves "liberal," and who may oppose the War in Iraq or the current Bush administration, are unpatriotic. Arnold's

decision to place this sticker in a highly visible place provides insight into the unashamed political and social affiliations of the bar. Furthermore, one does not have to assume, based upon the reputation of Arnold's and the clientele it attracts, as to the political perspectives or orientations of people who frequent there.

Located on the wall behind the bar is a signed picture of Merl Saunders as well as a poster for Hope Claiborne's "Big Black Booty." In spite of the predominately White demographic of this community, it is noteworthy that all of the prominent posters or pictures displayed throughout Arnold's are of Black musicians or individuals.

Most markedly, also located behind the bar at Arnolds is a bottle of fluorescent blue Hpnotq on display. This bottle of Hpnotq is strategically located on the top corner of the shelves of liquor, directly behind the cash register. Due to its location, it is more likely that individuals cannot miss this bottle, whose label is large enough that individuals can read it as well, even if they don't recognize the bottle. Hpnotq, and its customary marketing within a predominately urban environment, is especially peculiar within this White, rural community. Recently, Hpnotq has been cited in the lyrics of many mainstream rap artists and can be seen in the party scenes of many mainstream rap videos. This prominent display of an "urban" drink is notable, particularly considering its visible presence in rap music videos, and may be indicative of an attempt on the part of Arnold's to establish a welcoming, or to create, to the greatest extent possible, "urban" atmosphere. Erving Goffman (1959) would identify the bottle of Hpnotq, in addition to the posters and bumper stickers, as props Arnold's uses to portray their identity to patrons.

The small space of the venue contributes to a relatively close approximation of individuals within Arnold's which further cultivates the potential for association or the close approximation of individuals that may not interact outside of Arnold's. The small space of Arnold's, in addition to its overall inclusive environment, creates a venue where individual's may not only come to hear music, but may engage in conversation with others that they would not in the broader university and local community. This may represent the attempts of the owners of Arnold's, and the bands that play there, to fashion an environment where individuals feel welcome to be themselves and do not feel the need to conform to any one specified mold.

True Sound

True Sound is a local hip hop band comprised of six members, five of whom are Black males and one White male. The mere sight of True Sound may elicit a political message and does according to some informants. Two band members, George and Genesis, have long dreadlocks and members of True Sound are frequently seen wearing Afrocentric colored clothing and accessories. The prominence of Afrocentric colors remains constant throughout True Sound's appearance and advertising.

Flyers for True Sound shows are widely disseminated and posted around the community at least one week in advance of shows. True Sound flyers characteristically have a picture of the group, an Afrocentric color scheme, the band's logo, and advertise the band as live hip hop, reggae, funk, soul, and even, "ghetto rock." One flyer prominently featured an outlined picture of Africa located centrally on the top of their flyer. The unashamed pronouncement of African symbols and African American identity remains consistent throughout True Sound's advertising, performances, and politics.

The appearance of True Sound (particularly, the highly visible dreadlocked hairstyles of some band members), may be a marketing tool in and of itself. Associations with dreadlocks as being "political," Rastafarian, or conjuring up references to marijuana or other drugs may further entice White individuals to consume and embrace the "exciting" music and culture of hip hop (see Gibbs 2003).

True Sound goes a step further in their publicity and advertises their website at their shows and on the bottom of flyers. Their website, www.soundofthetruth.com, characterizes True Sound as the state's "premiere live hip hop act…striving to inform listeners of their universal message of love." The description of True Sound continues: "Hidden within the body moving infectious grooves of True Sound are socio-political commentaries ranging from life, love, spirituality to songs dealing with the plight of African and poor peoples around the world, government corruption, and the sad state of popular music." Their website also provides an opportunity for True Sound fans to talk on message boards. Some of the message board topics include discussing politics, the commercialized rap music industry, as well as providing an opportunity for other artists to exhibit their poetry or rhymes. The vast majority of respondents on these boards, including some band members, harshly criticize the current Bush administration, the War in Iraq, and the state of world affairs. The opportunity that True Sound has provided its fans to interact with one another not only as musical fans, but also as concerned citizens, further positions True Sound within the politically conscious realm of hip hop music.

The True Sound logo is inspired by an element of hip hop, graffiti.[15] The logo for their band is written in graffiti-styled green, red, yellow, green and black lettering further reinforcing the Afrocentric dimensions and symbols of True Sound. Emerging from their

[15] The four elements of hip hop are graffiti, emceeing, deejaying, and breakdancing (see Toop 2000).

logo is a microphone, referencing another element of hip hop, emceeing. What remains consistent and certain throughout is that True Sound markets, and is oriented around, Afrocentric messages and images of hip hop.

In addition to live shows at Arnold's, True Sound has also produced a CD available for purchase at their shows. The marketing of their album is consistent with the other Afrocentric representations True Sound emanates. Each of the songs on their *Live Livity* (2003) album contains slightly different messages although themes such as the need for unity, rising up against violence, injustice and racism, developing a social conscious, a new vision for hip hop, and the realization that love prevails over all reinforce the politically conscious elements of True Sound.

The album begins with the lead singer, Genesis, asking how many hip hop heads are in the house tonight. The resounding loud response from the audience attests to individuals in the audience self-identifying as fans of hip hop. Genesis then goes on singing, "Bring it Back," a song about how he has to battle in the world and how he had to fight to survive being a Black male within a racially hostile college environment. Genesis rhymes, "just because a brother got a bit of hood knowledge, I'm hated by professors and the administrator's office."[16] Genesis reinforces his stance against being defined as "stupid" because of racial stereotypes and epithets: "I'm not a nigger that's dumb. I possess the knowledge of the planet, stars, moon, and sun." A later verse, "who the hell do you think I am? I'm an African who never had an uncle named Sam," further depicts the struggles faced by African Americans within college and in larger society.

In "Karrupshun," Genesis continues this line of rhyming when he speaks to the corrupt world that we live in. "We are, into, enslaved by, so blind to, fooled by, tricked

[16] The university Genesis attended is the same university where this research was conducted.

with, and schooled by karrupshun." As a result, many atrocities happen frequently within inner cities and broader society. The overall message of "Karrupshun" rests in the irony that corruption has become so normalized in our lives that we are blind to its power and presence.

Later tracks on the *Live Livity* album speak to the corruption within hip hop. In "Jersualem," Genesis rhymes about the confusing and unrighteous messages of hip hop. In reverence and in witness of Jah (the God of the Rastafarian faith), Genesis tells us that he's, "using my creativity to get a sense of liberty so that the lost childs of ours can claim their identity." He goes on to critique the mass marketed images of hip hop, "who out there is sick of pimps, thugs, and players? Tired of twenty inch rims, platinum ice and gators?" His answer to these messages is to provide an alternative "political, spiritual rhymes, makin sure I, it's about giving praises to the most high." Genesis is suggesting that hip hop has gotten away from its political origins and roots. Later lyrics include, "to free minds is my mission," which further suggests that True Sound is not up on stage merely to perform. They are there to witness Jah, to encourage children, and to reintroduce a sense of politics and social responsibility within hip hop.

Further mention is given to the need for social and political responsibility not only within hip hop, but also amongst its audience in "The Ghetto is Crying." Prior to onset of this song, Genesis remarks, "the ghetto is crying and no one wants to address that problem so we're going to address it." This frank statement on the part of Genesis again reinforces the politics of True Sound and their desire to address topics and issues they view as important, and which many people find convenient to ignore. Furthermore, it can be assumed that although many different races live in the ghetto, the ghetto has become

synonymous with poor Black people. Therefore, this song can be interpreted as a critique against the dismissal an inattention given to this segment of society.

The call for societal change is undergirded throughout the album and performances with a more ardent emphasis on love, unity, and fighting racism. In "By Myself," KC introduces the song stating, "this song speaks of unity, wherever it may be. If it seems like you're alone, just realize that you're not by yourself. Just listen to this song." The progression towards a new social order can only be accomplished hand in hand and in recognition that "we gotta stand up tall, but not alone. While divided fall, we can all belong." The tempo of this song is slower than many of the others, so the message has the opportunity to clearly be heard by the audience. The call for unity and the development of a collective consciousness based on love is what will overcome division.

The last track on the album is aptly titled, "U.N.I.T.Y." Repeated throughout this song is the title track of a Bob Marley song, "One Love." Throughout the progression of the album, True Sound unapologetically calls for the unity of people and a heightening of social consciousness across all barriers and lines. Such unification can only be accomplished if we all recognize our social, moral, and political responsibility to live in love in the faces of adversity, trials, racism, and oppression.

Rooted in Afrocentric traditions and always striving to drop some science,[17] True Sound embodies elements consistent with conscious hip hop. Their desire is not merely for people to be fans of their music, but to become active citizens within their local and global communities.

[17] "Droppin science" is slang for disseminating knowledge.

Chapter 4: Methods

Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity or "provoked and accompanied self analysis" has become increasingly beneficial to qualitative research. Reflexivity, as opposed to a positivist research approach, provides both the interviewees and the interviewers an opportunity to analyze their own actions (Hamel 1998). Reflexivity is needed, according to Matthew Adams (2003), because it "excavates layers of tradition which once formed the unquestioned, naturalized aspects of the self" (p. 224).

The nature of this research has asked informants to be reflexive in their thought processes in an attempt to articulate their musical taste patterns. Through questions which have often challenged the unchallenged aspects of the self, it has been difficult at times, for those interviewed to provide an explanation for their choices and preferences. Throughout such a challenging process, I felt it only appropriate that I too must ask myself the same questions I am asking of others. This introspection began as I traced back the origins of my first experiences with the meanings of race, rap music and my introduction to True Sound.

The True Sound Experience

It was the fall semester of 2000. Ian would repeatedly come into the psychology lab, where we were both conducting research at the time, and tell me that he'd just seen an awesome live hip hop show of a band called The Truth. Ian was an intelligent, preppy White kid from the suburbs of Philadelphia. He was a great connoisseur of music, but was always more excited than usual the Mondays after he had seen The Truth play.

The next time The Truth played I went with Ian. I was in awe. It was a packed, virtually all White audience to see a virtually all Black hip hop band perform. I

recognized the faces of people in the audience who I wouldn't have guessed in a million years would like rap music. It all just seemed too bizarre to me. I, for one, was excited that there was live hip hop in this small college town, but was still having trouble making the association between the band I saw on stage and the people I knew in the audience.

I consistently attended every show I could. I was quite excited not only to hear live hip hop, but to listen to a group that was consciously portraying positive messages. The songs of The Truth would commonly call for unity of all people and the need to rise above anger, hatred and racism. I resonated and identified with these messages. One year after I had first heard them, The Truth changed their name to True Sound. It seems that while their named changed, their message and audience did not. The audience remained racially homogenous, i.e. White. In a college town that was not known for being the most welcoming environment,[18] it seemed simultaneously odd and encouraging to see people rallying around music that advocated such views.

Whether they were The Truth or True Sound, I always found myself leaving the shows encouraged and motivated to "do something." I just wasn't sure if others left the show with the same inspiration. My later interactions with some of these individuals confirmed that they probably never intended to "do something" that was not going to directly benefit them. So then, why were there faces seen as often in the crowd as mine was? Why did they come to True Sound shows? I couldn't understand the possible incongruity between their personal beliefs and their musical consumption. I realized that only through personally talking with these individuals would I ever be able to answer

[18] This observation comes from many non-White students I have spoken with who view the town as somewhat racially hostile and unfriendly as well as from the campus climate survey (see Chapter 5).

these questions. What I would later realize was that the simple answers I thought I'd find didn't exist.

Interview Techniques

Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were the methods employed in this study. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they're designed to answer specific research questions while also giving participants leeway to share other relevant thoughts or opinions. Often unstructured interviews are so amorphous that it becomes difficult for the researcher to categorize responses in order to assess whether any response patterns emerged. Structured interviews commonly yield problems in the opposite direction with questions often being so directed and focused that interviewees are not given ample opportunity to expound on the questions or to share other relevant information pertaining to the questions. Thus, semi-structured interviews provided a medium between the two as participants were able to elaborate on their responses while also being guided in their questions. As Bernard (1995) notes, semi-structured interviews based upon the interview guide are the best strategy for obtaining reliable and comparable data. In an attempt to assess any congruity between the responses of participants, specified questions were selected prior to the interview based upon the guiding research questions.

One of the possible drawbacks of utilizing semi-structured interviews is the always present possibility that a significant topic or issue was not covered in the interview guide, and thus, will not comprise a question in the interview. However, the flexibility afforded with qualitative research is the ability for the researcher to re-contact individuals if necessary. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews may also leave room

for a qualitative differential effect among the participants. In other words, some individuals may choose to elaborate on certain questions while others do not, and thus, the ability to compare individual responses remains limited. However, given these drawbacks, this method of inquiry remains the most desirable for this project. Semi-structured interviews provided rap music fans the best opportunity to have their voices heard while keeping with themes that are important to this study.

Phases of Collection

The initial phase of data collection was conducted between October 2003 and February 2004 at True Sound and other hip hop shows at Arnold's. While the audience members at True Sound were the primary area of focus, it was important to note if there was any difference between the audience members of True Sound shows and other hip hop shows. Was there a specific "type" of person at a True Sound show that was not present at other local hip hop or live music shows? Noting these observations helped to further explain whether individuals in the audience were specifically True Sound fans or whether they were just fans of live hip hop music. Furthermore, observing audiences at other hip hop shows provided me the opportunity to gauge whether or not there was indeed something unique about a True Sound show and its crowd, or whether the limited availability of hip hop shows was the main contributor to people attending the shows.

The time I spent at Arnold's had multiple functions, one of which was locating possible individuals to interview. While at Arnold's, I engaged in participant observation as well as casual conversations with people in the audience. This afforded me the opportunity to gauge the general atmosphere of the venue as well as the audience. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note that conversations are often better than formal

interviews and those casual conversations help to facilitate rapport between researcher and informants. Furthermore, participant observation provided me, as the researcher, the opportunity to try to share experiences as similar as possible to those of my informants (Bernard 1995). Through casual conversation at Arnold's, I interacted with individuals, some of whom I later interviewed. While at Arnold's I frequently positioned myself within different areas of the venue in order to gain varying perspectives and to also see if there was any noticeable differences among audience members relative to their position within Arnold's.

At one True Sound show I found myself towards the back of the venue talking with an audience member that had recognized me from town. A friend I was with questioned him about his understanding of the lyrical content of the group (without any prompting on my part), to which he replied, "It doesn't matter. The beat is good and you can dance to it." It was multiple short conversations such as this one that provided me with valuable insights into the mindsets of fans at True Sound shows.

Throughout my time at True Sound shows at Arnold's, I would often slip off to a corner or the restroom and write down jotted notes which were later used as the basis for writing field notes. Initially, I was overly cautious, making sure that I was as covert as possible. As my time at Arnold's continued, I sometimes felt that individuals, some of whom I never had any direct contact with, knew I was there as a researcher. Bernard (1995) explains that jottings or "scratch notes" provide the researcher with the trigger to recall detailed information which they do not have the opportunity to write down while in the field. My jottings consisted of the ambiance of Arnold's on a given evening, my overall perception of the audience that evening (were there any familiar faces in the

crowd), and any specific observations I had regarding people or members of the band performing that evening.

Even amongst individuals whom I had already engaged in a casual conversation with, introducing myself as a researcher was often an awkward and difficult task. At times, I imagine that men thought that I was trying to "hit on them" and women were generally skeptical of my approaching them in a bar. Admittedly, my perceptions of an intimidating or aloof demeanor of some individuals at Arnold's may have led to a bias on my part. I would, at times, approach people who I felt would be more open and receptive to conversation and a later interview.

After mustering up enough courage, I would introduce myself as a researcher who was studying True Sound audience members. I asked individuals whether or not they would be interested in having a casual conversation with me at a later date about their attendance at a True Sound show. No one declined. I was actually often surprised at people's willingness and eagerness to participate in my research project. Upon their agreement, we mutually exchange information and I contacted the individuals at a later date. Establishing a mutually agreeable time and location was a more daunting task than I would have imagined. Many individuals, while initially willing to participate, were slow to respond to emails and telephone calls. I found myself, quite apologetically, actively pursuing these individuals trying to conduct an interview. After lengthy pursuit, all individuals approached who agreed to be interviewed were interviewed.

The basis of selection for potential interviewees was based on numerous criteria. As someone who has consistently attended True Sound and hip hop shows at Arnold's, there was a small group of individuals whom I always saw at shows. I attempted to

interview as many of these people as possible. Interviewing these people provided the "typical case" portion of the sample. Typical case sampling tries to describe what is typical to those who are unfamiliar with the setting (Denzin 2000). Due to the eclectic crowd of individuals at True Sound shows, typical cases were actually quite diverse. There were individuals who, based solely on visual precepts, would be considered hippies. These people were the ones who could frequently be seen dancing on the balcony of Arnold's or near the front of the stage. There were also, based upon visual stereotypes, common faces of sorority women and fraternity men, as well as preppy individuals. These individuals were less apt to dance and could commonly be seen conversing with friends. My assessments as an observer confirmed Goffman's (1959) contention that when unacquainted with another individual, clues from their conduct and appearance are taken and judgments based upon previous experiences are made, often based upon untested stereotypes. While these individuals represent the wide spectrum of typical cases at True Sound shows, it is important to note that at any given show there were audience members who may have never seen True Sound before, or who had only seen them a limited amount of times.

In addition to typical case sampling, snowball or chain sampling was used as a means of locating informants. Snowball sampling relies upon those typical cases, or well situated individuals within the scene, to identify other possible individuals to interview (Denzin 2000). Upon interviewing a few of those individuals I frequently saw at shows, I asked them if they had any recommendations of other people they thought I should talk to. The receipt of such information was then followed up by either a phone call or an email to see if these individuals were interested in being interviewed. Contacting these

individuals, whom I had no prior interaction with, actually proved to be easier than those I directly approached at Arnold's. As I followed up with these recommendations, I was able to explain that their friend had given me their name because they thought they would be a valuable interview. Perhaps due to the recommendation from their friends, as opposed to being approached by a stranger in the bar, these individuals seemed more eager and excited to be interviewed.

The final sampling strategy used was opportunistic sampling which involved an on the spot decision to interview (Denzin 2000). This sampling strategy was necessary as I overheard some conversations that particularly peeked my interest. For example, my interview with Marcus was sparked by a comment he made to a friend of his that he thought dreadlocks were "awesome." I was immediately intrigued by this statement and casually asked him why. He replied that he was from Arkansas where no one had dreadlocks and told me, "I'm just fascinated by them." I suspected that Marcus's view of True Sound would be a valuable one, and he agreed to be interviewed.

As previously mentioned, the sample of individuals I approached at Arnold's was admittedly slightly skewed. However, the utilization of snowball sampling provided me the opportunity to interview individuals whom I may not have been hesitant to approach in Arnold's. The totality of typical case, snowball, and opportunistic sampling provided me with three sampling strategies from which to gain a representative picture of True Sound audience members. I was able to talk with individuals who represented multiple facets of the True Sound audience, from those that were close friends with band members and rarely missed shows, to those who had come for the first time at the request of a

friend. The totality of these three sampling measures provided me with the opportunity to speak with the wide array of members of the True Sound audience.

These three interview methods were selected because they provided the best strategy to understand individual processes of engagement within hip hop culture. My aim in this research was not to obtain a representative sample, but rather, to allow these twelve individuals to explain their hip hop consumption and experiences with True Sound. What has emerged from these interviews is that there is no simple explanation. Prior explanations (see Chapter 2) as to why Whites may consume rap music have not been supported by this research. Instead, what was found was the process of engagement with culture differs among these individuals and may subsequently, also differ for other White consumers of hip hop.

The second phase of the research, conducted December 2003 through March 2004, was comprised of twelve interviews (see Appendix A for a demographic breakdown of interviewees). After the exchange of information at Arnold's, and a mutually agreeable location and time was established, I engaged in one time individual semi-structured interviews with individuals averaging 45 minutes. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) remark that one-on-one semi-structured interviews are best for only interviewing individuals once and important because individuals may be willing to share information that they would not be willing to with others present. During the interview process I found some validation for this assertion. Towards the beginning of many interviews, individuals were cautious as to what information they shared and often wanted reassurance that they would not be linked back to their statements. However, as

the interview progressed, informants generally became more comfortable and were, to my surprise, quite open to divulging personal beliefs and stories relating to the questions.

Semi-structured interviews are often based upon the interview guide that will be used in all interviews in an attempt to obtain reliable and comparable data (Bernard 1995). Accordingly, the questions in the interview were geared towards answering the three primary questions guiding this research. The three main guiding research questions were: why do Whites consume rap music with "politically conscious" messages? Do Whites who consume this music believe the messages spoken about are an accurate depiction of reality? Does a relationship exist between consumption of "politically conscious" rap music and an individual's political beliefs? The questions comprising the interview guide included:

1. What genre(s) of music do you listen to at home or in the car?
2. Who is your favorite author? Favorite movie? Favorite CD?
3. Do you come to True Sound shows often? If you do, why do you come? Do you go to any other hip hop shows? How would you categorize the music of True Sound? Do you have a favorite True Sound song?
4. Do your friends like or listen to rap music?
5. Are you active in any community or campus organizations? If yes, would you consider yourself an "activist"?
6. Do you vote? Did you vote on November 4th? Do you typically vote a specific party?
7. Are you friends with anyone in True Sound?
8. Do you own a True Sound CD? Have you ever visited the True Sound website?
9. Do you think inequality exists in America? Do you think inequality has lessened in the past 25 years?
10. Do you see a connection between political beliefs and musical consumption? Do you think there needs to be a connection (in your life and in the lives of others)?

The first two questions were designed to give me as a researcher a better understanding about the totality of the person that I interviewed. For example, do individuals always listen to rap music or do they just like to hear live music? Also, the

second question helped me to understand whether or not other areas of their lives are also permeated by messages that could be deemed political. Further, informants answer to that question helped to establish whether or not their attendance at a True Sound show was a result of, or a deviation from other personal preferences. The third and fourth questions strove to understand the individual's level of involvement or participation within the hip hop scene or at True Sound shows. These questions sought to understand how individuals would classify the music of True Sound, whether such classification was in agreement with their previously stated musical preferences, and whether or not their friends shared similar musical tastes or preferences. The fifth and sixth questions gauged the level of political involvement or civic participation amongst respondents. These questions were designed to begin to assess whether or not a relationship existed between the consumption of politically conscious music and an individual's political beliefs. Questions seven and eight gauged the individual's level of interest in True Sound. Perhaps people attended these shows in support of a friend who is in the band or perhaps they had heard the True Sound album which prompted their attendance. The last two questions were specifically asked in order to assess whether or not the individual saw any connection between politics and music. Specifically, did they see such a connection in their own life and did they believe that there needed to be any sense of congruity between an individual's political beliefs and musical consumption. The ninth question, in particular, attempted to answer the underlying question pervasive throughout this research. Do individuals believe inequality still exists in America? If not, then perhaps, they would also not resonate with the politically conscious messages of True Sound and their strides to promote a collective social consciousness. Participants' responses to the

above questions allowed me to explore the possibility of a connection or relationship amongst political beliefs and politically conscious rap music consumption.

A Categorization of Responses

"Am I making sense?" This phrase was repeatedly mentioned throughout numerous interviews, as well as in my mind, as I began to try to make sense of the interviews. While each interview was unique to the individual, there were some generalizable trends by which the themes of the interviews were coded and analyzed.

In accordance with the research questions, four moderately definitive categories of responses emerged. These broadly defined categories were politics, inequality, musical consumption, and True Sound experience. Subsumed under the category of politics were voting tendencies of respondents and how they politically defined the university and town. The category of inequality included recognition of whether or not individuals believed inequality still exists in America, if they are personally involved in any organizations striving to rectify such inequalities, as well as if they considered themselves an activist or a supporter of activist causes or ideologies. The musical consumption of individuals brought about some repeated responses indicating eclectic musical tastes, love of attending live music shows, as well as listening to reggae, electronic music, and Bob Dylan. Finally, responses pertaining to the True Sound experience included whether or not they were friends with anyone in True Sound, owned a True Sound CD, if they could recall the lyrics to any songs, as well as the ultimate question as to the possibility of a link between music and politics-whether this is true in their life and if they believed there needed to be a link in their life or in the lives of others.

My Whiteness

Conducting research that brings into question an individual's racial and ethnic identities is a highly controversial enterprise, particularly within race-centered societies such as the United States (Stanfield 1993). The mention of Whiteness as a racial identity is a relatively new and surprising phenomenon for many in mainstream society. Being White has become equated with being the norm, and subsequently, relatively unquestioned, until recently (McIntosh 1988). Undeniably, my Whiteness was an asset conducting this research, just as it is in many other areas of my life.

Margaret Andersen (1993) advocates strongly that Whites who conduct research on race and ethnicity should, "examine self-consciously the influence of institutional racism and the way it shapes the formulation and development of their research, rather than assume a color-blind stance" (p. 43). This brief section is my attempt at this.

The Whiteness I possess has allowed me to identify with the individuals I interviewed, as well the ability to interject a "me too" into the conversation. This affirmation to their opinions and feelings often facilitated a more open and responsive atmosphere. Also, studies have shown that the race of the researcher plays a contributing role to the responses given by those being interviewed (Andersen 1993). Sharing a similar racial background with the majority of people I interviewed initially, and perhaps unconsciously, set the tone for the interview. My Whiteness may have allowed individuals whom I interviewed to not perceive me as a judgmental interviewer, as may have been the assumption if I was, in particular, an African American conducting a study on White consumption of rap music. Furthermore, individuals may have shared information with me because of our similar racial backgrounds that they would not have

if I was not White. It should be noted that all of these are merely assumptions, based upon prior research and my interactions with individuals. While I am confident that the gist of the conversations would not have varied substantially if my racial background was different, I do recall a few comments proceeded by, "I don't mean for this to sound racist, but…" which questionably may not have occurred if I was not White.

Concluding Thoughts

Researching an area that many have told me is "cool" (namely in reference to the notion that many Whites consider rap music, and as Norman Mailer (1959) contends, the source of "Hip") has prompted many questions that lie outside the parameters of this research. However, what is noteworthy is that the vast majority of those individuals, who are often peculiarly excited by my research, are White.

I have faced similar, "this is so cool," reactions by individuals whom I interviewed. However, their excitement for this project is an added bonus as I believe this allowed them to be more excited about being a part of this research. In this research, searching beyond simplistic explanations for our musical tastes, such as "I just like it" or "it has a good beat," has proven to be a difficult task for respondents, myself included. The realization and recognition that perhaps our race, gender, sexuality, social class and position within society contribute to our musical preferences has been a difficult one (see Croteau & Hoynes 2000).

This task has been equally as daunting on me. I find it only fair that if I ask individuals to volunteer their time and divulge personal information that contributes to the completion of this research, then I too owe them, and myself, the answers to these same questions. Going through the interview guide on my own has been a fascinating

experience of self revelation and discovery. I have traced back the origins of when I first started actively listening to rap music, how my musical tastes have persisted despite being the only one in my peer group consuming this genre of music, as well as how various artists have contributed to the formation and maintenance of my identity. It is my hope that those individuals who so generously volunteered their time and energy to this research will have a similar realization.

Chapter 5: Findings

The more I listened, the more I understood. I understood the intricacy with which issues of musical consumption and politics are interwoven and complicated. Through a breakdown of the four emergent themes in this research (musical consumption, politics, views on inequality, and True Sound), these complexities are better explained.

Musical Consumption

> MEREDITH: What kind of music do you normally listen to?
>
> CAROLINE: I love all music. I have a love affair with it all.
>
> MEREDITH: Well, are there certain ones you love more than others?
>
> CAROLINE: Anything that has a good bass beat. I'm a big fan of a good bass beat.

Caroline, a witty and sarcastic South Carolinian, self identified as "less than a Southern bell," reaffirmed the classic response of many Whites that she "likes anything that feels good and that you can dance to" (see Farley 1999; Sullivan 2003). For a "smalltown, Southern White girl," Caroline considers herself a great connoisseur of all music, but especially rap and reggae music which she said has a "hot beat."

Emergent throughout my discussion with Caroline and others is that while individuals usually listen to one or a few genres of music, no one responded that they did not like any one particular genre of music. In fact, many individuals expressed having a difficult time narrowing their consumption to one particular genre of music. Underlying many responses was a certain level of pride in not being narrowly defined in their musical preferences.

> PAUL: In terms of music, I have a very eclectic musical taste. By no means am I a hip hop connoisseur. I listen to everything from jazz to bluegrass to country to rock and roll.

Responses such as Paul's and Caroline's provide support for Peterson and Kern's (1996) theory that individuals have progressed towards a more omnivorous consumption of music. While omnivores do not like all music indiscriminately, they are open to appreciate all music (Peterson & Kern 1996). Omnivorous musical consumption goes hand in hand with the post-modern lifestyles of new middle class consumers (Van Eijck 2001). Within a world that is increasingly promoting the value of diversity, similar messages have also transitioned into taste patterns as well. No longer may individuals find it acceptable to respond that they only like one particular genre of music for fear that they may appear narrow or close minded.

Along with an omnivorous pattern of musical consumption, almost all individuals responded that no matter what genre of music a specific performance was, they loved attending live music shows.

> TAYLOR: I like everything. Especially live music. I'm not too picky what it is, because I love all live music.
>
> JUSTIN: I see tons of live shows, at "Arnold's" especially. All the time. Every kind of music.

Responses such as Taylor's and Justin's were echoed throughout numerous interviews with many people indicating that they enjoy live music so much that they often travel within a few hours to hear a "good show." Further responses indicated that virtually all individuals reported that they thought True Sound were great live performers.

> ANNA: I also really like hearing live music in general. They're (True Sound) really good and they're high energy which is important to me. Cause I really love to dance.
>
> NICK: I go to True Sound shows because I think they are entertaining. I think that they are more entertaining, if I can separate entertainment from politics. Just to sort of say that there is a night when you want to turn off the thinking part of your brain and just go listen to some music, I think that True Sound are fabulous entertainers first and foremost for me.

What can be made of these responses, in combination with the previously discussed shifting patterns in omnivorous musical consumption, is two-fold. First, True Sound or other hip hop shows are not the only live shows that individuals report going to. This comes as no surprise because individuals report listening to a broad range of musical genres, and it would not be uncommon for them to also attend a wide variety of live musical shows. Thus, the specificity of the hip hop genre (amongst others to be discussed later) may not be the foremost contributing factor of an individual's attendance at a show. Rather, individuals tend to be drawn to the show primarily because they love live music and consider True Sound to be good live performers.

A second noteworthy observation is that some individuals have no problem divorcing certain elements of the performance from others, i.e. the message from the beat or entertaining quality of the performance. While individuals like Nick, a sophisticated intellectual who prides himself on being "cultured," have no problem readily admitting that they divorce lyrical content from personal pleasure, is a topic deserving of greater explanation. No longer can it be said that some individuals, such as Nick, do not understand the political intent of a band such as True Sound, but rather, they *choose* to ignore their political dimension in an attempt to "just go and listen to some music."

When I asked individuals what genre(s) of music they would classify True Sound as, only two people responded definitively with hip hop. In spite of True Sound's marketing on flyers and their website as the state's "premiere live hip-hop act," audience members had difficulty identifying their music as hip hop (some in fact did not even mention hip hop or rap music as one of multiple genres). These responses may be further indicative of the eclectic musical tastes of those I interviewed coupled with a narrow definition of hip hop.

The eclectic musical tastes of many individuals may have contributed to a blurring of distinctions between different musical genres (Peterson 1997). Lines of experimentation and authenticity are constantly challenged within music, and arguably, no more than within hip hop. Accordingly, the borrowing of elements from other musical genres may have made it more difficult for individuals to pinpoint bands such as True Sound as hip hop. Although True Sound identifies some of their music as inspired by reggae, funk, and soul, it remains central to discussion the difficulty individuals had even mentioning hip hop or rap music. Notably, this lack of recognition of True Sound as hip hop also has further reaching implications as to an individual's lack of awareness that they are consumers of hip hop music. A conversation with Tyson,[19] an African American senior at the university, illuminated the complexities surrounding the classification of True Sound into one specific musical genre.

> MEREDITH: How would you classify them (True Sound)? As far as their music goes.

[19] Tyson was the only African American interviewed. This was not by choice, but rather, other African Americans in the audience at True Sound shows were frequently opening acts, or there in support of the opening acts, not audience members of True Sound. Also, because Tyson was the only African American interviewed, he should not be expected to speak for his whole race nor should broad generalizations be made based upon his responses.

> TYSON: I don't know. Maybe even live hip hop. It's weird, because hip hop is so diverse, sometimes even I have a hard time confining it to one definition. Not all hip hop bands have a live guitar, and some of them don't even have live instruments.

Tyson made an important distinction that many individuals, I speculate, may not realize: hip hop is diverse on multiple levels. The common monolithic representation of hip hop, most notably vis-à-vis Top 40 radio stations, MTV, and BET, could more accurately be described as the party, mack, or reality (i.e. "gangsta") rap sub-genres within rap music (Krims 2000). The fourth sub-genre of rap music Krims outlines is that of jazz/bohemian, a sub-genre that prides itself on being conscious and political and is more aligned with the music and messages of True Sound. However, this fourth sub-genre, partially due to it's desirability to be less commercial, is often what many mainstream rap fans may not readily identify as rap music.[20] Due to the live instruments used by True Sound, as opposed to the deejay/emcee style or produced beat many may associate with being "real hip hop," True Sound blurs the lines and expands the bounds as to what is commonly conceived as hip hop.

In addition to enjoying live music and having eclectic musical taste, a substantial portion of individuals also indicated a strong preference for electronic music or Bob Dylan. While these two preferences may initially seem at odds with one another, I believe that the music of True Sound represents the convergence of these two preferences. In interviews, Bob Dylan was affirmed as a musician whose music is political, a musician who has been deemed a "proto-rap pioneer" (Potter 1995).[21]

[20] See Allinson (1994) for a discussion of the particular appeal of gangsta rap to Whites.
[21] Of those interviewed who mentioned musicians using their voice in a political manner, it is noteworthy that all musicians mentioned were White.

> MEREDITH: So, we've talked about politics and talked about music that you listen to. Do you think that there's any connection between the two?
>
> CAROLINE: Well, I try to keep the two separate. But, I do think that music has always held an important role in politics. I mean throughout history you can look at anything from Bob Dylan's "Hurricane" to the Dixie Chicks and Madonna today. Music is always gonna have a voice, they're always going to say how they feel.

The consumption of electronic music brings into play another vital aspect of music: the beats. Most electronic music is centered on or around the beats of the music, often with little or no lyrical content. Thus, individuals who consume electronic music could be said to have a vested interest in the rhythmic and beat quality of music.

True Sound, a self identified politically conscious hip hop group, merges both of these underlying musical aspects together: the beats and the politics. The mere identification of True Sound as a hip hop band conjures up associations of "feel good music" people can dance to and have a good time. For others, although they reported listening to Bob Dylan for his messages, they do not report attending True Sound shows because of their messages. Justin, a friend of the band who can be seen at almost all True Sound shows dancing in the balcony, explained True Sound to me this way:

> MEREDITH: Would you consider True Sound positive hip hop (in reference to a previous point)?
>
> JUSTIN: Oh yeah, definitely. 100%.
>
> MEREDITH: Is there a certain reason you say that? Is there a song in particular that you like?
>
> JUSTIN: No, I think that their lyrics are very positive, but I couldn't say like any specific lyrics that I like. I love Genesis (one of the lead singers); he's such a positive influence. Everything he says is right on. I love to sit down and talk to him all the time. He's got a positive outlook on a lot of things.

Justin raised an important point which will be revisited later: even though he has attended every True Sound show I have been at conducting this research, he cannot identify a particular song or lyrics that he likes which influences his perceptions of the band.[22] Perhaps, in his case, it is more his personal interaction with band members that shapes his impressions rather than his attendance at shows.

However, what remains pertinent to the discussion is that while individuals independently consume electronic music and listen to Bob Dylan (of which there were no overlaps in responses), True Sound could be said to merge the beats of music that some individuals are attracted to as well as the politically conscious (whether they consciously acknowledge this or not) musical preferences of others.

Politics

MEREDITH: Do you tend to vote a specific party or just based on the person?

PAUL: Well, I've never voted Republican.

Sentiments such as Paul's were echoed throughout numerous interviews, and only Caroline indicated that she had ever voted Republican. Many individuals expressed discontent with the Republican Party citing them as "a party of the rich" and "not a party for the working man." However, while the majority of individuals who said that they will vote for anyone but Bush in 2004, there were others who remained somewhat indifferent in their political opinions of Bush and the Republican Party.

[22] Justin's response is typical according to research conducted by Robinson and Hirsch (1972). For a contrasting view, see Ryan et al. (1996) for a discussion of how lyrics matter and impact emotion.

MEREDITH: Is there a certain reason that you identify more with the Democrats than the Republicans?

JAMES: I do agree with them on a lot of issues. I think that if I was to sit down and went through all the issues, I might agree with both sides. But, I think that it's alright if people are rich, I don't have a problem with that. I think it's a good idea that we are in Iraq right now and what we're doing and I don't think that we should just pull out, which I think a lot of the Democratic nominees want to do. I probably agree with the Democrats more on my tax issues.

James is a preppy senior accounting major who recently began to deejay. He does not fit any stereotypes of a hip hop fan or deejay. James's indifference about the Republican Party may partially be influenced by his belief in the American Dream.

JAMES: We live in a capitalist society, so I believe that if you work hard enough, every person can succeed. You just have to put forth your own effort and work hard enough. So, for the people that aren't succeeding and they are poor, I kind of think that's their own choice. I think that if they worked hard enough, they could get out of their situation.

While James believes that being poor is somewhat of an individual's choice, he cites the capitalist system as a means for upward social mobility. James's privileged position within society places him amongst the upper echelon of society and his belief in the American Dream furthers, what Sacks and Lindholm (2002), refer to as a distancing of identity from the macro social structure.

A racially privileged status is not afforded to Tyson, whose views sharply contrast James's response to the same question.

MEREDITH: Do you think that inequality exists in America?

TYSON: Oh yeah. I think a lot of people would argue that it's extremely overrated, it's not what people are trying to make it out to be. But yeah, I think America is largely defined by inequality. Even when people are trying to define capitalism they will say that inequality is a result of capitalism gone wrong. But

> really, it's a completely natural result of capitalism. You can't be competitive and be equal. It just doesn't make sense. But yeah, I think that one of the foundations of American society is inequality.

While both Tyson and James report that they are liberal in their political affiliations, there remains a perceptual gap, perhaps due in part to personal experiences based upon their race, as to how they view issues of inequality in America. Such a difference further highlights the heterogeneous composition of political parties as well as how an individual's background may contribute to their political perspectives. Perhaps, due to James's acknowledgement that he's "virtually been handed everything in my life," he does not realize how this contributes to his belief that the American Dream is viable for all.

James's later responses, along with seven others interviewed, cited economic policy as one, if not the sole, contributor to inequality in America. Such an assertion does not take into account what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) refers to as the matrix of domination, suggesting that inequalities are more than additive, they are multiplicative.

While virtually all individuals indicated having a liberal ideology or political affiliation, it is noteworthy that these individuals' political stances do not vary substantially from those of their parents. James, along with 25% of respondents interviewed, cited being raised in a Democratic household as one of the reasons he considered himself a Democrat. An examination of Generation X based upon 1994 American National Election Survey (ANES) data revealed that only 41% of Gen-Xers revealed a strong attachment for the political party of their choice as well as a declining significance of parental political affiliation on their children's political affiliation (Dennis & Owen 1997). Through interviews, individuals confirmed this lack of need to be

associated with one political party. However, many individuals made it clear that they would be associated with any political party or individual *except* that of George W. Bush or the Republican Party.

The self-defining liberal group of individuals in attendance at True Sound shows also considered the surrounding community politically progressive.[23]

> MEREDITH: If you had to characterize "collegetown" politically or socially, or "State U," would you say that it's progressive, conservative, or in the middle?
>
> DUSTIN: I would say that it's progressive and pretty liberal. I guess most college towns are. The thing I really like about "collegetown" is that there's something for everyone. Even though there's really not that many minorities here, I think that we were talking about it the other day that there's only like three percent African American, it doesn't feel that way to me. But, that's what I like about it. Even though the numbers are kind of low, even though there's not as many types of minorities as a major city, there is still something for everyone.

Dustin, a suburban university student and hip hop deejay for the college radio station, shed light on another important issue regarding racial perceptions. While Dustin believed that this university and town are not as diverse as major cities, his judgments of this university and town as diverse do not coincide with the responses of African American students in a campus-wide survey.

A survey conducted by the university in 1998 indicated substantial differing perceptions between White and African American undergraduate students.[24] The campus climate survey revealed that White American males, in particular, viewed the campus as supportive, comfortable, and "sufficiently diverse." 59% of White American students

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[23] It should be noted that "State U" will represent the university and "collegetown" for the town State U is located in.

[24] Although this survey is six years old, it is reasonable to conclude that perceptions of university life have not changed drastically since the survey was conducted.

characterized the university as "relatively non-racist" whereas only 24% of African American students rated the campus in a similar light. Further, only 36% of African American students believed that the university was committed to the success of students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds whereas 84% of White Americans agreed with this statement. Overall, African American students viewed the university as a less receptive climate, while White American respondents reported attending a university where they thought students were treated fairly and where diversity was actively promoted (OMA 1998). As shown by numerous studies of attitudes and values (see Bobo 1999; Sears et al. 2000), an individual's race influences not only their experiences, but shapes their perceptions of the experiences of others.

Many individuals cited the location of the university, relative to the surrounding area, as a reason why they perceived it as liberal.

> MARK: "Collegetown" is kind of like the red-headed stepchild of Southwest "state name." I think that the general young population, the population that is not here in the summer, is probably fairly liberal. But, as a whole, I think it's probably an even spread. Also, "State U" is a science and engineering school and that brings a certain genre of people.

Mark's comments highlight a broader trend when White students may consider the university and community progressive in terms of ideology, rather than in terms of inclusiveness. In other words, saying that this university is liberal may conjure up beliefs of liberal or forward thinking individuals, rather than an environment that is racially and ethnically diverse, welcoming, and inclusive.

Inequality

> MEREDITH: Do you think that inequality exists in American today?
>
> NICK: Yes, definitely. I think it exists economically. I think inequality for sure, but I don't by that imply any lucrative standpoint on what I think forms that inequality. The margin between rich and poor is quite wide.

Nick's class-based inequality explanations were echoed by the majority of Whites interviewed. While encouraged that everyone interviewed answered an affirmative yes to the existence of inequality in America, racial differences contributed to explanations as to why inequality exists. Whites indicated that inequality existed primarily economically, with all subsequent forms of inequality emerging as bi-products of economic inequality. As explained earlier, this response may be indicative of the racial privilege Whites' posses.

Their responses may also be influenced by their social location (see Croteau & Hoynes 2000). Social location contributes to how we are situated within society, and subsequently, also influences how we view others and their societal positions. Thus, White individuals are more apt to identify certain trends or forms of inequality that they are most able to readily identify with (i.e. not racial inequality). This is not to say that individuals cannot see beyond the scope of their personal experiences, but such a recognition is often more difficult. Even amongst progressive Whites this may be why their explanations for inequality were grounded in economics. In particular, social location may be the largest determinant for White, heterosexual men to view inequality economically because they are privileged in all other dimensions of their identity (see Collins 2000).

In response to whether or not inequality has lessened in their lifetime, responses were clustered more in accordance with an individual's major in school rather than gender or race.[25] Those whose majors were within the social sciences or liberal arts were more likely to highlight the institutionalization of inequality and how that contributes to misconceptions that it has lessened. Those outside the social sciences remained more optimistic towards diminishing inequality due to programs such as affirmative action.

> TAYLOR: I think in a sense its (inequality) has gotten worse because people think that it doesn't exist. So then that allows people to ignore it and not pay attention to it. And then they can let other people be prejudice and ignore it because it's not, quote, a problem. But back when all the segregation laws were in place, everybody knew it was an issue and talked about it. At least you knew, pretty much, who was racist and who wasn't. And now you just don't know. You may not even talk to your friends about it. If it's not an issue than you don't have to take a stand on it.
>
> DUSTIN: I definitely think that there are more opportunities, you know, because of affirmative action and people who want to go to school. I'm okay with affirmative action but I think it's really a shame that they are fighting discrimination with discrimination. But I also think that it's getting harder in a sense because you can't distinguish people by race anymore.

Although Dustin, a junior business management major, does not have a problem with affirmative action, his belief that affirmative action is a tool of discrimination used against individuals like him (White men), is worthy of examination, especially considering he is a deejay of primarily underground hip hop. Despite his immersion within the underground hip hop subculture, Dustin's beliefs about inequality appears to have not been as influenced by his involvement in hip hop as by his personal experiences.

Taylor, a senior theatre arts major, conversely, readily acknowledged the "hush hush" policy that pervades discussions of inequality. While such distinctions cannot be

[25] A study by Hughes and Tuch (2003) indicated that gender was not a significant predictor of White racial attitudes.

clearly delineated across academic disciplines, the acknowledgement of institutionalized discrimination amongst those disciplines more centered on those issues may not be arbitrary. An individual's major of choice may contribute to their world view.

However, ten out of twelve interviewees recognized that racism exists in America.[26] This recognition was not consistent with an individual's major. However, reasons for the continual existence of racism were consistent with previous patterns in explaining inequality as systemic in origin or as a result of individual choices or behaviors. A general sense of helplessness also pervaded the discussion of racism.

> TAYLOR: It's not good for that issue (racism) for there to be so much apathy. I just don't know what to do.

Taylor's inability to "know what do to" may also be applied to other areas of social inequality. Respondents acknowledged the presence of inequality and racism in America, but the role they played in perpetuating or lessening that inequality remained absent from discussion.

Less than one fourth of individuals interviewed reported being involved in any campus or community organizations oriented towards challenging inequalities. Of those White individuals who were active within these organizations, it should further be recognized that Anna's efforts primarily were with the university's women's center and Paul was primarily involved with environmental issues. While these individuals were undoubtedly working to better society and the lives of others, it remains significant that such efforts were not focused within organizations or areas that specifically addressed

[26] The interview question addressed inequality broadly, and ten out of twelve interviewees brought up racism as an example of inequality. This does not mean that the other two interviewees do not believe racism still exists, but rather, they did not mention it as an example of inequality.

racism. I remain cautious not to establish a hierarchy of oppression, as Collins (2000) warns against, while simultaneously identifying a trend. While I believe individuals would not consider themselves opposed to working within organizations promoting racial equality, it is worth mentioning that their efforts thus far have not been directed in such a manner.

Although many said they would not consider themselves "activists," or even involved in any campus or community organizations, many people viewed themselves as supporters of these causes.

> TYSON: I don't know if I deserve to be called an activist. I don't know if daily I'm involved in hands on stuff. Like, I don't go to meetings and I haven't really protested anything in a while. But ideologically, I would consider myself, in terms of social consciousness.
>
> JUSTIN: I haven't been involved in any organizations. I'd say that I'm not an activist. I'd like to be, it's just priorities, you know.

The overall sentiment of individuals to support causes they believed in remained strong while direct action remained limited. The 1994 ANES study revealed that 72% of Gen-Xers agreed with the statement, "our generation has an important voice but no one seems to hear it" and 61% agreed "politicians and political leaders have failed my generation" (Owen 1997). While this survey seems to indicate that these sentiments would contribute to an apathetic political perspective, the feeling of "not being heard" has energized some individuals interviewed. While not evidenced through their direct involvement in organizations, it can be seen in their disdain for President George W. Bush. Over half of the individuals who indicated that they disliked Bush also stated that they talked or will talk to their friends about politics and try to encourage them to vote (specifically, not for

Bush). Thus, while not directly involved, individuals like Marcus who, "want my vote to count this time," are activists in getting their friends to vote.

True Sound

> MEREDITH: Would you still say that inequality exists in America today?
>
> TAYLOR: Oh yeah. Definitely, definitely. Actually, I thought of that when I saw True Sound. It was so cool to see five black men get up on stage and perform. It was so cool to me. I don't know if I think about those things more than the average person. And they had such a strong presence, all five of them.[27] They're just beautiful, big, and George is just so tall and they have dreads. And they're all just so comfortable with themselves. It was just beautiful to see five black men get up and do their thing. It was great.

Taylor, recalling her only time attending a True Sound show, repeatedly emphasized throughout the interview how excited she was that a band like True Sound not only performed, but lived, in this small college town. Echoing Taylor's comments, virtually everyone recognized True Sound as comprised of excellent performers, while those who did not personally know any members of the band were more likely to refer to members of the band by their appearance, particularly their hairstyle. Although all the African American men in the band could be said to have "natural" hairstyles, in trying to identify specific members of the band, individuals consistently identified individual band members as "the guy with dreads" although more than one had dreadlocks. While this may appear to be an oversight on one level, on another, it also highlights the appearance, and the politics that accompany it, of True Sound, are recognized by their audience.

Even though individuals were not quick to forget the physical appearances of True Sound members, they were apt to forget the lyrics of the songs. Despite the number

[27] Kevin, the White bass player, was absent from the performance Taylor was referring to.

of times people had attended True Sound shows, *no one* was able to recall the title of a favorite True Sound song or lyrics to a song. Nick explained his lack of recognition of songs to me in this way:

> NICK: Isn't the situation in most of their live shows that most of us have, that it can be hard to hear what it is, exactly, what the words are. That's often attributed to poor sound quality. I am aware that there is a political content to their music and a certain affiliation, this might sound prejudicial, I'm not sure, to a, reggae kind of art. I don't know the right language to describe this but it's sort of reggae politics if you will. That's completely my ignorance.

While Nick could not recall any specific songs or lyrics of True Sound, he recognized, as did others, that there were political undertones to the music. Gregory Stephens's (1991) discussion of rap music as a crossroads for interracial communication delves further into this apparent disparity between *listening* to rap music versus *hearing* rap music. Stephens contends that although the origins of rap music originated with Black urban youth, the primary White audience of rap music (and True Sound) presents opportunities for discussion across racial lines. Stephens views these crossroads as particularly evident within conscious hip hop, such as True Sound. Utilizing rhythm as the "vehicle of transcendence" by which to attract listeners, rappers are then given a platform to offer a critique on mainstream interpretations of history and social reality (Stephens 1991). While a mere gaze at a True Sound audience would suggest that such a discussion is being had, it appears that while individuals may be at the show listening to the music, they are not hearing the lyrics.

KC, one of the lead singers in True Sound, told me that he thought their predominately White audience was a result of the geographical location of this town.[28] He wants everyone, regardless of race, to listen to their music because "we live in this world together and we need to learn how to get along." KC's aim for the music of their band to transcend barriers is reminiscent of Attali's description of music as an "instrument for understanding" (Goehr 1994) and Georg Simmel's declaration that music is an "acoustic medium of communication" that conveys the feelings of performers (Etzkorn 1964). While KC believes the virtually all White audience of True Sound should be viewed as encouraging, he also indicated that the band had received very positive feedback from fans regarding the lyrical content of their songs.

> MEREDITH: Do you think that people in the audience are taking away the messages True Sound intends for them to?
>
> KC: Yeah, I think that people are taking away those messages. We've received really positive feedback on our lyrics. We love to play music but we also want to educate people. We want to unify people through self awareness and realize why we're in the situations we're in and what we can do to make them better.

From those whom I spoke with, while the recognition of True Sound as "positive hip hop" or as a "political" group was acknowledged, the lyrical content of the songs appeared to play little, or no role, in reaching such a conclusion. The characterization of True Sound may be influenced by what Lydia Goehr (1994) refers to as the functionality of music being defined in opposition to that which it is not. Subsequently, music is classified in accordance with what description remains after other possibilities have been exhausted. Goehr's theory further explains Marcus's characterization of True Sound.

[28] Although "State U" is 79% White (IRPA 2003), I estimate True Sound shows to be about 95% White. Also, African Americans comprised approximately 50% of the audience at the Kanye West concert.

MEREDITH: How would you categorize the music of True Sound?

MARCUS: I don't really know, because I haven't heard them that much. If I had their CD I may be able to tell you, but from going to their shows, it didn't seem that they were the gangsta rap kind of stuff, but that may also have been how they were dressed and stuff. I know one guy had dreads and to me that says he's a Rasta guy and all those stereotypes. Ok, he's mellow and whatever. And I don't know if that came out in their lyrics. But I got the impression that they were more about positive kinds of things, sort of like unity, and definitely more of a constructive kind of feel. But, I don't know, I can't remember any of the lyrics.

Without any recollection of specific lyrics, Marcus received the impression that True Sound was not gansta rap. For Marcus, it was the elimination of what he knew True Sound was not that led him to his characterization of what True Sound was. In later conversation, Marcus cited lyrics from a Kanye West song which indicated he had the ability to recall the lyrics to specific rap songs.[29] Marcus also raised another noteworthy point that he does not own the True Sound CD. No one interviewed said that they owned the CD and only Tyson had heard a friend's CD. This may have contributed to an inability to recall specific lyrics, as their consumption of True Sound may be limited to their monthly shows at Arnold's. The fact that none of the informants owned a True Sound CD stresses the role of the local scene in constructing impressions of and experiences with True Sound. All conclusions made about True Sound were shaped through experiences at live shows, further emphasizing the profoundly social aspect of the True Sound scene.

However, True Sound plays many of the same songs at every show, such as "Jerusalem." "Jerusalem" has a repetitive chorus of "one love" throughout the duration

[29] Marcus was the only individual interviewed who attended both True Sound shows and the Kanye West concert. At the time of Kanye's concert, he had the number one album in the country (Billboard, week of March 15, 2004).

of the song which brings into question the inability of individuals to recall a simplistic chorus. Whether it's the beat, the performance, or overall feel of the show, what continually draws individuals back to True Sound appears *not* to be the lyrics.

Chapter 6: Research Questions Answered

Why do Whites consume rap music with politically conscious messages?

"Music's presence is clearly political, in every sense that political can be conceived"- Tia DeNora (2000)

> JESSICA: I think that music is a really good way to bring issues to the table. I think a lot of artists do a really good job in pinpointing it. Although I don't think that the right people are listening to it and the ones that are picking out all the bad stuff and not the good stuff. Does that make sense?
>
> MEREDITH: Yeah, totally. Would you say that there are any messages that you take away from True Sound?
>
> JESSICA: No, because I don't even know their music well enough, I don't think.

Jessica, a senior education major who loves reggae music and who also does not consider reggae "political music," can be seen with her friend Anna at almost all True Sound shows. Jessica's lack of acknowledgement of reggae as political music may also contribute to her inability to take away messages from another group who considers their music within the realm of "political music." Jessica is not the exception; she is the norm amongst those interviewed. So why do Whites consume politically conscious rap music? One explanation would be that it's the lyrical content. However, the inability for anyone to recall any True Sound lyrics rules out this possibility.

Without recognition that True Sound's music is political, this question becomes increasingly difficult to answer. While individuals recognized, as cited earlier, that True Sound may have a political element to them, very few individuals can identify what those politics are. Further, such an affiliation with the politics of True Sound appears to be more influenced by the visual presence (specifically the dreadlocked hairstyles) and general aura of the band rather than the music they produce.

Stephens's (1991) discussion focusing on rap music as a crossroads for interracial communication provides further insight into the selective acknowledgement of certain messages. Stephens comments that when Whites listen to rap music that offers a race-based critique of individuals, Whites will "try not to take it personally" or screen out these comments. Whites instead focus on elements of shared culture across races. While individuals such as Nick, Mark, Justin, and Paul identified True Sound as moderately political in intent, no one highlighted themes of racism or discrimination are pervasive throughout True Sound lyrics and commentary. Instead, individuals were more apt to, in line with Stephens's assertion, identify with broader universal themes of unity and love.

When discussions arose about the possible political intent of True Sound, Paul responded indifferently as to whether or not he felt True Sound's primary intent was to forward a message.

> PAUL: Maybe if a band like True Sound is out there just to forward their political position or advance their message or whatever, than maybe it's a problem if people are just there to get slammed.[30]
>
> MEREDITH: Do you think it's their intent to forward a message?
>
> PAUL: I don't think so. From my observations, I would think that, you know, they are just trying to play music and get people to enjoy it and if people can take something home with them from listening to them in terms of some eye opening experience that's a bonus.

Paul's comments shed further light onto Nick's previous mention of having no problem separating musical form from musical content, especially in the event that individuals just want to go and hear live music. Lydia Goehr (1994) further argues in her article,

[30] My observations of individuals at shows were that very few people (whom I later interviewed) were drunk. Some interviewed, such as Jessica, do not consume alcohol and still could not recall the lyrics. However, questions as to the influence of marijuana and other drugs may factor into an inability to recall lyrics.

"Political Music and the Politics of Music," when individuals claim that "this is only music," they are being disingenuous or defensive in their responses because music must have meanings for humans who live in a human world. Throughout all interviews no one was able to adequately explain the appeal of True Sound music to them. While some individuals came because they knew members of the band, and others came because they wanted to dance or hear live music, *no one* indicated that they came because of the lyrical and political messages of True Sound.

From the interviews of True Sound fans, it appears that the messages and critiques leveled through this music have not informed individual opinions regarding political and social issues. Even amongst socially and politically conscious individuals, their inability to recall specific lyrics limits the ability for True Sound music to directly serve as an affirmation or motivator of their beliefs. Regardless of how individuals characterized themselves politically and socially, the rationales for attending True Sound shows remained consistent: they loved live music and True Sound puts on a good show.

Do Whites who consume this music believe the messages spoken about are an accurate depiction of reality?

Without recognition that the messages True Sound are truthful, it would seem unreasonable to believe that there would be any relationship between attendance at True Sound shows and an individual's political beliefs. So, do people believe the messages spoken about are truthful and accurate?

> JAMES: Well, a lot of the lyrics people put aren't real. I mean there are some people that talk about the life and the struggles they've had. And so when people talk about their life and what they've been through, you have to take it for what it's worth. It's not like once you start listening to it, it's like, no that never

> happened. If it's true, then yeah, you need to take that into consideration in your life. If there's racism going on and they are taking about it in the music, then if you turn it off, it doesn't mean that it's not going on anymore in the world. For the people that try to speak the truth in their lyrics, I think you definitely have to take that into consideration. But, for the people that are just making lyrics to sell albums, I don't think that counts for much.
>
> MEREDITH: So, do you like people that talk more about their life?
>
> JAMES: I think it fluxuates. I don't really care as long as it has a good beat.

While James believes that some the lyrical content of some rap songs are embellished,[31] his willingness to take into consideration the real life stories of others is admirable. The recognition that "if you turn it off, it doesn't mean it's not going on anymore in the world" is a relevant point in explaining broader consumption trends. Despite the "reality" or "truthfulness" of rap music, turning it off does not mean that the themes talked about are not being experienced.

Hip hop, once considered "black noise," is now the cultural and political voice for Black youth (see Rose 1994). Hip hop's "tell it like it is" motif strives to raise the awareness of the general public about issues facing African Americans (Stapleton 1998). While True Sound remains aligned with the jazz/bohemian subgenre of rap music (see Krims 2000), an acknowledgement of True Sound as rap music has not been recognized by their listeners. While some individuals, such as James, are doubtful as to the truthfulness of some rap lyrics, the lack of recognition of True Sound lyrics raises further questions pertaining to the level of internalization of these messages.

However, despite the inability for anyone to recall lyrics at True Sound shows, numerous times throughout any given performance, Genesis or KC will preface a song

[31] James primarily consumes mainstream hip hop which may factor in to his views on the "truthfulness" of hip hop's messages.

regarding a present issue or source of concern. Even if one cannot recall the lyrics to a song such as "The Ghetto is Crying," they have the opportunity to hear Genesis introduce the song stating, "the ghetto is crying and no one wants to address that problem, so we're going to address it." Prologues to many of their songs provide True Sound audience members, who may not be able to recall lyrics of specific songs, the opportunity to understand the perspective from which the song hails.

True Sound's lyrics appear to play little, if any, role in drawing individuals to a show. Repeated comments that True Sound has a good beat, in addition to comments that my research is really "cool" adds further support to the hypothesis that Whites attend True Sound shows and like rap music because it is a fad. However, definitions of why True Sound would be considered "cool" differ in accordance with who was interviewed. Amongst the preppy individuals and sorority men and women, True Sound is "cool" because they are hip hop. For the hippies in attendance, True Sound is "cool" because they aren't mainstream, and to a certain extent, are recognized as political.

True Sound may actually provide one of the safest havens in this town to consume hip hop. Listening to live hip hop amongst an audience that is racially similar allows for Whites to consume hip hop, and Black culture, within a safe space where race does not have to become a salient factor in interactions.

The hypothesis that Whites attend True Sound to express alienation from mainstream culture also has a similar breakdown. Because of the limited number of downtown bars where one does not feel the pressure to conform (both in apparel and behavior), Arnold's provide an atmosphere where this is not necessary. The clothing and demeanor of True Sound, as previously highlighted by Marcus, may further contribute to

audience members having a similar "come as you are" attitude. Those preppy individuals and sorority men and women may be expressing alienation from their culture by opting to come to Arnold's in the first place. For others (mainly hippies), their presence at Arnold's should not be regarded as rebellion from mainstream culture. True Sound shows, in fact, may provide one of few opportunities for these individuals to be in the presence of others who think, look, act and dress similarly. Their alienation and rebellion from mainstream culture is experienced more in their everyday lives, while for preppy individuals and sorority men and women, their attendance at True Sound shows expresses theirs. The hypothesis that Whites attend True Sound as a source of expressing alienation is not easily answered. It appears that alienation is relative for Whites depending on their social group identification within mainstream culture. Identification within the core or periphery sectors of mainstream society influences a sense of alienation more so than mere presence at True Sound shows.

Does a relationship exist between consumption of politically conscious rap music and an individual's political beliefs?

> MEREDITH: Do you see a connection between politics and music?
>
> CAROLINE: Yeah, I do, but not for me personally.
>
> MEREDITH: Do you ever find yourself listening to music because of the message it has?
>
> CAROLINE: No. I just think that music should be fun and politics to me are not fun. So, I don't mix things like that. It ages ya.

While previously Caroline acknowledged that music can be used as a political platform, she *chooses* not to establish that relationship in her own life. Caroline's

response, while more direct than others, indicated a trend amongst almost half of those interviewed who did not see a personal connection in their life between musical consumption and political beliefs (it should be noted that not seeing a connection did not imply that there was a connection for the other half of individuals). Reasons cited by most individuals were similar to Dustin's.

> DUSTIN: I think music is just another form of entertainment. So, I don't think that you can hold that too seriously. So, you can call someone a hypocrite but it just wouldn't make sense. For them to even go out and buy a lot of music that doesn't fit in with their beliefs isn't a big deal, because it's just entertainment.

Dustin's belief that there is nothing hypocritical in listening to music that opposes personal beliefs is contrasted by the thoughts of Tyson on this issue.

> TYSON: I do think that the experience you would have listening to that music would be different. If it was just without lyrics, it would be different, obviously, but I think that if you are really listening, then yeah, there's a problem. I think when you hear lyrics you also reflect on yourself because you're judging, ok, what is he saying. Ok, yeah, that's true. I think that if you listen to a song and every line is completely against what you believe it is going to hinder your ability to enjoy it to an extent…I think a lot of listeners enjoy bands because of their ability to connect to the band. So, if something happens where a core belief is contrary and makes them feel uncomfortable as a listener, I think that would create a distance between them and the band.

Tyson's comments were the strongest comments reflecting a problem listening to music that contradicted individual beliefs. The difference in opinions between Tyson and others such as Dustin may be partially influenced by their race. Previous research suggesting Whites will not interpret messages in the same fashion as African Americans was affirmed. In accordance with Sullivan's (2003) findings, this research has supported the notion that Whites consume hip hop primarily for its "good beat," while African

Americans listen to hip hop for its messages. While this conclusion must be taken with caution because Tyson was the only African American interviewed, out of all those interviewed, he expressed the strongest belief that consuming music not aligned with your beliefs was uncomfortable and would hinder a listener's musical experience. Amongst Whites, especially those who considered themselves the liberal of the left, ideally thought a connection between politics and music was desirable, though they did not find it necessary.

> TAYLOR: I think it would be great if there was all this political music and people talked about it and talked about issues and their beliefs and then connected it directly to music. I think that would be really, really cool. I don't see a lot of that…I don't think many people I know listen to music for political reasons at all. Either they don't pay attention to the lyrics or they just don't know.

While her comments here and elsewhere revealed a lack of knowledge concerning the political message of True Sound, and the political intentions of other music, Taylor expressed a desire for all aspects of an individual's life to be harmonious with respect to musical consumption and beliefs. Similar to Taylor, those who expressed a desire for there to be a relationship between consumption and beliefs were more likely to be in the social sciences and more likely to be female. People's apparent inability to believe that they could consume music in sync with other aspects of their lives remained a common explanation as to why they believed the two did not necessarily have to be intertwined in their lives, nor in the lives of others.

What is fascinating is that Dustin and James, arguably the two individuals most involved in hip hop culture because of their deejaying, did not express a need in their own lives, nor in the lives of others, to establish a connection between political beliefs

and musical consumption. In fact, they were two of the most ardent supporters of listening to music primarily for its beats, rather than its messages. Such an assertion does not appear completely contradictory in the respect that both are deejays who are always digging for new records and beats to mix. However, what is noteworthy is that Dustin and James, perhaps more so than others, are familiar with the culture of hip hop and the conditions from which it emerged. Their interactions with artists and others involved in production would seem to provide them with a greater insight as to the post-industrial conditions from which hip hop emerged (Rose 1994) and a greater understanding as to the important voice hip hop provides today.

Ultimately, it appears that while most individuals considered themselves progressive, and the music they consume (such as True Sound) may have a liberal or political slant to it, the relationship between the two remains independent in the lives of almost all individuals. In terms of a relationship between consumption of politically conscious rap music and political beliefs, the question as to which direction the arrow should go, or whether bi-directionally, remains unanswered. The consistent renouncement of rap music, or True Sound, as simply a good musical performance or a band with a good beat, did not allow individuals to probe deeper into themselves to understand why they perceive the beats of rap music as good, as opposed to the many other genres of music which are also very influenced by a bass beat. Further, merely saying that True Sound, or rap music, is solely for entertainment purposes may account for a lack of internalization or recognition of messages. If music is "just entertainment," how seriously is one supposed to take its lyrical content? When prompted to consider why rap, why True Sound, most individual's responded similar to Jessica:

MEREDITH: Can you pinpoint a reason why you like it (True Sound)?

JESSICA: I like to dance a lot and I love to go to shows.

For Jessica and others, the relationship between consumption of politically conscious rap music and political beliefs is non-existent. While the two may exist independently of one another (i.e. an individual may listen to "political" music and have strong political beliefs), the articulation of a conscious relationship between or amongst the two is not present.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The Music Didn't Make You Do It

Research on audience members of True Sound shows confirms one thing: it's "still the beat" (see Sullivan 2003). While individual political beliefs and the beliefs of True Sound members are characterized as more similar than not, it appears that individuals already considered themselves liberal before walking through the doors of Arnold's. Instead, it is the cultural tools people use or do not use that affect their characterization of their True Sound experience.

The inability to recall lyrics of True Sound further complicates the discussion. How do we know if individual beliefs were changed or challenged if *no one* can recall any of the lyrics? Further, articulations of True Sound as a band who was political in intent could not be substantiated by any particular examples, specifically lyrical ones. Such observations appeared to be based more on the dreadlocked hairstyles of band members than anything they said.

These findings are in support of the theory of an active audience (see Croteau & Hoynes 2000). Active audiences not only give leeway to differing interpretations of the same text, but also give power, agency, and autonomy to audience members. The audience is no longer viewed as a passive recipient, but rather, an active agent in interpreting (or not) those messages. This furthers reinforces the argument that True Sound fans *choose* not to identify or interpret certain messages.

Croteau and Hoynes (2000) also note an individual's social position factors into the cultural tools utilized for decoding media and politics. In other words, our social position provides a framework through which we view the world. This framework makes

certain issues more visible than others. The tools we use are influenced by our race, ethnicity, social class, age, and gender. The result is individuals who are active agents constrained by specific structural conditions.

The tools utilized by True Sound audience members also shaped their reception of the messages of the music. The recognition of themes such as unity and love, while not those of discrimination and racism, is indicative of how our societal scope is commonly constrained by our personal one. This does not mean that individuals are unable to see beyond these constraints, just that the ability to do so is more difficult.

The notion of an active audience not only influences into the interpretations of messages of True Sound audience members, but also has implications for the accusations commonly brought upon gangsta rap for promoting violence. Such claims are based upon the premise that listeners passively engage in the music with no ability to discern the context of its messages. This assertion rests upon the belief that there is a direct correspondence between listening to a musical text and replicating its themes.

However, this is not the case. In this study, not only do individuals not act upon the messages spoken about, but they cannot even specifically identify what those messages are. Their inability to recall messages seriously brings into question their ability to act upon them.

Tia DeNora's (2000) notion of consuming music within a social setting (True Sound at Arnold's) versus consuming music as a means of shaping identity also contributes not only to the inability of individuals to recall lyrics, but also, their (in)action

upon them.[32] DeNora asserts that the difference amongst these two rationales also negotiates the parameters of action. For individuals who attend True Sound shows, but do not view their attendance as a contributing factor to their identity, this disjuncture may be one explanation for a lack of a relationship between consumption of music and altered beliefs. This is a trend amongst those interviewed as most everyone indicated that they thought True Sound were good entertainers. Further, minus the two hip hop deejays (Dustin and James), no one said that in their primary musical consumption was hip hop. These two response trends provide a greater foundation for concluding that individual's come to True Sound shows more for the social aspect than the identity one.

True Sound shows at Arnold's afford audience members an opportunity to be immersed in a subculture with relatively few sacrifices. Arnold's liberal, though predominately White, affiliation within the community provides an opportunity for Whites to "tip toe" into Black culture without getting their hands dirty. Being surround by people that look like you at True Sound shows and in everyday university life, provides Whites with the luxury of not having to question their Whiteness (see Potter 1995). Instead, they can embrace True Sound's universal themes of unity and love, while ignoring those such as racism and discrimination, which they do not recognize as having an impact on their lives.

DeNora's theory also sheds light on the attacks against gangsta rap. Her work argues against the idea that if an individual listens to gangsta rap, and they can identify with some of the situations spoken about, then they will act upon those messages in a similar light. Based upon the work of Rachel Sullivan (2003), while African Americans

[32] This does not mean that one's identity is shaped in isolation from social settings. However, individuals may not consciously be aware of the forces shaping their social interactions, and subsequently, may be less likely to act upon these messages.

report listening to rap music as an affirmation of their experiences, this is predominately within the contexts of experiencing racism and poverty. It should not to be misread as an argument that people who listen to music that speaks of killing people is motivated by their identification of having committed murder.[33] What must be acknowledged is that the contextualizing of music and patterns of musical consumption is extremely important. It is the divorcing of context from lyrical content that has lead to misinterpretations of music and its messages.

Contributions to Sociology

This study has highlighted how consumption and engagement with culture shapes identity. While individuals may not readily recognize how their presence specifically at True Sound shows shapes their personal and collective identities, many acknowledged that music was an important component of their identity. Understanding how patterns of consumption and engagement with culture shape identity is valuable in understanding not only rationales behind consumption, but also the best manner to clearly articulate specific messages. Simon Frith's (1996) question of how music creates a web of identities for those who consume it is clearly demonstrated. However, for some individuals, the web is not always connected. The ability for individuals to separate different facets of their lives further highlights not only the literature on privileged identities, but also how to better understand competing, and at times conflicting, identities.

This research has affirmed the complex and entangled web of identity, music, and politics. In support of Croteau and Hoynes's (2000) perspective on active audiences, individuals have *chosen* to selectively identify with certain messages of True Sound. The

[33] Gangsta rap is not the only genre of music that speaks about violence. However, critiques have unilaterally been waged against gangsta rap.

understanding of how individual demographics and life stories contribute to such a selection is valuable.

The selective identification of messages has great implications for many of the culture wars occurring today. As previously discussed, the findings that Whites listen to rap music primarily for the beat and not the message is significant when we consider the critiques waged against gangsta rap, in particular, for being responsible for the actions of their listeners. This study has indicated no direct one-to-one correspondence between the two.

The literature on how people consume culture and use it for their own personal identity is limited, specifically within consumption of hip hop. This study has contributed to this body of emerging literature and has provided individuals the opportunity to articulate the reasons for their musical consumption and preferences.

Based upon this study, we can conclude that there are no simple answers why Whites listen to hip hop, further, why anyone listens to any music. Prior theories that Whites consume hip hop solely as a means of expressing alienation or rebellion are not sustained. The literature on taste preferences also does not provide us with a clear explanation regarding White consumption of hip hop. The answers, for these twelve individuals, are far more complex and multifaceted. In the end, we are left with a phenomenon that White rap music fans themselves cannot explain.

Limitations of this Study

This study was conducted in a small college town and as such, its generalizability is limited. However, there is no reason to believe that the process of using culture would differ elsewhere. This study is also limited by its small sample size and lack of African

American respondents. Increasing both the overall number of interviews, as well as African Americans interviewed will provide the opportunity to reach more conclusive results as to possible differences due to racial experiences and identity.

Future Research

This research specifically focused the White audience of True Sound. It would be instructive to do a longitudinal study and follow up with these same individuals in ten years and reassess their patterns of musical consumption and political beliefs. Particularly with Dustin and James it would be intriguing to know if they are still avidly listening to hip hop and deejaying. The consumption of rap music, primarily during the college years, when one's identity is shaped, and the question of whether people continue to listen later in life would contribute to our understanding of how selective musical consumption shapes identity.

In terms of broader musical consumption, it would also be informative to do a cross-genre study to assess the range of recall of lyrics and messages at other live shows. This study would allow us to assess whether the inability to recall lyrics and messages is indicative of broad patterns of musical consumption, or if it is specific to hip hop. If Whites listen to other musical genres for their messages, it would be noteworthy why for hip hop it remains the beat.

Finally, conducting a study on an all White hip hop group and their audience would be a good basis of comparison to the True Sound audience. Are their similar patterns amongst audience members and political beliefs? Further, is the inability to recall lyrics similar despite who is on stage? The ability to better comprehend whether

it's the message and/or the beat would shed light on the racial dynamics and interplay between band members and their audience.

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Appendix A: Demographic Breakdown of Respondents

Name	**Gender**	**Race**	**Major**
Anna	Female	White	Sociology
Caroline	Female	White	Undeclared
Dustin	Male	White	Business Management
James	Male	White	Accounting
Jessica	Female	White	Elementary Education
Justin	Male	White	Forestry
Marcus	Male	White	Architecture
Mark	Male	White	Undeclared
Nick	Male	White	Urban Affairs and Planning
Paul	Male	White	Urban Affairs and Planning
Taylor	Female	White	Theatre Arts
Tyson	Male	African American	Sociology