The emergence of the postindustrial city radically altered black communal sensibilities in the late 1970s and 1980s. Intense poverty, economic, collapse, and the erosion of viable public space were part and parcel of the new urban terrain that African-Americans confronted. Called from the discourse of the postindustrial city, hip-hop reflected the growing visibility of a young, urban, and often angry so-called "underclass." Aesthetically the genre drew on diverse musical sensibilities like James Brown and the Parliament/Funkadelic collection and on black oral traditions like the prison toasts, "The Dozens," and the Black Arts poets of the 1960s. As the genre represented a counternarrative to black middle-class mobility, it also represented a counternarrative to the emergence of a corporate-driven music industry and the mass commodification of black expression. Relying largely on word of mouth and live performance as a means of promotion, hip-hop may represent the last black popular form to be wholly derived from the experiences and texts of the black urban landscape.

The emergence of hip-hop in the postindustrial city was far removed from the daily realities of an expanding black middle class. Inspired in part by Smokey Robinson's *A Quiet Storm* and the lusher recordings of Gamble and Huff, black popular recordings began to reflect the sensibilities of the black middle class. The subsequent Quiet Storm format, popularized on many radio stations with large black audiences, allowed the black middle class the cultural grounding that suburban life could not afford them, while maintaining a distinct musical subculture that affirmed their middle-class status and distanced them from the sonic rumblings of an urban underclass.
By the mid-1980s, both an urban-based working class/underclass and suburban middle class exhibited symptoms of "postindustrial nostalgia." Loosely defined as a nostalgia that has its basis in the postindustrial transformations of black urban life during the 1970s, many contemporary cultural workers began to appropriate the narratives and styles of black life in black urban spaces prior to the structural and economic changes of postindustrial transformations. While most visible in the burgeoning new black cinema of the late 1980s and 1990s, postindustrial nostalgia is also reflected in the popular music industry. The prevalence of nostalgia-based narratives in black popular culture would have particular effects on the maintenance of intradiasporic relations, at once providing the aural and visual bridge to reframe diverse communal relations, particularly those across the generational divide, while underscoring the black middle class' general refusal to adequately engage the realities of the Black Public Sphere in the postindustrial era.

Quiet Storms: Soul and Survival in the Suburbs

Excepting the trio of Holland, Dozier, and Holland, William "Smokey" Robinson has been the most influential black singer/songwriter/producer of his generation. After a long and productive collaboration with the Miracles, Robinson embarked upon a solo career in the early 1970s. Possessing one of the most gifted and distinct falsettos in the history of popular music, Robinson's songwriting skills, best exemplified by songs like "My Girl," "Ooh Baby, Baby," and "Shop Around," were no longer on the critical edge in the early 1970s. Momentarily regaining his creative energies, Robinson release his first "concept" recording with the 1975 classic A Quiet Storm. A Quiet Storm reflected the changing dynamics of popular music in the 1970s.

Some twenty years plus after the emergence of the 33-rpm long-playing format, artists began experimenting with longer recordings that often features self-contained themes examined over the course of the entire album. This was a concept that Album Oriented Rock (AOR) exploited to its fullest commercial potential with groups like Led Zeppelin and The Eagles. Marvin Gaye was the first black artist to embrace this concept with large commercial success with his 1971 recording What's Going On, though Isaac Hayes' groundbreaking Hot Buttered Soul charted this territory with some success among black audiences before Gaye's crossover success. These changes in popular music represented the first opportunities for black artists to experiment with improvisation and arrangement outside of the gene of jazz and partially ended the reign of the 45-rpm recording as the only viable commercial format for popular music. Hayes's eighteen-minute reworking of Jimmy Webb's "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," and Donny Hathaway's gospel-tinged recording of Bobby Scott's "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother," from Donny Hathaway (1970) are two of the best examples of this new creative terrain for black artists. Though neither attracted mainstream appeal—Hayes commercial breakthrough occurred with the soundtrack to Shaft and Hathaway's only mainstream success occurs with pop-soul duets with Roberta Flack—these recordings laid the foundation for the later artistic achievements of Flack, Earth, Wind and Fire, and Barry White. It was in this context that Robinson made his own self-contained suite of romance recordings in 1975.

Robinson's seven-minute title track to A Quiet Storm surprised him by becoming the aesthetic cornerstone of a more upscale and sophisticated soul sound that would captivate an older, mature, and largely black middle-class audience that relished its distance from a deteriorating urban landscape. The cover art to A Quiet Storm finds a pensive Robinson examining woodland terrain with a black Shetland pony, an image that was unthinkable as cover art for a black recording artist a generation earlier, though Robinson's cover photo appealed to the sensibilities and desires of a newly emerging black middle class. Covering traditional soul themes like love lost, love found, and love betrayed, the entire first side of the album, recorded as a suite, is held together by the sounds of whispering winds, hence the recording's title.
As important as the recording was to Robinson's then-fading career, it proved more important to black radio programmers searching for programming that would appeal to a growing black middle class with disposable income, as a Howard University communications student appropriated Robinson's title and introduced the Quiet Storm format to black radio programmers. The generally late-night format basically consisted of soul ballads interspersed with some jazz and possibly a little contemporary blues. By the early 1980s, the format was a fixture in virtually every major radio market that programmed black or, as it came to be known by the late 1980s, urban contemporary music. For Quiet Storm audiences, this format offered a welcome reprieve from disco and funk, both of which were arguably driven by working-class youth audiences. While the Quiet Storm format was in part shaped by middle-class sensibilities, particularly given its Howard University roots, it cut across class lines because it appealed to adult sensibilities. Most notably, these recordings were in most cases devoid of any significant political commentary and maintained a strict aesthetic and narrative distance from issues relating to black urban life.

Artists like PIR stalwarts Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes and the O'Jays were all at home in this format. The solo careers of Patti Labelle and Teddy Pendergrass were in part shaped by their appeal to Quiet Storm audiences. Tracks like Labelle's "If Only You Knew" and Pendergrass's "Turn Out the Lights" are still Quiet Storm staples. Vocal groups like Atlantic Starr, The Whispers, Frankie Beverly and Maze, as well as solo acts like Deniece Williams, Peabo Bryson, Stephanie Mills, Roberta Flack, and Jeffrey Osborne offered Quiet Storm audiences an aesthetic connection to the traditions of black popular music, particularly as postindustrial transformations further eroded public spaces in black communities and disco dance clubs migrated from black locales into more mainstream provinces. Furthermore, as time passed, some elements of the black middle class were increasingly responsible for familial relations in black urban centers and began to successfully develop institutions within their own provinces, like churches and other social groups predicated on a common middle-class experience.

Gamble and Huff perhaps exploited this phenomenon best by always carefully packaging their recordings with potential pop Top-40 singles and Quiet Storm type album cuts. The O'Jays 1978 release *So Much Love* is a case in point. Though the infectious pop-soul ditty "Use Ta Be My Girl" is still their highest charting single, the album's "Cry Together" has gone on to become a Quiet Storm classic. More importantly, much of this was occurring with little or no corporate interference, in that this market, dominated by black middle-class consumers who often equated consumption with acceptance in "integrated" America, was virtually ignored by the major corporate labels. Veteran soul singer Tyrone Davis's 1979 release "In the Mood" is such an example. Signed to the Columbia/CBS label, promotion of Davis's album *In the Mood* left the shuffle of releases by younger black artists like Earth, Wind and Fire and Michael Jackson. Despite this the title track found a market niche among black audiences who were attracted to Davis's old-styled soul balladry.

By the mid-1980s, Luther Vandross and Anita Baker were perhaps the two artists who most benefited from the development of Quiet Storm radio. A veteran of stage musicals and commercials, Vandross achieved some success with his guest appearance with the disco group Change on its 1980 release *The Glow of Love*, in which Vandross sang lead vocals on the title track and the exquisite "Searching." While "Never Too Much," the lead single of his first Epic/CBS recording, garnered considerable support from black and white audiences alike, it was Vandross's own seven-minute arrangement of the Hal David and Burt Bacharach song "A House Is Not a Home," that gave him his reputation as a definitive soul balladeer. On subsequent releases like *Forever, For Always, For Love* (1982), *Rudy Body* (1984) which included a startling remake of the Carpenter's "Superstar," and *The Night I Fell in Love* (1985), Vandross established himself as an innovative singer/arranger and producer, particularly within the context of Quiet Storm radio.
With stellar sales among black listeners, Vandross's crossover success began with the release of his fifth recording, 
*Give Me the Reason*, in 1986. This success occurs at precisely the same moment crossover audiences were embracing Anita Baker's 1986 release *Rapture*. Possessing limited vocal range but a highly distinctive vocal quality, Baker attracted attention among black audiences as lead singer of the group Chapter 8 during the late 1970s and with her debut solo release, *The Songstress*, on the independent Beverly Glen label in 1983. Baker's jazz-flavored major label debut on the Elektra/Warner label found support among black radio and contemporary jazz stations that were embracing the pop-jazz of artists like David Sanborn, Grover Washington, Jr., and a still relatively unknown Kenny G. What is notable here is that the commercial successes of Vandross and Baker were overshadowed by the commercial appeal of another form of black music that developed largely in the shadows of black middle-class mobility and in the ruins of an eroding urban landscape. While mature black audiences supported the music and performances of what Nelson George has called "retro-nuevo" soul, corporate labels focused their attention on the crossover appeal of three young black men from Hollis, Queens, Run-DMC, who along with their white proteges, The Beastie Boys, sold more than six million records of a "new" genre of music known as hip-hop or rap.2

**Postindustrial Context(s): Hip-Hop, Postindustrialism, and the Commodification of the Black Underclass**

Despite national rhetoric that suggested the contrary, the Black Public Sphere of the postindustrial city represented a de facto state of racial segregation that was, arguably, much more insidious than segregated black spaces prior to the Civil Rights movement. Lacking an indigenous economic base, these new social constructs developed largely as bureaucratic props of the federal government, as the postindustrial economy institutionalized a veritable nation of displaced workers, as integral cogs in the federal government's economy and industry of misery.3 Meanwhile public institutions, already taxed by black middle-class flight and the inability of the black working class to negotiate the economic burdens of community maintenance, were literally destroyed as part of the spatial logic of the postindustrial city. As Tricia Rose relates in her seminal text on hip-hop music:

The city's poorest residents paid the highest price for deindustrialization and economic restructuring.... In the case of the South Bronx, which has frequently been dubbed the "home of hip-hop culture," these larger postindustrial conditions were exacerbated by disruptions considered an "unexpected side effect" of the larger politically motivated policies of "urban renewal." In the early 1970s, the renewal [sic] project involved massive relocations of economically fragile people of color from different areas of New York City into parts of the South Bronx. Subsequent ethnic and racial transition in the South Bronx was not a gradual process that might have allowed already taxed social and cultural institutions to respond self-protectively; instead, it was a brutal process of community destruction and relocation executed by municipal officials.4

Thus black urban populations were affected by economic and social transformations both internal and external to the traditional Black Public Sphere. In the quest to create a functional postindustrial environment, the masses of multiracial working-class and working-poor people were some of the most expendable urban resources human resources that, a half-century earlier were enticed to migrate to urban spaces in support of industrial development. As urban development changed in response to technological "advancement" and economic restructuring, so did social and economic investment in working-class communities. As John Mollenkopf suggests in his texts on the emergence of postindustrial cities like New York, "The
magnificence of the Manhattan central business and shopping district and the resurgence of luxury residential areas may be juxtaposed to the massive decay of the city's public facilities and poor neighborhoods." Many working-class communities and their inhabitants were deemed as peripheral to the mechanisms of the postindustrial city as high finance and the consumerist desires of a growing managerial class influenced municipal development, including well-publicized tax breaks to corporate entities that remained within certain municipalities without any specific commitment to their lower-tier workers. This phenomenon further challenged working-class communities as a diminishing tax base led to cuts in municipal and later federal aid, thus instigating a further spiral into poverty and community erosion for many working-class communities. Under the banner of "urban renewal," the black working class and working poor were marginalized and isolated from the engines of the postindustrial city—the privatization of public space in downtown areas being emblematic—and instead exposed to intense poverty and rampant unemployment, which subsequently challenged traditional desires to maintain community.

Poverty within the postindustrial city featured spatial dimensions that also altered African-American efforts to build and maintain urban communities. As David Theo Goldberg states, "The segregated space of formalized racism is over-determined. Not only is private space restricted by the constraints of poverty, so too is public institutional space." By the mid-1970s, Goldberg's thesis found its logical icon in the sprawling federal housing projects that largely replaced the kitchenette tenements of black urban spaces in the North and Midwest. Goldberg's "living space of poverty" acknowledges an urban landscape that privileges the private and the local—the manifestation of fractured communal relations and the pervasive aura of social isolation. Though many federal housing projects represented a marked improvement over the quality of urban housing prior to the Civil Rights movement, the very logic of federally subsidized "low-income" housing meant that the poorest blacks would be socially and economically isolated from the mechanisms of the postindustrial city in neighborhoods that were acutely overcrowded and lacked the necessary public and institutional space to build and maintain communal sensibilities. This social isolation has been defined by sociologist William Julius Wilson as "lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society." Though isolation from mainstream culture remains a substantial barrier to survival in the postindustrial city, the fracturing of communal relations within the African-American diaspora has had a more profound effect on the black poor as communal exchange, critique, and other communal relations that were integral to black survival in the industrial era were severed by regional and spatial dislocations within the Black Public Sphere and economic and political transformations beyond it.

Given the paucity of private and public space, it was no surprise that the private and the public began to conflate, as the familial, communal, and social "dysfunction" of the African-American experience entered into mainstream public discourse. While dysfunction exists in many communal settings, regardless of race, class, and social location, African-American dysfunction was mass mediated and commodified for mass consumption via network news programs, Hollywood films like Fort Apache, and television programs like Starsky and Hutch and Baretta. By the late 1970s, the commodification of the black poor or underclass as human spectacle became a standard trope of mass culture, parlaying a clear sense of social difference from "blackness" for many mainstream consumers, including an emerging black middle class. My point is not to suggest that "dysfunction" among white communities was not present in mass culture, but that the mass-mediated images of the black underclass often served as the only images available to mainstream consumers, whereas a diversity of images for the white ethnic experience was often presented for consumption, albeit with its own internal markers of class and social difference. Many of the experiences of the "ghettoentric" poor were essentialized as a representative sample of the broader black community, to the obvious detriment of many
segments of the African-American diaspora including the black poor. For instance, mass-mediated misrepresentations of the black poor often validated the rhetoric of conservative politicians like Ronald Reagan who opposed increased federal spending for social programs, by deemphasizing the roles of racism, poor education, inadequate health care, and the collapse of industrial-based economies and by instead projecting drug addiction, laziness, and the inferiority of African-American culture as the primary culprits of black misery.

The rather vivid imagery of black urban spaces within mass culture was further enhanced by the layout of communal spaces in many urban communities. For example, many of the federally subsidized housing projects of the Northeast and Midwest—Chicago’s Cabrini-Green comes to mind—represented the inverted logic of Jeremy Benthem’s Panopticon, by providing surveillance from the bottom. Though I am not suggesting that the federal housing projects were part of some conspiracy to manage the black masses, the high visibility of such housing, with its distinct architecture that privileged more efficient use of urban space over livability and the concentration of the black poor within such spaces, increased notions that such communities were socially isolated from mainstream life and thus to be feared and neglected. Of course, in many locales like the Compton and Watts districts in Los Angeles, technological advancements in policing have allowed many police departments the ability to “patrol” black urban spaces via helicopters or “ghetto-birds.” Such developments countered historical examples where black isolation was often accompanied and defined by invisibility. To the contrary, in the postindustrial era, the black masses continued to be marginalized but remained highly visible within varying social constructs.

In response to poverty and unemployment, an illicit economy emerged as a primary conduit for economic survival among some segments of the postindustrial city. Illicit activities like petty thievery, numbers running, prostitution, and even drug dealing had been a small part of the informal economy of segregated black spaces throughout the twentieth century. For example, one of the few black patrons of the “Harlem Renaissance” was West Indian numbers runner Casper Holstein, who helped finance the Urban League’s literary awards in 1926 from his profits. What radically changed the nature of the informal economy of the Black Public Sphere in the post–Civil Rights era is the intensity of the economic collapse, accompanied by massive unemployment within those spaces and the emergence of an illegal drug that is perhaps the most destructive element to emerge within the contemporary Black Public Sphere.

Crack cocaine was a unique drug; its emergence exemplified the paradox of consumptionist desire in the midst of intense poverty. In his exhaustive examination of postindustrial Los Angeles, Mike Davis writes of the cocaine trade:

Like any “ordinary business” in an initial sales boom, the cocaine trade had to contend with changing relations of supply and demand. Despite the monopsonistic position of the cartels vis-à-vis the producers, the wholesale price of cocaine fell by half. This, in turn, dictated a transformation in sales strategy and market structure. The result was a switch from *haute cuisine* to fast food, as the Medellin Cartel, starting in 1981 or 83 (accounts differ), designated Los Angeles as a proving ground for the mass sales of rock cocaine or crack.

To counter the flattening of demand for cocaine, a less expensive form of cocaine was introduced into poor communities within postindustrial cities like Los Angeles, New York, and Detroit in an effort to expand markets. Not only did crack cocaine increase demand for cocaine nationally, crack cocaine created its own thriving market. It featured a short, intense high that was highly addictive and thus offered “more bang for the buck.” As Cornel West has suggested, the intensity of crack cocaine addiction mirrored the intensity of consumptionist desire in America. The craving for the type of stimulant that crack cocaine provided made it popular among those who desired transcendence from the everyday misery of postindustrial
life. In this regard, crack cocaine addiction resembled the historical examples of religion, recreational sex, and dancing as temporal releases from the realities of African-American life in the twentieth century. Crack cocaine differed from these aforementioned examples in that it also helped destroy communal relations within the Black Public Sphere as crack cocaine addiction led to increased black-on-black crime and the emergence of illicit sex acts “performed” within distinctly public forums where sex acts were exchanged often for drug money or drugs themselves.

More compellingly, the crack cocaine trade was attractive as a counter to poverty within the postindustrial city. As Davis maintains in *City of Quartz*, the crack cocaine industry was introduced to postindustrial Los Angeles after large numbers of blue collar workers were displaced from the industrial plant economy that was largely responsible for black migration from the South into Los Angeles immediately after World War II. The postindustrial transformation of Los Angeles, including the emergence of Japanese imports, effectively mitigated many of the economic and social gains made by the black working class in the post–World War II era. Furthermore, many African-Americans, particularly young black men, were excluded from both the service and the high-tech industries that were developing in the region, leading to unemployment rates well over 40 percent among black youth. The significant demand for crack cocaine and the relative ease with which in could be produced on-site made the crack cocaine trade an attractive alternative to the abject poverty that defined the postindustrial experience for many blacks.

What was unique about the crack cocaine industry for many African-Americans is that it attempted to counter a poverty that was itself constructed against commodified images of wealth and consumption. Unlike previous periods of widespread poverty that existed somewhat in isolation from mainstream wealth, the impoverished masses within America generally faced a barrage of commodified images of wealth and consumption via television, film, and other organs of mass culture, as self-worth increasingly came to be defined by the ability to consume. African-American youth were particularly subject to this barrage of wealth and consumption as part of the first real generation of American youth socialized by television. As mentioned previously, African-American youth investment in television was intensified as a corollary to corporate annexation of black popular expression, marking the post–Civil Rights generation(s) of African-American youth as the first who could readily consume the iconography of “blackness.” As street-level sellers and producers of crack cocaine, African-American youth found a way to escape poverty and to consume as a measurement of self-worth. Thus unlike other ethnic groups who used the drug trade as a foundation to build upon “legitimate wealth”—Mario Puzo’s examples in the *Godfather* chronicles immediately come to mind—African-American youth involved in the crack cocaine industry simply invested in material icons of wealth like cars, cellular phones, jewelry, and au court fashion instead of transforming such wealth into familial or communal efforts to rebuild community. Furthermore, African-American youth interest in the crack cocaine industry was particularly profound because of the “juvenization of poverty” among many urban groups. In Los Angeles County, for instance, more than 40 percent of children lived below or just above the official poverty line. This mirrored a doubling of children in poverty across the state of California in just a generation. These trends were further realized in many postindustrial urban environments across the nation.

What emerged in the shadows of many of these developments was a distinct African-American youth culture whose basic sentiments were often incompatible with mainstream African-American leadership and mainstream culture in general. In its worst case, it was a culture personified by gang turf wars over the control of the crack cocaine industry, a culture described by Michael Eric Dyson as a “ghettocentric juvocracy” where economic rule and illegal tyranny is exercised by a cadre of young African-American males over a significant portion of
the black urban landscape. It is at this end of the spectrum that the postindustrial realities of black life continue to challenge the very idea of community as drive-by shootings and subsequent police occupation continue to rip communities apart by militarizing public spaces. At the more positive end of the spectrum a distinct discourse of African-American youth, with obvious regional variations, emerged to narrate, critique, challenge, and deconstruct the realities of postindustrial life. Hip-hop music and culture represented such a discourse.

The Discourse(s) of Hip-Hop: Resistance, Consumption, and African-American Youth Culture

While many African-American youth were not privy to the everyday realities of the black urban experience, a distinct urban-based African-American youth culture emerged in the mid- to late 1970s. Prior to World War II African-American youth culture was largely hidden from mainstream culture, subsumed within the parameters of segregated black spaces. The zoot suit riots and explosion of bebop music represented the first real glimpse into African-American youth culture for those beyond the confines of segregated urban spaces. Though bebop was essentially an aesthetic movement driven by the sensibilities of black male musicians, some well into their thirties who were reacting to racism in the North, the movement was given its energy and stylistic acumen by African-American youth who embraced the movement as a form of transcendence/resistance from the everyday drudgery of their existence. Zoot suits, the Funky-hip, and jive were all the nuances that African-American youth brought to the subculture of bebop music.

Historically African-American youth culture has rarely been driven by ideological concerns, but instead has embraced, appropriated, and reanimated existing structures, organizations, and institutions that African-American youth perceived as empowering them within various social, cultural, and economic constructs. Many of the stylistic excesses associated with African-American youth culture were conscious efforts to deconstruct and critique mass-mediated images of African-American youth. The impact of African-American youth culture on existing political and social movements was perhaps most profound when black youth embraced the Civil Rights movement of the early 1960s. The lunch-counter sit-ins, marches, and Freedom Summer bus rides were all emblematic of the impact of black youth culture on the movement. The development of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), often referred to as the youth wing of the traditional Civil Rights movement, was a recognition on the part of the traditional leadership of the importance of black youth to mass social movement.

That importance was further realized when African-American youth began to reject the strategies of the traditional Civil Rights leadership and embraced the nationalist leanings of the Nation of Islam and later the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party, whose members were often culled from youth street gangs like the Slausons in south-central Los Angeles and the Blackstone Rangers in Chicago, personified African-American youth culture’s ability to impact upon mainstream culture both within and beyond the Black Public Sphere. Not surprisingly, such overtly political organizations gave way to less-inspiring constructs as a direct response to the collapse of the Civil Rights/Black Power movements and the increased commodification of wealth and consumption within mass culture. Thus the return to street-level gangs like the Crips and Bloods in Los Angeles or the Black Spades in New York City where emblematic of the belief within African-American youth culture that mass consumption and the accumulation of wealth for mass consumption were the most viable means of social transcendence afforded them in the post-Civil Rights era. The introduction of the crack cocaine industry into black urban spaces further enhanced such notions well into the 1990s.

Hip-hop music and culture emerged as a narrative and stylistic distillation of African-
American youth sensibilities in the late 1970s, hip-hop differed from previous structures influenced by African-American youth in that it was largely predicated and driven by black youth culture itself. The fact that hip-hop emerged as a culture organic to African-American youth in urban spaces reflects the aforementioned social isolation afforded black youth and the conscious effort by many corporate capitalists to develop a popular music industry largely anchored by the sensibilities of American youth. Given this context, it was perfectly natural that the most profound aesthetic movement in black popular music in the post–Civil Rights era would be profoundly influenced by black youth culture. In reality, African-American youth appropriated many diverse examples of black expressive culture, including the Jamaican Toast tradition, and created an aesthetic movement that was uniquely tailored to their historic moment and their own existential desires.

I maintain that the emergence of hip-hop, which appeared in a rudimentary state in the mid-1970s, was representative of a concerted effort by youth urban blacks to use mass culture to facilitate communal discourse across a fractured and displaced national community. As Rose states, “Rappers’ emphasis on posses and neighborhoods has brought the ghetto back into the public consciousness. It satisfies poor youth black people’s profound need to have their territories acknowledged, recognized and celebrated.” While much of this activity was driven by the need to give voice to issues that privilege the local and the private within the postindustrial city—thus the overdetermined constructions of masculinity, sexuality, criminality, and even an urban patriarchy—hip-hop’s best attempts at social commentary and critique represented traditions normalized and privileged historically in the Black Public Sphere of the urban North. Arguably the most significant form of counterhegemonic art in the black community over the last twenty years, the genre’s project questions power and influence politically in the contexts of American culture and capitalism, the dominance of black middle-class discourse, but most notably the “death of community” witnessed by African-American youth in the postindustrial era.

Despite its intense commodification, hip-hop has managed to continuously subvert mass-market limitations by investing in its own philosophical groundings. Like bebop before it, hip-hop’s politics was initially a politics of style that created an aural and stylistic community in response to the erosion of community with the postindustrial city. Perhaps more that any other previous popular form, hip-hop thrived on its own creative and aesthetic volatility by embracing such volatility as part of its stylistic traditions. This has allowed the form to maintain an aesthetic and narrative distance from mass-market limitations, though I must acknowledge that it is often a transient moment. As Tricia Rose suggests, “Developing a style nobody can deal with—a style that cannot be easily understood or erased, a style that has the reflexivity to create counter-dominant narratives against a mobile and shifting enemy—may be one of the most effective ways to fortify communities of resistance and simultaneously reserve the right to communal pleasure.”

Commercial disinterest in the form during its developing years allowed for its relatively autonomous development. Relying largely on word of mouth and live performance as a means of promotion, hip-hop represents the last black popular form to be wholly derived from the experiences and texts of the black urban landscape. In the aftermath of disco and corporate America’s considerable retreat from its commitment to producing and distributing black popular music, hip-hop was allowed to flourish in public spaces and on several independent recording labels. Hip-hop’s live performances were largely predicated on the recovery of commodified black musical texts for the purpose of reintegrating these texts onto the organic terrain of black urban communities. According to critic Paul Gilroy:

Music recorded on disk loses its pre-ordained authority as it is transformed and adapted.... A range of deconstructive procedures—scratch mixing, dubbing, toasting, rapping, and
beatboxing—contribute to new layers of local meaning. The original performance trapped in plastic is supplemented by new contributions at every stage. Performer and audience alike strive to create pleasures that can evade capture and sale as cultural commodities.20

Like bebop, hip-hop appropriated popular texts, often refiguring them to serve hip-hop sensibilities. This phenomenon contextually questions and ultimately undermines the notion of corporate ownership of popular music and would have legal ramifications well into the decade of the 1990s.21 Gilroy’s comments are instructive in that even as hip-hop became a thoroughly commodified form in the late 1980s, its ability to mine the rich musical traditions of the African-American diaspora through the process of sampling allowed the form to privilege local and specific meanings historically aligned with organic sites of resistance and recovery.

For African-American youth, hip-hop music also allowed them to counter the iconography of fear, menace, and spectacle that dominated mass-mediated perceptions of contemporary black life by giving voice to the everyday human realities of black life in ways that could not be easily reduced to commodifiable stereotypes. The release of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message” was a prime example of these sensibilities in the early stages of hip-hop. Recorded and released in 1982 to mainstream critical acclaim, it is the first hip-hop recording to be accorded such praise. Part of the recording’s obvious appeal to mainstream critics was its unmitigated and “authentic” portrayal of contemporary black urban life. “The Message” was the first significant political recording produced in the post-soul era, representing an astute critique of the rise and impact of the Reagan right on working-class and urban locales.

Melle Mel’s narrative portrays the transformation of the individual spirit within a context that offers little or no choice or freedom for those contained within it. Within Melle Mel’s text, the fate of the individual spirit living within the parameters of the postindustrial urban landscape has been consigned at birth to live a short and miserable life. Representative of the genre, hip-hop was perhaps the first popular form of black music that offered little or no hope to its audience. The fatalistic experience has become a standard trope of urban-based hip-hop—“The Message” is but one clarion example of this. Juxtaposing diminishing hope and the rampant materialism of the underground economy of the urban landscape, Melle Mel identifies a ghetto hierarchy that ghetto youth have little choice but to invest in. Here, Melle Mel is cognizant of the “role model” void produced by middle-class flight and the lack of quality institutions to offset the influence of the illicit underground economy. In this context, Melle Mel identifies the failure of inner-city schools to provide a necessary buffer against urban malaise.

Seven years after the release of “The Message,” more than 600,000 black men ages twenty to twenty-nine were either incarcerated, paroled, or on probation. The American prison population doubled over the twelve-year period from 1977 to 1989.22 What Stevie Wonder had emphatically prophesied in “Living for the City” had become a stark and inescapable reality for the urban constituency that Melle Mel represented in “The Message.” Using dated tropes of black masculinity and political resistance, Melle Mel considers a penal system that is incapable of producing rehabilitated individuals and has become a site of sexual violence between men. If the ideological imagination of the Black Power movement was partially related to the reintroduction of a hypermasculine patriarchy within the black community, Melle Mel’s imagery of black male rape is an assertion that the Civil Rights/Black Power eras were far removed historically and intellectually from the landscape of the postindustrial city. In the end, Melle Mel transforms his ghetto narrative into a contemporary slave narrative, in which the protagonist chooses death at his own hands as opposed to incarceration and enslavement.23

The closing moments of “The Message” find members of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five engaged in casual banter on a street corner in New York. The group is shortly
confronted by members of the NYPD who immediately accuse them of and arrest them for some unnamed crime. In a comic moment, one of the group members asserts, “But we’re Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five,” to which a cop responds, “What is that, a gang?” and proceeds with his arrest. While the scene on one level acknowledges the lack of status afforded hip-hop artists within mainstream culture, a recurring theme in hip-hop, it also is a thinly veiled appropriation of a similar moment during Stevie Wonder’s “Living for the City.” I suggest that a comparison of the two recordings adequately details the changes within the postindustrial urban landscape over a period of nine years.

The most significant difference in the two texts is the fact that Wonder’s protagonist migrates from the American South, during what is the very last stages of the black migration from the South in the twentieth century. Melle Mel’s protagonist was born in the urban North, and thus could never invest in the type of promise that was articulated in the oppositional meanings of the mass migration. It is this lack of hope that remains a constant marker of the differences detailed in both narratives. While Wonder’s protagonist is unwittingly introduced to the economic subculture of the urban North, Melle Mel’s protagonist makes a conscious choice to invest in the economic subculture of the postindustrial city, precisely because of the lack of educational and economic opportunities that Wonder’s protagonist envisioned in the urban North in the first place. Both artists are critical of the lack of rehabilitation that takes place in the American penal system, though the world that Wonder’s protagonist returns to after prison is more closely aligned to the world that Melle Mel’s character is born into.

The death of Melle Mel’s protagonist suggests that the continuing transformation of the urban landscape will produce an environment that is as unlivable as it is unbearable and perhaps unnameable, within Melle Mel’s narrative imagination. For example, neither Wonder nor Grandmaster Flash could foretell the coming threat of crack addiction within the black community, though Melle Mel would document its presence on his solo recording “King of the Streets” in 1984, almost two years before mainstream culture would acknowledge the presence of what is defined as a “smokable, efficient, and inexpensive” drug, that produces “hyperactive, paranoid, psychotic, and extremely violent” addicts. The introduction of crack cocaine into the black urban landscape would arguably have as much effect on the quality of life within the postindustrial city as black middle-class flight and the postindustrial economy. Hip-hop music and the burgeoning “ghetto” cinema that emerges from within its traditions were both uniquely poised to represent the realities of contemporary black urban life within mainstream culture. In their best moments, these cultural narratives create critical exchange within the vast constituencies of the African-American diaspora. In their worse moments, these narratives are too often interpreted by a dislocated black middle class as the products of individuals who lack the civility and determination that befit their middle class sensibilities. Almost a full century after the first articulation of the “New Negro,” the old Negro had been transformed from southern migrant to urban ghetto dweller, and the black middle class was equally disdainful of both.

Despite recordings like “The Message,” early hip-hop recordings rarely ventured beyond themes associated with the everyday experiences of urban-based African-American youth. Because of hip-hop’s intimate connection to African-American youth culture, its narratives usually mirrored whatever concerns were deemed crucial to black youth. Like the music that echoed throughout black dance halls in the 1930s and 1940s, the “party and bullshit” themes of most early hip-hop represented efforts to transcend the dull realities of urban life, including body-numbing experiences within low-wage service industries and inferior and condescending urban school systems. Though hip-hop represented an art form that countered mainstream sensibilities and clearly could be construed as a mode of social resistance, in and of itself, it was not invested with political dimensions, at least not any more so than African-American youth culture contained within itself. At best hip-hop represented a distinct mode.
of youthful expression primed to serve as a conduit for political discourse as it coincided with the sensibilities of black youth. Jesse Jackson’s first presidential campaign in 1984 and the reemergence of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam represented two distinct though related phenomena that would politicize black youth and thus politicize some aspects of hip-hop music in the early to mid-1980s.

On the surface Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaign in 1984 was largely rooted in the discourse of the traditional Civil Rights movement and thus was not initially attractive to hip-hop’s primary constituency. The Civil Rights movement and electoral politics, for that matter, were often interpreted as being marginal to the primary concerns of the black urban poor. The failure of the increased numbers of black elected officials in various municipalities to adequately empower the black poor in those municipalities is one of many issues responsible for such interpretations. But Jackson’s campaign, which was publicly parlayed as the first serious attempt at the presidency by an African-American—Shirley Chisholm’s efforts in 1972 largely removed the black political landscape—attracted tacit support throughout the African-American diaspora because of its historic meaning.

Louis Farrakhan’s public support of Jackson’s efforts offered the Nation of Islam leader the mainstream visibility, if not credibility, that the Nation of Islam had not been afforded since the death of Malcolm X. Though Farrakhan’s black nationalist politics and critiques of white supremacy were often oppositional to the broad mainstream appeal that Jackson craved and needed to be seriously considered for the presidency, his momentary alliance with Jackson gave him access to the black masses, particularly the urban masses who had long rejected the style of political activism that Jackson personified. Particularly appealing to black urban youth was Farrakhan’s willingness, like his late mentor Malcolm X, to speak forcefully about the nature of American race relations and the evils of white supremacy. Farrakhan’s penchant for rhetoric, which often bordered on anti-Semitism, effectively demonized him among mainstream pundits, and his subsequent outlaw status further attracted black youths who felt themselves demonized in mainstream culture. Farrakhan’s inability to project lasting solutions to the problems that face the urban poor did not deter support from black youth, in that his channeling of black rage in a national context validated the black rage that black youth often expressed within their own personal and local contexts. Farrakhan’s rage, within the context of the increasing misery of urban life, provided the impetus for segments of the hip-hop community channel their own critiques of white supremacy and expressions of black rage into their music.

The group Public Enemy was perhaps the most accomplished at projecting black rage as a political discourse that would prove attractive to the youth audiences that hip-hop garnered. Born and raised on the fringes of the Black Panther Party, Public Enemy leader Chuck D intuitively understood the attractiveness of black nationalism to urban youth in the 1960s and attempted to reintroduce many of those themes to black youth within a contemporary social and aesthetic context. Chuck D’s political rhetoric for the Reagan era was initially and cautiously presented on Public Enemy’s first recording, Yo! Bum Rush the Show, in 1987. It failed to attract black youth audiences, mostly because much of the music was undanceable, hence for those who are serious about making music popular among black youth. Moreover, given black radio’s initial rejection of hip-hop and the subtle transformation of the music from a live/public form of expression to one increasingly produced in a studio for mass consumption, it was imperative for its survival that hip-hop be conducive to the types of public spaces where black youth were most likely to convene. Dance halls or clubs continued to be the most accessible spaces for black youth to congregate, so the challenge for those who were interested in presenting hip-hop as political discourse was to make sure the music was danceable. Public Enemy later recorded a succession of twelve-inch releases that were not necessarily any more danceable than those found on Yo! Bum Rush the Show, but instead chal-
lenged and dared black youth to dance to them, much the way bebop artists dared black youth to lindy-hop to their self-styled musical tomes.

The sonic cacophony of “Rebel Without a Pause” and “Bring the Noise” represented the vanguard of hip-hop production styles. Chuck D’s driving baritone was the perfect foil for the “organized confusion” that was a staple of Public Enemy’s producers, The Bomb Squad. These innovations proved enticing to both a mainstream public and black youth, who were perhaps tired of the unimaginative drum machine programming that had come to dominate the genre. *It Takes a Nation to Hold Us Back*, released in the late spring of 1988, represented Public Enemy’s vision for hip-hop’s role in galvanizing a political vanguard in the post—Civil Rights era. As Greg Tate wrote at the time of the recording’s release:

Nation of Millions is a declaration of war on the federal government, and that unholy trinity—black radio programmers, crack dealers, and rock critics…. For sheer audacity and specificity Chuck D’s enemies list rivals anything produced by the Black Liberation Army or punk—rallying for retribution against the Feds for the Panthers’ fall (“Party for your Right to Fight”), slapping murder charges on the FBI and CIA for the assassinations of MLK and Malcolm X (“Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos”), assailing copyright law and the court system (“Caught, Can I Get a Witness”).

Chuck D’s call for truth, justice, and a black nationalist way of life was perhaps the most potent of any political narratives that had appeared on a black popular recording. Public Enemy very consciously attempted to have hip-hop serve the revolutionary vanguard, the way soul did during the 1960s. Despite Public Enemy’s vast popularity among black and white youth audiences, their 1960s-style rhetoric raised old antagonisms from those further on the political right as well as mainstream African-American leaders concerned about both the group’s militancy and its obvious connections to Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam.

Chuck D clearly saw hip-hop as an alternative medium for black youth and their fellow travelers to access political and social reality as construed by Public Enemy. Nowhere was this more evident than on the song “Don’t Believe the Hype,” where Chuck D offers a compelling argument for media education. Chuck D characterizes mainstream media as misinformed and malicious in their distribution of misinformation. Chuck D’s narrative constitutes a counternarrative to mainstream attacks on the social and political commentary reflected in the work of the group. In an effort to democratize the mainstream critical establishment, the Public Enemy front man links his experiences to John Coltrane. Coltrane’s jazz explorations in the 1960s were also criticized by a biased and misinformed critical establishment. Chuck D embraces a nationalist argument that suggests that critiques of black popular culture are best performed by those immersed in the organic culture that produces it. Within Chuck D’s worldview, hip-hop represents the most natural environment in which to critique the social and political experiences of an urban-based African-American constituency. Black radio’s early rejection of hip-hop, excepting the few late-night programming slots given to well-known hip-hop DJs in the major markets, reflected the sentiments of the black middle class regarding hip-hop and in part reflected a historical trend among the black middle class regarding popular art forms that emerge from the black working-class experience.

But Public Enemy’s resuscitation of 1960s-style black political rhetoric was often problematic, particularly when considering that the group’s primary constituents were not likely to provide the type of critique that was necessary to realize Chuck D’s lofty goals. Chuck D’s politics were particularly problematic in the area of gender, where tracks like “She Watch Channel Zero” could have been used as a chorus for Reagan’s attacks on “welfare queens,” as the track suggested that black women who watch soap operas are partially to blame for the precarious predicament of black children. Public Enemy’s failure to adequately critique the ideals
they espoused was of course logical in the type of vacuum that their rhetoric was reproduced in. The erosion of communal exchange that marked the post–Civil Rights period, also denied the movement the ability to critique itself in ways that would allow it to be self-sustaining and progressive. Thus a younger generation of activists emerged, many of whom were not privy to the type of communal processes that were crucial to black political discourse prior to the Civil Rights movement, and they appropriated the ideological themes of the era without the benefit of critiquing these themes to make them more applicable to a contemporary context. The fact that groups like Public Enemy were unable to critique the sexism inherent to much of black political thought in the 1960s is particularly disheartening in that black women have been the most outspoken critics of the movement’s shortcomings, particularly in regard to gender issues. Unfortunately, Public Enemy’s political shortcomings were easy to ignore, as Greg Tate relates: “Were it not for the fact that Nation is the most hellacious and hilarious dance record of the decade, nobody but the converted would give two hoots about PE’s millenary desires.”

The release of It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back coincided with several industry initiatives that offered hip-hop much more accessibility and visibility. Two years after the release of Run-D.M.C.‘s landmark Raising Hell recording, many independent recording labels that featured hip-hop entered into distribution deals with corporate conglomerates. The Def Jam label’s sale to conglomerate CBS/Columbia was strikingly reminiscent of the conglomerate’s relationship with Gamble and Huff more than a decade earlier. With distribution outlets increased and cooperate labels having more money to spend on artist development, hip-hop began its growth as one of the more popular music genres. This despite all of the negative connotations associated with it within mainstream society. Never radio-friendly, hip-hop got a necessary promotional boost with the debut of Yo! MTV Raps on MTV in the fall of 1988. Music video opened hip-hop to an audience of mid-Americans youths, who relished in the subversive “otherness” that the music and its purveyors represented. By the time Gangsta rap (an often cartoonish portrayal of black masculinity, ghetto realism, and gangster sensibilities) became one of the most popular genres of hip-hop, a significant portion of the music was largely supported by young white Americans.

Despite such successful recordings as Fear of a Black Planet (1990) and Apocalypse ’91 ... The Enemy Strikes Black (1991), It Takes a Nation ..., would be the apex of politically infused hip-hop and Public Enemy’s popularity among black youth. The failure of explicit political discourse to remain an integral part of hip-hop was influenced by various dynamics. Placing a premium on lyrical content, artists like Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions featuring KRS-One, Paris, X-Clan, former Public Enemy member Professor Griff, and Michael Franti and the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy all failed to grasp the significance of producing music that would be considered danceable by the black masses they aimed to attract. As Tate surmised about Public Enemy’s first recording, many of these artists produced music that consistently “moved the crowd off the floor.” The simultaneous emergence of NWA (Niggas with Attitude), whose production by Dr. Dre effectively altered the hop-hop landscape by removing the industry focus away from the East Coast and New York specifically, should have been instructive to artists with explicit political designs. Lacking a cohesive ideology but possessing an accessible critique of poverty, economic exploitation, and police brutality in postindustrial Los Angeles, NWA recordings like “Fuck the Police,” from Straight Out of Compton (1988), ingratiated them to those who shared their experience and craved a funky beat. Ironically it was NWAs antipolice anthem that drew the most attention from federal agencies like the FBI and not the more ideologically sound rhetoric of groups like Public Enemy or Boogie Down Productions.

Ultimately, political hip-hop was undermined by hip-hop’s own internal logic that often privileged constant stylistic innovation, both in narrative and musical content, as a response
to intense commodification. Thus as Todd Boyd suggests, political hip-hop "seems to have functioned as a genre whose popularity had passed, instead of a sustained movement which connected both cultural artifacts and 'real' political events."³⁶ But political hip-hop was also challenged by efforts of segments of mainstream culture to control or "police" hip-hop, efforts that would ultimately transfer control of the genre away from its organic purveyors and limit access to the form in communal settings where alternative interpretations could be derived which countered mass-mediated presentations of the genre. These threats to hip-hop's ability to function as conduit for communal exchange came from those already entrusted to police black youth, the insurance industry and corporate America, the latter of which slowly began to continue their aborted effort to fully annex the black popular recording industry.

Fear of a Black Commodity: The Policing, Criminalization, and Commodification of Hip-Hop Culture

In November 1992, Spike Lee produced and directed the cinematic epic Malcolm X. The fact that the most visible icon of black political resistance over the past thirty years was the focus of a Hollywood film would suggest that the efforts of groups like Public Enemy and X-Clan had successfully altered the landscape of mainstream American culture. Only three years earlier another Spike Lee film, Do the Right Thing, which featured Public Enemy's now-classic recording "Fight the Power," was criticized for potentially stirring the black masses to violence in response to the film's vivid portrayal of race relations in a fictional Brooklyn neighborhood.³⁷ Several months before the release of Lee's Malcolm X, the city of Los Angeles exploded in violence in response to the acquittal of the police officers involved in the videotaped beating of black motorist Rodney King. On the surface the communal response to the highly controversial court decision further suggested that hip-hop had succeeded in producing a visible and influential political vanguard. But Malcolm X was instead released to much mainstream acclaim for the film, its director, and its star, Denzel Washington, who earned an Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of the black nationalist icon. The revolutionary vanguard that Lee, Public Enemy, Louis Farrakhan, and Malcolm X's memory supposedly inspired were instead to found "Rolling wit' Dre." While such a reality clearly suggests that the political expediency that some hip-hop artists tried to instill in black expressive culture had been subsumed by the economic interests of a cadre of middle-class black artists driven by the demands of corporate capitalism, it also reflected the limits placed on political expression in an era where public expressions of identity and self-determination are so readily commodified and mediated for mass consumption, particularly when such consumption could in fact distribute values contrary to those valued in mainstream culture.

Following the highly influential solo efforts of former NWA comrade Ice Cube, whose recordings AmerikkKa's Most Wanted (1990), Death Certificate (1991), and The Predator (1992) captured hip-hop's creative imagination, Dr. Dre released his first solo recording, The Chronic, in the autumn of 1992. Dr. Dre's musical ode to "good weed" and the self-styled lifestyles of postindustrial gangsters had all but solidified the Los Angeles area as the dominant creative and commercial force in hip-hop and the "G-Funk" of Dr. Dre and his proteges Snoop Doggy Dog and Warren G as the dominant production style. The underlying influences of G-Funk, or as it came to be known among mainstreams pundits, "gangsta rap," included narratives as diverse as the fiction of Iceberg Slim, the music of Parliament-Funkadelic, and Brian De Palma's 1983 remake of the film Scarface. Within contemporary black male culture, particularly that located within poverty-stricken urban spaces, the film had long been embraced as a contemporary example of a postimmigration attempt at pursuing the American Dream. Like the cocaine industry that framed the film's core themes, crack cocaine served a similar purpose in the real-life narratives of the young black men that the film appeals to. The culture
and an industry of crack's intimate relationship to the culture and industry of hip-hop would be realized with The Chronic and Dr. Dre's stirring production style.

The introduction of the G-Funk was largely framed by efforts of various social forces to curtail and control the popularity of hip-hop and its potential use as a conduit for oppositional discourses. Though Public Enemy's efforts to create a political insurgency for the 1980s were destined to fail because they existed beyond an actual political movement rooted in legitimate political concerns, and the efforts of NWA, while more closely aligned to sensibilities of black urban youth, ultimately lacked the political sophistication to be a legitimate threat to mainstream society, both efforts held the potential to galvanize popular resistance to some of mainstream culture's core sensibilities. Nowhere was this more evident than the response from law enforcement agencies in the aftermath of NWA's "Fuck tha Police." The circulation of the recording, which critiques police violence against black youth, instigated an unprecedented response from the assistant director of the FBI, who charged the group with advocating violence against law enforcement officers. The notoriety of the song was used against the group as law enforcement officers in several cities openly challenged the group to perform the song in concert with threats of detaining them or shutting down their shows.  

The policing of NWA reflected an increasingly common trend to criminalize hip-hop artists, their audiences, and the music itself. This seemingly random, incidental acts of violence and criminal activity occurring at hip-hop concerts were characterized as social intolerable communal acts capable of destroying the civility of mainstream society. Very often these random exchanges were instigated by the treatment that young concertgoers received from arena security, as many venues forced ticket holders to be searched for drugs, weapons, or any other paraphernalia that could be defined as counter to mainstream sensibilities. As Tricia Rose relates:

The public school system, the police, and the popular media perceive and construct young African Americans as a dangerous internal element in urban America: an element that, if allowed to roam freely, will threaten the social order: an element that must be policed. Since rap music is understood as the predominate symbolic voice of black urban males, it heightens this sense of threat and reinforces dominant white middle-class objections to urban black youths who do not aspire to (but are haunted by) white middle-class standards.  

Mainstream reaction to hip-hop concerts, particularly the reactions of law enforcement agencies, was rooted in deeply held historical concerns about the congregation of African Americans in public spaces. These concerns were heightened and legitimized within mainstream society in the post-World War II period as African American youth began to assert themselves socially, culturally, and politically and in the process publicly question various forms of social authority that countered their own desires. Thus the criminalization of African American youth in mass media contributed to the type of social paranoia already existent in American society, particularly since most major concert venues were in locations most suitable for access by white middle-class suburbanites. Thus in the eyes of many suburban whites, hip-hop concerts in places like Long Island's Nassau Coliseum represented a temporary threat to the day-to-day stability of white suburban life. The historic policing of public spaces where blacks often congregated often had a profound impact on the ability of African Americans to build and maintain community, and such was the case when young African Americans congregated at the local clubs and concert venues where the core values of the "hip-hop" generation were distributed and critiqued.

Despite such efforts to curtail community building within the hip-hop "community," hip-hop concerts remained a thriving industry for various promoters, performers, and venue operators, though increased collusion on the part of venue operators, the insurance industry, and
law enforcement agencies began to erode acceptable public spaces for an art form, itself predicated on the lack of viable public space in black communities. The insurance industry had a particularly compelling impact by raising venue insurance rates for hip-hop concerts in relations to the public paranoia associated with hip-hop performances, in effect making the promotion of such events a distinct financial risk. Common strategies included the denial of insurance for any promoter who promoted a show where “significant” violence erupted or even a tenfold increase in the minimum insurance allowed to cover a hip-hop event. What was insidious about this practice is that the criminalization of hip-hop in mainstream society effectively helped mask racist efforts to deny black expression, as venue operators and insurance companies regularly facilitated concerts by white acts whose concerts also featured random and incidental acts of criminality, without the constraints placed on hip-hop artists. As Tricia Rose suggests, such efforts mirrored previous efforts to control the influence of jazz music via cabaret laws.35

As the number of venues willing to present hip-hop concerts evaporated, mass media increasingly dominated the presentation of not only mainstream critiques of hip-hop, but hip-hop itself. The social and public policing of hip-hop and its audiences coincided with the corporate annexation of the hip-hop industry and a subsequent period of intense commodification. Increasingly as programs like MTV’s Yo! MTV Raps and major recording labels like SONY and Warner Brothers became the primary outlets to access hip-hop discourse, the discourse itself was subject to social controls rooted in corporate attempts to mainstream hip-hop for mass consumption. So successful were these efforts initially that Oakland-based rapper MC Hammer could legitimately claim Michael Jackson’s “King of Pop” title, as he attempted to do upon the release of his 1991 recording Too Legit to Quit.34 Part and parcel of Hammer’s success was the mainstreaming of the iconography of black youth culture—Hammer’s clothes and hairstyles were as appealing to young white as his music—and the distribution of narratives that were palatable to mainstream sensibilities even if they were often nonsensical.

But hip-hop’s notoriety was also a stimulus for its own commercialization as recording labels carefully distributed recordings and videos to be accessed via alternative video outlets like the Black Entertainment Channel’s (BET) Rap City or viewer request channels like The Box, who were more willing to present videos from artists who rejected mainstream impositions. This was particularly effective in the marketing of “gangsta rap” as the subgenre’s notoriety and the notoriety of its artists correlated directly to recording sales. Like the jazz performers that Norman Mailer so eloquently describes in his essay “The White Negro,” the apolitical “G,” who stood at the center of the G-funk universe, proved attractive to young whites who viewed hip-hop as a conduit for oppositional expression and the “G” as a model for oppositional behavior. Via hip-hop music and videos, the antisocial behavior of “fictional” black drug dealers was embraced by many young whites as a mode of social resistance, though this influence was manifested in stylistic acumen and not political mobilization.

Hip-hop artists became the spokespersons for stylistic developments within black youth culture and hip-hop the vehicle for which these styles would be commodified for mass consumption both within and beyond mainstream culture. Clothing designers and companies as diverse as Timberland, Starter, Tommy Hilfiger, and even haute couture designers like Versace benefited from the visibility of hip-hop artists who willingly used their bodies, music, and videos—often without remuneration—to market these products. Of course the attraction of black youth to these products is the manifestation of complex identity issues where black youth equate social status with mass consumerism. Much of what is today a multibillion-dollar industry was stabilized when the black middle-class entrepreneurial spirit collided with corporate capitalist desire as hip-hop artists and fellow travelers begin to exploit hip-hop’s mainstream influence for financial gain beyond recording contracts. Thus black entrepre-
neurs like Karl Kani and hip-hop artists like the Wu-Tang Clan, who started a line of clothing called Wu Wear, became petit bourgeois exponents of hip-hop's popularity. These developments mirrored changes from within the recording industry itself that would have tremendous impact on hip-hop culture.

Reflecting the furious consolidation that has taken place in the entertainment industry, more than 80 percent of all music recorded in the United States was controlled by six major corporate entities. Black popular forms accounted for approximately 25 percent of the total sales of recorded music. Exploiting the black nationalist/capitalist rhetoric among the black working class and middle-class elite, still marginalized even after two decades of Civil Rights legislation, many corporate entities would turn "ghetto pop" producers into contemporary ghetto merchants. Arista/BMG, for example, run by Clive Davis, was once home to three distinct boutique labels run by Antonio Reid and Kenneth Edmonds (LaFace), Sean "Puffy" Combs (Bad Boy) and until recently, Dallas Austin (Rowdy). While Quincy Jones and Gamble and Huff were seasoned songwriters, producers, and businesspersons, many of the ghetto pop vanguard were only a few years removed from high school and lacked any definitive critical perspectives beyond the marketing of their respective boutique labels. Many of these artist/producers remain distant from the real seats of power within their respective corporate homes—power that could be defined along the lines of point or sole ownership of recording masters, control over production and promotional costs, and the authority to hire and replace internal staff members. In many regards, many of these ghetto merchants are little more than glorified managers or overseers, involved in what was little more than a twenty-first century plantation operation.

Stephen Haymes's work on urban pedagogy and resistance constructs a broader paradigm to interpret the connection between contemporary hip-hop and mass consumer culture. In his work Haymes suggests that the intense commodification of African-American culture and the changes in the consumption habits of the black masses is rooted in structural changes linked to the process of American Fordism. Historically linked to efforts to raise workers' wages as a vehicle to increase consumption, Fordism is the concept around which much of the industrial labor force has been structured throughout the twentieth century, as higher wages and concepts of leisure helped promote the burgeoning advertising industry, which emerged to help stimulate and institutionalize consumptionist desire in industrial workers. The consumptionist ethic became as valuable as the work ethic in the construction of Americanness. But as Haymes further suggests, the failure of the Fordist model to counter market saturation in the post-Civil Rights era led to the emergence of a subsequent model, which he refers to as neo-Fordism, designed to both integrate the black populace into mainstream markets and increase consumption. As he states, "Unlike the strategy of Fordism, which sought to fuel demand by integrating the industrial working class via higher wages, neo-Fordism aimed, through an expanded welfare state, to fuel demand and economic growth by also integrating poor and working-class blacks into the American Dream."

Of course much of this state-sanctioned expansion collapsed with the emergence of the Reagan right in the early 1980s, though the logic of neo-Fordism continued as the advertising industry increasingly became the vehicle by which not only goods and services were promoted but lifestyles and identities were constructed and consumed. This was partially achieved through the process of niche marketing, where specific products were aimed at various populations based on income, social status, race, gender, and ethnicity. What is important here is that individuals no longer consumed products, but also the social status and lifestyle that particular products represented. Accordingly, the high visibility of couture fashions and other emblems of conspicuous wealth within hip-hop served to stimulate desire and consumption that transcended the structural realities of many black urban youth; processes that were often construed as forms of resistance against the invisibility and misery associated
with black urban life. Not surprisingly, such marketing trends occur during an era when much of black popular expression has in fact been annexed by the engines of corporate capitalism and thus black popular expression is placed in the service of stimulating consumption among the very masses for whom the American Dream was inaccessible throughout much of the twentieth century.

In less than a decade, hip-hop culture had been transformed from a subculture primarily influenced by the responses of black urban youth to postindustrialization into a billion-dollar industry in which such responses were exploited by corporate capitalist and the petit bourgeois desires of the black middle class. The latter developments offered little relief to the realities of black urban youth who remained hip-hop's core constituents, though the economic successes of hip-hop artists and the black entrepreneurs associated with contemporary black popular music were often used to counter public discussions about the negative realities of black urban life. Economic issues aside, corporate control of black popular expression, often heightened the contradictions inherent in music produced across an economically deprived and racially delimited urban landscape. As Rose relates:

In the case of rap music, which takes place under intense public surveillance ... contradictions regarding class, gender, and race are highlighted, decontextualized, and manipulated so as to destabilize rap's resistive elements. Rap's resistive, yet contradictory, positions were waged in the face of a powerful, media-supported construction of black urban America as a source of urban social ills that threaten social order. Rappers' speech acts are heavily shaped by music industry demands, sanctions, and prerogatives. These discursive wars are waged in the face of sexist and patriarchal assumptions that support and promote verbal abuse of black women. 60

Within this context, discourse(s) of resistance were undermined by narratives with privileged patriarchal, sexist, and even misogynistic ideals, that were themselves taken out of their organic contexts. In the past, socially problematic narratives were critiqued and distributed according to communal sensibilities in a process that maintained the contextual integrity in which the narratives were produced. Ironically the most visible critiques of hip-hop and ghetto pop emit from black middle-class groups who are in part responsible for the fractured quality of social and political narratives produced by black urban youths in the postindustrial city.

Postindustrial Nostalgia: Mass Media, Memory, and Community

In the spring of 1994, talk show host Arsenio Hall ended his successful run as host of The Arsenio Hall Show, a nighttime talk and variety show. Only a year earlier, Hall had celebrated the fifth anniversary of his show with a rousing rendition of Sly Stone's "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" led by soul singer Bobby Womack and soul recluse Sly Stone himself. The song's performance was a metaphor for the show itself, as the show served as a vehicle for the presentation of black popular culture on black popular culture's own terms. Though Hall's own hyperblack antics often broached the worst stereotypes associated with black men, including his insatiable desire to fawn over white women guests, Hall and his audiences reveled in the insincerities that mainstream America was not privy but was so willing to consume. For a six-year period, The Arsenio Hall Show remained a fixture in African-American households, precisely because it represented a link to community and black expressive culture, as Hall used his own memories of black Cleveland as a springboard to personify contemporary black anxieties and concerns through humor. The Arsenio Hall Show was crucial to the hip-hop community because Hall allowed his show to be a forum for their concerns, not just as performers.
but as public spokespersons and critics for their communities. Thus it was not unusual for Hall to interview the likes of KRS-One or female hip-hop artist YO-YO about the complexities of hip-hop and black urban life. Like Soul Train a generation earlier, Hall’s show was an audiovisual remnant to seminal black public spaces that promoted communal exchange and critique. Though Hall’s interviews often lacked depth, he covered an astounding diversity of issues and personalities.

Hall’s late-night television show ended as Spike Lee premiered his seventh film, his first since Malcolm X appeared in late 1992. Personified by cultural workers like filmmaker Lee, the black middle class responded to the proliferation of ghetto imagery and “ghetto pop” that appeared in commodified form on television, film, and black radio stations with a nostalgic return to the 1970s. Lee’s 1994 film Crooklyn is an example of what I call postindustrial nostalgia, loosely described as a nostalgia that has its basis in the postindustrial transformations of black urban life during the 1970s. While the post-cultural texts of the 1970s have proved to be huge commodities for this generation of black cultural producers, I maintain that these nostalgic turns yearn more for the historic period they consume as opposed to the profit motives that inspire their appropriation and reanimation, as the decade of the 1970s marked the increasing tensions of a burgeoning postindustrial economy and the continued erosion of the Black Public Sphere. It is the realization of those tensions that frame the major concerns of the largely autobiographical Crooklyn.

Perhaps the opening sequence of Crooklyn best suggests Lee’s focus for the film. Minus Lee’s usual bravado and self-indulged wit, the film opens with the sounds of Russell Thompkins Jr.’s stirring falsetto from the recording, “People Make the World Go ‘Round.” Very clearly a film more about people than ideas, community than ideology, Crooklyn places the black family and community at the center of the film. Notions of people and community resonate throughout the film from the imagery of the opening sequence to continuous musical reminders like the Stylistics’s “People Make the World Go ‘Round” and Sly Stone’s “Everyday People.” Indeed as the closing credits begin to roll and we are treated to a “Soul Train line” circa 1975, one is reminded of the centrality of music and dance to black life and of the communal purposes such cultural activities have historically played for people within the African-American diaspora. Films like Lee’s Crooklyn or Robert Townsend’s nostalgic The Four Dimensions were clearly intended to counter the influence of ghetto-centric filmmaking as represented by New Jack City, Boyz N the Hood, and Menace II Society.

Crooklyn introduces us to the Carmichael family as they attempt to negotiate the schisms of the postindustrial urban North and an eroding public sphere, as such schisms begin to threaten their multiethnic Brooklyn community. The Carmichael family members represent animate metaphors for the realities of postindustrial Black America. Both mother and father figures represent complex issues regarding the location of black women and men in the workforce, the potential effects of integration, and the challenges faced by organic cultural producers, who can no longer be sustained by the community they live in and have little or no value in the marketplace. Meanwhile, the unbridled fascination of the Carmichael children when confronting black images on the television in the form of Soul Train and Afro-sheen commercials portends the uncritical consumption of black images and sounds that stifle contemporary black youth sensibilities. The family patriarch, Woody Carmichael, is in many ways a living embodiment of the marginalization of high African-American art in the black community as well as a useful example of the lack of public spaces provided specifically for jazz music and jazz musicians. Woody confronts a world where the valued practice of African-American musicianship has given way to the demands of a recording industry that values less experimental and more formulaic approaches to popular music as well as an eroding public sphere that can no longer economically sustain jazz musicians.

The changes in the recording industry during that era are reflected in the two-volume
soundtrack of classic soul from the late 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by corporate efforts to annex the black popular music industry. The two-decades-old catalogs of artists like Marvin Gaye, Teddy Pendergrass, and the O'Jays sold more than one hundred thousand units apiece in early 1995 to a largely black middle class consumer base weary of contemporary black popular music. Black radio would in turn respond to this commercial shift by radically changing programming formats to acquiesce to the taste and buying power of their middle-class audiences. Under the banner of “Classic Soul and Progressive R&B,” many urban contemporary stations would begin programming classic soul recordings with upscale and less offensive (read: more adult) contemporary R&B. RKO Broadcasting, in a fairly interesting and innovative move, would purchase a rival station that exclusively featured “ghetto pop,” transfer many of their younger DJs to the newly acquired station, and change the initial station's format to the “Classic Soul and Progressive R&B” format. This of course gave the parent company the opportunity to nurture two distinctly different audiences bases.39

Within the context of the black popular music tradition, this trend toward “nostalgia programming” provided invaluable access to a digitized aural Chitlin’ Circuit for younger generations of artists and audiences. Part of this curiosity was peaked initially by the use of classic soul and soul jazz samples by innovative hip-hop producers who may have been introduced to the musical texts as kids. Within the context of a middle-class critique of contemporary black popular culture, the emergence of “postindustrial” narratives offers few lasting solutions to the continued erosion of African-American diasporic relations. By embracing the soul narratives of twenty years ago, the black middle class yearns for a social and cultural landscape that they were, in part, responsible for transforming. In addition, while there should be some balance in the marketing and production of black popular music forms, ghetto pop, and hip-hop, particularly that which is derived from the real-life tension of young urban life, deserve to be supported. The production of many of these ghetocentric narratives partially reflects the black middle class’ refusal to address these issues within the context of African-American diasporic relations.

Postindustrial nostalgia was not limited to the social imagination of the black middle class, however. It was also a construct of contemporary black youth, who attempted to reconstruct community, history, and memory by embracing communal models from previous historical eras. The erosion of the Black Public Sphere provided the chasm in which the hip-hop generation was denied access to the bevy of communally derived social, aesthetic, cultural, and political sensibilities that undergirded much of black communal struggle throughout the twentieth century, fracturing the hip-hop generation and the generations that will follow from the real communal history of the African-American diaspora. It is within this context that mass culture fills the void of both community and history for contemporary black youth, as it becomes the terrain in which contemporary hip-hop artists conflate history and memory in an effort to reconstruct community. The recording “Things Done Changed” from the debut release of the late Notorious B.I.G. (aka Biggie Smalls) is such an example.40 Within his narrative, the Notorious B.I.G. reconstructs a community where young children engaged in games in various public spaces and where a communal ethic existed to support activities like cookouts and block parties. Though the artist was raised in the postindustrial era in a black urban community that was not immune to poverty, crime, or random violence, he chose to highlight the type of communal exchanges that dominated his childhood experiences. Even in his memories of hanging on street corners and drinking beer, he chose to forget the high unemployment and school dropout rates that black urban youth have faced for the past twenty-five years, effectively affording many black youths of Notorious B.I.G.'s generation the time to hang out on the street corners.

The point here is not to question the accuracy of the narrative but to note that it contains a sense of community that the author clearly finds missing within black urban life in the
1990s. Even more telling is his reading of how these changing dynamics have altered familial relations as a segment of black youth prey on their parents and other adults within the community. This aspect of communal erosion is so significant that many black adults have chosen to ignore decades of police brutality and have subjected their communities to an intensified police presence in order to control black youth. While Notorious B.I.G.’s narrative fails to convey some of the complexities of this reality, he clearly articulates a sense of community collapse and suggests that this collapse is partially connected to a generational divide within the African-American diaspora. While “Things Done Changed” adequately documents the impact of community erosion, other hip-hop artists used other modes of nostalgia to advance solutions to the plight of contemporary blacks.

The release of Arrested Development’s 3 Years 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life of in 1992 represented a challenge to the status quo in hip-hop as its Afrocentric “grunge” style distanced them from both gangsta rap and the political narratives of Public Enemy and KRS-One. As Todd Boyd suggests, Arrested Development shared its context with the emergence of a generation of black collegiates who used African garb and hairstyles to articulate their connection to the African continent. As the group’s name suggests, many of the recording’s tracks were critical of the impact of migration and urbanization on the black community. Throughout the recording, but especially on tracks like “People Everyday” and “Tennessee,” the group’s lead vocalist articulated a notion of difference within the African-American diaspora that has its basis in class difference but is articulated as a difference between black rural and urban culture. The recording represented a clear revision of historic class sensibilities that posited southern migrants as the primary threat to black middle-class development in the urban North and Midwest. Within Arrested Development’s framework, urbanization had clearly destroyed traditional black communal and familial sensibilities.

The track “Tennessee” perhaps best exemplified Arrested Development’s use of nostalgia to counter the impact of urbanization on the black community. The track, which shares its post-migration theme with songs like the Gladys Knight and the Pips classic “Midnight Train to Georgia,” represents an open rejection of black urban life. As many black creative artists and intellectuals ponder a vision of communal empowerment on par with the role “Promised Land” migration narratives played in the early to mid-twentieth century and emancipation narratives played in the antebellum period, Arrested Development lead vocalist Speech asserts that the American South will be the focus of the next stage of communal movement. Using Tennessee as a symbol for this movement, Speech articulates his concern for his peers and his desire to reconnect with an African-American spiritual past. Speech’s use of the American South as a metaphor for black homespaces is of course nothing new. As Farah Jasmine Griffin and Ralph Ellison both suggested, many migrants attempted to re-create southern homespaces within industrialized urban spaces, but the migrants were also clear about their memories of the Deep South’s racial oppression, violence, and segregation.

As a postmigration narrative, “Tennessee” differs from traditional migration narratives in its suggestion that traditional black communal and familial values had been lost precisely because the most malicious aspects of the American South are no longer present to galvanize the black community as witnessed in the charcoal drawing of a lynching that serves as a subtext for the song’s music video. But to read “Tennessee” as a rejection of the hard-fought political and social gains won as a corollary to mass migration and urbanization is to misread the song’s text. Given the proliferation of Afrocentric iconography that was present in the group’s music videos and publicity photos, “Tennessee” clearly represents a contemporary metaphor for the African continent, as is suggested in the song’s chorus, which states, “Take me to another place / Take me to another land...” While a mass-migration movement to the African continent is perhaps more politically credible in the late twentieth century than it was in Marcus Garvey’s era, Speech is not suggesting a return to Africa but instead posits the
American South and its physical terrain as the connection to forms of African spiritually that have been lost to migration and urbanization. The point here is not whether a return to the South would stimulate economic development in the black community, decrease homelessness, or affect public policy in any way, but rather how African spirituality could be one of the vehicles by which community could be reconstructed.

Several artists would embrace various modes of nostalgia to reconstruct a seminal relationship within the African-American diaspora. For instance, bisexual artist Mc'Shell Ndegocello uses the iconography of black plantation life to affirm same-sex love in a period of heightened homophobia. On the track "Mary Magdalene" from her recording Peace Beyond Passion, she states, "I imagine us jumpin' the broom." The phrase "jumpin' the broom" was initially used by enslaved blacks in the ante-bellum period to signify marriage between slaves, when the legality of such was severely challenged. Here the phrase is appropriated to signify lesbian marriage in an era when the idea of homosexual and lesbian marriages is being sharply criticized and attacked in mainstream culture. Ndegocello's use of the symbolic imagery of black marriage at once reaffirms her status in the African-American diaspora, even as black homosexuals and lesbians are being marginalized within that community, while linking the struggles of contemporary homosexuals and lesbians to the African-American tradition of social protest and resistance.

In another example, hip-hop artist Method Man appropriated the melody of the Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell's classic "You're All I Need to Get By" for his recording "I'll Be There for You: You're All I Need to Get By." The recording, which featured contemporary soul vocalist Mary J. Blige, used the Ashford and Simpson composition to reaffirm heterosexual relationships in the postindustrial era. The recording, which represented one of the more popular affirmations of the continuity of African-American expressive culture, highlights the role of popular music as a primary conduit to express various continuities within the African-American diaspora. Such continuities were perhaps undermined when the Coca-Cola Co. used both the original Gaye/Terrell recording and Method Man/Blige update in a commercial to signify a generation gap within the black community, a generation gap that was bridged according to the company, because of the continuity of Coca-Cola in the lives of black families. The commercial again highlights the increasingly intimate relationship between memory, history, and the marketplace.

Driven by his own realization of the commercial value of ghetto narratives and his own middle-class and nationalistic sensibilities, Spike Lee has been one of the few contemporary black cultural workers to successfully integrate the often oppositional taste within both urban working-class/underclass locales and segments of the black middle class. The first volume of the Crooklyn soundtrack contains a hip-hop recording from a trio of solo artists, Buckshot, Special Ed, and Masta Ace, who combine their efforts under the banner of the Crooklyn Dodgers. The recording entitled "Crooklyn" is a stunning acknowledgment of postindustrial transformation within black urban spaces as mediated through the increased presence of mass culture. Within the context of the "Crooklyn Dodger" narrative, the erosion of black public life is represented by television sitcoms, in an interesting conflation of contemporary communal crises, 1970s television icons, and designer fashions. The memories of the traditional Black Public Sphere of the early 1970s are contained, specifically in the narrative of a black sitcom like What's Happening. In one regard, this narrative serves to deconstruct romantic recollections of black public life, while also identifying the pervasive impact of mass culture on the lives of African-Americans. Consistent with hip-hop's own project, the artists use mass-market-produced imagery and meanings to parlay their narrative concerns.

The recording, which is sandwiched between broadcast accounts of the 1955 World Series, including Jackie Robinson at bat, highlights a phenomenon perhaps organic to post-Civil Rights generations of African American South. While memories of national and international
events have been mass-mediated in the twentieth century through print organs, radio, and later television—how many people remember World War II via Life magazine’s coverage?: Crooklyn highlights how some of the seminal memories of community life are mass-mediated via television for the generation of black youth that emerged immediately after the Civil Rights era. My point here is not to delegitimize these memories, particularly given the role television has played in socializing African-American youth since the early 1970s, but to suggest that contemporary efforts to reconstrcut community would most likely also be mediated through mass culture, though not necessarily via television.

Notes

1. George discusses the birth of Quiet Storm radio in The Death of Rhythm and Blues, 131–35, 172–73.
2. George defines “retrorenaissance” as black music that embraces the past to “create passionate, fresh expressions, and institutions.” The Death of Rhythm and Blues, 186–88.
3. My commentary here is not of an effort to engage in debates about welfare reform, but to acknowledge the bureaucratic realties associated with many federal programs, particularly in their ineffectiveness in countering the general misery associated with black urban life.
5. Mollenkopf, Dual City, 8.
6. Goldberg, “Polluting the Body Politic,” Racism, the City and the State, 52.
7. Ibid., 51–52.
8. Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged, 60.
10. Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue, 129–30.
11. Davis, City of Quartz, 311.
12. West, Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times, 122.
13. Davis, City of Quartz, 304–305.
15. Davis, City of Quartz, 306.
17. Davis, City of Quartz, 293–300.
18. Rose, Black Noise, 11.
19. Ibid., 61.
21. The litigation between Chic and Sugar Hill records over the use of “Good Times” was just the first of many celebrated sampling cases, of which the 1991 legal battle between artists Biz Markie and singer/songwriter Gilbert O’Sullivan is the most notorious. Many artists have dealt with this problem by simply giving sampled artists songwriting credit, though given the history of pop music, these credits simply enhanced the financial coffers of corporate entities who controlled the publishing rights.
23. Manning Marable offers a credible argument in his text How Captivation Underdeveloped Black America, that the increased rates of black male incarceration is related to the use of prison inmates in the maintenance of municipal works and services. Marable believes that the use of prison inmates in such a way is representative of a modern form of enslavement.
25. Tate, Flyboy in the Buttermilk, 125.
26. The works of black women like Angela Davis, Kathleen Cleaver, and Elaine Brown exemplify the type of necessary critique and reflection that needs to take place to more adequately consider the success and failures of the Civil Rights/Black Power era.
27. Tate, Flyboy in the Buttermilk, 126.
28. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 126.
33. Ibid., 130–33.
34. Despite a recording career that has been inconsistent at best and well-publicized financial problems, MC Hammer remains the best-selling hip-hop artist of all time.

35. During the summer of 1996 Combs renegotiated his deal with Arista/BMG, giving him ownership of his label's recording masters over a period of time. At the time of Combs's deal Reid and Edmonds were rumored to renegotiate along the same terms, issues of autonomy and product ownership were at the core of Andre Harrell's severed relationship with Uptown/MCA, the label he founded in the autumn of 1995. Harrell was subsequently chosen to lead Motown into the twenty-first century with considerably more autonomy and prestige than was offered at the boutique he founded in 1986, though his failure to produce new acts led to his forced resignation in August 1997.

36. Haynes, Race, Culture and the City, 36–39.

37. Ibid., 37.

38. Rose, Black Noise, 104.

39. RKO owns both Hot 97 and Kiss FM in New York City. Hot 97, which is dedicated to a twenty-four-hour ghetto rap and hip-hop format, has also brought in pop and R&B artists, including former Yo! MTV Raps hosts Dr. Dre and Ed Lover, to host segments of their programming. Ed and Dre, as they are affectionately known, are the station's morning drive-time hosts. WBLS-FM, the only black-owned station in the market, responded to these shifts only after RKO's experiment proved successful.


42. I am thinking here of works like Sami Zimmt's Home, Cornel West's Prophetic Fragments, and Spike Lee's film Crooklyn and Clockers, which all consider the lack of communal vision in the aftermath of the migratory movement.

43. Arrested Development, "Tennessee," 3 Years, 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life of ... (Chrysalis 1992)

44. Ibid.


46. The Crooklyn Dodgers, "Crooklyn," Music From the Motion Picture Crooklyn (MCA 1994).

References


