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Hearing #BlackLivesMatter: The Soundtrack of Rhetorical Resistance and Levels of Agency

“He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face”—W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

“[. . .] You sang:  
*Walk togedder, chillen,*  
*Dontcha git weary.* [. . .]”

The strong men keep a-comin’ on  
 The strong men git stronger. . . .”

—Sterling Brown, “Strong Men”

Patrick Sullivan reminds us of the crucial relationship between those who teach, those who learn, and the impact of such strong connections: “the need for institutions that work for the public good and promote equity and social justice” are not behind us but are “perhaps more important now than they have ever been” (327). Sullivan challenges student/teacher-scholar roles and relationships to expand by embracing the activist title. How is the construct of the student/teacher/scholar/activist deconstructing injustices and why is it important to recognize agency in different manifestations? Both questions are taken up inside and outside school walls. The effects from injudicious government policies and excessive police force resulting in African American killings spawned a movement: #BlackLivesMatter. In the wake of this racialized civil and political injustice, which is far from “new” for Black and Brown bodies, many people reach for creative outlets to use their voice, including those inside the academic walls; some look toward Hip Hop for protest songs, activist strategies, and acknowledgements of value of Black life in America. During these times of digital savviness and social regression, the need to identify rhetorical resistance is important, not just as a kairotic exigency but also as an engagement in critical awareness for all persons including student/teacher/scholar/activist.

In this paper, I argue rhetorical resistance is exemplified in multiple levels of agency and rationalized as a tool for civic engagement that deconstructs white,<sup>1</sup> male patriarchal epistemes. Rhetorical resistance is a rhetorical moment that (en)acts agency

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<sup>1</sup> I am purposefully not capitalizing white to not give the word and its connotations power as opposed to Black which struggled to be capitalized in recognition of our personhood.

upon a specific discourse community by means of being consciously aware of and responding to imposing factors such as exigency, audience, topoi, discourse community, and kairos. Rhetorical resistance, as I theorize it here, is intended to usurp dominant beliefs, structures, and/or practices of the discourse the writer, the text, or the audience is already functioning within consciously interrupting inhabited spaces effectively and rhetorically. We can see this stratification of resistance if we look towards Hip Hop discourse; this lens provides us a means of responding, provoking, and engaging in (or with) the #BlackLivesMatter movement which pushes against hegemonic structures, ideologies, and actions. I use Hip Hop discourse as a tool to deconstruct methods of resistance and acts of agency within #BLM and Black communities. More specifically, I explore the relationship of Hip Hop discourse and the student/teacher/scholar/activist within nontraditional frameworks of biorhetorics and vernacular literacies—including the hashtag—from print, digital, and physical standpoints. This position expands Marilyn Cooper's construction of agency, and Jared Sexton's notion of Social life and Social death while also interpolating Gramsci's use of the "intellectual" as a counter-cultural public figure. Within this framework, I also consider historical oppressions (and impacts) on the Black body as noted by Joy DeGruy and Sally Hadden as it expands the concept of rhetorical resistance in hopes of broadening future outcomes for the field and challenging how we can define social action and agency.

### **I've Been Framed: Theoretical Framework of Rhetorical Resistance**

Taking a look at what resistance and agency means, I look toward Marilyn Cooper's "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted" as she notes the importance of individual agency is being comprised of two important characteristics: (I) open responsiveness to others and environment; (II) the engagement in the invitation to listen "as agents in persuasion" (420). Cooper argues that individuals create meaning through a response of action and the process of consequences that stem from the conscious acts; thus, the exchange between thought, action, and consequence is the active meaning making of agency in the rhetorical situation. For Cooper, agents consciously reflect on his or her actions thus exhibiting goals and plans. However, Cooper states "their agency does not arise from their conscious mental acts [. . .] Agency instead is based in individuals' lived knowledge" (421). So, although there is this multilevel development of agency occurring, agents are not aware of all individual echelons. Although Cooper's definition is an intriguing perspective of the individual agent, I believe there is more to this scope of agency.

Hence, this explication still leaves me with some questions: How can this really be said for all persons when experience differs so greatly between persons? Yes, conscious actions are the product of conscious, reflective agents. And yes, conscious, reflective agents do exhibit goals and plans. But the actions of the agent, i.e. agency, *can* rise from "conscious mental acts" specifically *because* they are lived experiences. For instance, one's biological composition qualifies him or her to be predisposition to a variety of social, cultural, geographical, political, monetary, and behavioral situations. This agent, then, would be fully aware—on some level—that his or her experience is a difference of occurrence because of his or her difference to the "standard" put in place by those in power.

Let's explore biorhetorics as a possibility and rationale of difference further. By difference I am mostly referring to difference of one's subject position, most commonly difference through biological factors. Exploring the potentiality of biorhetorics as a framework allows me to open another avenue of discussion for the traumas and violences imposed on Black and Brown bodies. Both #BLM and Hip Hop discourses, as an advocate, explicitly disrupt those in power—and the systems they put in place—by exposing the ways in which hegemonic forces take advantage of Black and Brown bodies and their communities; this is initially done by drawing attention to the physical body. Henceforth, when we highlight the physical body and the difference of experience deriving from the physical body, we are also implicitly highlighting biological difference. Thus, understanding that biological ruptures create disjunctures in time and space allowing the possibility of multi-leveled configurations of rhetorical resistance and agency. Biorhetorics, albeit from non-traditional form, provides a framework for deconstructing these agitations of hegemonic spaces, ideologies, and violences in their most organic form.

Traditionally, biorhetorics combines “biology” and “rhetoric” as lexical terminology, academic discourse and theory of practical application. Stephen Pain asserts, “Biorhetorics is an applied form of rhetoric for actual usage in the life sciences” (755). Moreover, according to Pain, biorhetorics is possible by the presence of these three stages: (1) rhetoric with a purpose; (2) symbolic rhetoric; and (3) rhetoric designed for one time, one space, one organism (760-65). For instance, all organisms go through a process in which DNA or RNA (the essential coding structures for developing and continuing life) becomes replicated or transcribed, respectively. During that process, a number of different structures have various roles (some related to copying and some not). However, during this process a number of things could also change—even minutely—those very coding structures thus causing natural genetic mutations resulting in differing biological genotypes and phenotypes like having curly instead of straight hair, brown eyes instead of blue, or an undeveloped arm resulting from DDT (a pesticide) exposure, tumors, or cancer (Frum, Deb, and Deb). Mutations can result from genetic conditions or environmental factors like UV rays, which, coincidentally, lead to a spectrum of melanin concentration from person to person; the production of melanin leads to the physical appearance of the Black/Brown gradient, along with other factors. Organisms, down to their genetic coding, have a specific fingerprint at one point during its continual cyclical evolution. Each person, each body, is different on a minuet level. Pain's description of an innate “language” or rhetoric enabling communication between cells during genetic coding inevitably effect the outcome of one's life and resulting experience like trauma, denial, or rememory.

In a similar fashion, Pain mentions that there is an added dimension of a rhetorical framework to experiences of life. This dimension lends itself to ask at what point is rhetoric consuming or creating mode(s) of agency (by way of communication) for life, particularly for Black and Brown life. The body is a physical medium that signals rhetorical language and experience. Kristie Fleckenstein, furthermore, argues that biorhetorics is “a discourse of bodysigns” (761). For Fleckenstein, biorhetorics “offers the possibility of effecting change by positioning us within the ambiguous interplay of materiality and semiosis” (761). This applicable and rhetorical framework now speaks to a larger, more general level of bodies yet remains specific enough to highlight particular

genetic modifications communicating meaning between nonverbal signifiers. The role of agency becomes embedded within the self and being. The importance or the role of “*bio-*” or *life* quickly becomes the emphasis. But what is to be considered as life? How do we address life? In what context does life become denied or protected? What qualities deem life acceptable?

Using biorhetorics as a framework to explicate the use of the body, being careful to include all its differences genetically and superficially, as a rhetorical tool, which allows us to deconstruct language that is “mutually entangled in a nonlinear weave of cause and effect. We can know them [body, language, and sign(s)] and live them only at a point where they blur” causes us to push this idea of biorhetoric as a framework (Fleckenstein 762). Black and Brown bodies are constantly linked to methods of resistance regardless if it is verbally expounding because the experience of difference challenges views of agency and power. If we look at images from a Klan rally in Memphis Tennessee—much like the recent racialized and violent demonstration in Anaheim, California—we can see a police line *facing* Black bodies as they protest and exercise their right to free speech. However, it is the placement of bodies that describes the sociopolitical atmosphere. The environment described by Jessica Garraway, who writes for Deep Green Resistance News, which can be seen in similar images, describes police forces facing the opposing threat and peering through a chain-link fence. Because of the message opposing the Klan, a historical extension white supremacy, the militarized law confronts the bodies of color and marks them as “deviant other.” They are seen as instigators or “the problem” for speaking out and naming their marked bodies because of their differential experiences of oppression within a white, heteronormative, cis-make, able-bodied capitalist system. This positioning of bodies—“power” facing “criminal”—demonstrates a nonverbal communication intending to construct hierarchies based on power differential within a white, patriarchal structure. This is, in effect, one example of biorhetoric.

In this same line of thought, the body, because it is seen as raced and gendered, historically experiences difference in the wake of hegemonic oppressions. Joy DeGruy asserts: “We rarely look to our history to understand how African Americans adapted their behavior over centuries in order to survive the stifling effects of chattel slavery, effects which are evident today” (13). The generational traumas and violences stemming from slavery, even pre-slavery, manifest physiologically in the present and in representations contemporary systems and ideologies of power.” She continues: “I believe that the behaviors...[are] in large part related to trans-generational adaptations associated with the past traumas of slavery and on-going oppression (13). Since Black Americans “are repeatedly asked to reveal proof of the realities of racism to skeptical white people” on a daily basis, Black and Brown bodies continually express experience of difference both physically and psychologically (DeGruy 25). This manifestation of skepticism is often carried out in terms of over surveillance and marking Black and Brown bodies as the “deviant other” or the “criminal.”

Historically, Frederick Douglass’ narrative maintains similar parallels of white, patriarchal, able-body policing and surveillance described in the antebellum South that are arguably still seen in past and recent actions of contemporary American law. Douglass’ anecdote about the overseer, Edward Covey, lying low in the grass, sneaking around, and hiding on the land develops the singular idea of law in terms of the

white/black binary of slavery in America. However, Salley Hadden's *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* complicates America's policing history. Hadden argues that various types of people were under supervision. Early on, Hadden constructs an international model of policing from which America cherry-picked certain tactics: "The story of patrollers (an early form of policing), both rural and urban, begins in a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Caribbean," she continues, "[. . .] Nonetheless, the beginnings of a formal, organized, and public slave patrol system in the antebellum South can be traced to the private, informal, and sometimes voluntary efforts of Spanish and English colonist in the Caribbean and Latin America who sought to control their growing enslaved populations" (7). Slave patrols also watched over free Blacks and sketchy whites that associated with Blacks (3-4). Salikoko Mufwene provides a background supplying economic welfare and environmental factors as primary characteristics driving slave populations, and therefore early policing tactics, to shape America's early history thus asserting that places like Virginia and South Carolina, specifically, had slave populations greatly exceeding the white populations during that particular time ("The Emergence of African American English" 59) meaning fear and vigilance indeed were cultural norms. "According to Kulikoff (1986)," Mufwene asserts, "By the early 1780s, more than two-fifths of the slaves who resided in eight piedmont counties organized before 1760 lived on plantations with twenty or more other slaves. In contrast, more than two-fifths of the slaves on the frontier piedmont counties organized after 1760." Mufwene continues to quote Kulikoff, "In Virginia, both James City and York counties were more than 60 percent enslaved in the 1780s" (qtd. in "The Emergence of African American English" 59). Mufwene's assertion echoes and supports Hadden's argument of early forms of white slave patrols in South Carolina: "Southern whites feared their slaves and needed mastery over them; in Hammond's South Carolina they were outnumbered by their bondsmen from nearly the beginning of the eighteenth century" (6). This historical context about the development and perceived "need" for regulated safety against or from Black bodies indeed continue to shape American political clout even in this "post-racial" or "Post-Black" period.

Even as recent as March 3 we see stressed and tensed political and legal relationships in the American South between those in power and those of color. The blame and responsibility shift between Customs and Border Protection (C.B.P.) in border cities Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico when in October of 2012 "patrolmen" killed a teenager José Antonio Elena, armed only with a cellphone, by fatally shooting him 10 times. Elena was 16 and walking within Mexico borders. The US patrol claim to have been in the midst of taking down a possible drug smuggler or *coyote* while also being pelted with rocks from an unidentified source. The New York Times reports that "A 2013 investigation by the Arizona Republic found that since 2005, C.B.P. agents had killed at least 42 people, a majority of them in the United States, but most of the agents' identities had been kept secret, and the officers faced 'few if any, public repercussions, even in cases in which the jurisdiction for the shooting seems dubious.' Thirteen of the cases involved American citizens; at least three involved unarmed teenagers who were shoot in the back," very similar to Elena (Binelli). Hadden's argument for expanding our view of patrolling and policing is necessary to expanding to how we see #BlackLivesMatter and what is becoming the everyday interactions between law and people of color in some instances, particularly the South as an international exchange.

Equally important, we see this pattern of criminalization continue from multiple and dynamic epicenters. Kimberlé Crenshaw discusses intersectional identity and its greater sociocultural implications as a much needed scope within the inadequate justice system—particularly for women and legal matters. Crenshaw notes, “Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color to a location that resists telling” justice falls short (1242). The either/or binary in place is not efficient. The both/and descriptors should be examined more closely to map the complexities of identification.

Founders of #BLM even note the underlying racism and oppressive heteronormative standards within the very movement they began. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors responded to the appropriation of #BLM and the exclusion, at times, within the movement by stating the following:

Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. It goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.

The very body itself harbors essential methods of communicating rhetorical resistance and agency by way of acknowledging the ways in which body mediates experience differentially. Therefore, biorhetorics, albeit from a non-traditional and at times asynchronistic if not historical view, provides a space for acknowledging Black and Brown bodies as disruptions, resistance, and agents of change.

In addition to race and gender, intersectional identity, as noted by the body, marks political and economical implications. Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix recall Sojourner Truth’s speech in 1863 asking, “Ain’t I a Woman” by arguing that Truth “deconstruct[ed] every single major truth-claim about gender [and race] in a patriarchal slave social formation.” Truth’s speech also gives “a devastating critique of socio-political, economic and cultural process of ‘othering’ whilst drawing attention to the simultaneous importance of subjectivity—of subjective pain and violence that the inflictors do not often wish to hear about or acknowledge” (77). Black and Brown bodies have not only historically marked traumas and inequalities by calling attention to the differential experience with the presence of their raced and gendered bodies but also called attention to American injustices by way of class, politics, and geography with their experience of the body.

If we look at the classic example of W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* through a biorhetorical lens, we recognize the constraints of biological predisposition of “double-consciousness.” For Du Bois, race is the prime indicator for the constant struggle of salient identities, but the white gaze upon bodies of colors constructs emotional, physical, psychological, and social conditions that change and affect the body’s reactions,

perspectives, and experiences, like DeGruy theorized. Similarly, Jared Sexton recognizes this impact: Sexton poses questions regarding how to define, identify, and engage with Black identity if the performativity is regarded as “nothing” or absent, held “captive” but at the same time for white, patriarchy (usually heteronormative, cis-male, able-body) these are the same qualities “we” “can’t live without” (6). In this contradictory construction, Sexton arguably theorizes that Black identities, Black life, and by extension Black bodies are based on white epistemologies but also in a constant state of conflict. Sexton defines his construction of “the social life of the social death” as the “fact of blackness” which is to say that Black thought or “the *racial* discourses of life philosophy” is understanding that life, particularly Black life, is inextricable from thought which is seen in a sociocultural context as a problem; the problem of Black thought (15). Acknowledging Du Bois’ “double-consciousness” as an outcome of the rhetorical environment, which Sexton describes, allows us to use the body (vis-à-vis the consciousness) to navigate hegemonic ideologies. Thus, explicitly engaging Black and Brown bodies to disrupt oppositional gazes creates rhetorical resistance and, in effect, physically, psychologically, and socially creates multifaceted agents of change.

### **(En)Acting Levels of agency**

In addition to these dynamics ways in which biorhetoric manifests methods of rhetorical resistances, we begin to parse out ways in which agency takes form. Let’s revisit the framework of agency for a moment. We have said that (individual) agency is constructed with the following qualities in mind:

- (I) open responsiveness to others and environment;
- (II) engagement in the invitation to listen “as agents in persuasion” (Cooper 420);
- (III) expression of experience

It is this expression of experience, by way of difference, which adds to Coopers’ construction of agent, that we can further parse out agency into three levels that factor into moments of rhetorical resistance; these three levels are cognizant reflection, dilemma, and reaction. From the previous example of “double-consciousness,” I have demonstrated one level of agency, a cognizant reflection. This first level of cognizant reflection is similar to Cooper’s in that some type of reflection must go on in order to carry out some active form of agency. However, the impulse behind cognizant reflection is somewhat formed as a passive agency and varies from person to person since lived experiences do differ. The degree passivity could be misunderstood as non-resistance thus excluding this phase from acts of agency since recognizing the exigency would then be an “unconscious” act. However, on some level there is a recognition that engages some form of stimulus, a response to think in some minor form based on some minute detail of one’s life even down to the positioning of bodies. Moreover, either the cognizant (en)acting—this includes the dis/agreeing or remaining neutral—on any issue of a specific situation or the empathizing of a situation allows for a space for conscious reflecting on actions, or, consciously organizing/planning/making a goal/setting a challenge with an end purpose or intention in mind. If the (en)acting or empathizing does not happen, then reflecting cannot happen. Because of this cognizant reflection, the lived

experience does not exist for one to draw inferences from; thus, it cannot be a conscious intention and no agency is instituted.

By the same token, I argue that multiple agencies are always at work, which inherently leads to the engagement of rhetorical resistance, what is passed as agency; the level of effectiveness varies. The next level of agency is the dilemma phase. Dilemma can only come after a realization of a context and one's subject position. Furthermore, dilemma sits as a junction of choices; this is the threshold concept of decision. For example, in the case of Tamir Rice it was Officer Timothy Loehmann who told Officer William Cunningham "He gave me no *choice*. He reached for the gun and there was nothing I could do" (Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department 12, emphasis added), but his moment of dilemma was conceived by his conscious reflection of the situation and his reaction. There was a choice. When receiving information about Rice as a "suspect," the dispatcher relayed information notifying the officers that Rice is an adolescent with a "probably fake" gun (the cause of the disturbance) (Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department 3). This information plays a role in creating even the tiniest hesitation or dilemma, affecting the way one (en)acts his or her agency and ultimately rhetorically resists the hegemonic structure of America. In other words, dilemma can require both, or some combination of, "passive" and "active" agency. Dilemma only builds on cognizant reflection to continually contextualize any series of events leading up to a specific moment. To put it another way, decisions are formed by some combination of conscious reflection at some point with respect to lived experience.

The last level of agency is reaction. This level of agency is controversially active. Reaction is the choice in which one decides the level of involvement with a situation. Reactions, however, can take on passive roles. One has the choice to remain passive or to do something that is active, and even "active" takes on very different forms. For instance, the very involved civil rights campaigner Harry Belafonte commented on the lack of Jay-Z's presence, voice, and influence in regard to maintain a public role favoring social equality, particularly after Trayvon Martin's death which prominently showcased the devaluing of Black life in America in "post-racial" American policies and attitudes. However, Jay-Z's "passive" reaction to the ongoing racial tensions—either not publicly addressing situations or just not inhabiting spaces—(Mitchell) may be unsettling for some, but his reaction to be less outgoing than Belafonte was still a determinate choice. Based on conscious reflections of various lived experiences, including passive moments and dilemmas, the additive effect amounts to continuous and varied approaches to rhetorical exigencies and decisions. The levels of agency are both linear and cyclical; each level depends on the previous level but multiple acts of agency can be (en)acted simultaneously and asynchronously.

### **Interjecting Hip Hop: Constructing Hip hop Intellectual As An Agent with Rhetorical Resistance**

Recasting, or rather outkasting<sup>2</sup> the agent itself, deconstructs white supremacist epistemes and allows Afrocentric cosmologies also seen in Hip Hop discourses to engage

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<sup>2</sup> This spelling of "outcast" derives from the Atlanta-based Hip Hop duo OutKast. I used their interlude in my digital project.

in conversations of, with, and about Black and Brown bodies in various manifestations of rhetorical resistance. These conversations then are new models for discussion of rhetorical resistance and agency. In this line of reasoning, Rhetorical resistance is a way of engaging in critical awareness of geopolitical-sociocultural perspectives and structures. Rhetorical resistance is an outcome of multiple agencies which can be exhibited in Hip Hop Discourse as an advocate and a rationale and tool for civic engagement, particularly seen in connection to African Americans and the #BlackLivesMatter, which pushes against hegemonic structures by subverting and challenging dominant ideologies. A. A. Akom argues that Hip Hop ideologies have the power to sustain these very same conversations both inside and outside the conversations:

In much of the literature, hip hop is depicted as something occurring outside of school; something that takes place on the ‘bloc,’ in the ‘street,’ in ‘da hood, in ‘da club,’ after school, after dark, and in distinctive social spaces set aside for play (Kelley, 1998, p. 196). Indeed, the hip hop aesthetic in the world of education, whether it be fashion or a ‘cypher,’ is often associated with the realm of ‘leisure’ and anti-intellectualism. (53)

However, this “anti-intellectualism” should not be seen as such. Here I am connoting distinct differences in the “intellectual” in two ways, historically: (1) the Black intellectual, as Hortense Spillers defines it, or (2) Gramscian intellectual. For Spiller’s notion of the Black intellectual, Black intellectual was an author that incorporated the skills of an auto/biography writer, or the “self-life-writer,” and critiques of political and cultural situations for Black life and Black creativity (66-67). Spillers argues that Black intellectuals now do not take up issues such as the insufficient conditions of Black life. It’s too simplistic to think it is a choice between defining what is a community and what event lead to creating communities and the resulting sociocultural impacts, but she argues that black intellectuals now are nearly satisfied with initial and superficial concepts, thus disqualifying them from being contemporary black intellectuals (72-3). Hip Hop discourse not only allows for the continuation of “self-life-writing” but also continues to challenge the conformity and status of Black and Brown communities. Beyoncé’s release of “Formation,” for example, drew on the historical composition of New Orleans, Louisiana as a show of personal solidarity demonstrating agency and resistance in community but also illustrated generational composition of Black communal identity that challenged the traditional status quo.<sup>3</sup>

For Gramsci, on the other hand, an intellectual always has the possibility to form; the intellectual is not a distinction of social markers nor is the intellectual dependent of class like the academics or public figures solely determined by financial backing—although it can be a large contributing factor (113). What differs between types of Gramscian intellectuals is within specific social contexts and ideologies. To put it another way, the intellectual is diverse and ubiquitous, not static and prescribed. Therefore, the intellectual, Gramsci argues, is found in two fundamental capacities: Traditional and Organic. Traditional intellectuals, Gramsci posits, belong to professional, literary, scientific spheres; these intellectuals have subject positionalities in sociocultural-geopolitical and class-based intersections. The organic intellectual is associated with

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<sup>3</sup> This was a discussion from the #BlackLivesMatter class 1 March 2016 which stemmed from a previous discussion between Kinitra Brooks and Sonja Lanehart.

thinking models and organizing more defined by currency and weight of ideas rather than work common to a specific class in which a person belongs. In other words, one in the working class or vocational trade, like clergy or blacksmith, would be connected to job-related, class-status type of thinking such as concerns of metallurgy and theology. This is the traditional intellectual. Whereas, thinking associated with leisure time, wealth, and grand concepts were commonly reserved for the organic intellectual. Within the differences between organic and traditional intellectual, Gramsci also notes the difference in urban and rural intellectuals. Although the traditional intellectual and the rural intellectual are linked together because they both connect country dwellers and petite bourgeoisie via sociopolitical functions (this is not so much the case anymore due to the industrial revolution), the urban intellectual is not the same as the organic intellectual. The urban intellectual is similar in function to what Gramsci names *Risorgimento*, an intellectual that intermediates class struggle and information between sociopolitical spheres. This type of intellectual “articulate[s] the relationship between the entrepreneur [organic intellectual] and the instrumental masses and to carry out the immediate execution of the production plan” and is able to do so because his or her identity is fluid between the proletariat and lumpenproletariat (14-15). Both the *Risorgimento* and the urban intellectual are what I call *floating intellectuals*—intellectuals that are able to move in and out of rhetorical exigencies based on classlessness. They do not necessarily belong to one particular class, but they function within multiple classes, multiple spaces. Much like the sampling that goes on within hip hop, floating intellectuals draw from their experience (and knowledge) of difference. *Risorgimento* and floating intellectual may have successfully moved and resituated in another class while still holding on to connections to the previous class thus consciously increasing social agency one or multiple times. This means that he or she is able to provide means of communication through vernacular literacies in meaningful spaces.

Translating floating intellectuals, or in this case “Hip hop intellectuals,<sup>4</sup>” into the expanded view of agency, we can now draw a number of similarities arguing an even more complex agent who (en)acts agency. Engaging the fluidity associated with the floating intellectual, the use of multimedia and vernacular literacies become apparent. Both aspects of vernacular literacies and medium are inherent characteristics specific to geopolitical-sociocultural spaces. In order to be rhetorically effective, the Hip hop intellectual as agent reflects knowledge gained from immersion and repetitive contact with multiple communities enabling a bank of literacies in which to draw from and connect various lived experiences to agency. For Hip Hop, the ability to provide means of vernacular literacy in spaces prove meaningful when translated into possible effective points of resistance and (en)acted agency.

### **Explicating the Hip Hop Intellectual as Agent**

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<sup>4</sup> Hip Hop intellectuals is the combination of 3 concepts: Gramsci’s intellectuals, Smitherman’s discussion of Hip Hop vs. hip hop (the difference in discourse and genre, respectively), and my use of floating intellectual. The Hip hop intellectual is an individual who can float between spaces, especially within both the Hip Hop Discourse and hip hop genre, to deliver messages (representations of salient identity) and/or carry out decisions of other invested partners (i.e. producers).

Vernacular literacy is not the only rhetorical skill connected to hip hop artists and Hip hop intellectuals. Following in the African American rhetorical tradition, some Hip Hop intellectuals are similar to *griots*, which are held in high regard within a certain sociocultural structure. In *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, Adam Banks defines griots as “an archivist, a canon maker, time binder; someone with an encyclopedic knowledge of traditions, a searing and searching awareness of contemporary realities, . . . [with] text-blending abilities to synchronize traditions, present realities and future visions in that future text” (16). Griots are highly important figures responsible for transmitting knowledge, not just knowledge of the self but also generationally cultural or community knowledge(s). A griot, although usually seen as transmitting knowledge orally, can be seen as interpreting words through various texts including social media. To illustrate a modern manifestation of the griotic role where music and language coalesce to promote positive outlets for Black (youth) consciousness and Black American voices in which concern for the community and individuals’ wellbeing is noted has been documented through radio stations and DJs. This aspect of Hip Hop intellectuals take up an important space in communicating current happenings—including rallying points for protest. The rise of hip hop<sup>5</sup> music, for example, has traditionally been seen as a space to express information inter- and intra-personally. “Long before Chuck D made his declaration,” Banks argues, “that Hip Hop was black people’s CNN, the black radio DJ fulfilled the griotic function of delivering and interpreting the news to African Americans” (24). Although the medium in which “black people’s CNN” takes shape has changed dramatically, the connection to Hip Hop has continued to be ever-present as a vital source of information, representation of Black consciousness, and interpretation of societal atmospheres at-large and the shaping of identities. For example, the Watts riots and the police brutality committed upon Rodney King in the 1980s-90s were accompanied by some of hip hop’s more profound, aggressive, and progressive lyrics that motivated and called for change in policies (perhaps the outlook surrounding the O.J. Simpson trial) and social dynamics like Tupac’s *Me Against the World* album or N.W.A’s *Straight Outta Compton*. But have we seen a shift in the ways we use communication to achieve agency or gain status? I believe we have. Online platforms and social media has taken the place of the DJ/radio, in the traditional sense, but this move to the digital decentered views of public/celebrity/scholar trichotomy, all of which can produce valued sites of information.

In addition to the griot, Hip hop follows African American rhetorical patterns described by Staci Perryman-Clark: “1. call and response . . . 2. Signifying . . . 3. rhymic, dramatic, evocative language or imagery. . . 4. narrative sequencing . . . 5. cultural values, community consciousness . . . 6. cultural references . . . 7. field dependency” ( 256-57). Reciprocating rhetorical moves like cultural values and references are conscious choices that Hip hop intellectuals make enhancing his or her status as floating, Hip hop

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<sup>5</sup> *hip hop* spelt in lower case, denotes a personal choice of some authors and common conception to note the naming of a music genre; in lower case form it can serve as both the noun or adjective. However, I denote and, by means of classification purposes, use *Hip Hop*—with capital letters (the noun *only*)—to indicate the discourse. Hip Hop also reflects KRS-ONE’s perspective of Hip Hop as a discourse: “Rap music is commonly referred to as ‘*Hip Hop*.’ However, more precisely speaking, Hip Hop encompasses much more than music. In its totality . . . it is a culture, a world view, a way of life” (Smitherman, *Word from The Mother* 85, emphasis added).

intellectuals maneuvering between spaces, between where one starts and where one wants to be.

However, Hip Hop discourse continues challenging both of these definitions of the “intellectual” by incorporating a multitude of qualities from both definitions. In this sense, Hip Hop discourse allows us the flexibility to critically analyze the rhetorical exigency of sociopolitical movements, specifically #BLM while bridging student/teacher/scholar/activist roles and relationships within expanded dialogic forms of rhetorical resistance and definitions of agency. Let’s take a closer look at the Hip Hop intellectual within a new frame of rhetorical resistance and agency.

Some Hip hop intellectuals<sup>6</sup> are known for their lyrics and others are known for their activism. The voicing of reality in some artists’ songs detail the conditions of corrupt geopolitical-sociocultural spaces to mass populations, thus being the voice of the marginalized. Conscious Hip hop intellectuals tell the good, bad, and the ugly; artists gain fans for what Geneva Smitherman identifies as “*testifyin*, [the] concept referring to a ritualized form of black communication in which the speaker gives verbal witness to the efficacy, truth, and power of some experience in which all blacks have shared” (*Talking and Testifyin* 58). In the rhetorical exigency behind #BlackLivesMatter, the ongoing devaluing of Black life in America is the shared experience which drives knowledge and agency. The perspective of Hip hop intellectuals like Nicki Minaj or Nas, both of whom have spoke out regarding #BlackLivesMatter, some more explicitly than others, become a representation of Black intellectualism; agency; rhetorical resistance; and youth consciousness because of the shared experience “testifyin” and cultural references. The role of activist is not inherent; it is (en)acted. As Sullivan reminds us, both teachers and Hip hop intellectuals choose rhetorical resistance which (en)acts agency because of lived experience, specific knowledge, and as Cooper pointed out, the willingness to engage as listener and responsiveness to environment. The student/teacher/scholar/activist/intellectual, encounters agency at different times, stages, and to different degrees. The celebrity status (gained from speaking out and identifying with various communities) allots a wider stage in which audience members view cognizant reflection, dilemma, and reaction in a specific manner—agency (en)acted.

Nevertheless, controversy surrounds this issue too. Aligned with the Jay-Z and Harry Belafonte instance, the mere status of Black celebrity comes with great pressure to perform as the Hip hop intellectual activist within certain time frames. In a *Rolling Stones* article, Ferguson, Missouri activists spoke out against the little Black celebrity support. T-Dubb-O, hip hop artist and one of four “freedom fighters,” lambasted:

“We got all these black athletes, black rappers, all these one-percents, record label owners, CEOs that's not saying nothing, that's not bringing

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<sup>6</sup> My use of *Hip hop* intellectual is somewhat loosely aligned with A. Shaid Stover’s definition of the *Hip Hop* intellectual—“[. . .] identifies with lumpenproletariat values, is responsible, for cultivating a critical consciousness which meets the urgent needs of an ascendant humanity, struggling in the streets of a world in a structural transition, spiritual alienation, socio-political upheaval and intellectual revolt (26, emphasis added)”; someone involved with Hip Hop who “grasps Hip Hop aesthetics as cultural resistance to oppression and choses to function as the critical consciousness of the postmodern lumpenproletariat” (114).

nothing to the community. You're bleeding the community dry,' he says. 'The shoes we buy, the clothes we buy, the music we play, the videos we watch. You glorify being from the hood but do nothing for it. You glorify being from the trenches but do nothing for it. When they killing us, you stand by silent. When you have this platform... [sic] we don't have a *Rolling Stone* in St. Louis we can go to. You get invited to these interviews daily, and you quiet. You quiet.' ("Ferguson Activist")

But while some call for immediate action from Hip hop intellectuals, some Hip hop intellectuals are taking note of alternative agencies and rhetorical resistances.

Minaj addresses the shared experience of devaluing Black life by authority in her recent *Rolling Stones* interview. "It's sickening," she states "I've been reading so many people saying, 'Why are we surprised?' That's what's really sad: that we should somehow be used to being treated like animals" ("Nick Minaj"). She continues addressing the role of Hip Hop as activist: "I feel like when Public Enemy were doing 'Fight the Power,' we as a culture had more power — now it feels hopeless," Minaj says. "People say, 'Why aren't black celebrities speaking out more?' But look what happened to Kanye when he spoke out. People told him to apologize to Bush!" ("Nicki Minaj"). The backlash stemming from Kanye's comments are arguably the reason why hesitation exists for some Hip hop intellectuals. The role of Minaj as an activist or advocate within the space of #BLM is still being argued today. During the Question and Answer session between panelist Aria Halliday, presenter of "Anaconda Feminism," and Assata Richards, Co-founder of Sankofa Research Institute in Houston, Texas, at this years Hip Hop Literacies Conference in Columbus, Ohio a lively debate was exchanged. Richards put the question about Minaj's role as an activist to Halliday: "[we don't see] Minaj stepping out or speaking out, so I struggle [. . .] so I wonder with that [naming Minaj "feminist" or "activist"] when she won't take on [those identities explicitly]." Halliday responded "we need to expand the ways we see activism." Like her interview in *Rolling Stones*, Minaj understood her subject position (based on her raced, gendered, intersectional body), theorized her dilemma, and reacted thus demonstrating agency that rhetorically resisted white supremacist structure. However, her agency was presented in a different a form made complicated by her celebrity status and, for some, her generational identity.

We see the urgent agency and rhetorical resistance in other media as #BlackLivesMatter evolves into subthreads. Subthreads are what I am classifying as hashtags specific to particular instances but still linked to the overarching movement. As an illustration, #FreddieGray a common hashtag was used to report the police abuse, which led to his death, of Baltimore resident Freddie Gray. Following the coverage of #FreddieGray also led one to the various media perspectives covering the case and the resulting #BaltimoreRiots and trial and #SayHerName in the wake of undocumented violences occurring on Black queer/(trans)girls and women. However, the contextualized microscopic situation continually makes sure to highlight the connection to and understanding of the importance within #BlackLivesMatters, the macroscopic context. The hashtags associated with the Baltimore, for instance, are subthreads. It is important to note that subthreads may take on life of their own, calling for specific (en)action, agency, and rhetorical resistance since geopolitical-sociocultural spaces are varied.

Hip hop intellectuals capitalizing on vernacular literacies derived from digital and communal spaces merge rhetorical resistance, agency, and attentiveness to #BlackLivesMatter. More aggressive, arguably more “active,” forms of agency carry out rhetorical resistance on Instagram just as they do on Twitter. This was particularly true after a shooting-spree and hate crime in Charleston, South Carolina, which took place on 21 June 2015. Both Lupe Fiasco and Nas took to their Instagram accounts composing “Dear White America” letters. Following Fiasco’s “Dear White Supremacy” letter deconstructing a history overturning white power (“Dear White Supremacy”), Nas shames America for letting discrimination reign over policies and attitudes (“Nas Speaks Out about Racism”). Fiasco’s and Nas’ public addresses are physical manifestations of reactionary agency (en)acting rhetorical resistance. This form of address highlights a different level of agency than Minaj’s reflective, critical interview but still maintains the purpose/goal/intent of resistance—reminiscent of Cooper’s agency, and our new expanded agency—to dominant power structures, in this case white American authorities. Both interviews and Instagrams require cognizant reflection, dilemma, and reaction in order to manifest agency and rhetorical resistance.

For this reason, using Hip hop intellectuals as a way to deconstruct white epistemologies of Black life lends us fruitful ways of understanding or “outkasting” rhetorical resistance and agency so that we can push understandings, identities, and uses grounded in non-traditional notions of agency. Although the Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s through 1970s marked moments of political and civic unrest, which highlighted the nation’s inequality based on factors like race, class, and gender, the call for equality still continues. The generational divide, like that seen between Halliday and Richards marks the traditional definitions of agency and rhetorical resistance that were once driven by a collection of activists’ voices and were once documented through a number of essays, speeches, and protests demanding a disruption of social functions (sometimes violent) in order to be seen, heard, and ultimately treated—socially and legally—as equals to other American citizens. The surge for equality during the 50s through 70s can arguably be seen as being repeated now, just in subtly different ways; However, music seems to remain a consistent link between the two methodologies. Even during antebellum America, Black music served as a pathway for seeing methods of rhetorical resistance and agency. As Nancy Baker noted, teacher, writer, and lyricist Abel Meeropol, also known as Lewis Allen, wrote a poem entitled “Bitter Fruit” in 1937 (25, 45). “Bitter Fruit” was eventually recorded as “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday in 1939 as a political statement against the prolific lynchings of African Americans (Baker 45, 52). Renditions of “Strange Fruit” continue to be produced like Nina Simone’s 1966 cover on *Pastel Blues* and Kanye West’s sampling of Simone’s “Strange Fruit” cover on his 2014 release “Blood on the Leaves.” Furthermore, the lines of that poem—“Southern trees bear strange fruit/Blood on the leaves and blood on the root/Black Bodies swinging in the southern breeze [. . .]”—as well as renditions of that song have become one of the more famous protest anthems because it carries a very real and emotional weight symbolizing the urgency and importance behind protest rhetoric and its impact.

Hence, the ability to cross time and space with music and language gives us valuable insight to deconstructing rhetoric of resistance demonstrated by the ability to connect through experiential difference. Samuel Perry posits that, “Holiday’s powerful performances of the song were generative of a mutually reinforcing ethos between

Holiday and ‘Strange Fruit’ that captured the pain inflicted through lynching and racial discrimination” (449). I argue this generation biorhetorical tool can still be seen even in the various forms and recasting of the Hip hop intellectuals. The use of this rhetorical tool ekphrasis—verbal, descriptive, and procedural verbal performance of visual scenes (Perry 449-451)—“expose[s] the social structure of representation as an activity and a relationship of power/knowledge/desire-representation as something done to something, with something, by someone for someone” (qtd. in Perry 452). Coalescing verbal performance and visual representations by affect highlight areas of strife which house individuals, policies, and moments of resistances. The body houses much of these resistances, performances, and ideologies.

Like the example of “Bitter Fruit,” instances of interruption, rhetorical exigency, audience, and kairos do coalesce to create a resistive moment grounded by methods of rhetorical application and theory by specific, active agents thus (en)acting rhetorical resistance. Following Perry’s rationale of ekphrasis through musical performance, we can see musical discourses, particularly hip hop, as serving a link between sound and language, seeing and doing, bridging agency and resistance. Moreover, occurrences like the protests Ferguson, Missouri and in Baltimore, Maryland over the jury’s decision to not indict police officers charged with the murders of unarmed Black men, or the outrage in Waller, Texas when the news indicated that Sandra Bland “committed suicide” in her jail cell discouragingly become less and less unfamiliar. Since the recession of the American economy in 2008, awareness of constricting pressure continues to highlight how much “freedom” is truly gained, or rather accessed, by Black and Brown bodies. It is in these in moments of resistance, I argue, that ways of provoking change and reclamation are agitated in various ways of agency; and it is within Hip Hop discourse that we can clearly see the levels of agency the provoke various kinds of resistance.

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