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2006

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Filipino Youth Cultural Politics and DJ Culture

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Antonio T. Tiongson Jr.

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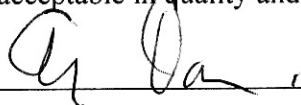
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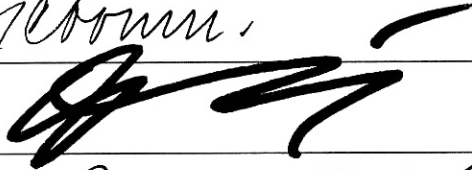
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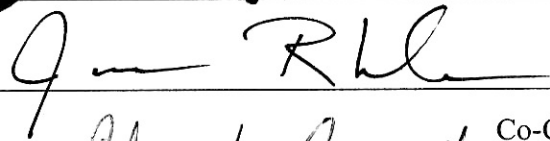
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University of California, San Diego

2006

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## PUBLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Filipino Youth Cultural Politics and DJ Culture

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2006

Professor Jane Rhodes, Co-Chair

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In this study, I aim to make sense of an emergent form of youth expression that has come to be associated with Filipino youth and in many ways, a constitutive element of Filipino youth identities. I'm particularly interested in those complex forms of identification taking place among Filipino youth which revolve around questions of race, ethnicity, gender, and generation and what they reveal about the racialization of Filipinos in the U.S. and contours of the Filipino diaspora. This study employs multiple methods including an analysis of interviewed conducted with Filipino DJs, observation of DJ events, as well as a wide range of secondary sources including historical and popular

accounts of hip hop and magazine interviews with Filipino DJs. The objective is to develop insights into the ways Filipino youth go about contesting the terms by which they are inserted into the racial hierarchies and economic structures of the U.S. and imagining new ways of being Filipino that both accommodate and challenge the normative boundaries of Filipinoness.



## **Chapter I Framing Culture: The Politics of Youth Culture and the Negotiation of Cultural Meanings and Identities**

On September 7, 1997, the International Turntablist Federation (ITF)<sup>1</sup> held its second annual World Championships at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco in various skill categories: scratching, beat juggling, team or DJ bands, and all around.<sup>2</sup> In all these categories, Filipino DJs made up the bulk of the competitors, prompting the host to remind the audience that even though Filipinos dominate DJ competitions across the nation and the globe, ITF actually does not stand for “It’s Totally Filipinos.” This elicited laughter from the crowd which was also largely comprised of Filipino youth in their teens and early twenties.

The host’s comments are not without basis as DJing has become an expressive form in which many Filipino youth invest their time, energy, and passion.<sup>3</sup> By the 1980s, Filipino youth had come to dominate the local DJ scene in places like San Francisco and the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and New York subsequently making their mark nationally not only as battle DJs but also as club DJs, radio DJs, mix DJs, and scratch DJs in a cultural practice historically associated with African Americans. This phenomenon has international dimensions as well with Filipino DJs from Canada and Australia winning

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<sup>1</sup> The ITF is an organization that began sponsoring DJ competitions worldwide in 1996 and promotes the notion that the turntable is an instrument that produces rather than just plays music.

<sup>2</sup> Scratching and beat juggling are common DJ techniques and have become standards of battling. Doc Rice, a DJ himself, describes scratching this way: “Virtually all scratches involve moving the record by hand in a forward and backward manner” and “require the use of the fader.” See Doc Rice, “Essential DJ Fundamentals: The Language of Scratching,” *Rap Pages* September 1998, 30. Beat juggling, on the other hand, involves creating “a new rhythm without cross-fader use by pausing both records alternately--one hand for each record--and breaking down the beat and separating the drum elements.” See Doc Rice, “Essential DJ Fundamentals, Part 2: Tricks of the Trade,” *Rap Pages* October 1998, 40. Finally, team or DJ bands refers to DJ(s) performing as a team, “with each member taking on the role of separate musicians, such as vocals, drums, etc., and switching off between them.” See Doc Rice, “Essential DJ Fundamentals, Part 2: Tricks of the Trade.”

<sup>3</sup> DJing is considered one of the core elements of hip hop along with MCing or rapping, writing or graffiti, and b-boying or breakdancing.

competitions and achieving notoriety.<sup>4</sup> The crowd's response, therefore, was not a surprise given the emergence of DJing as a signifier of Filipino youth identity. It is now a commonplace assumption that Filipinos make the best DJs in the world.

In highlighting the dominance of Filipino youth in DJ culture, the host touched on a set of issues that will be addressed in this study; issues having to do with the contours of contemporary youth culture, politics, and identity. For example, what forms of identification and affiliation are made possible through Filipino youth involvement in DJing? What does it mean for Filipino youth to not only dominate an expressive form many consider to be black, but also claim as their own? Does an embrace of DJing signify or represent a "loss of culture" or a "loss of tradition" or more to the point, an indicator of a lack of authenticity? Why do U.S. based Filipino youth rely on DJing to express their Filipinoness, an art form seemingly far removed from practices considered Filipino rather than on conventional markers of Filipino culture? How do they explain their involvement in DJing? What kinds of narratives underlie their cultural claims? What are the broader implications in terms of the perceived boundaries of Filipinoness?<sup>5</sup>

But the host's comments were also telling because of its gendered implications. The prominence of Pinoy youth in DJing coincides with the notable absence of Pinay youth and young women in general. With very few exceptions, women participate primarily as spectators in this subculture, which puts into focus questions about the gendered construction of DJing. For instance, in what ways is DJing implicated in the formation of gendered subjectivities and meanings including formations of femininity

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the 1998 DMC National Champion from Australia, DJ Dexter, and the 1998 DMC National Champion from Canada, Lil' Jazz, are both of Filipino descent.

<sup>5</sup> The claiming of an expressive form not considered Filipino is not specific to DJing. Filipino youth have made similar claims with regards to Latin freestyle, house, and r&b. Elizabeth H. Pisares also notes that these claims are geographically specific. Italian and Greek Americans on the East Coast, for example, consider freestyle music as their own while Filipinos in California claim it as their own. See Elizabeth Pisares, "Do You Misrecognize Me: Filipino Americans in Popular Music and the Problem of Invisibility," Antonio T. Tiongson Jr., Ed Gutierrez, and Ric Gutierrez (eds.), *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

and masculinity? What is it about DJing that discourages and delimits female participation? How does it serve to enhance the status and prestige of Pinoy youth? Conversely, what sort of strategies do Pinay DJs engage in order to negotiate with the masculinist orientation of DJing? What do their narratives suggest about the ways ethnicity and gender collude with one another to define the boundaries of Filipinoness? How is their involvement in DJ culture conditioned by gendered expectations specific to DJ culture but also by expectations rooted in normative notions of Filipina womanhood?

In this study, I aim to make sense of an emergent form of popular expression that has come to be associated with Filipino youth and in many ways, a constitutive element of Filipino youth identities. I'm particularly interested in those complex forms of identification taking place among Filipino youth which revolve around questions of race, ethnicity, gender, and generation and what they reveal about the racialization of Filipinos in the U.S. and contours of the Filipino diaspora. The objective is to develop insights into the ways Filipino youth go about contesting the terms by which they are inserted into the racial hierarchies and economic structures of the U.S. and imagining new ways of being Filipino that both accommodate and challenge the normative boundaries of Filipinoness. Far from simply constituting a leisure or entertainment space, then, DJing affords Filipino youth the opportunity to negotiate the terms of their racialization and positioning in the diaspora.

In participating in an expressive form considered to be black, the role of Filipino youth (and that of other nonblack youth including young women) in the evolution of hip hop has been largely overlooked.<sup>6</sup> My interest, however, is less in overcompensating for this lack of recognition or in providing a direct analysis of why such a high concentration

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<sup>6</sup> Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Kyra D. Gaunt, "Translating Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop: The Musical Vernacular of Black Girls' Play in Joseph K. Adjaye and Adrienne R. Andrews (eds.), *Language, Rhythm, and Sound: Black Popular Cultures Into the Twenty-First Century* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1997).

of Filipino youth are into DJing, than in analyzing claims made in the name of “culture,” what serves as the basis for these claims, and what is being accomplished through the deployment of culture. It is also not my interest to reinscribe the experience of Filipino youth into standard accounts of hip hop in a celebratory or additive manner which, in many ways, has become a *sine qua non* of youth culture scholarship, or to merely document the history of Filipino youth participation in hip hop. Rather, this study represents a sustained effort to interrogate what Virginia R. Dominguez has described as “the seeming transparency of the reference to culture.”<sup>7</sup> More specifically, it represents an effort to theorize more rigorously the specificities of Filipino youth cultural productions—the ways in which Filipinoness is narrativized, experienced, and produced—within the contexts of U.S. racial formations and Filipino diaspora.

By *cultural politics* I’m alluding to the ways Filipino youth look to culture as a site where they can envision, elaborate, and articulate what it means to be Filipino on their own terms. A function of the coming of age of children of Filipino migrants to the US., it encompasses a wide array of cultural forms and practices—literature, music, film, performance arts, culture shows, murals, just to name a few—that are implicated in contemporary discourses on Filipinoness. This points not only to the emergence of a visible and dynamic Filipino youth culture but also the increasing complexity of the current cultural terrain occupied by Filipino youth, a cultural terrain characterized by competing agendas and conflicting visions of Filipinoness as well as a wide range of authenticating discourses and claims. Common to them all, however, is how they enable particular forms of identification that simultaneously reproduce and rupture the normative boundaries of Filipinoness.

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<sup>7</sup> Virginia R. Dominguez, “Invoking Culture: The Messy Side of ‘Cultural Politics,’” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 91:1 (Winter 1992), 22.

I focus on hip hop because it has been a critical terrain for the construction of contemporary youth identities but also racial differences, distinctions, and meanings. I concentrate in particular on DJing because this element of hip hop has emerged as a key site for exploring the shifting boundaries of Filipinoness, a critically important site for analyzing the processes of racialization—how social subjects position themselves and are positioned as racial(ized) subjects. It constitutes a strategic locus where contemporary discourses of Filipinoness are generated, struggled over, and elaborated with reference to a larger narrative of race and migration at the same time that it provides specific possibilities for Filipino youth to creatively reimagine individual and group identities. DJing, therefore, provides a prism with which to make sense of how Filipinoness functions at this contemporary moment as well as the dynamics of contemporary Filipino cultural politics.

I employ multiple methods including an analysis of popular and academic accounts of hip hop that delineate the cultural contexts in which hip hop evolved and flourished. As a number of cultural critics point out, the emergence of hip hop as a commercial and cultural force has coincided with the proliferation of journalistic and scholarly writings about hip hop which, in turn, have become a constituent element of the cultural landscape of hip hop. This growing body of work, however, is not merely an uninvested or benign study of cultural formations and social practices just as academics and journalists are not simply documenting hip hop history as it unfolds. Instead, hip hop critics and writers are very much an integral part of hip hop history, shaping the contours of this history in the process of writing about it.<sup>8</sup>

The project, then, is more than a synthesis of existing analyses; it is also a reconsideration of hip hop scholarship to draw out the ways in which knowledge of the

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<sup>8</sup> Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (eds.), *That's the Joint! Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

culture is constructed, framed, and conveyed particularly around questions of origins, authenticity, and cultural belonging. This study attempts to tease out the parameters of this debate including shifts in the prevailing discourses of hip hop specifically as it revolves around hip hop's perceived ethno-racial scope. Accordingly, it looks to hip hop research and popular reporting as a productive enterprise and to academic and journalists as gatekeepers of public meanings and knowledge about hip hop. I rely in particular on the burgeoning literature on DJing in order to situate Filipino youth involvement in this expressive form. This body of work establishes the pivotal role that DJs played in the emergence of hip hop as well as the shifting status of DJs. For the most part, however, it is largely descriptive providing little or no analysis. In contrast, this study offers a nuanced analysis of DJing, one that is attentive to differential histories of power which condition and shape the participation of various groups of youth in hip hop.

In an effort to illuminate the contours and dynamics of DJ culture, I also rely on personal accounts of eight Filipino DJs—four male and four female—that I interviewed for this study. Appendix A provides family history and background as well as information about their involvement in DJing including their entry into DJ and the significance of DJing in their lives. These firsthand accounts put into sharper focus those complex forms of identification taking place which simultaneously reproduce and rupture the normative boundaries of Filipinoness. They shed light on the racialized and gendered discourses as well as authenticating claims circulating within hip hop, specifically those revolving around questions of cultural entitlement and authenticity. The aim, therefore, is not to provide a detailed picture of the lives of Filipino DJs but rather, to treat their personal narratives as cultural productions constitutive of the cultural terrain of DJing.

This chapter provides a brief yet critical survey of theoretical frameworks with which this study employs, frameworks that have informed our understanding of youth culture with an emphasis on more contemporary work. The purpose of the chapter is to

lay out the groundwork for a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complexities and contradictions of youth culture from a number of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. In underscoring the premises and emphasis of different approaches, it seeks to delineate how these frameworks inform and illuminate the set of questions guiding the study. This chapter also foregrounds emerging themes, debates, and developments in the analysis of youth culture and their relevance to the study. Taken together, they constitute the core bodies of theory and scholarship that inform and shape the project.

The remarkable dominance of Filipinos within DJ culture only makes sense within the context of Filipino migration and racial formation. Chapter 2 provides a historical account of early Filipino migration to the U.S. followed by a description of early Filipino communities in the U.S. It shows that Filipino migration to the U.S. is a function of U.S. imperial and global economic policies. The chapter also discusses contemporary Filipino migration to the U.S. after 1965 and the shift in residential patterns of Filipinos from urban enclaves to suburban neighborhoods. In these same places, especially the San Francisco Bay Area, the children of post-1965 migrants helped create a thriving DJ scene and in particular, a thriving mobile DJ scene which paved the way for the dominance of Filipinos in DJing.

Chapter 3 traces the evolution of DJing focusing on two key factors--the reappropriation of Afro-Caribbean diasporic musical and oral practices and the redeployment of technology--that figure prominently in the innovations and practices of early DJ pioneers and hip hop DJs today. The chapter documents the key role that Filipino DJs played in the resurgence of DJing as they took the lead in exploring the seemingly limitless possibilities of sounds one can create through the skilled manipulation of sound technology and in advancing the notion of hip hop DJs as

musicians and of turntables as musical instruments. It establishes the importance of the mobile DJ scene in the emergence and eventual dominance of Filipino DJs.

Chapter 4 sheds light on how Filipino youth go about carving out a niche in an expressive form, considered by many to be black by relying on a number of authenticating strategies including the foregrounding of lived experience and fidelity to hip hop's core set of cultural values. In doing so, the DJs I interviewed are simultaneously negotiating the terms by which Filipinos have been racialized in the U.S. but also the terms by which the Filipino diaspora has been narrativized. The chapter also foregrounds the ways in which DJing constitutes a highly gendered stratified space through which Filipino youth can adopt, generate, and redefine conventional gender and heterosexual norms including established meanings of masculinity and femininity in complex and contradictory ways. For Pinoy youth, DJing serves as the vehicle for the production and performance of an emergent Filipino masculinity built around the mastery of technical and musical skills. For Pinay youth, DJing affords them an opportunity to rearticulate not only what it means to be a female DJ but also what it means to be Filipina.

The underlying assumptions of this study are grounded in the insights of cultural studies which have provided the impetus for much of the research on youth culture over the past few decades. It is particularly indebted to the seminal work associated with scholars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, England, much of which has influenced the analytical tools and theoretical perspectives that social scientists employ in attempting to interpret the social significance of youth culture. For example, this study subscribes to the notion of culture as a key site for examining wider social relations and processes and therefore deserving of critical



scrutiny. It also shares cultural studies' concern for the need to conceive of culture as a site of political critique and intervention where struggles over power take place.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, this study engages with the works of feminist cultural studies scholars, U.S.-based cultural studies scholars, and diaspora studies scholars, individuals who not only build on but also reconfigure the project of cultural studies and broaden its scope. Shifting away from class-based approaches, they provide an important and necessary corrective to the masculinism, ethnocentrism, and nationalist focus of early cultural studies. On the one hand, feminist cultural studies scholars illuminate the construction of gendered meanings and subjectivities while U.S.-based cultural studies scholars illuminate the racialization of various groups in distinct and historically specific ways but also in relationally and mutually constitutive ways. On the other hand, diaspora studies scholars illuminate how migration shapes people's sense of identity and belonging. In sum, these works shed light on the broader implications of Filipino youth involvement in DJing within the contexts of U.S. racial formations and the Filipino diaspora.<sup>10</sup>

### **On the Politics of Youth Culture and the Meaning of Style**

Encompassing a wide range of disciplines and theoretical positions, cultural studies has provided the impetus for much of the research on culture the past 30 years or so. Associated with the works of scholars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham, England, it sheds light on the importance of culture as a

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the theoretical legacies and trajectories of cultural studies, see Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge), 1992. See especially introduction and chapter authored by Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies."

<sup>10</sup> Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991); Leslie G. Roman and Linda K. Christian-Smith (eds.), *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture* (London: Falmer Press, 1988); Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Gayatri Gopinath, "'Bombay, U.K., Yuba City': Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora," *Diaspora* 4:3 (1996); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

key site for the production and reproduction of social relations. Consequently, culture has become a focal point in scholarship, viewed as worthy of serious and sustained intellectual scrutiny rather than dismissed as frivolous or meaningless or simply reproducing dominant social formations.

In conceiving of culture as a field of struggle, CCCS analysts look to individuals as not simply cultural puppets or dupes easily manipulated by the culture industry or unproblematically inserted into dominant relations and ideologies. They are especially critical and suspicious of perspectives like that of the Frankfurt School, perspectives that focus almost exclusively on the power of the culture industry and overlook consumer appropriation of commodities in ways not originally intended. Representing one of the earliest attempts to provide a systematic reading of popular culture, the Frankfurt School is best known for its reductionist and monolithic view of mass culture, what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno refer to as the “culture industry.” According to this line of thinking, mass culture is uniformly manipulative and vulgar, imposing dominant ideologies upon an unsuspecting public and exploiting their unconscious desires. For these analysts, then, mass culture serves to consolidate existing social relations promoting conformity and passivity among consumers.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, CCCS analysts challenge the understanding of culture as merely a vehicle for the culture industry, the notion that there is a level of equivalence between the power of the cultural industry and its influence. Instead, these cultural critics assert that structural limitations and constraints do not preclude the exercise of agency, pointing out that individuals look to culture to create their own meanings by subverting and appropriating dominant meanings. This is not to deny the power of the culture industry

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<sup>11</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1927). For a more detailed discussion of the limitations of the Frankfurt School, see Tony Bennett, “The Politics of ‘the Popular’ and Popular Culture,” in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Wollacott (eds.), *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986).

or that consumption can sometimes be a passive or problematic process but more to recognize that its power is not absolute or all-encompassing and that the reproduction of dominant meanings is a far more complex and unstable process.<sup>12</sup>

By the same token, CCCS analysts contest the notion of culture as an autonomous realm located outside relations of domination and subordination. Stuart Hall, for example, finds dubious the notion of a “real” working class culture which serves as the vehicle for the authentic expression of working class experiences or the authentic mode of resistance to the interests of capital. In his view, such a romantic view of culture is problematic because of the way it overlooks the imbrication of cultural forms with market forces and logic and because of the way it underestimates the power of the culture industry.<sup>13</sup>

Instead, cultural critics working within this tradition conceive of culture as a major site of ideological struggle constitutive and reflective of social relations. Making use of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, they are particularly interested in how culture is implicated in relations of power and conversely, how domination and subordination are an integral part of cultural relations. As Hall puts it,

Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture—already fully formed—might be simply ‘expressed.’ But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why ‘popular culture’ matters.<sup>14</sup>

In emphasizing the contested nature of culture, CCCS analysts such as Hall suggest why the study of culture matters, directing our attention to the ways patterns of domination

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<sup>12</sup> John Clarke, “Pessimism versus Populism: The Problematic Politics of Popular Culture,” in Richard Butsch (ed.), *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” in R. Samuel (ed.), *People’s History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, 239.

and subordination are reproduced but also contested in everyday life. Consequently, there can never be particular cultural forms belonging only to the “people” or exclusively serving dominant interests. At the same time, cultural practices are neither inherently oppositional nor reactionary. They often serve to reaffirm prevailing social relations and ideologies but they can also generate alternative possibilities.<sup>15</sup>

But precisely because culture constitutes a highly contested terrain, cultural forms and practices do not carry their own meanings across time. Instead, their meanings and political trajectories are subject to contestations and struggles and are therefore never final or predetermined. To understand the meaning(s) of a particular cultural form or practice, then, necessitates an analysis of its conditions of production and consumption. Meanings, in other words, cannot be determined outside the contingencies of history and politics, to be simply read off at the moment of production as if a text or practice is the issuing source of meaning rather than a site where the articulation of meanings take place.<sup>16</sup>

This approach has proven to be highly influential in the study of youth subcultures which came about as an effort by CCCS analysts to make sense of the emergence of various youth groups—teds, mods, skinheads, punks and so forth—in postwar Britain. It gained currency with the publication of such works as *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* in which CCCS analysts speculated that subcultures came into being as part of an effort by white working class youth to work out the contradictions of their class location and in particular, negotiate with the decline of working class traditions and communities and the concomitant rise of consumer culture through acts of selective appropriation and consumption. They did so within the realm of leisure through the adoption of oppositional cultural lifestyles. What

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<sup>15</sup> Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” *People’s History and Socialist Theory*.

<sup>16</sup> John Storey, *Cultural Studies & the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).

came to be known as subcultural theory, however, is most associated with Dick Hebdige and his highly influential book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.<sup>17</sup>

Hebdige's work represents a shift in the analysis of subcultures conceptualizing youth style as a signifying system rather than an expression of class location. For Hebdige, youth styles are akin to texts to be deciphered for the statements they make. He was particularly interested in uncovering those subversive meanings embedded in various youth styles through the appropriation of meanings associated with particular commodities.

Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalization'. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. Our task becomes, like Barthes', to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as 'maps of meaning' which obscurely re-present the very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal.<sup>18</sup>

By subverting and inverting the signs of the dominant culture, what Hebdige terms as bricolage, subcultural youth are able to create their own distinct meanings in ways not intended by the producers of these commodities. In the hands of punk youth, for example, safety pins worn through the cheek or the lip become a constituent element of punk fashion rupturing the meanings normally associated with them.

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<sup>17</sup> Subculture is a notion first developed by the Chicago School of Sociology during the 1920s and 1930s as an alternative to the prevailing accounts of juvenile delinquency which located the origins of problems associated with juvenile delinquency in the individual. In contrast, Chicago School analysts looked to "deviant" behavior as a normalized response to social problems such as unemployment and poverty. Key texts in subcultural theory include Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1993), first published in 1975 as *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* no. 7/8; Paul Willis *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 1977); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 18. For an account of the historical trajectory and scope of subcultures scholarship, see Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (eds.), *The Subcultures Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997). For an account of dramatic changes in the nature of consumption in the late 1950s and early 1960s including the emergence of a youth market, see Clarke, "Pessimism versus Populism," *For Fun and Profit*.

<sup>18</sup> Hebdige, *Subculture*, 18.

But Hebdige is also quick to point out that these symbolic forms of resistance are only ephemeral as emergent youth styles are quickly co-opted by the culture industry, attenuating its subversive potential and turning it into a commodity for mass consumption: “Thus, as soon as the original innovations which signify ‘subculture’ are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become ‘frozen.’ Once removed from their private contexts by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, they become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise.”<sup>19</sup> For Hebdige, subcultural style can function as a disruptor of dominant meanings only as long as it remains unincorporated by the market. Once incorporation takes place, however, subcultural styles are stripped of their potency becoming nothing more than raw material for the culture industry to exploit for profit.

While the emergence of the various youth subcultures must be read within the context of social transformations in British society following World War II, it must also be read within the context of white youth appropriation of elements of black British and West Indian culture. Certain features of punk style, for example, were culled directly from what Hebdige describes as “black West Indian rude and Rasta styles”<sup>20</sup> including hair style, dress, and even jargon. In addition, punk bands like The Clash interwove reggae slogans and themes into their own material as well as reggae numbers into their sets. Hebdige speculates that punk youth gravitated to Afro-Caribbean culture because of the way it resonated with punk core values (e.g., reggae’s disavowal of Britishness), allowing them to express their sense of alienation.

Subcultural theory represents the first systematic attempt to make sociological sense of the emergence of various youth subcultures in postwar Britain. Nonetheless, it

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<sup>19</sup> Hebdige, *Subculture*, 96.

<sup>20</sup> Hebdige, *Subculture*, 66.

has come under critical scrutiny for its monolithic formulation of youth culture and reductionist conception of politics and more specifically, its tendency to reduce the politics of youth to the politics of style and its conflation of reception or consumption with resistance. Even Hebdige himself has distanced himself from some of the conclusions he made in *Subculture* in his later work, stressing the ambiguity of subcultural style as neither resistance nor conformity.<sup>21</sup> CCCS analysts in particular have been taken to task for their over-politicized and romanticized conception of cultural resistance. A number of cultural critics, for example, object to subcultural theory's propensity to conceptualize working class life and culture as authentic, in opposition to and an antidote to the ills of commercial culture as if subcultures are divorced from the realm of commerce rather than constituted by and constantly engaged with it. These critics also find problematic the implicit cultural elitism structuring subcultural theory as reflected in the opposition between subcultures and mass culture. They point out that this kind of formulation obscures the shifting boundaries between subcultural youth and mainstream youth and how both groups engage in similar forms of activities.<sup>22</sup>

Cultural critics also note that early accounts of subcultural theory was predisposed to impute intent on signs and symbols and in the process, fetishize consumer items endowing them with almost "magical" or "mystical" meanings. In the case of punk, for example, seemingly unremarkable and mundane consumer items like a tampon or safety pin suddenly took on a magical or mystical aura. Moreover, subcultural accounts unproblematically valorized "spectacular" youth subcultures overlooking how the lives of youth are far more prosaic than subcultural accounts might suggest while at the same

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<sup>21</sup> In a later work, for example, Hebdige claims that he overemphasized the link between youth subcultures and resistance. See Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (Routledge: London, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed critique of CCCS accounts of subcultures and cultural resistance, see Laurence Wai-Teng Leong, "Cultural Resistance: The Cultural Terrorism of British Male Working-Class Youth," *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 12 (1992): 29-58. See also, Gary Clarke, "Defending Ski-Jumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures," in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

time reducing young lives into typologies. Furthermore, there was a dearth of first person accounts as subcultural theorists like Hebdige never bothered to ask white working youth what it means for them to don a certain kind of clothing or sport a certain kind of hairstyle.<sup>23</sup>

Feminist analysts working within a cultural studies framework have also taken issue with the CCCS construction of youth culture as primarily or essentially male and its uncritically masculinist readings of subcultural forms. For one thing, the focus was primarily on male youth expressions and styles. Nonetheless, this did not preclude CCCS analysts from making it seem as if their conclusions applied to all youth. Moreover, early CCCS accounts either overlooked female youth altogether or devalued their activities, conflating adolescent femininity with consumerism and depicting female youth as passive consumers (e.g., as members of groupies) rather than as creative participants. By the same token, the celebration of white working class youth culture as “oppositional” or “resistant” obscured the ways these practices habitually took place at the expense of both women and people of color. CCCS feminist scholars, for example, pointed out that verbal and physical abuse of women hardly constituted “resistance.” In other words, there is nothing inherently oppositional about subcultures.<sup>24</sup>

Early CCCS feminist publications such as *Women Take Issue*<sup>25</sup> attempted to validate and make visible female youth and female youth subcultural activities as a way to challenge the masculinism of the existing literature. They emphasized the gendering of space, directing our attention to spatial restrictions and family responsibilities that burden

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<sup>23</sup> Leong, “Cultural Resistance,” *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*; Clarke, “Defending Ski-Jumpers,” *On Record*.

<sup>24</sup> McRobbie has written extensively about this subject. See, for example, her collection of essays in *Feminism and Youth Culture*. For an overview of feminist critique of subcultural theory, see Gill Valentine, Tracey Skelton, and Deborah Chambers, “Cool Places: an Introduction to Youth and Youth Cultures,” in Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine (eds.), *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> Women’s Studies Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (ed.), *Women Take Issue* (London: Hutchinson, 1978).



female youth but not male youth which, in turn, served to confine female youth to the home and delimit their participation in youth culture. CCCS feminist analysts, however, were also quick to suggest that the confinement of female youth to the domestic sphere did not preclude participation in youth culture. As Angela McRobbie has pointed out in a number of her works, the home constituted a crucial site of activity for female youth and not merely a site for consumption. Thus, female youth have not only been active participants in a wide array of subcultural forms including those deemed masculine but have also engaged in distinct forms of activities that need to be accounted for on their own terms.<sup>26</sup>

In response to the masculinism of early CCCS scholarship, CCCS feminist analysts aimed to validate and make female youth practices visible. They were not only interested in the ways female youth ended up subscribing to traditional gender roles and expectations—e.g., to the role of wife and mother through the ideology of romance articulated in popular magazines—but also in the ways in which female youth made use of commercial forms that simply cannot be reduced as capitulation to consumer culture. In short, these analysts called for the kind of analysis that takes into account the ways female youth are constrained not only by their class position but also by highly gendered expectations from family and peers which, in turn, inform and complicate their mode of subcultural response.

CCCS feminist analysts, however, have been criticized themselves for replicating the problematic tendencies and assumptions of CCCS male theorists in their efforts to validate the experiences of female working class youth. Leslie G. Roman and Linda K. Christian-Smith, for example, point out that by focusing almost exclusively on female working class youth CCCS feminist analysts made it seem as if gender was synonymous with “women.” This formulation, they argue, is problematic because it obscures the

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<sup>26</sup> McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*.

significance of gender relations, how the experiences of men and meanings associated with masculinity only make sense in relation to women and femininity while dominant forms of masculinity rely on particular meanings of femininity. Roman and Christian-Smith also find fault in early CCCS feminist accounts for its celebratory stance toward female youth culture, exaggerating the extent to which they engaged in oppositional practices. Furthermore, the a priori privileging of the family as the site of female subordination masked the subordination of women in other spheres and the interconnections among these spheres.<sup>27</sup>

Feminist cultural criticism has also shaped the trajectory and scope of subcultural scholarship. This is part of an overall effort to by scholars such as Sarah Thornton to provide more nuanced accounts of youth subcultures. To illustrate, there is a discernable move away from uncovering moments or acts of resistance in an effort to give a fuller account of the politics of contemporary youth cultures. There is also a conscious effort to problematize binary oppositions that have historically informed subcultural accounts, oppositions between subcultures and the mainstream, subcultures and the media, or subcultures and commercial culture.

In *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*, Thornton coins the term “subcultural capital” in her effort to make sense of the values and hierarchies of British club cultures. Reformulating Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital,” she uses the term to describe the means by which youth accumulate status which then serves as the basis of distinctions—what is considered authentic, legitimate, and hip—in this subculture.

Subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. In many ways it affects the standing of the young like its adult equivalent. Subcultural capital can be objectified or embodied. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so

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<sup>27</sup> Roman and Christian-Smith, *Becoming Feminine*.

subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections...Just as cultural capital is personified in 'good' manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know', using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles.<sup>28</sup>

Within club culture, then, subcultural capital takes on many different forms allowing subcultural members to define themselves against the media and mainstream youth but also to make distinctions among themselves. The premium is placed on making it seem as if the acquisition of subculture is innate and natural rather than contrived.

DJs are central figures in this subculture, occupying a position of power and prestige by virtue of their capacity to accumulate subculture capital. They are generally perceived as those with discerning taste who are largely "in the know" when it comes to music. And as the focal point of clubs, DJs accrue a great deal of subcultural capital based on their ability to move the crowd as well as from their ability to cultivate a distinctive style that separates them from other DJs. But DJs are also in a position to mould musical taste or opinion, set musical trends, and shape the national club scene. And in recent years, DJs have managed to work their way up to powerful positions in promotions and marketing departments of record companies and secure highly influential jobs as remixers, producers, and even artists on their own right.

While DJs today enjoy considerable status, substantial influence, and unprecedented popularity, this has not always been the case. DJs were viewed with disdain, as unskilled and untalented individuals who merely played other people's music, a view that persisted well into the 1970s. But shifts in sound or recording technology particularly in the authenticities accorded records and recorded events since World War II has transformed the nature of DJing, giving rise to new aesthetics and judgments of value. In contrast to previous years when live performance was viewed as superior to

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 11-12.

recording, recorded music has come to be viewed as genuine in terms of musical experience. In other words, records are no longer seen as a poor imitation of live performance and by implication, “real” music, but as an authentic source of original music. This has greatly benefited DJs who have come to embody a certain aura by virtue of being perceived as purveyors of original music.<sup>29</sup>

Though not talking about DJs in terms of subcultural capital, other studies conceive of club DJs in similar terms, as key players who wield a great deal of power and prestige. One writer, for examples, draws parallels between DJs and rock and roll guitarists: “To a large proportion of the generation now in their teens, it is the DJ rather than the rock and roll guitarist who provides both social and musical role models. These young adults would rather mix music on turntables than play it on instruments.”<sup>30</sup> Another writer describes the evolution of DJing this way: “The increase in status from record spinner to record producer has transformed the DJ from cult figure to cultural hero—even if the culture in question is still of marginal, subcultural character in the United States.”<sup>31</sup> In these accounts, then, DJs appear as protagonists in the dance music scene who are no longer confined to simply spinning records.

Within club culture, then, it is the DJ who has come to embody authenticity stemming from his command over a great deal of subcultural capital while at the same time facilitating his access to it. But as Thornton notes, authenticities are highly gendered with female youth occupying a subordinate position in the subcultural hierarchy. This is evident in the configuration of what is considered “hip” or authentic in masculine terms and the “unhip” or inauthentic in feminine terms and the characterization

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<sup>29</sup> The shift in the perception of DJs from unskilled individuals who merely played other people;s music to bona fide musicians is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Thornton, *Club Cultures*.

<sup>30</sup> Tony Langlois, “Can You Feel It? DJs and House Music Culture in the UK,” *Popular Music* 11:2 (1992), 234.

<sup>31</sup> Kai Fikentscher, “*You Better Work!*” *Underground Dance Music in New York City* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 54.

of their involvement and investment in this subculture as silly and trivial. In other words, although female youth can acquire subcultural knowledges and competencies in the club world, subcultural capital is generally seen as the privilege of male youth.<sup>32</sup>

As a number of cultural critics have suggested, however, authenticity is not an issue confined to debates and discourses surrounding club culture; it also figures as a central problematic in popular music criticism, a highly charged and highly contested term among scholars, musicians and fans alike. One cultural critic asserts that authenticity is popular music's "governing discourse" while another cultural critic asserts that "the discourse of authenticity informs virtually all musical idioms, from jazz to hip hop to alternative."<sup>33</sup> In other words, authenticity has become a prominent category of valuation by which to judge certain genres of music and certain performers and performances. This is evident in the way particular genres of music are validated as "real" or "authentic" while particular performers and performances are seen as more credible and believable than others.<sup>34</sup>

In contemporary usage, authenticity is typically defined as being that which is believed or accepted to be genuine, real, original, grassroots or "of the people." Authenticity is also defined as being that which somehow escapes or evades the "corrupting" influences of commodity culture and/or modernity. What is considered authentic, then, references a constellation of attributes ascribed to some group, person, object, or performance, attributes that is set off against what is constructed as its opposite—the fake, artificial, imitative, or commercially driven. The underlying

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<sup>32</sup> Thornton, *Club Cultures*.

<sup>33</sup> Coyle and Dolan, "Too Much Mead," 55; Michael Coyle, "Hijacked Hits and Antic Authenticity: Cover Songs, Race, and Postwar Marketing," in Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (eds.), *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> As a result of its commercial appeal, popular music itself has been configured as inauthentic especially as compared to other genres of music like jazz which do not enjoy the same level of popular appeal. Leach, "Vicars of 'Wannabe'," *Popular Music*.

assumption is that there exists an “essential(ized), real, actual, essence” that can be recovered, restored, and preserved.<sup>35</sup>

As a number of cultural critics point out, authenticity is typically ascribed to the culture of nonwhite peoples or to nonwhite peoples themselves, a practice rooted in imperial discourse that associates the East with tradition—i.e., backwardness, barbarity, and primitiveness—and in need of Western intervention. Conversely, this discourse associates the West with modernity—i.e., democracy, progress, and enlightenment. This dynamic is evident in the deployment of the designation “world music” to categorize third world artists and their music irrespective of the kind of music they are actually producing. Invariably, these artists are expected to produce music “true” to their culture and marketed, along with their music, as exotic, fresh, and somehow closer to nature.<sup>36</sup>

Authenticity continues to have great currency yet it has increasingly been problematized by cultural critics who assert that authenticity is not inherent in the object, person, or performance designated authentic but a social construction. Rather, authenticity is historically contingent with fluid and shifting boundaries, what one author refers to as the fabrication of authenticity.<sup>37</sup> Although made to seem as part of the natural order, authenticity is actually predicated on arbitrary distinctions and requires a great deal of labor to maintain. Critics point out that it is difficult if not impossible to discern at what moment an object, person, or performance becomes inauthentic given that the boundaries of authenticity are always in flux. Thus, authenticity cannot be evaluated or established in any objective sense. By the same token, ascriptions of authenticity are far from spontaneous. Authenticity claims, therefore, have less to do with retrieving

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<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Global Pop*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the discourse of world music, see Timothy D. Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997). See also E. Taylor Atkins, “Can Japanese Sing the Blues?: ‘Japanese Jazz’ and the Problem of Authenticity in Japanese Rap Music,” in Heide Fenrenbach and Uta G. Poiger (eds.), *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000); Thornton, *Club Cultures*.

<sup>37</sup> Phrase taken from Petersen, *Creating Country Music*.

some uncontaminated essence than with invoking nostalgic notions of the past through which legitimizing knowledge and authority are produced.<sup>38</sup>

With the exception maybe of jazz, few expressive forms are as preoccupied with authenticity as hip hop is as evidenced by the ways its boundaries are zealously guarded by practitioners, participants, and fans alike. Even with its diffusion on a global scale, authenticity continues to be a pertinent question. Evocations of history and roots—what constitutes hip hop history, the terms by which this history is understood, and who gets to define them—have proven to be a bitterly disputed issue in both popular and academic circles. Accordingly, claims of authenticity abound, highly racialized and gendered claims which generally pivot around what constitutes an authentic cultural subject and production. Authenticating claims based on hip hop’s apparent “blackness” has proven to be especially contentious, coming under critical scrutiny and generating scholarship that aim to expand the ethnoracial scope of hip hop and reconfigure the parameters of hip hop history.

What passes for authentic in hip hop takes on various guises but for the most part, it is still largely predicated on exhibiting signifiers of blackness or adopting a distinct cultural style associated with black masculinity. This is due in large part to hip hop’s conflation with blackness, the construction of hip hop as “the very *blackest* culture,”<sup>39</sup> and the fact that hip hop and blackness share the same set of markers of authenticity including skin color (dark skin), living experience (growing up in the ghetto), gender (male), and class background (poor or working class). To illustrate, hip hop is seen as a product of the streets, a space long considered the privileged location of uncompromised

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<sup>38</sup> For a critical interrogation of the notion of authenticity in relation to blackness, see E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003). See also John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Leach, “Vicars of ‘Wannabe’,” *Popular Music*; Atkins, “Can Japanese Sing the Blues?,” *Transactions*.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Gilroy, “‘After the Love Has Gone’: Bio-politics and Etho-poetics in the Black Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 7 (1994), 52.

authentic blackness while both hip hop authenticity and black authenticity are typically conflated with black masculinity. Hence, a performer or performance is deemed authentic or inauthentic depending on their proximity to blackness—the more markers of authentic blackness one has or possesses, the more authentic and conversely, the fewer markers one has or possesses, the less authentic.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, there is an emphasis on remaining true to one's self or, in Todd Boyd's words, "what is assumed to be the dictates of one's cultural identity."<sup>41</sup> According to this line of thinking, authenticity is a matter of cultivating or creating a distinctive style that reflects one's own personal experiences. Likewise, failure to do so is frowned and looked down upon as mimicking someone else's style and therefore lacking substance and originality. For non-black participants, this means that adopting or performing signifiers of blackness can be a risky proposition for to do so in a patently contrived or fabricated manner is tantamount to trying to be "black," being something one is not which is considered the ultimate marker of inauthenticity.

Hip hop authenticity is not just rooted in fidelity to one's self but also adherence to history as evidenced by hip hop's ongoing valorization of "tradition." The cultural critic Boyd puts it this way: "Hip hop is defined by a strong sense of historical identity. The phrase 'back in the day' connotes this at a high level. There is a celebration of history. From the acknowledgements or 'shouts out' to old school rappers, the sampling of old music, or the wearing of old school fashion, hip hop is all about history."<sup>42</sup> As Boyd suggests, tradition in hip hop is evoked in different ways, foremost among them is paying homage to the old school and hip hop pioneers who paved the way for contemporary practitioners and participants. In affirming its connection to its "roots,"

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<sup>40</sup> Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*.

<sup>41</sup> Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C. (Head Niggas in Charge): The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, 89-90.



however, the tendency is to subscribe to a nostalgic view of hip hop, a “golden age” of hip hop when the culture was purportedly driven by innovation and creativity rather than by market concerns.<sup>43</sup>

Another key aspect of hip hop authenticity is its imbrication with market forces and logic. To quote Robin D.G. Kelley, “What passed as ‘authentic’ ghetto culture was a much a product of market forces and the commercial appropriation of urban styles as experience and individual creativity. And very few black urban residents/consumers viewed their own participation in the marketplace as undermining their own authenticity as bearers of black culture.”<sup>44</sup> Like other genres of music, commodity culture mediates notions of hip hop authenticity. Unlike other genres of music, a preoccupation with market imperatives is not necessarily seen as antithetical to the production and maintenance of hip hop authenticity. In other words, commercial success and critical acclaim are not necessarily seen as mutually exclusive. To the contrary, crossover appeal can be seen as enhancing authenticity as long as the artist in question is perceived as remaining true to one’s self rather than keeping up with market trends.<sup>45</sup>

Also confounding and complicating claims of hip hop authenticity particularly as it revolves around hip hop’s perceived ethno-racial scope is growing recognition of the formative role of non-black youth—namely, Puerto Rican and Afro-Caribbean youth—in the evolution of hip hop. While acknowledging hip hop’s black antecedents, a growing number of critics point to the eclectic and wide ranging formative influences of hip hop that exceed the bounds of African American culture and complicate claims of hip hop as a strictly African American phenomenon. Accordingly, these cultural critics call for a

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<sup>43</sup> Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.* For the purposes of this study, I’m not particularly concerned with the falsity or genuineness of what passes for the master narrative of hip hop history. I’m more concerned with the kinds of claims made in the name of history, the underlying basis of these claims, and to what effects.

<sup>44</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 26.

<sup>45</sup> Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*

more nuanced narration of hip hop history that does not underplay or underestimate the degree to which the cultural histories of various groups overlap. As Kelley puts it, “Yet to say it is a ‘black’ thing does not mean it is made up entirely of black things.”<sup>46</sup> In emphasizing hip hop’s complex and variegated history, cultural critics like Kelley, Juan Flores, and Raquel Z. Rivera are challenging the existing historiography of hip hop and providing a corrective to what they perceive as African American centered accounts. At the same time, they are reconfiguring the terms by which hip hop has been understood and in the process, opening up alternative modes of validating authenticity.<sup>47</sup>

In “Puerto Rican and Proud, Boyee! Rap, Roots and Amnesia,” Juan Flores interrogates the notion of hip hop being an exclusively black phenomenon in light of the formative role of Puerto Rican youth in its evolution. He is especially concerned with how prevailing accounts obscure Puerto Rican participation and contribution to the emergence of hip hop.

It (hip hop) was either a “black thing,” which you could only “understand” by mimicking or diluting it, or it was an all-purpose-thing, of equal utility and relevance to anyone, anywhere, as long as you’re “with it.” The disappearing (sic) of Puerto Ricans from the public representation of rap was thus part of a larger process aimed at its disengagement from the concrete social context in which it arose. The fatalities of this process were of course many, having as much to do with gender, class and regional considerations as with ethnic and racial interaction. But it is the Puerto Ricans, as a group and as co-creators of new forms of interaction, whose reality was most manifestly elided.<sup>48</sup>

For Flores, hip hop is one more moment in the long history of black-Puerto Rican mutual collaborations and exchanges which is not a surprise given the similar social location that both groups occupy in New York City. He maintains that accounting for the formative

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<sup>46</sup> Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!*; Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Juan Flores, “Puerto Rican and Proud, Boyee! Rap, Roots and Amnesia,” in Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (eds.), *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 95.

role of Puerto Rican youth would mean expanding the boundaries of Puerto Ricanness to accommodate the shared history between blacks and Puerto Ricans but also coming up with a framework that can illuminate the “creative coauthorship” of hip hop.<sup>49</sup>

In his effort to put into focus the variegated origins of hip hop, Flores makes the crucial point that while it is problematic to conceive of hip hop as strictly a “black thing,” it is just as problematic to conceive of it as a multicultural “youth thing.” In other words, to conceptualize hip hop as either a “black thing” or a multicultural “youth thing” is problematic because it detaches hip hop from the context that gave rise to it and obscures the different settings and contexts in which it is taken up to serve particular purposes. Additionally, it obscures how different groups of youth are racialized in different ways which, in turn, condition the manner in which they negotiate with the racialized discourses and authenticating claims circulating within hip hop. The cross-cultural collaborations that take place within hip hop, then, is not a seamless process but one fraught with tensions and ambiguity over the very questions of authenticity, belonging, and group interests.

Building on Flores’ work, Rivera points to the shared history and culture between Puerto Ricans and blacks in which hip hop constitutes just another moment in a long history of joint cultural productions between the two groups.

Puerto Ricans in the United States are commonly thought of as being part of this country’s Hispanic or Latino population. But Puerto Ricans are also considered an exception among Latinos. Their exceptionality is based on a history that diverges from what has been construed as the Latino norm and that bears much in common with the experience of African Americans. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans share common ground with African Americans not only because of their similar socioeconomic experiences as racialized ethnic minorities in the United States but also because Puerto Rican culture is as Spanish as it is African, thus making it

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<sup>49</sup> Phrase taken from Flores, “Puerto Rican and Proud,” *Microphone Fiends*, 97.

part of the myriad group experiences that make up the African diaspora in the Americas.<sup>50</sup>

Conceiving of Puerto Ricans as part of the African diaspora in the Americas, Rivera makes a compelling case that Puerto Ricanness and blackness do not make up mutually exclusive categories but rather, overlapping categories. This not only serves to confound and complicate claims of cultural distinctiveness but also affords Puerto Rican youth legitimacy within hip hop or at least a compelling basis to make legitimizing claims.

Yet prevailing accounts of hip hop construct it as, in her words, “lodged within an exclusively African American matrix”<sup>51</sup> particularly in the case of MCing and DJing. In the following, Rivera suggests that the narrow identification of hip hop with African Americans has meant an effacement of the pivotal role that Puerto Rican youth played in the development of hip hop but also accounts for, at least in part, their low degree of participation and visibility in these elements of hip hop.

Rhyming and DJing were from the beginning more ethnic-racially identified with African Americans and closed to perceived outsiders by virtue of their reliance on dexterity in the English language. Thus, they were most easily traceable to the African American oral tradition and primarily employed music considered to be African American. Hip hop’s musical dimension seems to have been premised on an Afro-diasporic urbanity, where, although the participation of young people of Caribbean ancestry was pivotal, this music was often narrowly identified solely with African Americans.<sup>52</sup>

Rivera goes on to point out that when the presence of Puerto Rican youth has been acknowledged, it has been commonly seen as an intrusion into a black realm and a betrayal of their Puerto Ricanness as if Puerto Ricanness and blackness are mutually exclusive categories.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Rivera, *New York Ricans*, 8-9.

<sup>51</sup> Rivera, *New York Ricans*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Rivera, *New York Ricans*, 61.

<sup>53</sup> Rivera, *New York Ricans*.

But Rivera also points to recent shifts in the prevailing discourses of hip hop revolving around questions of cultural entitlement and authenticity that have served to legitimize Puerto Rican participation in hip hop. Beginning in the 1990s, there was a marked shift in the perceived ethnoracial scope of hip hop as the Afro-centric focus in hip hop gave way to a ghettocentric focus emphasizing socio-economic realities that encompass both Puerto Ricans and blacks. Given this emphasis on what Rivera calls “class-identified blackness/nigganess,”<sup>54</sup> Puerto Ricans have come to be seen as core participants rather than encroachers trying to “be black.”<sup>55</sup>

In the case of Asian American youth, the marked shift in the perceived ethnoracial scope of hip hop with its ghettocentric focus has not served to legitimize their participation in hip hop. In other words, Asian American youth have yet to be seen as core participants because they lack the racial and class credentials. In contrast to Puerto Rican youth, Asian American youth are not in a position to make originary and historical claims as the basis of their cultural entitlement and authenticity in hip hop. After all, unlike Puerto Rican youth, they were not among the first MCs, DJs, writers, and b-boys/b-girls when hip hop first emerged in the Bronx. Moreover, Asian youth and black youth do not have overlapping experiences of racialization, marginalization, and labor exploitation, at least not to the same extent that exist between Puerto Ricans and blacks in places like New York.

Given the absence of historical, cultural, and class continuities between the originators of hip hop and themselves, Asian American youth instead have to establish

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<sup>54</sup> Rivera, *New York Ricans*, 100.

<sup>55</sup> In both academic and popular texts, there is now recognition of the significance of Latinos, namely Puerto Rican youth, to the emergence and evolution of hip hop. Rivera, for instance, points to the widespread recognition of the pivotal role of Latinos, along with Blacks, in the emergence and evolution of hip hop in popular media including hip hop magazines like *The Source* and rap video shows like *Rap City* and in the academic literature citing works by Christopher Holmes Smith and Peter McLaren. She goes on to say, however, that notwithstanding this recognition, the specificity of Latinos continues to be underspecified in these accounts. Rivera, *New York Ricans*.

their cultural legitimacy and belongingness in terms other than proximity to blackness. They do so by engaging in a particular set of authenticating strategies including adherence to hip hop's purported core set of values and cultivation of their own distinctive style that is not simply a mimicking of black style. In making these authenticating claims, Asian American youth are attempting to carve out their own niche within hip hop but also claiming a different kind of authenticity for themselves or resignifying tropes and signifiers of hip hop authenticity.

In her discussion of Asian American youth involvement in hip hop, Deborah Wong discusses the Asian American rap group the Mountain Brothers and the way they deal with the perceived blackness of hip hop. She notes that the group has made a concerted effort to downplay their Asianness and avoid references to ethnicity. In the words of the group itself which consists of three Chinese Americans: "We avoid initially making explicit references to ethnicity so that we can be given a fair unbiased listen based on the merits of our music, lyrics and style, as opposed to avoiding making explicit references to ethnicity so that we can pass for black."<sup>56</sup> For the Mountain Brothers, staking out a place in hip hop means acceding, on some level, to the discourse of authenticity operating in the culture. However, this does not preclude working with and around the terms of the discourse. As Wong points out, the group has adopted a dual marketing strategy, one geared toward Asian American audiences in which they affirm their Asian Americanness and one geared to the larger hip hop audience in which they make no reference to their Asian Americanness as a way to remain true to who they are and at the same time carve out a niche within hip hop.

In another article, Wong notes that even as the Mountain Brothers subscribe to the view that hip hop is rooted in black culture, they nonetheless attempt to carve out their

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<sup>56</sup> Quote taken from Deborah Wong, "Just Being There: Making Asian American Space in the Recording Industry," in Kip Lornell and Anne K. Rasmussen (eds.) *Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 309.

own distinctive space by adhering to what they consider are the underlying values of hip hop.

Because of [the Mountain Brother's] dedication to the art, they (like the originators and true keepers of hip-hop) bring the kind of material that will add to hip-hop music, not steal from it or cheapen it. No shallow gimmicks, no karate kicks, no horror movie blood splattering, no "songs that sound like the group that went platinum," just straight up self truth. What the Mountain Brothers represent most of all is a deep love, respect, and ability for true "rewind the shit over and over in your walkman" hip-hop.<sup>57</sup>

The foregoing can be read as an attempt by the Mountain Brothers to achieve cultural legitimacy in hip hop. More specifically, by adhering to hip hop's core set of values, the group is not merely adopting black style but cultivating their own distinctive style that serves to elevate hip hop culture. At the same time, their "dedication to the art" allows the group to align itself with "the originators and true keepers of hip-hop" affording it cultural authenticity.

Attention has also been given to what it means for hip hop to be diffused on a global scale and taken up in settings and contexts far removed from its South Bronx origins. The contributors to *Global Noise, Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the U.S.A.*, for example, assert that hip hop cannot be viewed merely as an African American expressive form imported from the U.S.; instead, it has become a global youth form adapted to local circumstances for local purposes. In other words, the diffusion of hip hop on a global scale has given rise to new forms and identities that exceed the bounds of African American culture. Accordingly, contributors to the volume attempt to make sense of the complex set of negotiations and identifications taking place beyond hip hop's context of origin that belie its status as a "black thing." They are particularly interested in how youth in different parts of the globe establish their cultural legitimacy given the lack of

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<sup>57</sup> Statement appears in the Mountain Brothers' publicity packet; taken from Deborah Wong, "The Asian American Body in Performance," in Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (eds.), *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 80-81.

historical, cultural, and racial continuities between the originators of hip hop and themselves.<sup>58</sup>

To illustrate, Australian youth consider hip hop as much their thing as it is a black thing. In making such a claim, this group of youth relies on a number of authenticating strategies, strategies which range from fidelity to the core values or principles of hip hop to fidelity to one's true self. For them, authenticity is not a matter of geographic, racial, or class specificity or affiliation. Instead, it is more a matter of being true to what they consider the "essence" of hip hop which encompasses a commitment to upholding the various elements of hip hop including the use of two turntables and a microphone (purportedly hip hop's "original" instruments) in their music.<sup>59</sup>

Underspecified in these accounts, however, are the ways power inflects cultural relations and formations. While it is indeed the case that hip hop has not only become multicultural but also global in terms of its scope and appeal and therefore cannot be simply viewed as an expression of African Americanness, it does not follow that hip hop has also become an "an all-purpose-thing, of equal utility and relevance to anyone, anywhere, as long as you're 'with it'"<sup>60</sup> as a number of contributors to *Global Noise* seem to suggest. To borrow from Jacqueline Urla, "appropriations and border crossings are always inflected by histories of power that shape when cultural, ethnic, or linguistic boundaries are asserted, when they are transgressed, and they are misunderstood."<sup>61</sup> It is precisely these "histories of power" and critical questions of cultural and racial appropriation that are overlooked in recent scholarship on hip hop, histories of power which condition and shape the participation of different groups of youth in hip hop.

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<sup>58</sup> Tony Mitchell (ed.), *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the U.S.A.* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Ian Maxwell, "Sydney Stylee: Hip-Hop Down under Comin' Up," in Mitchell (ed.), *Global Noise*.

<sup>60</sup> Flores, "Puerto Rican and Proud," *Microphone Fiends*, 95.

<sup>61</sup> Jacqueline Urla, "'We Are All Malcolm X!': Negu Gorriak, Hip-Hop, and the Basque Political Imaginary," in Mitchell, *Global Noise*, 173-174.



Diaspora studies scholars pose yet another challenge to the construction of hip hop as a specifically African American mode of cultural expression. They too aim to broaden the perceived ethno-racial scope of hip hop but from a different vantage point. Taking issue with the conceptualization of hip hop within a nationalist framework, these scholars foreground the pivotal role of black diasporic practices to the emergence and evolution of hip hop. There have also been efforts to interrogate the convergence between multiple diasporic histories including that of South Asian and Afro-Caribbean diasporas and the implications for our understanding of the contours and dynamics of culture.<sup>62</sup>

### **Diaspora and Youth Culture: Hip Hop, Bhangra Music, and Second Generation Youth**

In the last decade or so, diaspora has become a major category of analysis in cultural studies and other disciplinary formations particularly in relation to the study of contemporary youth culture. Initially deployed to make sense of the plight of Jews, it is now deployed more broadly, referencing the experiences of different groups as a way to signify “the movement—forced or voluntary—of people from one or more nation-states to another.”<sup>63</sup> The notion of diaspora has proven to be an especially useful concept to think through the dynamics of identity and belonging within the context of migration and settlement. Diaspora studies scholars insist that we can no longer assume that the nation is the primary anchor for creating a sense of identity and belonging or that nation, identity, and place cohere in a logical, straightforward manner. By the same token, we

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. For a more recent publication bringing together established and emerging diasporic scholars including the aforementioned Gilroy, Martin F. Manalansan IV, and Gayatri Gopinath, see Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds.), *Theorizing Diaspora* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies,” in Braziel and Mannur (eds.), *Theorizing Diaspora*, 8.

can no longer assume that diaspora is “the bastard child of the nation—disavowed, inauthentic, illegitimate, an impoverished imitation of the originary culture.”<sup>64</sup>

The emergence of diaspora as an important category of analysis has also paved the way for a broader reconsideration of culture, providing ground on which to reconsider the dynamics and contours of culture within a transnational frame. Providing an alternative to the nationalist focus which has long characterized cultural criticism, recent theorizations complicate and confound conventional understandings of culture wedded to essentialist notions of authenticity, purity, and origins. Instead, they foreground the ways a wide range of expressive forms cannot be adequately considered by simply referencing the nation-state because it does not account for the displacements and dislocations that inflect these forms.<sup>65</sup>

By the same token, youth culture has become an important site from which to think through the contradictions and complexities of diaspora. A critical consideration of cultural productions within a diasporic frame, for instance, foregrounds the intricate nature of migration and settlement, the ambiguities of belonging and longing, and the (re)production of culture and tradition. It illuminates the convergence of multiple diasporas, how a diaspora is “always multiply constituted, at the juncture of various cultural, racial, and political histories.” And as Gayatri Gopinath has shown in her work, a reading of expressive forms through a diasporic lens sheds light on the imbrication between nation and diaspora, elucidating the historical relationship between the two terms.<sup>66</sup>

Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* has proven to be a highly influential work delineating the limitations of relying on the frame

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<sup>64</sup> Gopinath, “Bombay, U.K., Yuba City,” *Diaspora*, 317. See also Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302-338.

<sup>65</sup> Braziel and Mannur (eds.), *Theorizing Diaspora*.

<sup>66</sup> Gopinath, “Bombay, U.K., Yuba City,” *Diaspora*, 307.

of nation as a unit of analysis of cultural and political formations. In it, Gilroy takes issue with the nationalist focus in both British and U.S.-based cultural studies that renders cultural expressions coextensive with national borders, what he describes as the “the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture.”<sup>67</sup> For Gilroy, black cultural politics and formations cannot be adequately considered by simply referencing the internal dynamics of any one nation. Instead, a transnational and intercultural framework is required to begin to account for the intricacies of black history which encompasses a network of cultural exchanges and transformations spanning Africa, the Caribbean, the U.S., and Europe.<sup>68</sup>

From this vantage point, Gilroy challenges the racialization of hip hop as an exclusively African American phenomenon, the notion that hip hop is the absolute ethnic property of African Americans. Conceptualizing hip hop this way, he argues, effectively erases its origins in the black diaspora and the formative role of black diasporic cultural practices in its emergence. Notwithstanding its multiple origins and influences, however, considerations of hip hop continue to be informed by African American exceptionalism as evidenced by the use of the term “rap” or the deployment of accounts that conceive of hip hop as a direct descendant of jazz, soul, and the blues which Gilroy argues is more evocative of African American influences and genealogies. Instead, he calls for an alternative understanding of hip hop and other black cultural productions that is not rooted in discourses of nationalism and ethnic exceptionalism but one that is predicated on a recognition of the syncretic character of black cultural formations.<sup>69</sup>

Gilroy also takes issue with how music has become an important medium to make authenticating claims and in the case of hip hop, a potent signifier of racial authenticity

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<sup>67</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. See also Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (New York: Serpent’s Tail, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

and in particular, blackness. He finds especially troubling the valorization of African American-based hip hop by African American scholars as authentic and the concomitant devaluation of hip hop rooted in other locations in the black diaspora as inauthentic, a function of its purported distance from a specific (and identifiable) point of origin. What potentially can serve as a vehicle for unsettling the notion of authenticity (because of its syncretic character), therefore, has been deployed as signifier of authenticity. Gilroy goes on to assert that the issue of authenticity has not only persisted but assumed greater significance among practitioners, consumers, and fans alike even with the proliferation of hip hop related styles and genres on a global scale. Authenticity has actually enhanced the appeal of black cultural forms and has become an integral part of the ways these forms are marketed, packaged, and sold.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the widespread influence of the *Black Atlantic* in the study of diaspora, critics have taken issue with its conceptualization of the diaspora particularly along the lines of race and gender. Gayatri Gopinath, for instance, suggests that notwithstanding his critique of the black-white binary, Gilroy's notion of the black Atlantic reinscribes this bipolar framework as evidenced by his failure to engage with the presence of South Asian youth in Britain. Gopinath takes Gilroy to task for overlooking how South Asian youth appropriation of Afro-Caribbean forms not only redefines Asianness but also reconfigures black diasporic cultural formations. In his reliance on the black-white binary, then, Gilroy fails to account for the convergence between different diasporic histories and the implications for his notion of the black Atlantic, diasporic cultural formations, and race.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

<sup>71</sup> Gopinath, "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City," *Diaspora*. For a more general critique of Gilroy's formulation of the relationship between blackness and modernity, see the special issue of *Research in African Literature* 27.4 (1996).

Gopinath also takes issue with the way gender is unmarked in Gilroy's formulation of the diaspora effacing women or registering their presence only as reproducers of cultural and communal boundaries which, in turn, serves to naturalize patriarchy and heterosexuality. This is confirmed by Gilroy's foregrounding of ships, turntables, and sound systems—technologies historically inaccessible to women—as a vehicle to talk about the syncretism underlying diasporic cultural productions. But in so doing, Gilroy constitutes the diaspora in a deeply gendered way, privileging a masculinist genealogy of the black diaspora without considering how these forms of travel and cultural production have not been open to women.<sup>72</sup>

More recently, however, there have been efforts to broaden the scope of diasporic scholarship as a corrective to the black-white bipolar framework which informs cultural criticism. This is reflected in the burgeoning literature on diasporic South Asian youth cultural productions revolving around bhangra music. Originating in the Punjabi provinces of India and Pakistan, bhangra is a particular style of folk music performed to mark the end of the sugar cane harvest and also to commemorate the arrival of the Punjabi New Year. Within the context of the South Asian diaspora, however, bhangra has taken on new and distinct meanings with the incorporation of different genres of music enabling South Asian youth to redefine their South Asianness.<sup>73</sup>

With the migration of Punjabi families to Britain in the 1950s, we began to see experimentations and innovations in the form and style of the music disrupting its exclusive association with Punjabi music and culture. Performed at weddings and other community celebrations, musicians started combining traditional bhangra instruments such as the dholak (drum played with sticks) and the dholki (a smaller version of the

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<sup>72</sup> Gopinath, "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City," *Diaspora*.

<sup>73</sup> Sabita Banerji and Gerd Baumann, "Bhangra 1984-8: Fusion and Professionalization in a Genre of South Asian Dance Music," in Paul Oliver (ed.), *Black Music in Britain: Essays on the Afro-Asian Contribution to Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990).

dholak played by hand) with Western music and instruments that resulted in distinct new sounds. Andy Bennett, for example, identifies the emergence of two new bhangra styles, bhangra and northern rock bhangra as a consequence of these modifications.<sup>74</sup>

By the 1980s, a new generation of South Asians—British-born South Asian youth—had not only embraced bhangra but also engaged in their own experimentations and innovations combining it with other forms of contemporary music such as hip hop, reggae, and techno. Bhangra and its various permutations eventually supplanted hip hop and soul as the music of choice as bhangra music scenes surfaced in places like New York, Chicago, Toronto, Vancouver, Delhi, and Bombay. These various scenes developed their own distinct flavors, adapting to local contexts while at the same time being shaped by local inflections and influences. Bhangra has evolved into a catch-all category for music that created by South Asian youth that may or may not incorporate Punjabi folk rhythms. In New York, for example, bhangra is infused with hip hop and reggae beats while in Chicago, it is mixed with house music, a genre of music considered indigenous to Chicago.<sup>75</sup>

The scholarship on bhangra focuses on the significance of bhangra in the formation of new Asian youth identities in the diaspora. It explores the various ways in which the music serves as an important medium through which desi youth invoke a diasporic notion of South Asianness and locate themselves within contemporary diasporic settings. Sanjay Sharma, for example, describes its emergence in Britain “as an

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<sup>74</sup> Bhangra continues to evolve with the emergence of new forms such as fusion (a blend of bhangra with house and techno) and ragga (a blend of bhangra with rap and reggae). Andy Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001). See also Banerji and Baumann, “Bhangra 1984-8,” in Oliver (ed.), *Black Music in Britain*.

<sup>75</sup> The bhangra music scene in Britain proved to be generative in the development of bhangra music scenes around the globe. For an account of the emergence of the bhangra music scene in Britain, see Gopinath, “Bombay, U.K., Yuba City,” *Diaspora*. For a discussion of the bhangra music scene in Toronto, see Jacqueline Warwick, “Make Way for the Indian”: Bhangra Music and South Asian Presence in Toronto,” *Popular Music and Society* 24.2 (Summer 2000): 25-44. And for a discussion of the bhangra music scene in Chicago, see Gregory Diethrich, “Desi Music Vibes: The Performance of Indian Youth Culture in Chicago,” *Asian Music* 31.1 (Fall/Winter 1999/2000): 35-61.

affirmative moment in the formation of an Asian identity discourse in the early 1980s, a site for Asian youth culture acquiring a sense of identity and visibility in the public domain, and negotiating an ambivalent positionality in relation to a culturally hostile and exclusionary British nation.”<sup>76</sup> Bhangra, therefore, is significant not only because it represented an expressive form that South Asian youth in the diaspora can claim as their own but also because it rendered South Asian youth visible and audible for the first time in a variety of diasporic contexts.

In New York, bhangra is an integral part of what Sunaina Maira terms “desi remix subculture,” essentially a dance or party culture created, organized, and frequented primarily by South Asian youth. It is informed by both a “politics of nostalgia” that looks to India as the site of cultural authenticity and by a “politics of cool” that look to contemporary youth culture in the U.S., allowing South Asian youth to claim their place in the ethnic and racial landscape of the U.S. but in a way that preserves the “authenticity” of their ethnicity and culture. Through their involvement in this subculture, desi youth are able to negotiate with, challenge, and reproduce ideologies of ethnic authenticity but also meanings of femininity and masculinity.<sup>77</sup>

In all these different contexts, DJs wield a great deal of power and prestige on the basis of their ability to create an environment conducive to partying. Those who are able to read the crowd and respond accordingly are held in high regard as well as those who are able to manipulate and reconfigure music from different genres to produce a new sound. According to Jacqueline Warwick this exhibits an ability to negotiate with the multiple and at times contradictory demands from parents, peers and mainstream culture

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<sup>76</sup> Sanjay Sharma, “Noisy Asians or ‘Asian Noise’?,” in Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk, Ashwani Sharma (eds.), *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (London: Zed, 1996), 33.

<sup>77</sup> Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

in a way that affirms South Asian identity while at the same time carving out a niche within mainstream society.<sup>78</sup>

Desi remix DJs, then, amass a great deal of subcultural capital in addition to the economic capita they earn from engagements at parties. As in other subcultures revolving around recorded music on vinyl, however, subcultural capital is typically distributed along gender lines and revolves around a highly gendered set of practices. Notwithstanding the presence of a handful of female DJs, the preponderance of DJs and DJ crews are men who form social networks as a way to pass on musical knowledge and technological expertise to other male DJs. Through this process, homosocial bonds are forged and reinforced which then serves as mechanism through which female youth are excluded and marginalized, a status that is reflected in the way male DJs confer status on their girlfriends. Following Thornton, Maira suggests that these bonds function to ensure that subcultural capital circulates largely among men.<sup>79</sup>

The gender and sexual dynamics of desi youth culture is not only evident in the perpetuation of subcultural capital among male DJs but also in the way it affords desi youth a space to negotiate gender and sexual ideologies shaped by expectations of parents, the ethnic community, peers, and the media. In the highly heterosexist environment of desi remix culture, for example, certain forms of masculinity and femininity are idealized with different implications for desi male and female youth. While men can enact a wide range of masculinities without placing their authenticity as ethnic subjects in doubt, women are expected to comply with normative expectations of Indian femininity. In other words, “issues of style and image for Indian American

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<sup>78</sup> Warwick, “Make Way for the Indian,” *Popular Music and Society*; Diethrich, “Desi Music Vibes,” *Asian Music*.

<sup>79</sup> Maira, *Desis in the House*.



women are thus clearly harnessed to the politics of ethnic authenticity” and therefore, embodying alternative femininities is seen as cultural betrayal.<sup>80</sup>

Maira’s consideration of the gender and sexual politics of desi remix culture represents more recent efforts to provide gendered accounts of the South Asian diaspora and diasporic youth cultural productions. This growing body of literature examines the ways in which gender and sexuality are implicated in diasporic articulations of identity, culture, and community at the same time that the diaspora serves as a space where gender and sexual norms are not simply reiterated but also reconfigured. There is particular interest in how youth diasporic cultural productions reproduce the gender ideologies of nationalist discourses, specifically the deployment and mobilization of gendered meanings and culture which position women as the embodiment of ethnic, cultural and national boundaries. But as diaspora studies scholars point out, these cultural practices and activities can also unsettle dominant articulations of gender and sexuality.<sup>81</sup>

Gopinath, for instance, asserts that while bhangra music serves as a vehicle for the construction of a diasporic identity at odds with the conventional notion of Indian identity, its deployment also tends to subscribe to the masculinist and heterosexist logic of conventional nationalisms as women continue to serve as markers of cultural and communal boundaries. This is evident, for example, in much of the work of Apache who relies on prevailing gender hierarchies in his effort to articulate an Indianness that does not look to India as the originary site of Indianness. So while bhangra can be interpreted as challenging essentialized notions of Indianness by foregrounding the performative nature or constructedness of ethnic and racial identity, it is also complicit in reinforcing standard articulations of gender through its production of an unmarked male diasporic subject.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Maira, *Desis in the House*, 173.

<sup>81</sup> Gopinath, “Bombay, U.K., Yuba City,” *Diaspora*.

<sup>82</sup> Gopinath, “Bombay, U.K., Yuba City,” *Diaspora*.

But while bhangra constitutes a masculine cultural form, the growing involvement of women as performers and DJs opens up the possibility of disrupting its masculinist logic. Gopinath points to one of the few female bhangra artist in the industry, Apna Sangeet, who unsettles gender conventions through a track entitled “Soho Road.” In it, she depicts women in a role typically reserved for men, as a diasporic subject capable of movement and exercising agency. The potential exists, therefore, for the deployment of bhangra to mobilize enabling articulations of gender that goes against nationalist formations of what it means to be female in the diaspora. In other words, bhangra is open to appropriation and resignification by South Asian women with the possibility of serving as a signifier of female diasporic identity.<sup>83</sup>

Like South Asian youth in the diaspora, Filipino youth have managed to forge a distinct youth culture they can claim as their own. This is not a surprise given the changing demographics of the Filipino community in the U.S. and in particular, the growth of the second generation which has not only given rise to a visible Filipino youth culture comprised of a wide array of cultural forms and practices—literature, music, film, performance arts, culture shows, murals, just to name a few—but also to an emergent Filipino cultural criticism informed by a diasporic perspective. In this kind of work, scholars situate their study of Filipino social formations within the context of colonization, displacement, and migration. They are particularly interested in the kinds of negotiations that take place around issues of belongingness and identity, negotiations complicated by the disjuncture between notions of home and nation.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Gopinath, “‘Bombay, U.K., Yuba City,’” *Diaspora*. Gopinath has also written about the appropriation of bhangra by queer South Asians serving as a signifier of a queer diasporic identity. See Gayatri Gopinath, “Notes on a Queer South Asian Planet: Gayatri Gopinath on Queer Transnational Cultures,” *Rungh: A South Asian Quarterly of Culture, Comment, and Criticism* 3(3): 9-10.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Y. Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities, and Communities* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998); Theodore S. Gonzalves, “The Day the Dancers Stayed: On Pilipino Cultural Nights,” in Maria P.P. Root (ed.), *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997); S. Lily Mendoza, “A Different Breed of Filipino Balikbayans: The Ambiguities of ‘Re-turning’,” in Antonio T. Tiongson Jr., Ed Gutierrez,

One of the central themes that runs through most of this work is the different ways Filipino youth, particularly college age Filipinos, position themselves in the Filipino diaspora given their lack of firsthand experience with the Philippines. All grapple with the question of what it means to be born and raised in the diaspora and in particular, how second generation youth negotiate their Filipinoness through literal and symbolic “returnings” to the homeland. For the most part, however, this body of work focuses almost exclusively on the practices oriented towards the homeland, practices informed by a politics of authenticity and nostalgia.

In his analysis of Filipino social and cultural formations in the U.S., Jonathan Y. Okamura suggests that Filipinos in the U.S. constitute “a diaspora because of their significant cultural, social, and economic linkages with their homeland that distinguish them from other ethnic minorities in the United States.”<sup>85</sup> He goes on to say that “These transnational relationships are developed and maintained by Filipinos in diaspora through cultural practices such as return visits, sending remittances and consumer items, and regular communication to the homeland.”<sup>86</sup> For Okamura, then, the notion of diaspora does not simply signify a dispersal of people but also the creation and maintenance of transnational linkages. Thus, we can no longer view Filipino American identities and communities as nationally bounded formations but rather, as transnational phenomena comprised of social relations and cultural practices that extend beyond national borders.<sup>87</sup>

Although primarily discussing first generation Filipinos, Okamura notes that a diasporic identity and consciousness is also apparent among second generation Filipinos

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and Rick Gutierrez (eds.), *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Mapping “Filipino American” Formations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

<sup>85</sup> Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora*, 8.

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion delineating the limitations of relying on the frame of nation as a unit of analysis of cultural and political formations, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (New York: Serpent’s Tail, 1993).

as evidenced by the turn to the Philippines for “culture.” He suggests that among Filipino youth, there is a strong interest in Philippine culture and history, that is, a strong desire to visit the home country and/or learn as much about Philippine culture and history.

According to Okamura, “This cultural (re)turning to the ‘Philippines as source’ denotes the diasporic nature of their ethnic identity and that it can be articulated symbolically and transnationally without requiring a literal return or longing for return to the homeland.”<sup>88</sup>

Among Filipino youth, therefore, greater emphasis is given to Philippine culture and history than to U.S.-based forms and practices as the basis of their Filipinoness.

Okamura makes a compelling case that it no longer makes sense to conceive of Filipinos as a bounded formation for to do so obscures the saliency of transnational linkages among Filipinos. He recognizes that nationalist perspectives are no longer an adequate basis to account for the scope and dynamics of Filipino social formations. In so doing, Okamura provides a more complex mapping of Filipino American social formations that disrupts “the assumed congruence among nation, identity, and place.” As such, his work represents a significant advance over those perspectives that domesticate Filipinos as ethnic minorities in the U.S., perspectives that conceive of the historical and contemporary experiences of Filipinos in terms of immigration, adaptation, and settlement in the U.S.<sup>89</sup>

But while Okamura’s work is helpful in terms of revealing the limitations of a nationalist framework to make sense of the realities of Filipinos, it is not particularly helpful in terms of illuminating complex forms of negotiations and identifications that are not oriented towards the homeland. Instead, in his formulation, Okamura assumes the desirability of return among second generation Filipinos making it seem as if Filipino youth identification with the homeland is somehow natural and inevitable rather than

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<sup>88</sup> Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora*, 25.

<sup>89</sup> Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora*, 12.

fraught with ambiguities and subject to continuous negotiations and constestations.

Implicit in his analysis is the notion of the homeland as an authentic space of belonging, a fixed point of origin to which one can nostalgically look back and return to in order to reclaim their Filipinoness. By and large, then, Okamura conceptualizes the relationship between nation and diaspora in a limited way, one in which the former stands in a privileged position over the latter and one in which diaspora is conceived in unilinear or unidirectional terms.

In making the argument that the turn to the Philippines among second generation Filipinos is indicative of a diasporic identity and consciousness, Okamura fails to provide a critical evaluation of the terms by which this process takes place. He cites Theodore S. Gonzalves' work on PCN but inexplicably overlooks Gonzalves' critique of the essentialist logic of the show, the very process that he seems to valorize in his book.<sup>90</sup> Okamura does acknowledge that second generation Filipinos turn to other sources and traditions not commonly identified as Filipino to define what it means to be Filipino. Again citing Theodore S. Gonzalves' work, he notes that Filipinoness is comprised not merely of elements identified as Filipino but also of elements, in this case hip-hop, with non-Filipino origins. Yet Okamura does not pursue the implications of this turn in relation to his conceptualization of Filipino diasporic identity and consciousness or what it means for Filipino youth to step out of the acceptable parameters of Filipinoness.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> In the article, Gonzalves points out that PCN subscribes to an essentialist logic whereby organizers and participants conceive of culture as fixed and static. What is seen on stage, therefore, is the reduction of culture to static markers of Filipinoness—language, ethnic clothing, indigenous dances—and the use of these markers to signify or represent ethnic identity. Gonzalves, "The Day the Dancers Stayed, *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*. For a more general discussion of the complications that migration presents in terms of reproducing cultural traditions and practices from the homeland, see Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). See also Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>91</sup> Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora*.

Like Okamura, Yen Le Espiritu conceives of Filipino American identity, culture, and community not as nationally bounded formations but as transnational formations maintained through activities and practices that exceed national boundaries. She conceives of the process of migration as “not only about arrival and settlement but, crucially, also about home orientation and return.”<sup>92</sup> And like Okamura, Espiritu looks into the dynamics of cultural and identity politics among second generation Filipinos. She is particularly interested in what she describes as “the practice of symbolic transnationalism” among U.S.-born Filipinos, many of whom have never set foot in the Philippines. Unlike Okamura, however, she provides a more substantive consideration of the terms by which post-65 second generation Filipinos construct a diasporic identity and consciousness interrogating how many in this cohort subscribe to essentialist notions of the homeland.

Having spent their formative years in the U.S., Filipino youth have minimal or no firsthand knowledge about the Philippines and must therefore depend on their parents and other cultural institutions for this knowledge. This lack of knowledge takes on added significance in light of the nonrecognition that surrounds the presence of Filipinos in the U.S. As a number of scholars point out, this is a condition that has come to characterize Filipinos in the U.S. Within standard historical accounts, for example, Filipinos have all but disappeared as evidenced by the erasure of the Philippine-American War and Filipino insurgency against U.S. imperial rule; if they appear at all, it is usually as objects of derision—savages unfit for self-government, economic threats displacing white labor, sexual deviants obsessed with white women, or ungrateful recipients of U.S. beneficence.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>93</sup> For a discussion of the elision of the Philippine-U.S. War in historical accounts, see Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia (eds.), *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream 1899-1999* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Luzviminda Francisco, “The

That Filipinos have yet to gain legibility in both popular and academic discourses, however, is not just a matter of institutional neglect but a function of the racialization of Filipinos in the U.S. Oscar V. Campomanes has written extensively about this issue, linking the illegibility of Filipino social formations to the profound silence and denial surrounding the history of U.S. imperialism. For Campomanes, “The invisibility of the Philippines became a necessary historiographical phenomenon because the annexation of the Philippines proved to be constitutionally and culturally problematic for American political and civil society around the turn of the century and thereafter.”<sup>94</sup> For Filipinos, the historical amnesia surrounding U.S. imperialism has come to mean grappling with the “spectre of invisibility”<sup>95</sup> themselves precisely because a full accounting of their presence necessitates a full accounting of a largely unthinkable history.

In contrast, Elizabeth Pisares contends that the historical amnesia surrounding U.S. imperialism cannot fully account for what she describes as the perceptual absence that has come to characterize the condition of Filipinos in the U.S. Instead, she argues this condition is more a function of the postwar racialization of Filipinos and their location in the racial order where “Filipino-Americans do not and cannot exist.” Pisares contends that prior to this period, Filipinos existed as a distinct racial group, racialized

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First Vietnam: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902,” taken from Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom (eds.), *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1987). For a discussion of the construction of Filipinos as ungrateful recipients of U.S. beneficence, see Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

<sup>94</sup> Oscar V. Campomanes, “Filipinos in the United States and their Literature of Exile,” in Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling (eds.), *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 53. See also Oscar V. Campomanes, “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino-American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 2.2 (Spring 1995). E. San Juan Jr. has also made a similar point asserting that Filipino invisibility is symptomatic of the lasting legacy of U.S. imperialism, a legacy which distinguishes Filipinos from other Asian groups. See E. San Juan Jr., *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992).

<sup>95</sup> Phrase taken from Campomanes, “Filipinos in the United States,” *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, 53.

not as Asian American but as Filipino to be distinguished and distinguishable from other Asian groups. In other words, it is their exclusion from U.S. racial discourse which came into being in the civil rights era that sets the condition of Filipino invisibility.<sup>96</sup>

Looking to Jocelyn Enriquez as a test case for her theory of invisibility, Pisares posits that the racial ambiguity surrounding this popular Pinay dance music artist is actually a condition familiar to Filipino Americans who, as she points out, “are seen as everything and anything but Filipino.” In Enriquez’s case, she had to deal with accusations of passing herself first as Latina, then as black but rather than center her analysis on Enriquez’s culpability, Pisares instead focuses on the broader context wherein this dance music artist’s racial fidelity becomes an issue. She goes on to argue that Filipino invisibility stems from their classification as Asian American while their experience of racial ambiguity stems from not conforming to others’ perceptual expectations of Asian Americans.<sup>97</sup>

Notwithstanding the dearth of knowledge about Filipino history and culture, Filipino youth strive to maintain ties to the homeland and incorporate what they consider Filipino cultural traditions and practices in their own lives beyond a symbolic level. There is a sense of loss and longing for an imagined homeland culture, a collective nostalgia for the Philippines as the originary site of identity, culture, and community no matter how mythical. This process, however, is far from seamless and straightforward but complex and contradictory. Nonetheless, for many, what it means to be Filipino is reduced to a narrow set of social and cultural markers such as language, food, and religion.

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<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth Pisares, “Do You Mis(recognize) Me: Jocelyn Enriquez, Filipina/o Invisibility, and the Condition of Perpetual Absence,” in Antonio T. Tiongson Jr., Ed Gutierrez, and Ric Gutierrez (eds.), *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: (Re)Mapping “Filipino American” Formations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>97</sup> Pisares, “Do You Mis(recognize) Me, *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*.



Lily S. Mendoza, for example, focuses on the ambiguities of homeland “re-turnings” among college age second generation Filipino American youths, what she describes as “the phenomenon of a different breed of balikbayans or homeland returnees.” Looking into Balik-Aral (Back-to-Study) summer programs designed to take Filipino American youths to the Philippines to learn about Philippine history, society, and culture, Mendoza examines what it means for these youths inspired by the Philippine indigenization movement to undertake not merely a symbolic but literal return to a place they have never set foot on yet consider “home.” She asserts that these programs serve as the basis for the reclamation of a previously disavowed history and the emergence of a new found Filipino subjectivity. As Mendoza notes, however, this process is far from straightforward and unproblematic, providing possibilities for both reproducing and disrupting common sense identifications with the signifier “Filipino.”<sup>98</sup>

Whereas Mendoza is interested in what it means for Filipino youth to literally return to the homeland, Gonzalves is more interested in what it means for Filipino youth to symbolically return to the homeland through their involvement in culture shows. In his analysis of the popular culture show, Pilipino Cultural Night (PCN), Gonzalves suggests that organizers and participants subscribe to an essentialist logic conceiving of culture as fixed and static. What is seen on stage, therefore, is the reduction of culture to static markers of Filipinoness—language, ethnic clothing, indigenous dances—and the use of these markers to signify or represent ethnic identity. The assumption is that the Philippines constitutes the site where one can learn and experience what it truly means to be Filipino, to get in touch with one’s Filipinoness, and resolve identity issues.<sup>99</sup>

Barbara S. Gaerlan also tries to make sense of the involvement of Filipino youth in PCN, examining how orientalist discourse is implicated in the staging of this culture

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<sup>98</sup> Mendoza, “A Different Breed of Filipino Balikbayans,” *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*.

<sup>99</sup> Gonzalves, “The Day the Dancers Stayed,” *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*.

show. She focuses on a key component of the show—folkloric dance—designed to teach Filipino students about the indigenous cultures of the Philippines. These dances, however, are not an “authentic” representation of indigenous Filipino life but a vehicle for the promotion of Philippine nationalism. Created by the Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company, it is actually a part of a Philippine government sponsored effort to promote a particular vision of the Philippines that relies on Orientalist representations of Filipinos and obscures the continuing brutal war waged by the Philippine government against the Moros. Gaerlan goes on to investigate why Filipino students are invested in orientalist visions of Philippine history and culture and concludes that it may very be an effort, albeit problematic, to compensate for the popular view that the Philippines does not have a culture.<sup>100</sup>

While Gonzalves and Gaerlan focus on culture shows, Elizabeth H. Pisares focuses on Filipino literary and musical productions in an attempt to make sense of Filipino responses to what she describes as “conditions of neocolonialism and racial marginalization, whose strategies of domination has been ones of assimilation into racial hierarchy, then exclusion from racial discourse.”<sup>101</sup> She is particularly interested in how Filipinos in the U.S. go about constructing their sense of Filipinoness given the absence of a Filipino American discourse. Pisares identifies several overlapping strategies including the fetishization of ethnic markers as evident in culture shows, identification as Asian American, construction of a racial discourse predicated on an essentialist notion of brownness, and refusal of Pinoy/Pinay identification as a way to master a cultural form.

In the case of ISP, Pisares makes the point that rather than assert their Filipinoness through their music, the group engages in a strategic refusal to racialize their

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<sup>100</sup> Barbara S. Gaerlan, “In the Court of Sultan: Orientalism, Nationalism, and Modernity in Philippine and Filipino American Dance,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 2:3 (October 1999): 251-287.

<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth H. Pisares, *Daly City is My Nation: Race, Imperialism, and the Claiming of Pinay/Pinoy Identities in Filipino American Culture* (Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1999), 21-22.

involvement in DJing. Instead, their aim is to innovate and perfect the techniques associated with this expressive form as evidenced by the following quote from Q-Bert: “We’re not Filipino artists, we’re artists. We’re not from the Filipino race, we’re from the human race...Ever since we started, race didn’t matter to us. As soon as it does matter, there’s something wrong. It never occurred to us that being Filipinos would hinder us in doing what we love. It never crossed our minds. What crossed our minds is we have to practice. That’s what would hinder us.”<sup>102</sup> Pisares goes on to argue that it is precisely because ISP is not bound to a racially defined musical genre or obligated to create music identifiably Filipino that allows them to excel in an artform like DJing to the point where no one can ignore a Filipino presence. In other words, Filipino invisibility conditions the mastery of the form.

As in South Asian youth culture, gender and sexuality figure prominently in the dynamics of Filipino youth culture with different implications for men and women. Within Filipino cultural criticism, however, there is a failure to provide a serious gendered analysis of Filipino social formations. Largely missing in these accounts, for example, are critical reflections on the ways gender and sexuality are implicated in the formation of diasporic identity and consciousness or the ways gendered and sexed meanings of tradition and culture are mobilized within a diasporic context. Also missing in these accounts are critical reflections on how gender and ethnicity collude to define and delimit the boundaries of Filipinoness.

For Pinay youth, culture constitutes a particularly vexed site, having to deal with the added burden of upholding the reputation of the family and the purity of cultural traditions. This is articulated through the deployment of a narrative of female morality based on a distinction between “Filipino” culture and “American” culture which marks the former as family oriented and the latter as individualistic and impersonal. Generally

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<sup>102</sup> Quote taken from Pisares, *Daly City is My Nation*, 147.

revolving around questions of sexuality, this narrative is underwritten by “a model of Filipina womanhood that is chaste, modest, nurturing, and family-oriented,”<sup>103</sup> an idealized model that is constructed in opposition to white womanhood.

As Espiritu notes, the idealized model of Filipina womanhood has tremendous costs for Pinay youth resulting in heightened scrutiny and restrictions on their movement and activities, restrictions not placed on Pinoy youth. For one thing, it constitutes a means of enforcing gender conformity, justifying the policing, monitoring, and disciplining of Pinay youth bodies in the name of preserving the family honor and Pinay purity and propriety. By the same token, it stigmatizes those who do not lead a so-called virtuous lifestyle; instead, they are considered “Americanized”—assertive, promiscuous, and immoral—and subject to family and community sanctions. In other words, Pinay youth who assert their sexuality in a way that does not subscribe to the idealized model of Filipinanness risk being perceived as acting white, as inauthentic ethnic subjects who betray their culture and bring shame to the family.<sup>104</sup>

For Filipina youth and other female members of the household, therefore, “the home” and related notions like “family” or “community” do not necessarily constitute a safe space but one fraught with tensions. Espiritu, for instance, points out that “homes are simultaneously places of nurturing and sites of conflict between family members who occupy different positions of power.”<sup>105</sup> As a repository of authentic Filipinoness, then, there is the possibility that any form of transgression on the part of Pinay youth may result in their literal or symbolic expulsion from “home.” Far from an ideal site, then, the invocation of home particularly by parents can be a traumatic and harrowing process for

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<sup>103</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “‘We Don’t Sleep Around Like White Girls Do’: Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipino American Lives,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26:2 (2001), 431.

<sup>104</sup> Espiritu, *Home Bound*.

<sup>105</sup> Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 2.

those who do not fit the normative expectations of Filipinoness. Instead, it often serves a site for reproducing gender conventions and heterosexual norms.<sup>106</sup>

Proscriptions directed at Pinay youth but not at Pinoy youth illustrates that ethnicity and gender collude with one another to define the boundaries of Filipinoness. What it means to be Filipino is not simply a matter of ethnicity or ethnic identification; it is also a matter of gender or gender identification. In other words, idealized notions of ethnicity and femininity are inextricably linked “so that transgressing the norms of one category simultaneously destabilizes the other.”<sup>107</sup> For example, in their effort to uphold ethnic identity, Filipino parents all too often invoke “Filipino” traditional values as a means of controlling their daughters’ behavior. By the same token, the refusal or failure to comply with normative expectations coded as Filipino is often viewed as a defiance of one’s ethnicity or a betrayal of one’s Filipinoness. For the Pinay DJs interviewed for this study, this means that their involvement is conditioned by a different set of expectations, expectations specific to DJ culture but also by expectations rooted in normative notions of Filipina womanhood.

The foregoing theoretical approaches to youth culture provide a framework to consider the complex forms of identification that are taking place among Filipino youth through their involvement in DJ culture. The dominance of Filipino youth in DJing, however, only makes sense within the context of Filipino migration and racial formation. The next chapter provides a historical account of Filipino migration to the U.S. and the emergence of Filipino communities in the U.S. It is in these communities—the Bay

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<sup>106</sup> Espiritu, *Home Bound*. See also Dylan Rodriguez, “Globalizing Survivals, Localizing Resistances: ‘Filipino American’ Discourse and the Problematics of U.S. Pinoy Social Space,” unpublished essay. For a critique of the ways nonheteronormative subjects are located outside the normative boundaries of “home” and “family,” see Karin Aguilar-San Juan, “Going Home: Enacting Justice in Queer Asian America,” in David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (eds.), *Q & A: Queer in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). See also Gayatri Gopinath, “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion,” *positions* 5:2 (1997).

<sup>107</sup> Amita Handa, *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture* (Toronto: Women’s Place, 2003), 111-112.

Area, Los Angeles, and New York—with a sizable number of Filipinos and a growing second generation that DJing has thrived.

## Chapter II Contextualizing Filipino Migration and Racial Formations

The decade of the 1890s is a crucial starting point for the discussion of U.S. imperialism not only because it culminated in the U.S. conquest of the Philippines in 1898 but also because of the convergence of several factors domestically and abroad which paved the way for the emergence of the U.S. as a bona fide empire. It marks the end of a century in which the U.S. more than doubled its size yet U.S. drive for more territory would also extend overseas.<sup>1</sup> By 1899, in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, the U.S. possessed an island empire stretching from the Caribbean into the Pacific, an empire comprised of Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

But the U.S. also encountered the Philippines at a time of domestic decline and at a time when its interests overseas were threatened. Following years of industrial growth, a deep depression hit the U.S. from 1893-1897 precipitating the worst labor violence in U.S. history.<sup>2</sup> Intellectuals like Frederick Jackson Turner lamented the closing of the American frontier while prominent politicians like President Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge thought that industrialization undermined the character of white native born men from middle and upper class backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Overseas, U.S. economic interests in Cuba were threatened by a revolution while its economic interests in Asia were threatened by European powers. In particular, the U.S. feared that countries like Germany and Russia would divide up China among themselves and shut out the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Just during the Polk administration, the U.S. annexed Texas, acquired Oregon from the British, and in the aftermath of the Mexican War, gained one third of Mexico's territory north of the Rio Grande. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> The largest strike occurred in June 1894 when workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company went on strike due to significant cuts in their wages. The strikers garnered the support of the American Railway Union, a national union of railway workers and successfully stopped all railway traffic coming out of Chicago. The strike ended when federal troops and the police used firearms and bayonets against strikers killing as many as 34 people. Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*.

<sup>3</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

from China's market. In short, Americans confronted an America in decline, an America which looked more and more like Europe rendering the notion of American exceptionalism questionable. It is within this context that overseas expansion came to be regarded as an attractive option to some and in the eyes of many, the only viable course of action.

### **Empire, Conquest, and Displacement**

At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Philippines became the site for debates over America's role in the world given developments both at home and abroad. In light of a deep depression that hit the U.S. during the 1890s, U.S. politicians and business interests considered the Philippines a potentially lucrative source of raw materials and a market for U.S. manufactured goods but also the first step in securing the Asian market in light of increasing competition from other countries like Russia and Japan. In their view, the acquisition of the Philippines put the U.S. in a position to take advantage of the potentially lucrative market of China. Imperialists also argued that conquest of the Philippines would serve U.S. strategic interests because it would allow the U.S. to establish a coaling station and a naval base in the Pacific and thereby maintain and further its interests in the region.<sup>4</sup>

As Yen Le Espiritu points out, however, empire building is not just a matter of economics or strategic considerations but also a subject-constituting project.<sup>5</sup> For the U.S., the Philippines afforded it a site to reaffirm itself as a civilizing force through the construction of Filipinos as "savages" and "children" incapable of self government and in need of tutelage. In his now notorious and often quoted remarks, President William

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<sup>4</sup> See also Captain A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1894)). Mahan is important because his ideas influenced U.S. foreign policy in the 1890s. More specifically, he looked to colonies not just as a source of raw materials and a market for surplus goods but also as a stepping stone to potentially lucrative markets.

<sup>5</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).



McKinley explained to a Methodist delegation the justification for U.S. conquest of the Philippines:

And one night late it came to me this way—I don't know how it was but it came: (1) That we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France and Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and (4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom, Christ also died.<sup>6</sup>

Precisely because Filipinos were incapable of self government, the U.S. government had no choice but to impose its benevolent rule on “natives” purportedly incapable of desiring freedom and governing themselves. U.S.-imposed rule, therefore, was an expression of benevolence, a means bring the Philippines into the civilized world rather than the deployment of brutal force and violence.

Underlying the U.S. thrust westward and overseas was the notion that people of Anglo-Saxon descent are divinely ordained to civilize and rule the world because of their purported inherent superiority. Accordingly, empire became a means by which a superior race of people could disseminate Christianity and its political institutions to the rest of the world at the same time that it brings material wealth and prosperity to the U.S. Conversely, so-called inferior races standing in the way of progress were doomed to subordinate status or extinction.<sup>7</sup>

In its attempt to make sense of Filipinos, the U.S. relied on discourses it deployed to make sense of its racial others. Walter L. Williams contends that U.S. Native

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<sup>6</sup> General James Rusling, “Interview with the President,” *The Christian Advocate* (January 22, 1903), 17. Taken from Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom (eds.), *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* Boston: South End Press, 1987), 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

American policy served as a precedent to U.S. imperial policy in the Philippines. Likewise, San Buenaventura contends that U.S. policymakers depended on its experience with and constructed knowledge of Native Americans and African Americans in its treatment and perception of Filipinos. The U.S. government, for example, granted Native Americans the status of “nationals,” the same status it granted Filipinos while Theodore Roosevelt frequently referred to Filipinos as “savages,” “Sioux,” and “Apaches.”<sup>8</sup>

In both popular and political discourse, Filipinos appeared as children in need of U.S. tutelage, guidance, and uplifting. Their purported childishness was taken to be yet another indication of the incapacity of Filipinos for self-government. According to this line of thinking, empire is a means to help Filipinos reach maturity, a case of the U.S. fulfilling its tutelary duties. U.S. policymakers like Sen. Albert J. Beveridge believed that dealing with Filipinos was essentially like dealing with children while Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge believed that entrusting Filipinos with self-rule was tantamount to entrusting primary school children with the administration of the public school system. And as a number of critics point out, images of Filipinos as children were analogous to images of Native Americans as wards of the state and African Americans as incapable of responsible citizenship.<sup>9</sup>

Filipinos also appeared as feminine, as lacking the manly attributes needed for self-government. In a reversal of what was considered the appropriate gender order, Filipinos occupied the proper role reserved for women while Filipinas occupied the proper role reserved for men. Filipino men, for example, engaged in domestic activities such taking care of the children and cooking dinner while the women took up the role of breadwinner. In other words, gender relations in the Philippines reputedly demonstrated

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<sup>8</sup> Walter L. Williams, “United States Indian Policy and the Debate over Philippine Annexation: Implications for the Origins of American Imperialism,” *Journal of American History* 66.4 (March 1980); Steffi San Buenaventura, “The Colors of Manifest Destiny: Filipinos and the American Other(s),” *Amerasia Journal* 24.3 (Winter 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*.

the effeminacy of Filipinos justifying U.S. intervention in order to change and correct these relations.<sup>10</sup>

As Kristin L. Hoganson demonstrates, racist assumptions colluded with highly gendered assumptions to justify U.S. conquest of the Philippines. She asserts that the desire and decision to take the Philippines stemmed not only from U.S. policymakers' doubts about the capacity of Filipinos for self-government but also from doubts about their own. Imperialists like Roosevelt and Lodge viewed war and subsequent taking of the Philippines as a matter of strategic and economic importance to the U.S. but also a way to counteract what they perceived as the growing problem of male degeneracy rooted in industrialization, urbanization, and corporate consolidation. Empire building became synonymous with character building which, in turn, enhanced the governing capacity of white men and ultimately, American democracy.<sup>11</sup>

The Spanish-American War (or more accurately, U.S. intervention in the War for Cuban Independence)<sup>12</sup> provided the U.S. with an opportunity to become an overseas empire and at the same time masked imperialist motives in the name of putting an end to Spain's subjugation of Cuba. The subsequent defeat of Spain paved the way for the acquisition of former Spanish colonies including Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. That same year, the U.S. Congress proclaimed Hawaii an American territory. For Filipinos, U.S. victory ensured the transition from one colonial ruler to another, a transition made official with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898 in which Spain recognized Cuba's independence and ceded the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam to the U.S. for \$20 million. It also meant fighting against another imperial power

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<sup>10</sup> Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*.

<sup>11</sup> Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*.

<sup>12</sup> The conflict between the U.S. and Spain lasted just over three months with only a few days of actual combat, a conflict precipitated by an explosion in the U.S. battleship *Maine*. The U.S. Navy blamed the explosion on a Spanish underwater mine yet this assertion has never been proven. See Louis A. Perez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

after overcoming Spanish rule and being subjected to the political and economic power of the U.S. even after the Philippines achieved nominal independence in 1946.

A year after the U.S. acquired the Philippines from Spain, a war broke out between the U.S. and the Philippines. As Gary Y. Okihiro puts it, “Acquiring the Philippines from Spain did not mean possession of the colony. It had to be conquered.”<sup>13</sup> The Philippine-American War, which officially lasted from 1899 to 1902, resulted in the deaths of 4,300 Americans and as many as one million Filipinos. In the face of Filipino mass resistance to U.S. imperial rule, U.S. military forces engaged in scorched-earth tactics as a number of towns and villages were reduced to ashes bringing about famine, disease, and pestilence while civilians were confined to concentration camps. Mass slaughter also became increasingly common in places such as Balangiga, Samar unsettling claims of U.S. benevolence and exceptionalism.<sup>14</sup>

Richard Drinnon writes that in its dealings with Filipinos, the U.S. adopted the paradigm of Indian-hating. This is not surprising given that many of the American soldiers who fought against Native Americans also fought against Filipinos characterizing the fighting in the Philippines as “Injun warfare.” Veterans of the Indian Wars like General Elwell Otis, Brigadier General Marcus Miller, and Major General Henry W. Lawton participated in both the extermination of Native Americans and the pacification of Filipinos. Due to resistance from Filipinos against American rule, the War Department took charge of affairs in the Philippines just like it did with Native Americans. The U.S. government created the Bureau of Indian Affairs in order to subdue native resistance. The U.S. government also authorized the formation of the Bureau of

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<sup>13</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *The Columbia Guide to Asian American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia (eds.), *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999* (New York: New York University Press, 2002). See also Luzviminda Francisco, “The First Vietnam: The Philippine-American War: 1899-1902,” taken from Schirmer and Shalom, *The Philippines Reader*.

Insular Affairs to deal with native subversion but this time among Filipinos. In short, “three centuries of Indian-hating” not only shaped U.S. treatment and perception of Filipinos; it also provided the U.S. with the infrastructure both in terms of personnel, bureaucracy, ideology and military tactics to deal with them accordingly.<sup>15</sup>

Once in power, the U.S. continued to engage in the process of subject-making, racializing Filipinos as filthy and diseased and therefore, a threat to Americans and themselves. More specifically, the U.S. waged a health campaign designed to create a docile and highly manipulable populace and to justify the regulation and control of Filipino bodies. In the eyes of American health officials, the Philippines; tropical climate coupled with the outbreak of diseases like cholera and typhoid called into question the hygiene and the ability of Filipinos to control their bodies. Unlike Americans who exhibited self-restraint and hygienic behaviors, Filipinos purportedly practiced unsanitary and ultimately dangerous behaviors. Cast as dangerous and infectious, Filipino bodies were subjected to laboratory tests, disease surveys and educational programs aimed at changing their “unsanitary” behaviors.<sup>16</sup>

Reynaldo C. Ileto further argues that U.S. efforts to eradicate disease were inextricably linked to U.S. efforts to eradicate Philippine resistance against U.S. imperial rule. Both constituted attempts to pacify the Philippines and consolidate U.S. colonial rule as evidenced by the U.S. campaign waged against the outbreak of cholera (1902-1904) in the Philippines. Ileto suggest that “the war against the cholera and the ‘pacification’ of Filipinos were barely differentiated, when medico-sanitary measures and popular resistance to such, were continuing acts of war.” Furthermore, U.S. military

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> To illustrate, teachers in public schools were encouraged to teach students the proper health etiquette. In effect, the class room became a laboratory, a space where teachers attempted to mold students into self-regulating (read: civilized) bodies. Warwick Anderson, “Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution,” *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Spring 1995).

health officials, like U.S. military troops, functioned as agents of colonial rule who helped justify the “continuing acts of war” against Filipinos rather than agents who helped saved Filipino lives.<sup>17</sup>

### **Filipinos as a Sexual and Economic Menace**

By the time the U.S. came into power, the Philippine economy had already become primarily export oriented, a process initiated by the Spanish but intensified under U.S. imperial rule. Miriam Sharma notes that the

United States colonial rule continued this basic policy of exporting agricultural products and natural resources. From 1899 until 1937, sugar, abaca, copra, coconut oil, and—to a lesser extent—tobacco remained overwhelmingly the major export commodities. The free-trade and tariff policies of the United States government bound the economic fate of the Philippine islands ever closer to their imperial overlords, even while the latter were speaking of political independence.<sup>18</sup>

In essence, the U.S. reorganized the Philippine economy to benefit the needs of U.S. monopoly capitalism and the U.S. market as well as a segment of the Filipino elite. But the shift to an export oriented economy disrupted local industries and displaced agricultural workers. In certain regions of the Philippines, it exacerbated tenancy and landlessness ultimately creating the conditions for large scale migration to the U.S. as residents opted for migration overseas to seek better opportunities. In addition, the

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<sup>17</sup> Reynaldo C. Ileto, “Cholera and the Origins of the American Sanitary Order in the Philippines,” in David Arnold (ed.), *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), 127. Similarly, Rodney Sullivan notes that the tactics used in the campaign against cholera were often indistinguishable from the military tactics utilized by the American military during the U.S.-Philippine War. For example, both involved the incarceration of crops and villages. Rodney Sullivan, “Cholera and Colonialism in the Philippines, 1899-1903,” in Roy MacLeod and Milton Lewis (eds.), *Disease, Medicine, and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Miriam Sharma, “The Philippines: A Case of Migration to Hawaii, 1906 to 1946,” in Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (eds.), *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 342.

Philippine economy became increasingly dependent on the U.S. economy, a dependency fostered by unequal trade agreements between the two countries.<sup>19</sup>

On the U.S. mainland, Filipinos were sometimes lumped together with other Asian groups supplanting the Chinese and the Japanese as the primary “Oriental” threat. Filipinos came to the U.S. after the Chinese and the Japanese and like them, they encountered anti-Asian violence and denied citizenship as well as prohibited from owning land. What set them apart from these groups, however, was their colonial status which made them particularly attractive to growers in search of cheap labor. Unlike the Chinese and the Japanese, Filipinos could move freely back and forth between the Philippines and the U.S., at least until the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934. But while the colonial status of Filipinos allowed unrestricted mobility, it also exacerbated their already precarious position in U.S. society. As U.S. nationals, for instance, Filipinos had no homeland government to turn to for protection and redress of grievances.

Government sponsored students comprised one group of early Filipino migrants, recruited by the Philippine territorial government to attend American colleges and universities as part of the pensionado program established in 1903. Within the context of empire, education served to consolidate U.S. imperial as part of America’s civilizing mission. In the case of the pensionado program, it was designed to develop an elite cadre that would support and implement U.S. colonial policies. Out of thousands of applicants a year, about one hundred students were chosen from prominent and well connected families by Filipino governors and American school superintendents. They eventually returned home to well-paying and prestigious job in various fields including government,

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<sup>19</sup> These include the Bell Trade Act of 1946 which privileged U.S. capital and the Laurel-Langley Agreement of 1955 which supplanted the Bell Trade Act but, in effect, extended the protection accorded U.S. capital. For a more detailed discussion, see Schirmer and Shalom, *The Philippines Reader*, 22-23.

business, and engineering. The program ended in 1910, peaking in 1907 when 186 Filipinos traveled to the U.S.<sup>20</sup>

Another group of students followed, spurred by the success of pensionados. Like pensionados, these students had hoped to attain an American education. Unlike pensionados, they had to work in order to subsidize their education. Irrespective of their qualifications, they were largely confined to service oriented work. Many performed domestic work which provided advantages migratory work did not provide. For instance, domestic work afforded students with room and board within walking distance of the university. Moreover, the flexible hours and task demands of domestic work enabled students to attend classes during the day.<sup>21</sup>

The largest group of early Filipino migrants, however, consisted of those recruited as cheap contract labor. Unlike students who headed for the U.S. mainland, these migrants, primarily single men, headed for Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations. Hawaiian sugar planters, most notably the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA), began recruiting Filipino labor in 1906 and intensified their recruitment efforts in the wake of U.S. government restrictions on Japanese migration and the growing militancy of Japanese workers. After initially looking to the Visayan region to fill their need for cheap labor, growers eventually concentrated their efforts on the Ilocos region where Ilocanos generally earned lower wages than workers in other regions of the Philippines. The shift to an agricultural export economy had a particularly deleterious impact on this region, destroying the region's once thriving textile industry and its economic growth. It's not an accident, therefore, that growers looked to this region to recruit workers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Linda Nueva Espana Maram, *Negotiating Identity: Youth, Gender, and Popular Culture in Los Angeles's Little Manila, 1920s-1940s* (Diss. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Maram, *Negotiating Identity*.

<sup>22</sup> Sharma, "The Philippines: A Case of Migration to Hawaii," *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism*.



Between 1909 and 1946, a total of 125,947 Filipinos entered Hawaii through the HSPA.<sup>23</sup> In 1909, 639 Filipinos entered Hawaii, a figure which jumped to 2,915 just a year later. Filipino migration to Hawaii peaked in the 1920s reaching an all-time high of 10,857 in 1928. Consequently, Filipino workers eventually displaced Japanese workers and became the dominant workforce on the sugar plantations. In 1915, for example, the Japanese made up 54% of the workforce while Filipinos made up only 19% but by 1932, the Japanese made up only 19% of the workforce while Filipinos made up 70%.<sup>24</sup>

Even before Filipinos arrived in the sugar plantations of Hawaii, growers already associated Filipino bodies with cheap labor because of their supposed willingness to tolerate and engage in menial work. A grower remarked that: “For two years I have been hiring Filipinos. The reason being that there is no need of providing them with decent living houses. They built usually a small shack and they live in it. We don’t have to give them very good food because they are used to living on cheap food...I do not have to pay them while they are not working. However, I cannot do this Japanese man. He would not stand for it in the first place.”<sup>25</sup> Plantation life was strictly scrutinized and regimented and usually involved ten to twelve hour workdays. For the most part, Filipinos remained as unskilled workers and labored on either a daily wage or a contract basis. They carried out the least desirable and most labor intensive tasks—what Sharma describes as “tasks of hoeing, planting, and weeding during the cultivation of cane and of cutting, hauling, loading, and fluming during the harvest.”<sup>26</sup> Filipinos also earned the lowest wages and lived in substandard housing. Furthermore, payroll reductions for such things as electricity, school lunches, and auto licenses significantly reduced workers’ wages.

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<sup>23</sup> Figures taken from Miriam Sharma, “Labor Migration and Class Formation Among the Filipinos in Hawaii, 1906-1946,” in Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (eds.), *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Sharma, “Labor Migration and Class Formation,” *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism*.

<sup>25</sup> Sharma, “Labor Migration and Class Formation,” *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism*, 601-602.

<sup>26</sup> Sharma, “Labor Migration and Class Formation,” *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism*, 589.

Furthermore, Filipino plantation workers were generally housed in segregated camps characterized by overcrowding and unsanitary conditions.

After their contracts expired, Filipino plantation workers typically migrated to the mainland. In 1923, for instance, 84.6% of Filipino migrants to California came from Hawaii. It was not until the end of the 1920s that the majority of Filipino migrants to the U.S. migrated directly from the Philippines. By 1928, this figure dipped to 35.4%.<sup>27</sup> Filipino migration to the mainland increased significantly in the latter half of the 1920s, jumping from an average of 618 per year between 1920 and 1922 to 5408 between 1926 and 1929 after passage of the Immigration Act of 1924.<sup>28</sup> With the exclusion of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Asian Indian workers, growers increasingly looked to Filipinos to fill their labor needs.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Hawaii, life on the mainland revolved around demands for seasonal labor as Filipinos followed crops all along the Pacific Coast and in the Far West. They generally performed agricultural work—planting and picking up a variety of fruits and vegetables—which was part of a labor circuit that included cannery work in Alaska during the summers and service work in urban areas during the winters. For the most part, these migrants were predominantly young, single men considered by growers to be ideally suited to perform stoop labor. Filipinos typically worked in gangs and crews

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<sup>27</sup> Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*.

<sup>28</sup> Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*.

<sup>29</sup> Starting with the Chinese Exclusion of 1882, U.S. lawmakers enacted a series of legislation restricting and, in some cases, effectively shutting off the immigration of successive groups of Asians to the U.S. While the Gentlemen's Agreement (1907-1908) restricted Japanese migration to the U.S. the 1917 Immigration Act denied entry to Asian Indians. Likewise, the 1924 Immigration Act eliminated exceptions for Japanese immigrants effectively halting Japanese immigration to the U.S. Paul Ong and John M. Liu, "U.S. Immigration Policies and Asian Migration," in Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood (eds.), *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Updated and Revised) (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

organized by a Filipino labor contractor who found work and negotiated terms with growers.<sup>30</sup>

Filipinos obtained work all along the Pacific Coast and in the Far West but the majority lived and worked in California where anti-Filipino sentiments were also most intense particularly around the issue of Filipino sexuality. Unlike other Asian groups, Filipinos dated and married white women generating and reinforcing fears that these unions would give rise to “half-breeds.” Accordingly, the hysteria surrounding Filipino sexuality was much greater than for the Chinese and Japanese. C.M. Goethe, President of the Immigration Study Commission, concluded that “These men (Filipinos) are jungle folk, and their primitive moral code accentuates the race problem even more than the economic difficulty...The Filipino tends to interbreed with near-morn white girls. The resulting hybrid is almost invariably undesirable. The ever increasing brood of children of Filipino coolie fathers and low-grade white mothers may in time constitute a serious social burden.”<sup>31</sup> Filipinos posed a threat to white racial purity precisely because they did not know their place, supposedly going after white women and exploiting them.

As one of the few places where Filipinos could socialize with white women, dance halls, in particular, drew the ire of whites but also middle class Filipinos. For mainstream society, dance halls epitomized the downfall of white racial purity and morality and the close association between vice, popular entertainment, and immigrant communities. Consequently, local white residents launched campaigns to delimit Filipino use of public spaces as well as renewed efforts to restrict Filipino migration to the U.S. There were also efforts to enact legislation which barred Filipinos from dance halls and made it difficult for dance hall operators to obtain a permit.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Maram, *Negotiating Identity*.

<sup>31</sup> C.M. Goethe, “Filipino Immigration Viewed as a Peril,” *Current History* (June 1931), 353-356.

<sup>32</sup> Maram, *Negotiating Identity*. Parrenas also makes the point that white men did not view Filipino relationship with white women the same way. While white working class men felt most threatened by these relationships and viewed Filipino men as corrupting white women, white middle and upper class men

But for the Filipino participants, dance halls became sites to create alternative individual and groups identities. More specifically, engaging in leisure activities associated with dance halls allowed them to redefine meanings attached to brown bodies—as sources of enjoyment, style, and sensuality rather than exploitable working bodies suited to engage in stoop labor. Maram, however, also notes that dance halls fostered heteronormativity with women functioning as highly prized and highly sought after commodities who enhanced the status and prestige of particularly among their peers.<sup>33</sup>

Self-appointed guardians of Filipino “morality” within the community, however, viewed dance halls as fostering leisure activities—gambling, drinking, and dancing with white women—that undermined Filipino middle class values and morality. Mutual-aid societies like the Filipino Federation of America (FFA), for example, denounced Filipino workers for wasting their hard-earned money, engaging in immoral behavior and reinforcing disparaging stereotypes associated with Filipinos. Some Filipino fraternal organizations organized their own dances as an alternative to dance halls but as Maram notes, these recreational activities were generally unpopular among Filipino workers: “The groups served no liquor, they kept the dance floor well lit, and the only female dance partners available were the wives of the organizers.” Self-appointed Filipino leaders also requested business owners to close down dance halls part of Sunday evenings with mixed results.<sup>34</sup> Filipino participation in dance halls, therefore, not only

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viewed white working class women as corrupting Filipino men. In other words, distinctions were made among white women that rendered white working class women expendable and served to preserve the racial hierarchy. Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, “‘White Trash’ Meets the ‘Little Brown Monkeys’: The Taxi Dance Hall as a Site of Interracial and Gender Alliances between White Working Class Women and Filipino Immigrant Men in the 1920s and 30s,” *Amerasia Journal* 24.2 (1998).

<sup>33</sup> Maram, *Negotiating Identity*.

<sup>34</sup> While some establishment like Danceland and Hippodrome Dance Palace complied with the request, others like Liberty Dance Hall did not. Linda N. Espana-Maram, “Brown ‘Hordes’ in McIntosh Suits: Filipinos, Taxi Dance Halls, and Performing the Immigrant Body in Los Angeles, 1930s-1940s,” in Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard (eds.), *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 128.

challenged mainstream values and expectations but also Filipino middle class values and expectations as well as the racial hierarchy within mainstream society but also the class hierarchy within the Filipino community.

Anxiety and hysteria surrounding Filipino sexuality were also reflected in efforts to change anti-miscegenation legislation to encompass Filipinos. There was a question of whether Filipinos were “Mongolian” and therefore subject to anti-miscegenation legislation in effect at the time. During the 1920s, a number of court cases attempted to resolve this issue, the most prominent of which was *Roldan v. Los Angeles County*. Salvador Roldan, a Filipino man, sought to marry Marjorie Rogers, a white woman, but the Los Angeles county clerk refused to issue the couple a marriage license. The case eventually reached the Superior Court which ruled in favor of Roldan, arguing that anti-miscegenation did not apply to Roldan because he was “Malay” and not a “Mongolian.” In 1933, however, the California legislature amended California law to include Filipinos as one of the groups prohibited by law from marrying whites.<sup>35</sup>

Due to the low pay of agricultural work many Filipinos found it necessary to engage in various forms of low wage service work in cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco. These include working as waiters, busboys, cooks, domestic help, and gardeners in hotels, restaurants, and private homes. In 1930, for example, approximately 11,400 Filipinos in California held service oriented jobs. As Maram points out, Filipinos were usually incorporated in the urban labor market through service work. Employers in the service industries considered Filipinos ideally suited to engage in service work,

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<sup>35</sup> Leti Volpp, “American Mestizo: Filipinos and Antimiscegenation Laws in California,” *UC Davis Law Review* 33 (2000): 795-835. See also Rachel F. Moran, *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); Megumi Dick Osumi, “Asians and California’s Anti-Miscegenation Laws,” in Nobuya Tsuchida (ed.), *Asian and Pacific American Experiences: Women’s Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Asian/Pacific American Learning Resource Center & General College, University of Minnesota, 1982).

attracted to their demeanor and youthful appearance of Filipinos and what they perceived as the propensity of Filipinos for courteous and polite behavior.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to supplementing their income with service work, a sizable number of Filipinos also performed cannery work. Students, in particular, found cannery work appealing because it allowed them to make money during the summer. Recruited by Chinese and Japanese contractors, Filipinos eventually became the dominant ethnic group in the cannery industry. By the end of the 1920s, they outnumbered all other ethnic groups. In 1928, there was a total of 3,916 Filipino cannery workers which surpassed the combined total of Japanese, Mexican, and Chinese workers and in 1930, they comprised 30% of all cannery workers.<sup>37</sup>

The numerical dominance of Filipinos, however, was not reflected in access to recruitment and management positions because of the dominance of the Chinese and Japanese in these positions. Instead, Filipinos could only move up to the rank of foreman while the majority worked as unskilled workers in mechanized plants. As a result, they had to rely on Chinese and Japanese contractors for jobs which often put them in a vulnerable position. According to Chris Friday, many accrued considerable debt even before the cannery season began to contractors who extracted cash and credit advances for rooms and made workers purchase useless, overpriced items like dress clothes from their stores. Nevertheless, the few Filipinos who moved up to positions of power were not immune from taking advantage of their countrymen, in some cases demanding that workers give up half of their monthly wages or more in exchange for a cannery job.<sup>38</sup>

In an effort to alleviate exploitative working conditions and to better their lives, Filipinos engaged in labor militancy through all Filipino unions and multi-racial unions. As the predominant labor force in the sugar plantations, they also became the most

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<sup>36</sup> Maram, *Negotiating Identity*.

<sup>37</sup> Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*.

<sup>38</sup> Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*.

visible group active in labor organizing. Pablo Manlapit was a key figure in Filipino labor struggles, founding the Filipino Labor Union (FLU) in 1919 and organizing a number of strikes including the 1924 strike on Oahu which resulted in the deaths of sixteen strikers and four policemen. Arrested, charged, and convicted of perjury and sentenced to prison in Hawaii, Manlapit moved to California where he helped launch the Filipino union movement. Filipinos also participated in Hawaii's last ethnic strike in 1937.<sup>39</sup> The all Filipino union, Vibora Luviminda, disbanded shortly after the strike but not before attaining union recognition.<sup>40</sup>

On the mainland, Filipino labor organizing grew and intensified in the midst of the depression and in the face of anti-Filipino violence. Excluded from organized labor, Filipinos formed their own unions like the Filipinos Labor Union (FLU) which fought for union recognition so it could bargain with growers. It participated in a number of strikes including one in the lettuce fields of Salinas which resulted in a wage increase and union recognition. The Salinas strike is significant because it formed the basis of successful organizing in the latter half of the 1930s after initial efforts failed. In 1936, Filipino and Mexican farmworkers convinced the AFL to grant a charter to the Field Workers Union, Local 30326, a predominantly Filipino and Mexican union. In the Pacific Northwest, the AFL local and Filipino led Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union (CWFLU) fought to curb the power of contractors and made efforts to take up broader concerns of the Filipino community. Filipinos continued to be active in labor union struggles through the 1960s spearheading the farmworkers' strike in Delano in 1965 that culminated in the formation of the United Farm Workers (UFW).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Howard, De Witt, *Violence in the Fields: California Filipino Farm Labor Unionization During the Great Depression* (Saratoga, California: Century Twenty One Publishing, 1980).

<sup>40</sup> Sharma, "Labor Migration and Class Formation," *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism*.

<sup>41</sup> For a consideration of Filipino labor unionization in the 1930s, see De Witt, *Violence in the Fields*. For a history of the pivotal role that Filipinos played in the revitalization of the farmworkers movement in the 1960s, see Craig Scharlin and Lilia V. Villanueva, *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino*

With the onset of the Depression in 1929, Filipino migration to Hawaii and California declined precipitously and eventually ceased before once again resuming after the war. Anti-Filipino sentiments deepened and racial and economic tensions between Filipino workers and white workers worsened fueling the proliferation of anti-Filipino vigilante groups and the drive to repatriate Filipino workers. Well-publicized incidents of anti-Filipino violence took place particularly in California where most Filipinos lived and worked. The most prominent occurrence took place in Watsonville in 1930 resulting in the death of Fermin Tobera but instances of anti-Filipino violence also occurred in places like Reed, Exeter, and Imperial Valley.<sup>42</sup>

As noncitizens, Filipinos were not eligible to receive federal relief. Consequently, they turned to one another for support and assistance and increasingly relied on fraternal organizations for such things as food and clothing as the depression deepened. Efforts to restrict Filipino migration also heightened culminating in passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934. It granted the Philippines independence in ten years but also changed the status of Filipinos from “nationals” to “aliens” and limited Filipino immigration to fifty per year. With the exception of Filipinos recruited by the U.S. armed forces and sugar plantation growers, Filipinos were now subject to exclusionary immigration measures.<sup>43</sup>

A year after passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, Congress enacted the Repatriation Act. Promoting the deportation of Filipino workers, the U.S. government offered to pay for the travel expenses of Filipinos who volunteered to return home but it also banned repatriates from reentering the U.S. The law was in effect from 1936 to 1940

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*Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement* (Los Angeles: UCLA Labor Center, Institute of Industrial Relations and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> De Witt, *Violence in the Fields*.

<sup>43</sup> Mae M. Ngai, “From Colonial Subject to Undesirable Alien: Filipino Migration, Exclusion, and Repatriation, 1920-1940,” in Josephine Lee, Imogene L. Lim, and Yuko Matsukawa (eds.), *Re-Collecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).



after Congress renewed it three times. For the most part, however, Filipinos did not participate in the program and balked at the idea of returning home because of bleak economic prospects in the Philippines. Only about two thousand Filipinos ended up taking up the government offer the majority of whom were students and middle class Filipinos.<sup>44</sup>

World War II brought about dramatic changes in the contours of Filipino communities in the U.S. as the Philippines became an ally of the U.S. and as thousands of Filipinos participated in the war effort. Filipino participation in the war which included service in the U.S. Armed Forces shifted the image of Filipinos from brown hordes to brave, loyal allies capable of living up to the ideals of responsible citizenship. This led to a more favorable treatment and perception of Filipinos but this was short-lived because as soon as the war ended, Filipinos were once again treated as second class citizens. Nonetheless, the war did bring forth unprecedented opportunities but also raised dilemmas.<sup>45</sup>

Demands for manpower in war related industries opened up employment opportunities previously unavailable as Filipinos found work as welders, technicians, and assembly workers in aircraft, shipbuilding, and weapons industries. At the same time, it is important to note that in the postwar period, a large percentage of Filipinos continued to hold unskilled, menial jobs. Moreover, state governments lifted restrictions banning Filipinos from owning and leasing lands. In some instances, Filipinos along with other communities of color directly benefited from the internment of Japanese Americans, purchasing homes and small farms previously owned by Japanese Americans at bargain prices. And for those Filipinos who served in the U.S. Armed Services, the war meant access to U.S. citizenship as mass ceremonies were held in places like Camp Beale in

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<sup>44</sup> Ngai, "From Colonial Subject to Undesirable Alien," *Re-Collecting Early Asian America*.

<sup>45</sup> Maram, *Negotiating Identity*.

California where over 400 Filipinos took the oath of citizenship as well as greater access to education and property through the G.I. Bill.<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding the attention given to Filipinos who served in the military during this period, not all Filipinos chose to don military uniforms; others opted for zoot suits instead.<sup>47</sup> As Linda Maram notes, there was nothing new with Filipinos using clothing to negotiate their identities and reclaim their bodies. Instead, it was a practice the previous generation of Filipinos already cultivated and engaged in even before zoot suits became popular. Like the McIntosh suits they wore at dance halls, zoot suits allowed Filipino youth to transform their bodies into sources of sensuality, style, and pleasure as well as challenge the stereotype of Filipinos as eager to please, submissive, poor, and undesirable. But within the context of war, wearing zoot suits was also considered un-American and unpatriotic. The exaggerated and flashy style was in contrast to the all white, starched uniforms worn by sailors and its use of fabric was considered excessive in an era of wartime shortage. In addition, government officials considered the wearing of zoot suits by Filipinos and other marginalized youth a threat to national security and the war effort because of the possibility of these groups getting together.<sup>48</sup>

In the postwar era, Filipino migration to the U.S. once again resumed as Congress passed several pieces of legislation that facilitated Filipino migration but only to a limited degree. The Luce-Celler Act of 1946, for example, permitted the entry of 100 Filipinos per year and extended the right of naturalization to Filipinos who had migrated to the U.S. before passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act. Those who had served in the U.S. armed forces were already eligible to become U.S. citizens at this point. Six years later,

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara M. Posadas, *The Filipino Americans* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> Generally associated with Mexican youth, zoot suits were also worn by other groups of youth including Filipino youth and black youth. The outfit generally consists of pleated trousers, long coats with heavily padded shoulders, as well as a long watch chain, pancake hats, and a ducktail hairstyle. For a discussion of zoot suits in relation to black youth, see Chapter 7 in Robin D.G., *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> Maram, *Negotiating Identity*.

the McCarran-Walter Act allowed the entry of relatives of U.S. citizens as nonquota immigrants although the quota of 100 persons per year remained in place. In addition, Filipinas and families first entered the U.S. in sizable numbers with passage of the War Brides Act of 1945 allowing approximately 118,000 spouses, children, and fiancées of U.S. servicemen to enter the U.S. without counting against the quota of 100 per year in place at the time.<sup>49</sup>

Filipino migration in the post-war era included Filipino plantation workers. Filipinos once again entered Hawaii to labor in the sugar plantation but unlike previous migrants, they were able to bring in their wives and children. In 1946, over 7000 Filipinos managed to get to Hawaii before the quota of 100 persons per year would go into effect.<sup>50</sup> Filipinos also continued to enter the U.S. through their service in the U.S. Navy. A direct by-product of U.S. military presence in the Philippines, Filipinos first became part of the U.S. Navy as early as 1898, the year the U.S. acquired the Philippines from Spain. The number of Filipinos in the U.S. Navy grew from nine in 1903 to about 4000 during the 1920s and 1930s. Even after Philippine independence in 1946, the U.S. continued to recruit Philippine citizens. Considered by many Filipinos as a means to alleviate poverty, thousands tried to enlist in the U.S. Navy. By 1970, more Filipinos served in the U.S. Navy than the Philippine Navy. In 1973 alone, about 200,000 applied for four hundred available slots.<sup>51</sup>

For the most part, the U.S. Navy restricted Filipinos to the ratings of officers' stewards and mess attendants, a policy which was instituted after World War I. This meant that Filipinos generally performed domestic work irrespective of their educational background. Their duties included preparing and serving meals, maintaining and tidying the living spaces of officers, and in some cases, walking the dogs of officers. It was not

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<sup>49</sup> Posadas, *The Filipino Americans*.

<sup>50</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives*.

until the 1970s that the U.S. Navy allowed Filipinos to enlist for any occupational rating. Filipinos, however, continued to be concentrated in clerical jobs and remained stewards even after the Navy changed its policy. As recently as the mid-1980s, Filipinos comprised nearly half (45 percent) of all those in the Mess Management or steward rating.<sup>52</sup>

Recruited to work low skilled labor, Filipinos generally resided in rural areas, at least through the 1930s. In Hawaii, Filipino workers lived on the plantations where their times and activities were severely circumscribed. In California, they inhabited labor camps characterized by substandard facilities and unsanitary conditions while in Alaska, Filipino cannery workers lived in bunkhouses segregated from other workers. Filipinos gradually settled in urban areas as Filipino workers migrated from agricultural fields to cities. This was particularly true of California. Enclaves known as Manilatowns or Little Manilas emerged in such places as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Salinas, Stockton, and Fresno. By 1950, the majority of Filipinos lived in cities and by 1960, this figure reached 80%.<sup>53</sup>

Manilatowns emerged in cities in which a significant number of Filipinos worked. The seasonal nature of agricultural work shaped the formation of these early Filipino communities. Prior to World War II, they served as disembarkment points, places from which Filipinos migrated along the Pacific Coast to work in the agriculture and cannery industries. It was not uncommon, for instance, for Manilatown residents to work in the fish canneries of Alaska and Seattle. During the off-seasons, these communities not only served as recreational centers but also afforded residents information about housing, employment, and other forms of assistance. As restrictions on status and immigration eased, Manilatowns became more permanent resident areas akin to Chinatowns and

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<sup>52</sup> Posadas, *The Filipino Americans*.

<sup>53</sup> Figures taken from Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America Through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993).

Japantowns. Subject to alien land laws and housing discrimination, Filipinos were largely confined to living in residential hotels or rooming houses. As a result of the influx of Filipinos, businesses geared to provide goods and services to Filipinos emerged including barbershops, restaurants, and pool halls.<sup>54</sup>

By the end of World War II, Manilatowns became home to older Filipinos who had recently retired either from agricultural work or the military. The end of the war, however, coincided with the decline of Manilatowns. Urban renewal projects created massive displacements, upgrading hotels but at the same time making them too costly for hotel residents. By the late 1960s, for example, San Francisco's Manilatown had lost many of its residents and had been reduced to the 800 block of Kearny Street with the I-Hotel serving as its last remaining remnant. Home to Filipino migrants since the early 1920s, the last group of hotel residents which also included Chinese residents were eventually evicted in 1977 after a long protracted battle between residents and their supporters and city hall.<sup>55</sup>

### **Contemporary Filipino Migration to the U.S.: 1965 to the Present**

While U.S. imperial policy at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and U.S. economic policy and foreign investment today serve as the broader context of Filipino migration to the U.S., changes in immigration legislation in 1965 provides the immediate context. More specifically, the elimination of national origin quotas and the implementation of a series of preferences to fill occupational shortages and promote family reunification, made possible the dramatic and unanticipated growth of Filipino communities in the U.S.

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<sup>54</sup> Michel S. Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in America Society* (New York: St. Martin's Place, 2000). For an account of the impact of urban policies after World War II on a section of downtown Stockton known as Little Manila, home to the largest number of Filipinos outside of the Philippines for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Dawn Mabalon, "Losing Little Manila: Race and Redevelopment in Filipina/o Stockton, California," in Antonio T. Tiongson Jr., Ed Gutierrez, and Rick Gutierrez (eds.), *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Mapping "Filipino American" Formations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis*.

These changes occurred in the midst of the cold war and the civil rights movement as well as an expanding economy. In an effort to present itself as the undisputed leader of the free world, the U.S. permitted the entry of a limited number of refugees and eliminated racial quotas in its immigration policy. At the same time, it also wanted to preserve the existing racial composition of the U.S. Moreover, in response to the global restructuring of capital, the U.S. encouraged the entry of a highly skilled and educated work force and their families to help develop and sustain an economy that would be competitive globally. What the framers of the 1965 Act did not anticipate, however, was the surge of migrants from Third World countries and the potential for chain migration and the concomitant decline of European migration.

The Immigration Act of 1965 established an annual quota of 170,000 for the Western Hemisphere and 120,000 for the Eastern Hemisphere with a limit of 20,000 per country. It also implemented a preference system which determined who could migrate to the U.S. Filipinos took advantage of these changes and entered the U.S. either through occupational preference categories or family reunification categories. These modes of entry, however, do not account for the large influx of Filipinos. Filipinos also took advantage of exempt categories which made it possible to exceed their 20,000 annual quota as citizens were able to bring in their spouses, minor children, and parents—all of whom did not count against the annual limits. More than any other group, Filipinos utilized family reunification categories to bring in quota exempt individuals.<sup>56</sup>

The surge in Filipino migration has resulted in the dramatic growth of the Filipino population in the U.S. Since 1965, Mexico is the only nation that has sent more migrants to the U.S. than the Philippines.<sup>57</sup> In 1960, 2,954 Filipinos migrated to the U.S. Ten

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<sup>56</sup> David M. Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>57</sup> Benjamin V. Carino, "Filipino Americans: Many and Varied," in Sylvia Pedraza and Ruben G. Rumbaut (eds.), *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America* (New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996).

years later, this figure increased to 31,203 and peaked in 1990 at 63,756. In the period between 1960 and 1970, the Filipino population nearly doubled from 181,614 to 336,731. By 1990, the total number of Filipinos in the U.S. exceeded the one million mark for the first time and in 2000, it reached nearly two million at 1,850,314.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to significantly altering the size of the Filipino population, changes in immigration legislation also dramatically changed its composition. In contrast to low wage agricultural and service sector workers which dominated earlier flows of Filipino migration, professionals and other highly trained skilled workers dominate contemporary flows. Initially taking advantage of occupational preference categories, this group of migrants eventually made use of family reunification categories to bring in their families and relatives. Moreover, sojourning single men no longer dominate Filipino migration. Instead, families intending to settle permanently in the U.S. predominate as well as females who can now enter the U.S. on their own under third preference categories. And with the emphasis on family reunification, Filipinas were also able to enter the U.S. as wives, daughters, or mothers of U.S. permanent residents and citizens.

Filipina nurses comprise a significant percentage of Filipino professionals to the U.S. The Philippines, in fact, has become the world's largest exporter of nurses sending large numbers of nurses not only to the U.S. but also the Middle East and Canada. But even before the passage of the 1965 Act, thousands of Filipina nurses already worked in the U.S. through the U.S. Exchange Visitor Program, a program in which U.S. institutions sponsored exchange visitors from a number of different countries including nurses from the Philippines. Passage of the 1965 Act, however, facilitated the entry of Filipina nurses at an unprecedented rate. Under the 1965 Act, foreign trained nurses could enter the U.S. as immigrants under the occupational preference categories. The U.S. Secretary of Labor pushed for this amendment in an effort to fill the shortage of

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<sup>58</sup> U.S. Census 2000.

nurses in the inner cities of major urban areas. But since 1970, foreign trained nurses have entered the U.S. primarily under the H-1 visa category. In the case of Filipina nurses who make up the bulk of foreign trained nurses, they have entered the U.S. as exchange students and as occupational migrants, at least through the mid 1970s. The use of occupational preference categories, however, has declined. Filipina nurses, instead, have relied on relatives already in the U.S. to sponsor them or have entered the U.S. as temporary visitors.<sup>59</sup>

A disproportionate number of Filipina nurses work in geographic areas and institutional settings where the nursing shortage is most acute. In terms of geographic distribution, Filipina nurses are more likely to live and work in the East and Midwest, many of whom eventually relocate to the West Coast. They tend to work in critical care and medical surgical units of large metropolitan and public hospitals in urban areas which means working in high stress environments in which burnout is more likely. And although their salaries are high as compared to nurses' salaries in the Philippines, a number of Filipina nurses end up in lower level jobs due to stringent licensing requirements. Furthermore, even with their numerical dominance, few Filipinas hold management level positions.<sup>60</sup>

Not all post-1965 Filipino migrants, however, are professionals. A significant portion consists of relatives of Filipinos who had entered the U.S. before 1965 with minimal ties to post-1965 professional migrants. In contrast to professionals, this group of migrants entered the U.S. through family reunification categories. In addition, they share similar socioeconomic backgrounds to those of their sponsors who lack the training and education of professionals. Many of the sponsors were likely manongs, old timers

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<sup>59</sup> John M. Liu, Paul M. Ong, and Carolyn Rosenstein, "Dual Chain Migration: Post-1965 Filipino Migration to the United States," *International Migration Review* 25(3):487-513.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Ong and Tania Azores, "The Migration and Incorporation of Filipino Nurses," in Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng (eds.), *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).



who had entered the U.S. prior to World War II without their wives and families. And although there has been a convergence in the modes of entry between this group and professionals, differences persist as evidenced by distinctive Filipino community formations that have emerged in Hawaii and NY/NJ.<sup>61</sup>

Undocumented Filipinos constitute another group of migrants overshadowed by the visibility and prominence of Filipino professionals. Unlike the bulk of post 1965 Filipino migrants, undocumented Filipinos or TNTs, typically migrate to the U.S. without their families. They generally enter the U.S. legally as visitors or temporary workers but overstay or violate the terms of their visa. Their status do not remain static but typically change over time as undocumented Filipinos make an effort to legalize themselves. Under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, an estimated 28,000 Filipinos were legalized and received immigrant status between 1989 and 1996. The 1996 Immigration and Control and Financial Responsibility Act, however, made it more difficult for undocumented to receive legal status.<sup>62</sup>

The Immigration Act of 1990 constitutes another important piece of legislation with implications for the contours of Filipino migration to the U.S. Like the 1965 Act, the 1990 Act retained the emphasis on family reunification and skilled labor. The bulk of Filipino migrants continued to enter the U.S. under exempt categories but sizable numbers also entered under family and occupational preferences. More specifically, the number of Filipinos admitted yearly on the basis of job skills increased substantially from the 4,000 admitted yearly under the 1965 Act to 9,800 under the 1990 Act. But the 1990 Act, also made it difficult for U.S. citizens to bring in brothers and sisters while it made easier for permanent residents to bring in spouses and children. Furthermore, it afforded

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<sup>61</sup> Liu et al, "Dual Chain Migration," *International Migration Review*.

<sup>62</sup> Posadas, *The Filipino Americans*.

citizenship to Filipinos who served in Philippine units under the U.S. flag during World War II. Under the 1990 Act, approximately 24,000 were naturalized.<sup>63</sup>

In the wake of September 11, Filipinos, along with other groups rendered “suspect” by the Justice Department have been targeted for deportation. Initiatives passed as part of the U.S. Department of Justice’s anti-terrorist campaign such as the Absconder Apprehension Initiative aims to locate and deport individuals known as “absconders,” especially males from areas designated as “Al Qaeda active nations” which includes the Philippines primarily because of the presence of the Abu Sayyaf. But as Melany Dela Cruz and Pauline Agbayani-Siewert note, the threat that the Abu Sayyaf supposedly poses or represents is largely overblown given that their activities are centered primarily in Basilan Island, only one of the over 7000 islands that make up the Philippines.<sup>64</sup>

Filipino airport screeners constitute another group impacted by public policy after September 11. At one point making up the majority of screeners at Bay Area airports including San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose, hundreds have been laid off casualties of a policy that make non-citizens ineligible for jobs defined to be vital to the national security. The Transportation Security Administration, which is now in charge of airport security across the nation, has continued this policy. Critics, however, point to inconsistencies in the U.S. government policy including allowing non-citizens to serve in the U.S. military.<sup>65</sup>

21<sup>st</sup> century Filipinos continue to reside primarily in California where nearly half of all Filipinos live while a sizable percentage continues to call Hawaii home. But

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<sup>63</sup> Posadas, *The Filipino Americans*.

<sup>64</sup> Melany Dela Cruz and Pauline Agbayani-Siewert, “Swimming with and against the Tide,” in Eric Lai and Dennis Arguelles (eds.), *The New Face of Asian Pacific America: Numbers, Diversity and Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (San Francisco, CA: AsianWeek Books, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> Dela Cruz and Agbayani-Siewert, “Swimming with and against the Tide,” *The New Face of Asian Pacific America*.

Filipinos have also dispersed to the Midwest and the East. Illinois (86,298) now has the third largest Filipino population followed closely by New Jersey (85,245) and New York (81,681). The bulk of Filipinos reside in these five states but sizable numbers also reside in Washington, Texas, Florida, Virginia, and Nevada. Like their Asian American counterparts, the bulk of Filipinos reside in the nation's metropolitan areas. Los Angeles has the most Filipinos followed by Honolulu, San Diego, Oakland, and San Francisco. Chicago, San Jose, New York, Orange County, and Riverside-San Bernardino also contain sizable numbers of Filipinos.

In the aftermath of the civil rights movement and passage of civil rights legislation, particularly fair housing laws prohibiting explicit forms of housing discrimination, we see a shift in the residential patterns of Filipinos from urban centers to the suburbs. An emerging professional class with the skills, education, and financial resources early groups of Filipinos lacked have moved to suburban neighborhoods.<sup>66</sup> And as Filipinos have moved into the suburbs in greater numbers, they began to form suburban enclaves in such places as Daly City, Hercules, Vallejo, and Union City in Northern California and National City, Carson, Cerritos, and West Covina in Southern California.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, various kinds of businesses have emerged including restaurants, groceries, video stores, and bakeries geared to provide goods and services to Filipinos living in these enclaves. Filipino communities comprised of Navy families have also emerged in cities that have a Navy presence. San Diego, for example, with its large naval facilities, has been a prominent U.S. destination of Filipino migrants.

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<sup>66</sup> The move of Filipinos and other people of color to the suburbs, however, does not necessarily mean that "they have made it." For an analysis of the problems associated with suburbanization among Asian American communities, see Gen Fujioka & Jo Ann C. Gong, "The Challenges of Asian American Suburbanization," *Asian American Policy Review* (Spring 1991), 81-89.

<sup>67</sup> According to the U.S. Census, Filipinos make up 31.6% of the total population in Daly City, 25% in Hercules, 20.7% in Vallejo, 18.8% in Union City, 17.3% in National City, 18.8% in Carson, 11.7% in Cerritos, and 9.2% in West Covina.

Filipinos, for instance, make up the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in Daly City, California. Nearly 33,000 Filipinos reside in this suburban enclave attracted to Daly City's proximity to San Francisco where many residents work, convenient transportation, and relatively affordable housing. They now make up a third of the population. The Filipino population began to grow numbers in the 1970s and increased dramatically in the 1980s with the number of migrants nearly doubling from 14,421 in 1980 to 24,950 in 1990. Many initially head for San Francisco, stay there for a couple of years before moving to Daly City after they have saved enough money for a down payment for a house. Daly City's affordable housing market in the 1970s proved particularly appealing to Filipinos who had lived in overcrowded apartments in San Francisco. Consequently, Filipinos have become a significant presence on local politics, churches and the local school district. In these same places, we are seeing the growth of the second generation who are increasingly becoming the bulk of the population.<sup>68</sup>

### **Post-1965 Filipino Migration and the Growth of the Second Generation**

The Filipino DJs I interviewed are part of what some call the "new second generation" which consists primarily of those born in the U.S. and those who migrated to the U.S. at an early age, usually 12 or before (what some refer to as the 1.5 generation).<sup>69</sup> In contrast to the second generation of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century whose parents hailed primarily from Europe, this generation is primarily nonwhite whose parents generally hail from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. Moreover, they constitute the fastest growing segment of their age cohort and in particular, the country's total population of children under 18 years of age. In 1997, they comprised one out of every five American children and they have recently surpassed the prior record number of second generation Europeans. As Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut point out, "the long-term effects

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<sup>68</sup> Bert Eljera, "Filipinos Find Home in Daly City," in Timothy P. Fong and Larry H. Shinagawa (eds.), *Asian Americans Experiences and Perspectives* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000).

<sup>69</sup> In this study, I deploy the term "second generation" to reference both groups.

of contemporary immigration will hinge on the trajectories of these youths than on the fate of their parents.”<sup>70</sup>

Due to the high rate of Filipino migration after 1965, the Filipino population in the U.S. is largely foreign born. But although immigrants still outnumber subsequent generations, their share has declined sharply as U.S.-borns are increasingly becoming the bulk of the population. In 1990, for example, nearly 70 percent of Filipinos in the U.S. were foreign born but by 2000, this percentage has dropped to 50 percent. Today, half of the Filipino population in the U.S. are U.S. born with second generation Filipinos making up 29.1 percent and subsequent generations (third generation or later) making up 21 percent.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, the bulk of the existing literature on Filipinos continues to focus almost exclusively on the adaptation of the immigrant generation in Hawaii and the continental U.S. In other words, through the study of second generation Filipinos holds considerable theoretical and social import, their complex realities have yet to be treated as matters of serious scholarly investigation and analysis, at least to the extent that the realities of their parents have been. According to Yen Le Espiritu, the dearth of research on the experiences of the second generation is a reflection of the small size of the cohort but also its relative youth.<sup>72</sup> Conversely, the focus on the immigrant generation is a reflection of how their progress through the labor market and through the immigration bureaucracy can be traced more easily.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 10; Ruben G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes, *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Alejandro Portes, *The New Second Generation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

<sup>71</sup> Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, *From Many Shores: Asians in Census 2000* (New York: University at Albany, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Class: The Multiple Identities of Second-Generation Filipinos,” *Identities* 1.2 (1994): 1-25.

<sup>73</sup> Portes, *The New Second Generation*.

The U.S. Census constitutes one major source of information, providing a demographic profile of both the first and second generation. As a number of scholars point out, however, the kind of information the Census offers lacks depth and detail. In addition, Census data and other official data have not provided a detailed socioeconomic profile of the children of post-1965 migrants. The 1970 Census was the last to identify children of migrants in a straightforward manner and to conduct analysis on the basis of this information. Nonetheless, the census data does give us a sense of how particular groups of youth are doing on several socioeconomic indicators in comparison to other groups.<sup>74</sup>

On the surface, the census data indicate that Filipino immigrants and their children are a relatively advantaged group exhibiting greater education and economic achievement compared to other groups. A more careful consideration of the demographic information, however, suggests a more dynamic and complicated picture. As a function of their nonwhite status, Filipino youth confront limited opportunities in the job market similar to native born youth of color. At the same time, many come from families that confer certain advantages on their children relative to native born youth of color including access to material resources. However, not all post-1965 Filipino migrants are professionals; a sizable percentage comprise of relatives of Filipinos who had entered the U.S. prior to 1965 who lack the training and education of professionals.<sup>75</sup>

A significant number of Filipino youth come from households with a median family income above the national average. In 1999, for instance, the median family among all Filipinos was \$65,189, a figure over \$15,000 higher than the median for all families and more than \$6,000 higher than that of all Asian families. This figure, though, reflects the high labor participation rate among Filipinos particularly among Filipinas

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<sup>74</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*; Rumbaut and Portes, *Ethnicities*; Portes, *The New Second Generation*.

<sup>75</sup> Liu et al, "Dual Chain Migration," *International Migration Review*.

who had the highest labor force participation among all Asian women.<sup>76</sup> Another indicator of middle class status among Filipinos is their high rate of homeownership (60 percent) which is second only to the Japanese (60.8 percent) compared to all other Asians.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, Filipino youth come from families that had relatively high levels of educational achievement that far exceeded the national average. The 2000 Census, for instance, indicates that a higher proportion of Filipinos (43.8 percent) than of the total population (24.4 percent) had earned at least a bachelor's degree. It is not a surprise, therefore, that most Filipino youth seek higher education after high school. Conversely, a lower proportion of Filipinos (12.7 percent) than of the total population (19.6 percent) had less than a high school education. Filipinos also exhibit a much lower poverty rate (6.3 percent) than the national average (12.4 percent), the lowest rate among all Asian groups. Moreover, 38.2 percent of Filipinos were employed in management, professional and related occupations compared to 33.6 percent of the total population. However, 17.5 percent were employed service jobs, a percentage higher than all other Asian groups with the exception of Thai (33.4 percent) and Vietnamese (19.3 percent).<sup>78</sup>

The Filipino population as a whole has a relatively high proportion of children and young adults compared with the general U.S. population—nearly 28 percent is under the age of 17, 9.8 percent between the ages of 17 and 24, and 62.6 percent over the age of 24. Given the relative youth of the Filipino population, it is not surprising that second generation Filipinos are very young and just coming of age. According to one estimate, the 0-17 cohort accounts for nearly 64 percent (63.6 percent) of all second generation

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<sup>76</sup> Barbara M. Posadas notes that although a higher proportion of Filipinas, both U.S. born and immigrants, hold white collar jobs than all U.S. women, those who migrated to the U.S. in the 1980s were more likely to hold service jobs than those who migrated to the U.S. before the 1980s. See Barbara M. Posadas, *The Filipino Americans* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 1999.

<sup>77</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "We the People: Asians in the U.S.: Census 2000 Special Reports," *United States Census 2000* (December 2004).

<sup>78</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "We the People," *United States Census*.

Filipinos, the 17-24 cohort for nearly 13 percent (12.9 percent), and the 25 and over cohort for nearly 14 percent (13.9 percent).<sup>79</sup>

A more careful consideration of the demographic information, however, indicates that in many ways the demographic profile of Filipino youth is in line more with that of Southeast Asian youth than more established Asian American youth. Compared to other Asian American youth, for instance, Filipino youth (the 0-17 age cohort) show a higher nonattendance rate (18.4 percent), a rate similar to that of Southeast Asian youth.<sup>80</sup> And while most Asian American youth live in married couple family households, a much higher proportion (13.6 percent) of Filipino youth live in female householder families with no husband present, a rate second only to Cambodians (21.5 percent) among all Asian groups.<sup>81</sup> Filipino, Vietnamese, and other Southeast Asian youth also tend to live in larger households.<sup>82</sup>

Interviews and personal narratives constitute another source of information but unlike the U.S. Census, they provide more nuanced profile of contemporary immigrants and their offspring particularly as it pertains to their modes of adaptation into U.S. society. With regards to the second generation, for example, this kind of material offers a wealth of information on relations with parents, language use, ethnicity, psychological well-being, and school achievement and failure. It also allows social scientists to compare and contrast children of immigrants with youth who have been here for generations.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Figures based on U.S. Current Population Survey: 1994-2000. Taken from Min Zhou, "Coming of Age at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: A Demographic Profile of Asian American Youth," in Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (eds.), *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>80</sup> Zhou, "Coming of Age," *Asian American Youth*.

<sup>81</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "We the People," *United States Census*.

<sup>82</sup> Zhou, "Coming of Age," *Asian American Youth*.

<sup>83</sup> For instance, there is the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) which explores the social, economic, and psychological adaptation of children of immigrants. See Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*; Rumbaut and Portes, *Ethnicities*.



Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut have written about the adaptation of the second generation raising questions about the relevance of conventional models of assimilation predicated on the experiences of ethnic Europeans and delineating the major challenges to their incorporation into U.S. society. In their view, the adaptation of second generation youth is far from a uniform and straightforward but rather, subject to many contingencies and affected by many variables. According to these authors, children of immigrants confront a number of challenges including the persistence of racial discrimination, the bifurcation of the U.S. labor market, and confinement or concentration in the inner city that can adversely impact their social mobility.<sup>84</sup>

One challenge that Filipino youth and other second generation youth face is coming of age in an increasingly bifurcated economy in which they face declining economic prospects for upward mobility. In contrast to the European second generation who worked within the context of an expanding economy, today's second generation have had to contend with the loss of well paid blue collar jobs, the very jobs that provided the basis for the upward mobility of previous generations of immigrant children. Instead, the growth in the economy has been in the service sector which encompasses both highly paid professional and managers and poorly paid service workers. This means that more so than before, social mobility requires advanced technical and professional skills.<sup>85</sup>

Compared to earlier generations of Filipinos, contemporary second generation Filipinos come from a more heterogeneous background which has implications for their adaptive trajectories. For those from professional backgrounds, social mobility is a distinct possibility given that they come from families with the requisite educational credentials, skills, and capital. But for those from working class backgrounds, social

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<sup>84</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*.

<sup>85</sup> As Portes and Rumbaut point out, manufacturing employment has steadily dropped the last half of the 20 century (1950-1996), for over one third of the labor force to less than 15 percent. See Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*.

mobility is a much more daunting possibility given that they come from families that lack the means to promote educational success.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the economic adaptation of the new second generation, scholarly attention has also been given to the issue of ethnicity and the ways this cohort confound conventional models of adaptation.<sup>87</sup> Yen Le Espiritu and Diane L. Wolf, for example, suggest that Filipino ethnic identification is a far more dynamic and complex process than predicted by assimilationist and pluralist perspectives. They point out that Filipino youth conform to pluralist forces by self-identifying as Filipino or Filipino American rather than as American and socializing primarily with other Filipinos as well as exhibiting awareness of racism against Filipinos. Notwithstanding their nonwhite status, however, many also conform to assimilationist forces by subscribing to the notion of the American dream and preferring English to their parents' native language.<sup>88</sup>

Another way Filipino youth confound conventional models of adaptation is by exhibiting more depression and lower self-esteem which is surprising given their relatively privileged background. In other words, high educational achievement and English language fluency is usually associated with psychological well-being but in the case of Filipina youth, results indicate otherwise. A number of possible explanations have been posited including strong parental pressures and expectations to achieve academically. As Portes and Rumbaut point out, however, this explanation is limited

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<sup>86</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the new Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New York Press, 1998).

<sup>87</sup> Pyong Gap Min points out that the issue of ethnicity is especially popular among Asian American scholars. She speculates that this may be due to the fact that Asian American academics themselves have struggled over questions of ethnic and racial identity as well as the specialization of many second generation Asian American academics in Asian American studies and their proclivity toward ethnographic research. See Pyong Gap Min (ed.), *Second Generation: Ethnic Identity Among Asian Americans* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002).

<sup>88</sup> Yen Le Espiritu and Diane L. Wolf, "The Paradox of Assimilation: Children of Filipino Immigrants in San Diego," in Rumbaut and Portes, *Ethnicities*.

because other Asian parents engage in similar practices without their children exhibiting high-levels of depression and low levels of self-esteem.<sup>89</sup>

Whereas Asian American youth as a group has received the bulk of scholarly attention in research on the new second generation, they have been generally overlooked in research on youth and youth culture in the U.S. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou contend that within the social sciences, “Asian American youth” has yet to emerge as a distinct analytical category. Instead, the assumption is that Asian American youth do not have a culture of their own. Moreover, Asian American youth do not seem to fit into popular images of youth culture or subcultures such as skinheads, punks, or graffiti writers further contributing to their elision from research on youth and youth culture. Under theorized, therefore, are the meanings of youth culture in the lives of Asian American youth as well as the ways they have created their own distinct culture.<sup>90</sup>

The next chapter delineates the development of hip hop in general and DJing in particular in order to illuminate the relationship of Filipino youth to hip hop—how they fit in this history and what it means for them to participate in an expressive form considered black. It demonstrates the ways Filipino youth have successfully carved out a cultural niche for themselves and created their own distinct style through their innovative manipulation of sound technology. At the forefront of DJ innovation, Filipino DJs complicate the perceived ethnoracial scope of hip hop and reconfigure the parameters of hip hop history.

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<sup>89</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*. The invocation of “family” to explain social phenomenon is also problematic because it is often conflated with structural determinants and feminizes social dysfunction.

<sup>90</sup> This has begun to change with the recent publication of edited collections on Asian American youth cultural productions. See Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren, *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Lee and Zhou, *Asian American Youth*.

### Chapter III Hip Hop, DJ Culture, and Filipino Youth

For the record, Hip-Hop's true founders were the DJs—the ones who controlled crowds through their scratching and mixing innovations, their shrewd and open-minded song selections, their beat-digging diligence, their unparalleled showmanship and the sheer power exerted by their sound systems.

Chairman Mao, *Rap Pages* (April, 1996)

In the early '90s, the Bay Area of California began to emerge as a hotbed for innovative DJs and the notion of turntablism coalesced more clearly. Distanced from the mainstream hip-hop communities of Los Angeles and the Easy Coast, and blessed with a tradition of ambitious independent music, the San Francisco region hosted a wealth of mobile party DJs during the mid-'80s, and local battle was fertile with talent.

Kurt B. Reighley, *Looking for the Perfect Beat: The Art and Culture of the DJ* (2000)

As Chairman Mao of *Rap Pages* alludes to in the foregoing, DJs have had a profound and lasting influence on the direction and shape hip hop has taken. Through the creative manipulation and rearticulation of sound technology, DJ pioneers like Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, Grand Wizard Theodore, and Grandmixer D.ST laid the foundation of hip hop and established it as a sonic force. These early DJ pioneers relied on Afro-Caribbean diasporic cultural practices and traditions, rearticulating them within the context of the Bronx, considered the birthplace of hip hop, to better serve their immediate needs and circumstances. In striving to throw the best party and to attract the biggest crowd, they explored the seemingly limitless possibilities of sounds and revolutionized the meaning, production, and consumption of music.

Filipino DJs drew upon and built on the innovations of early DJ pioneers in Jamaica and the U.S. But while parallels can be drawn between the practices of Jamaican soundmen, Bronx DJs, and Filipino DJs, it is the mobile DJ scene that provides the immediate context for the emergence of Filipino DJs. It is not an accident, therefore, that seminal Filipino DJs started out as mobile DJs. And as Kurt B. Reighley suggests, this

highly competitive environment proved to be crucial to the transformation of the Bay Area into a DJ mecca. What he fails to mention, however, is the prominence of Filipino DJs in this scene, which paved the way for their dominance in DJing. More specifically, it afforded them a space to hone their skills giving rise to the emergence of Filipino turntablists, DJs who consciously think of themselves as musicians and turntables as musical instruments. Today, Filipino youth have become a ubiquitous presence not only in the DJ battle scene but also in the club scene, the college party scene, and radio.

### **Deindustrialization, Urban Renewal Policies, and the Emergence of Hip Hop**

The South Bronx is generally regarded as the birthplace of hip hop, the place where the different elements of hip hop first came together in the decade of the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Though frequently conceived as interchangeable with rap, hip hop actually encompasses an array of expressive forms in addition to rap including writing or graffiti, b-boying or breakdancing, and DJing, each with its own distinct historical trajectory and antecedents. Nonetheless, cross-fertilization among these cultural forms characterized hip hop early in its development as practitioners participated in the same events characterized by face-to-face interaction and live community based practices. It was not uncommon, therefore, to see MCs, DJs, writers and b-boys/b-girls congregating in parks and select clubs and engaging in mutually supportive activities.<sup>2</sup>

As a number of scholars have noted, hip hop emerged as a way of life among marginalized youth, particularly black, Puerto Rican, and West Indian, in the face of diminishing resources and limited opportunities. Hit especially hard by New York's fiscal crisis, the South Bronx's poor and working class youth transformed the meanings

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<sup>1</sup> The South Bronx may be hip hop's birthplace but this does not mean that youth in surrounding areas did not engage in similar practices. In other words, we cannot assume that the different expressive forms constitutive of hip hop just suddenly came together in the South Bronx, what one writer has aptly called the "romanticized Big Bang theory" of hip hop. Vee Bravo, senior editor of *Stress* magazine, quoted in Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> For an extended discussion, see Greg Dimitriadis, "Hip Hop: From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative," *Popular Music* 15.2 (1996).

and uses of their environment in innovative and inspired ways in an attempt to make it work on their behalf. In their hands, subway cars became canvases while street pavements became recreational spaces, in effect “makeshift youth centers”<sup>3</sup> where young people could work on and develop their dancing as well as compete with one another. On a number of different occasions, DJs transformed public spaces into party spaces, plugging in their sound equipment to street light electrical sources in order to get the party started. In addition, these young people redeployed technology to serve their own needs and priorities. Writers, for example, utilized spray paint technology to enhance the visual impact and visibility of their masterpieces experimenting with different spray nozzles in order to come up with bigger, bolder, and more unique styles.<sup>4</sup>

But before the South Bronx came to be known as the mecca of hip hop, it had already come to be known as an international symbol of urban blight. What was overlooked in this formulation, however, was the whole host of social and economic transformations precipitated by both global and local forces that had a devastating impact on urban areas across the country. Rose documents these changes in *Black Noise*:

The growth of multinational telecommunications networks, the formation of new international divisions of labor, the increasing power of finance relative to production, and new migration patterns from Third World industrializing nations have all contributed to the economic and social restructuring of urban America. These global forces have had a direct and sustained impact on urban job opportunity structures, have exacerbated long-standing racial and gender-based forms of discrimination, and have contributed to increasing multinational corporate control of market conditions and national economic health. Large-scale restructuring of the workplace and job market has had its effect upon most facets of everyday life. It had placed additional pressures on local community-based networks and whittled down already limited prospects for social mobility.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Stampa Alternativa in association with IGTimes, *Style: Writing from the Underground: (R)evolutions of Aerosol Linguistics* (Italy: UMBRIAGRAF, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 27.

These changes had an especially deleterious impact on the working-class residents of the Bronx exacerbating their already tenuous position. At the same time, these same changes helped fuel the emergence of hip hop.

During the 1950s and 1960s, cities nationwide implemented redevelopment projects designed to alleviate “urban blight.” In particular, the federal government made available funding for slum clearance and public housing paving the way for urban renewal projects. This policy though targeted communities of color effectively decimating what was at one time thriving communities. In addition to the deleterious impact of city policies, the residents of South Bronx faced shifts in the economy. Deindustrialization hit urban areas across the country as corporations opted to move operations to low income countries igniting a wave of plant closures in the U.S. and leaving behind displaced workers as well-paying manufacturing jobs gave way to low paying service sector jobs.<sup>6</sup>

Already facing significant cutbacks on social services and a decrease in the availability of affordable housing as well as the prospect of unemployment and underemployment in the service sector, black and Puerto Rican residents of the South Bronx now had to deal with the decimation of their communities. The construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway gutted poor and working class communities in the area resulting in the demolition of hundreds of residential homes and the displacement of residents to already crowded neighborhoods. Moreover, redevelopment projects designated working class neighborhoods as “slums” clearing the way for the razing of some 60,000 Bronx homes and the forced relocation of 170,000 people. As Rose notes, these projects disproportionately impacted nonwhite residents who made up thirty seven percent of the displaced residents.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*.

<sup>7</sup> All information taken from Rose, *Black Noise*.

For the young residents of the Bronx, these changes meant growing up in an environment that has come to be associated with urban decay and ruin in the national imagination, an image immortalized in such movies as *Fort Apache* and *Wolfen*. It meant spending their formative years with limited access to space and resources as well as being trained for jobs that no longer exist. The seminal Puerto Rican graffiti writer Futura, for instance, ended up working at a McDonald's after graduating from a trade school which was supposed to prepare students for work in the print industry. Instead, computer technology rendered the skills he acquired from the school obsolete. DJ Red Alert experienced a similar fate as computer technology made his job reviewing blueprints for a drafting company redundant.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, this did not stop the young residents of the Bronx from forging their own social and cultural networks, complex formations like gangs which conferred a sense of identity and provided resources under dire circumstances.

Gang culture, usually associated with criminality and violence, proved to be a precursor to hip hop and helped fuel its emergence. It is not a surprise, therefore, that aspects of gang culture became an integral aspects of hip hop. As Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn put it:

Hip-hop culture rose out of the gang-dominated street culture, and aspects of the gangs are still defining features of hip-hop—particularly territorialism and the tradition of battling. As hip hop grew in the 70s, prominent DJs claimed specific territories as their own, and “crews” that derived either directly or in spirit from street gangs guarded the DJs, their equipment, and their territories. These DJs would battle for supremacy and territory. The art and the dance associated with hip-hop culture—graffiti and b-boying or breaking—also have their roots in gang culture. Gang members “tagged” their territories to identify them and tagged rival territories to provoke those rivals. These “tags” were taken up by “writers” who were not affiliated with specific gangs and developed into an art form that found its most spectacular expression in rolling murals on

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<sup>8</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*.



the city's subway cars. At the same time, battle dances were refined as an alternative to violence, though they were sometimes only a prelude to it.<sup>9</sup>

Gangs dominated urban youth culture from the 1950s to the early 1970s but with the emergence of hip hop, gangs gave way to crews yet many aspects of gang culture continue to be a part of hip hop culture today.

In many ways, Afrika Bambaataa's life history exemplifies the intersection between gang culture and hip hop culture. Like many of his contemporaries, he made the transition from gangs to hip hop, from being a member of the Bronx gang, Black Spades, to founder of the Zulu Nation. As the story goes, Bambaataa conceived of the Nation as an alternative to gangs, to provide an outlet for kids to have fun and compete with one another but without the violence that accompanied gang life. But in terms of DJing, Bambaataa constitutes a key figure because of the way he pushed the boundaries of this art form. More specifically, he became known for his expansive music collection that spanned a wide range of music and seemingly knew no bounds. According to Grand Wizard Theodore, another DJ pioneer credited with inventing scratching:

His record collection was just incredible. He would play the B-52s and everybody in the party would be going crazy. He would play Rolling Stones records, Aerosmith, Dizzy Gillespie. Jazz records, rock records. I remember I went to an Afrika Bambaataa party and he played "Honky Tonk Woman" and I thought, "Wow, what's that?" And after I went home and thought about it, I was like, "That's Mick Jagger and them." It didn't matter if you were listening to a white artist or a black artist, it was any record he could find that had a beat on it.<sup>10</sup>

Other DJs may have had better techniques or a louder sound system but when it came to music selection, Bambaataa had no match. A key component of Bambaataa's influence, then, was his expansive grasp of music, incorporating punk, rock, and even country music in the sonic repertoire of hip hop.

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<sup>9</sup> Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y'all: Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Quote taken from Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton (eds.), *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 221.

### **Hip Hop as an Afro-Diasporic Cultural Form**

Hip hop's early practitioners relied on transplanted Caribbean cultural practices brought over by Caribbean migrants, rearticulating and reworking them in the process to better serve their immediate needs and circumstances. As Dick Hebdige observes, the influence of Caribbean musical practices on hip-hop is neither arbitrary nor incidental. "The connections between rap and Caribbean music didn't have to be forced. A high proportion of the black population in the Bronx came originally from the West Indies. The area has its Puerto Rican and Cuban communities, too. And when these people came from the Caribbean, they brought their own music with them."<sup>11</sup> Because New York City was the primary destination of West Indian immigrants, these practices took on different meanings and forms. To conceive of hip hop within a national frame, as strictly an African American formation, therefore, obscures its complex transnational influences.<sup>12</sup>

Cultural exchanges and identifications among black diasporic communities, however, have never been neither straightforward nor unidirectional. Caribbean music proved to be crucial to the development of hip hop; but it is also true that American music shaped the trajectory of popular Caribbean musical forms including ska, rocksteady, and reggae. To simply say that hip hop is rooted in Caribbean music, therefore, conceals the American R&B "origins" of certain Caribbean musical forms and the intricate cultural interchanges that take place between diasporic communities. The appropriation of sounds, in other words, goes both ways as evidenced by the influence of

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<sup>11</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Cut "N' Mix: Culture, Identity, and Caribbean Music* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 146.

<sup>12</sup> The question of "origins" is a vexed and contentious one, particularly in relation to hip hop. There have been multiple claims made with regards to the the "origins" of hip hop. I have chosen not to foreground and address these claims. Instead, I focus on two key factors--the reappropriation of Afro-Caribbean diasporic musical and oral practices and the redeployment of technology--not only because they figure most prominently in the practices of DJs but also because their influences are the most established.

American radio personalities and R&B on Jamaican musical practitioners and the reliance of early hip hop DJ pioneers upon the cultural practices of Jamaican soundmen.<sup>13</sup>

Needing to rebuild in the wake of World War II, Britain turned to Jamaica to fill its need for cheap labor precipitating the migration of thousands of Jamaicans to Britain including trained musicians. In addition, the burgeoning Jamaican North Coast tourist industry drew local village bands to play in hotels and to provide tourists with a piece of “authentic” local culture. At about the same time, R&B produced by American blacks was beginning to take root on the island fueled in large part by the migration of Jamaicans to the U.S. who brought back R&B records on their return trips, and the expanding reach of American radio.<sup>14</sup>

With the migration of local musicians abroad and to the North Coast, Jamaicans looked elsewhere for their source of musical entertainment, giving rise to the phenomenon of the “sound system.” The Jamaican record producer Junior Lincoln describes a sound system this way: “A sound system is just like what you call a disco. But the only thing is, it is not as sophisticated as a disco set. The amplifiers are huge, well now amplifiers are as big as 2,000 watts. They emphasise a lot on the bass. And they play sometimes twenty or twenty-four inch speakers. So it really thump, y’know. The bassline is really heavy. You’ve never heard anything so heavy in all your life.”<sup>15</sup> Unlike local radio stations which catered to the middle and upper class, the sound system served the needs of the majority of Jamaicans. With only a few able to afford their own

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<sup>13</sup> Within the context of Jamaican musical culture, the “selector” plays the record and the “DJ” provides vocal accompaniment akin to a rapper in the U.S.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin O’Brien Chang and Wayne Chen, *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). See also Hebdige, *Cut “N’ Mix*.

<sup>15</sup> Taken from Hebdige, *Cut “N’ Mix*, 63.

stereo system, it provided wider access to musical entertainment. Moreover, the sound system also represented a viable alternative to bands which proved to be more costly.

American R&B supplanted mento as Jamaica's most popular music, dominating the sound system scene into the mid 1950s. Kevin O'Brien Chang and Wayne Chen speculate that R&B's local appeal stemmed from shared experiences between African Americans and Jamaicans, including plantation slavery and urban migration.<sup>16</sup> Demand for this kind of music only declined in the late 1950s with the ascendancy of rock and roll in the U.S. With their source of music drying up, Jamaican sound system operators looked to make their own tracks that could fill local demands. Anticipating the practices of hip hop's early pioneers, these musical practitioners did not merely duplicate R&B but added their own inflection, ultimately coming up with distinct musical forms.

As demands for sound systems grew, so did the competition among sound system operators which, in turn, fueled innovations. Initially, soundmen played in different venues vying to attract the biggest crowd. Eventually, however, competition spilled over in the same venue--rented halls or open air spaces--where sound system operators customized sound equipment to drown out and overwhelm the competition. Soundmen also tried to outdo the competition by getting hold of exclusive or hard to obtain R&B records. Initially obtaining these records from American sailors stationed on the island via trade, sound system operators themselves eventually traveled to the U.S. to procure American R&B selections not readily available in Jamaica. To protect their investments, soundmen would scratch off or soak off record labels and replace them with phony labels

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<sup>16</sup> Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*.

to throw off the competition, a practice that would eventually be taken up by early DJ pioneers such as Kool Herc.

In an increasingly competitive field, sound system operators did more than just select and play records. Taking on names or titles which exude royalty, these “larger-than-life characters,”<sup>17</sup> as Hebdige describes them, had their own theme songs and put on elaborate shows on stage.

Like Trinidad’s boastful calypsonians they often played with images of violence, presenting themselves in a jokey but nonetheless menacing fashion as criminals, gangsters and legendary bad men. For instance Duke Reid, who ran one of the most successful of the early sound systems, would preside over blues dances dressed in a long ermine cloak with a pair of Colt 45s in cowboys holsters, a cartridge belt strapped across his ample chest and a loaded shotgun slung over his shoulder, with an enormous gilt crown perched on top of his head.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to staging these flamboyant performances, sound system operators also performed a number of more mundane tasks geared to attract and move crowds including inviting people hanging out on the streets to the dances and greeting patrons at the door.

As sound system operators focused their energies on finding ingenious ways to gain an advantage over their competitors, a division of labor emerged whereby the selector played the records and the “DJ” introduced the selections and provided live vocal accompaniment. The DJ greatly enhanced the dancehall experience by toasting over records and providing witty or satirical commentary designed to incite the crowd into a frenzy. The pioneer DJ Winston “Count” Manchuki, for example, adopted the rhyming style of U.S. radio personalities and incorporated vocal clicks and beats into his performances. Another prominent DJ, U-Roy, could captivate a crowd without musical accompaniment. Jamaican DJs ultimately surpassed the selector in popularity and

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<sup>17</sup> Hebdige, *Cut “N’ Mix*, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Hebdige, *Cut “N’ Mix*, 63.

acclaim, gaining prominence in the 1970s and becoming the most dominant force in Jamaican music today.<sup>19</sup>

### **Reararticulating Afro-Caribbean Diasporic Practices in the Bronx: Kool Herc and the Breaks**

Jamaican musical culture has given rise to significant musical forms, most notably reggae, which continues to enjoy international prominence. More recently, dancehall has become an international phenomenon supplanting reggae in popularity with artists like Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton, and Beenie Man garnering worldwide acclaim. But Jamaican music have also had a profound influence on an array of musical forms. Chang and Chen, for example, contend that pioneers of dub, another popular Jamaican musical form, influenced the development of dance music including house, techno, industrial, and jungle.<sup>20</sup> With regards to hip hop and in particular, DJing, the innovations of sound system operators would prove to be crucial.

The DJ constitutes the focal point in Jamaican musical culture, supplying the popular entertainment and playing a central role in the development of Jamaican musical forms including ska, rocksteady, and reggae, all of which were meant to be played within the context of the sound system. It was in Jamaica where the DJ pushed the boundaries of music and explored the seemingly limitless possibilities of sounds. In their hands, pre-recorded music became a source of creative possibilities. Within the context of the sound system in Jamaica, the DJ did much more than just play records. Steve Barrow describes the significance of Jamaican music this way: “You look at Jamaica, and you think it can’t be...’cause the place is too small, it couldn’t have that influence. Then you say, what about drum and bass foregrounded in the mix? What about personality DJs playing dub-plates? And no one can deny it. The arsenal of techniques at the disposal of

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<sup>19</sup> For a history of Jamaican popular music including the rise of Jamaican DJs, see Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*.

<sup>20</sup> Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 72.

someone operating the decks--most of things were developed in Jamaica.”<sup>21</sup> Though the links have not always been direct, much of a DJ’s repertoire can be traced to Jamaica. In the case of Kool Herc, considered one of hip hop’s originators, the practices of Jamaican soundmen would prove to have a direct bearing on his innovations.

Born in Jamaica before emigrating to the U.S. in 1967, Herc grew up to the music of sound system operators in Jamaica. He recollects:

Not many people had trucks, so people would bring their equipment to the yard on handmade carts. I would watch as colorful lights were strung around the trees and the vendors would start preparing the curry goat. I was too young to go to the dance hall, but that didn’t stop me from peeking through a hole in the fence, watching what the grown folks was doing. To my young eyes it was quite fascinating. The music was always so loud that you could feel the vibration in your body. Everything in the house would be shaking. And the only thing you could smell was food and weed burning in the air.<sup>22</sup>

Inspired by their use of massive loudspeakers, he came to be known for his powerful sound system that overwhelmed the crowd and drowned out the competition. Some also credit Herc and his MCs as the first to utilize a rhyming style rooted in Jamaican toasting that was distinct from the rhyming style of disco DJs common in the 1970s. In the words of Bambaataa,

[Herc] knew that a lot of American blacks were not getting into reggae. He took the same thing that the deejays was doing—toasting—and did it with American records, Latin records or records with a beat. Herc took phrases like what was happening in the streets, new sayings going around like “rock on my mellow,” “to the beat y’all,” “you don’t stop” and just elaborated on that...he would call out the names of people who were at the party, just like the microphone personalities who deejayed back in Jamaica.<sup>23</sup>

Following Jamaican soundmen, Herc adopted the practice of soaking off record labels to throw off the competition and ensure that he had the best collection of records.

<sup>21</sup> Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Quote taken from Michael A. Gonzalez, “The Labors of Hercules,” *The Source* Jan 1998, 146.

<sup>23</sup> Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 72.

Herc, however, is best known as the originator of the breakbeat. His practice of accentuating and continuously playing the breaks of songs one after another--that part of the record b-boys would wait for to break or dance to--constitutes a significant hip hop innovation. Recognized more for his music selection than for his technique, Herc realized what it is that kept people, particularly breakers, on the dancefloor. Instead of playing the whole track, he isolated the best parts of old funk tracks which meant getting hold of several copies of the same record. This practice quickly caught on, generating a strong favorable reaction from the crowd and inspiring a countless number of DJs to dig for breaks in old, obscure records--a practice which continues today. More importantly, it helped create the musical foundation of hip hop distinguishing it from other musical genres.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Redeployment of Technology and the Development of Hip Hop Cultural Forms**

From the outset, advancements in technology have been deeply implicated in the development of hip hop cultural practices, constituting an important context of innovation. But while hip hop's cultural practitioners have had to adapt to advancements in technology, they have also readapted and redeployed technology to serve local needs and circumstances. As Rose points out in her analysis of hip hop, technology mediates and shapes cultural practices within hip hop at the same time its cultural practitioners utilize technology for specific cultural ends that diverge from its original purpose.<sup>25</sup> The range of potential uses of technology, therefore, is never wholly anticipated or predetermined, even by its designers and manufacturers. Hip hop's cultural practitioners have proven to be particularly adept at exploiting and creatively engaging with advanced technologies to create new cultural forms and develop distinctive cultural practices. In

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<sup>24</sup> Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life*.

<sup>25</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).



their hands, developments in technology have become a source of imaginative possibilities and a context for innovation.

To illustrate, hip hop's musical practitioners have taken advantage of the increasing use of digital technology in music production and consumption. They utilized digital technology in order to make an art out of sampling—selecting assorted musical excerpts from recordings—as well as using it as a context to create and innovate. Rose observes that before hip hop producers arrived at the scene, music producers and engineers utilized samplers as a means to bury the original sample or to accent a musical composition or to save studios time and money. By contrast, hip hop DJs and composers “recycled” and foregrounded previously recorded material, original breaks, because it enabled them to achieve a particular sound not easily produced today as well as to broaden the range of potential sounds they can exploit to produce new music.

Using the machines in ways that have not been intended, by pushing on established boundaries of music engineering, rap producers have developed an art out of recording with the sound meters well into the distortion zone. When necessary, they deliberately *work in the red*. If recording in the red will produce the heavy dark growling sound desired, rap producers record in the red. If a sampler must be detuned in order to produce a sought-after-low-frequency hum, then the sampler is detuned. Rap musicians are not the only musicians to push on the limits of high-tech inventions. Yet, the decisions they have made and the directions their creative impulses have taken echo Afrodiasporic musical priorities. Rap production resonates with black cultural priorities in the age of digital reproduction.<sup>26</sup>

Within the context of hip hop, sampling has become a viable means to make music and provides the basis to create “new” sounds through its simultaneous recuperation and reconfiguration of the past. Sampling through the use of digital computers (samplers) has become a well established practice to create music not just within hip hop but also within popular music in general. As hip hop's musical

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<sup>26</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 75.

practitioners point out, however, sampling is not just a matter of copying “other people’s music.” It can be very complex, involving the use of multiple samples and the (re)layering and (re)construction of multiple sounds in very intricate and innovative ways. Sampled sound “carries, above all, the unique ability not just to *refer* but to *be*; it offers not just a means but a new meaning.”<sup>27</sup> It is not just a way of bringing back the past, but also reconnecting with it and giving it new meaning.

Just as hip producers and composers transformed the meaning and use of samplers, early DJ pioneers also redeployed sound technology in ways that diverged from the intentions of manufacturers. Grandmaster Flash, more than any other early DJ pioneer, exploited sound technology in unexpected and creative ways that has had a profound and lasting influence on the direction and shape hip hop has taken. Like Herc, Flash also has links to the Caribbean though this did not figure prominently in his DJing. Instead, he took advantage of his background in electronics at Samuel Gompers vocational high school in the Bronx, New York, to come up with key hip hop innovations that has implications for other musical genres as well. Flash customized sound equipment to build on and advance the innovations developed by others. To illustrate, Herc may be best known as the originator of the breakbeat but it was Flash who took this innovation to a new level. Using his technical training to redesign a standard mixer, Flash was able to hear the record playing on the other turntable before the audience allowing him to mix breaks seamlessly and to play them for an extended period of time.

Flash also advanced the key hip hop innovation of scratching. Discovered by Grand Wizard Theodore, Flash incorporated this technique into his repertoire and executed it with precision.<sup>28</sup> He took parts of a record and scratched it to make new

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<sup>27</sup> Cutler, “Plunderphonics,” in Ron Sakolsky and Fred Wei-han Ho (eds.), *Sounding Off! Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1995), 74.

<sup>28</sup> By now a standard technique among DJs today, scratching nonetheless, constitutes a key innovation to the development of hip hop in general and turntablism in particular. Doc Rice, a DJ himself, describes scratching this way: “Virtually all scratches involve moving the record by hand in a forward and backward

musical compositions helping lay down the foundation for the emergence of turntablists. With scratching, DJs were able to treat turntables as musical instruments, reconfiguring sounds and creating musical compositions just like other musicians. In addition to his technical prowess, Flash was also known for his showmanship, using his elbows to scratch records or his stomach to manipulate the crossfader and spinning around in the middle of his sets. Flash's performance proved so compelling that instead of dancing, a crowd often gathered around Flash to watch him perform.<sup>29</sup>

Through their innovations, DJ pioneers like Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, Grand Wizard Theodore, and Grandmixer D.ST set the stage for the emergence of hip hop as a sonic force. As Chairman Mao of Rap Pages puts it: "For the record, Hip-Hop's true founders were the DJs--the ones who controlled crowds through their scratching and mixing innovations, their shrewd and open-minded song selections, their beat-digging diligence, their unparalleled showmanship and the sheer power exerted by their sound systems."<sup>30</sup> It was the DJ who built a local following and support with their ability to transform streets and parks into party spaces by wiring their sound system to any available electrical source including street lamps. Staking out their own territories where they reigned supreme, early DJs transformed funk and disco tracks into break records over which MCs could rap and b-boys and b-girls could dance.

But with the ascendancy of MCs and rap in the 1980s, the status of DJs declined. In particular, the transformation of rap into a mass mediated commodity precipitated by the release of *Rapper's Delight* in 1979 had profound implications for the trajectory of hip hop. It marked the shift of hip hop from a primarily performance-based artform to a mass disseminated artform. Dimitriadis writes:

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manner" and "require the use of the fader." See Doc Rice, "Essential DJ Fundamentals: The Language of Scratching," *Rap Pages* (September 1998), 30.

<sup>29</sup> Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life*.

<sup>30</sup> Chairman Mao, "The Knights of the Turntables," *Rap Pages* (April 1996), 50.

The decentralized face-to-face dynamic that marked early hip hop has thus given way to a different dynamic, one mediated by way of commodity forms such as vinyl, video, film, and CD. These configurations have separated hip hop's vocal discourse (i.e., "rap") from its early contexts of communal production, encouraging closed narrative forms over flexible word-play and promoting privatized listening over community dance. This shift towards in-studio production has affected the art in a number of crucial ways, especially by redefining hip hop culture by and through the relatively more narrow and more easily appropriated idiom of rap music.<sup>31</sup>

As a consequence of the mass commodification of rap, hip hop was no longer characterized by an integrated set of practices encompassing DJing, b-boying, writing, and MCing. Instead, it came to be viewed as strictly associated with rap and the emerging stardom of rap artists.

The spotlight shifted to MCs as record companies spent their energies and resources promoting MCs, relegating DJs to the background. According to Bambaataa "The record companies started doing what we call the Whispering Devil in the Zulu Nation, whispering in the rappers' ears. 'You don't need your DJs--y'all are the ones who('re) the stars!' Next thing you know, they started leaving the DJs and the turntables and going to DAT."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Peanut Butter Wolf notes that "For a while the MCs weren't even having scratching in their choruses. Part of it was the industry, and the money. For whatever reason, a lot of MCs didn't think it was worth it to split their money with DJs. People started feeling that the DJs were replaceable."<sup>33</sup> To make records, MCs were no longer dependent on DJs; all they needed was a producer and a studio. By the same token, MCs could rely on session musicians instead of DJs.

At the same time that advancements in sound technology made it possible for DJs to explore the sonic possibilities of turntables, new technologies also contributed to the marginalization of DJs. The growing sophistication of digital technology has made it conceivable for musicians and artists to reproduce sounds, including sounds developed by

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<sup>31</sup> Dimitriadis, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Reighley, 171-173.

<sup>33</sup> Reighley, 173.

DJs through the manipulation of vinyl like scratching, and use them to create new musical compositions. In many ways, new digital technology has taken out the human element in the production of music, recreating sounds and rhythms independent of a musician. According to Andrew Goodwin,

If one listens to a recording that uses state-of-the-art computer technologies, it is clear that machines are being used to mimic many of the techniques normally developed over time by human “real time” performers. These techniques include the elastic placement of the beat (slightly in front of or behind its “correct” mathematical position) to create “feel;” the use of subtle changes of volume or velocity to create “lifelike” dynamics; and deliberately making small changes in the tempo to emulate the way human performers speed up and slow down.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1980s, DJs became known more for their studio skills rather than their DJ skills as sampling technology reproduced the sonic productions of DJs while DATS supplanted DJs in live engagements. But in the mid to late 1980s, DJing experienced a resurgence fueled, in large part, by developments in the Bay Area and in the particular, the innovations of Filipino DJs.

### **West Coast Hip Hop and the Emergence of “Gangsta Rap”**

While the late 1980s marks the ascendancy of MCs and concomitant decline of DJs, it also marks an important shift in the cultural and musical compass of hip hop. More specifically, the emergence of so-called “gangsta rap” in Los Angeles decentered New York as the center of the hip hop universe showing that other regions in the country were capable of producing its own distinctive brand of hip hop on par with that of New York. It marked, in Murray Forman’s words, “the first real challenge to New York’s dominance”<sup>35</sup> with Compton taking its place alongside the Bronx and Queens as major sites of hip hop innovation and creativity. Other regions would soon follow—the Pacific

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Goodwin, “Sample and Hold: Pop Music in the Digital Age of Reproduction,” *Critical Inquiry* 30.3 (1988): 34-49.

<sup>35</sup> Murray Forman, *The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 193.

Northwest (e.g., Seattle), the Southeast (e.g., Miami), and the South (e.g., Atlanta)—all putting out their own unique sound and rhyming style that was not simply a derivative New York hip hop.

Hip hop historians and critics point out that while Los Angeles has come to be associated with gangsta rap, the inspiration for this genre of rap actually came from a couple of East Coast MCs. Philadelphia's Schooly D and New York's KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions are generally credited for producing hip hop's first gangsta records with the release of *Smoke Some Kill* and *Criminal Minded* in 1987. Just several months later, Ice-T released *Rhyme Pays*, what some consider the first West Coast gangsta record. A year later, Niggaz With Attitude (NWA) released *Straight Outta Compton*, a landmark hip hop album that cemented Los Angeles' place on the hip hop map but also took gangsta rap to another level. Robin D.G. Kelley describes the significance of NWA to the emergence of gangsta rap this way: "NWA placed even more emphasis than did Ice-T on exaggerated descriptions of street life, militant resistance to authority, and outright sexist violence. Although songs like "Straight Outta Compton" seemed more like modern-day versions of baaadman folklore, NWA's lyrics were far more brutal than any that had come before."<sup>36</sup>

In a span of a few short years, West Coast hip hop evolved rapidly as dozens of gangsta rappers burst onto the scene and gangsta rap achieved an aura of authenticity not accorded to early Los Angeles hip hop.<sup>37</sup> This particular genre of rap is characterized by descriptive first-person narratives of urban life and a heavy reliance on funk samples

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<sup>36</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles," in William Eric Perkins (ed.), *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 120. See also Brian Cross, *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race + Resistance in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> Early Los Angeles hip hop (i.e., pre-gangsta rap) was characterized by electropop and West Coast funk. The Wreckin' Cru, for example, which included future NWA member Dr Dre, wore maxicoats and lace gloves in contrast to the adidas sweat suits worn by the preeminent rap group of the time, Run DMC. Musically, the group was heavily influenced by the likes of Cameo, Prince, and Zapp. Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics," *Droppin' Science*.

from such artists as George Clinton, Parliament, and Sly Stone. In these narratives, gangsta rappers generally take on a persona—gang banger, hustler, or ordinary working person—through whose eyes they convey stories centering on the criminalization, surveillance, and incarceration of black youth but also on the sexual exploitations of these characters. In the process, gangsta rap became the lightning rod for debates about popular music and culture as well as an object of fascination among academics as evidenced by the body of scholarship it has generated.<sup>38</sup>

A number of cultural critics situate the formation of this genre of rap within post-industrial conditions in Los Angeles in the 1980s, conditions similar to those that plagued the Bronx just a decade earlier. Black communities such as Watts and Compton faced economic displacement, factory closures, and unprecedented downward mobility. There was the loss of thousands of high wage, stable, blue-collar jobs as major manufacturing companies such as General Motors, Goodyear, and Firestone closed plants in and around South Central Los Angeles and shifted production to the Third World. During the decade of the 1980s, an estimated 131 plants shut down leaving 124,000 people out of work. The poverty rate for Los Angeles County was 7 percent but in South Central Los Angeles, it surpassed 30 percent.<sup>39</sup>

For black youth, the picture was especially bleak. In 1983, for example, the unemployment rate in Los Angeles County 11 percent but for black youth, it was estimated at 50 percent. At about the same time, programs for inner city youth were being dismantled or cut back significantly. Kelley, for instance, points out that programs such as the Neighborhood Youth Corps and the Comprehensive Employment and

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<sup>38</sup> See. For example, Nick De Genova, "Gangster Rap and Nihilism in Black America," *Social Text* 43 (Fall 1995): 89-132.; Peter McLaren, "Gangsta Pedagogy and Ghettoethnicity: The Hip-Hop Nation as Counterpublic Sphere," *Socialist Review* 25:2 (1995): 9-55.

<sup>39</sup> Figures taken from, Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005). See also Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics," *Droppin' Science*.

Training Act (CETA) were dismantled while the Job Corps and Los Angeles Summer Job program were cut back substantially.<sup>40</sup>

Growing joblessness and poverty particularly under the Reagan-Bush era combined with the growing viability of the crack economy and other illicit forms of economic activity intensified gang activity as various gangs and groups competed for control over markets.<sup>41</sup> This set of circumstances, however, also brought about greater state repression as incarceration rates, particularly among young black men, soared to record highs. By the time the decade of the 1980s came to a close, Los Angeles had the dubious distinction of having the largest prison population in the country. Housing projects such as Imperial Courts became, in effect, minimum security prisons with residents required to carry identity cards while visitors were subject to regular searches. Moreover, police helicopters, electronic surveillance, and small tanks with battering rams the police used to barge into suspected crack houses increasingly became commonplace in black communities, a function of the militarization of urban America.<sup>42</sup>

Gangsta MCs drew from these circumstances for their lyrical material but as a number of cultural critics point out, it would be a mistake to interpret gangsta rap literally or as simply a reflection of the lived realities of the rappers themselves. In other words, the relationship between the postindustrial conditions in Los Angeles and gangsta rap is a lot more complex than a literal reading of lyrics would warrant. As Forman puts it: “The question that should be asked is not ‘Is this real and true?’ but ‘Why do so many young

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<sup>40</sup> Kelley, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics,” *Droppin’ Science*.

<sup>41</sup> While gang activity in South Bronx, New York subsided in the early 1970s, it was only beginning to escalate in South Central Los Angeles with the formation of the Crips in 1972. Shortly thereafter, in opposition to the Crips, gangs from adjoining neighborhoods joined forces to form what became known as the Bloods. Cross attributes the escalation of group violence to what he describes as “the changing tide of cocaine importation into this country, from Miami to the overland routes through Mexico into southern California. Cross, *It’s Not About a Salary*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Kelley, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics,” *Droppin’ Science*.



black and Latino men and women choose these dystopic images of spatial representation to orient their own places in the world?”<sup>43</sup>

Rather than dismiss gangsta rap for promoting violence or its misogynist, sexist, and homophobic lyrics, then, critics like Nick De Genova call for a more nuanced analysis within a broader context and framework. He points out that “gangster rap’s imaginative empowerment of a nihilistic and ruthless way of life can be better understood as a potentially oppositional consciousness—albeit born of desperation, or even despair.” For De Genova, gangsta rappers are public intellectuals who engage in social criticism, albeit contradictory and problematic. Nonetheless, there has been a backlash against gangsta rap not just from critics but also other rappers who have grown tired of the gangsta rap sound.<sup>44</sup>

In the Bay Area, the hip hop scene began to take shape in the 1980s, a time when deindustrialization, urban decline, and financial instability plagued urban areas across the U.S. During this period, the Bay Area has a bifurcated labor market with demands for technical, professional, and managerial labor but also blue collar work primarily filled by people of color, both U.S. and foreign born. While the Silicon Valley represented a locus of employment growth, the electronics industry experienced a severe slump and manufacturing experienced a decline as evidenced by the closure of steel works, tire plants, and vehicle assembly plants.<sup>45</sup>

One of the few Bay Area rappers to achieve notoriety during the 1980s was Too Short who became known for rapping about the pimp lifestyle over heavy bass loops and in the process, placed Oakland on the hip hop map although it was (and continues to be)

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<sup>43</sup> Forman, *the ‘Hood Comes First*, 198.

<sup>44</sup> Genova, “Gangster Rap,” *Social Text*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Dick Walker and the Bay Area Study Group, “The Playground of US Capitalism? The Political Economy of the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s,” in Mike Davis, Steven Hiatt, Marie Kennedy, Susan Ruddick, and Michael Sprinker (eds.), *Fire in the Hearth: The Radical Politics of Place in America* (New York: Verso, 1990).

largely overshadowed by Los Angeles. He paved the way for Bay Area MCs such as 415 who, in turn, influenced seminal Los Angeles rappers like Snoop Dogg.<sup>46</sup> Oakland would soon boast a diverse group of MCs with their own distinctive styles and sounds including MC Hammer, Digital Underground, Del the Funky Homosapien and more recently, the Luniz, the Coup, and the Whoridaz.<sup>47</sup>

Like hip hop scenes in other parts of the country, Bay Area hip hop cannot be reduced to one distinct sound or style. While Oakland may have been the focal point of Bay Area hip hop at one point, other parts of the Bay also contributed to its growth and development. In San Francisco, you had the likes of RBL (Ruthless By Law), JT the Bigga Figga, and Paris who is known for his trenchant critique of U.S. government and foreign policy. Other regions in the Bay Area such as Vallejo, East Palo Alto, Richmond, Sacramento, and Pittsburgh have also contributed to the growth and development of Bay Area hip hop.<sup>48</sup>

While gangsta rap secured the West Coast's place (and in particular Los Angeles) on the hip hop map, the same cannot be said about the Bay Area. Several hip hop writers and critics assert that Bay Area hip hop artists have yet to achieve national prominence like their Los Angeles counterparts. Some point to the lack of support for Bay Area rappers in both the local community and local radio while others point to a lack of money and major labels in the Bay Area which all contributed to a lack of exposure and airtime. Gary Anchor suggests another reason pointing to the bad reputation of Bay Area rappers among major labels. According to this manager of local hip hop talent, Bay Area MCs are purportedly known for blowing away record advances on drugs. Still others point to

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<sup>46</sup> According to Snoop Dogg, "The reason I formed 213 with Warren G and Nate Dogg is because Richie Rich (Bay Area rapper) had a group called the 415, I was lovin' his style and voice, which I incorporated into my style when I first started rapping." JR, *Hip Hop By Da Day* (Music Video Distributions, 2005), 7.

<sup>47</sup> JR, *Hip Hop By Da Day*.

<sup>48</sup> JR, *Hip Hop By Da Day*.

the quality of Bay Area hip hop as the source of the problem because of its static and formulaic sound.<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, others point to a vibrant underground hip hop scene that is characterized by an independent and supportive environment. Bay Area artists like Living Legends, Hieroglyphics (Hiero), and Hobo Junction take pride in producing music on their own terms rather than being beholden to major record labels. According to Bay Area DJ Peanut Butter Wolf, “One of the Bay Area’s distinctive features is how it’s all done independently. It’s more work but you can control your art.” Domino, Hiero producer and manager, agrees: “It gives you a lot of freedom. For example you can go in and record a song today and release it next week not like a major.”<sup>50</sup> What also characterizes the Bay Area hip hop scene is a particularly supportive environment in which it is not uncommon for local artists to work with each other and appear in each other’s albums. According to DJ Zen, managing partner of Solesides Records, “The Bay Area is a particularly supportive scene. Everyone comes together and does shows.” He points to Q-Bert doing the megamix for a DJ Shadow track (“Pre-Emptive Strike”) and Latryx working with DJ Disk on a track entitled “Burnt Pride.”<sup>51</sup>

According to Billy Jam, the emergence of this Bay Area underground hip hop scene is tied to the San Francisco-based hip hop zine and record label *Bomb* headed by David Paul. During its five year run (1991-1996), the *Bomb* magazine introduced readers to a whole host of up and coming artists like Dan the Automator while *Bomb Records* released “Bomb Hip-Hop Compilation” which featured for the first time on wax Bay Area MCs and DJs like Q-Bert (with Mad Child) and Charizma with Peanut Butter Wolf.

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<sup>49</sup> Rodrael Guadalupe, “Bay Area Hip-Hop Artists Lack National Recognition,” *BAMMA*, July 13, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Billy Jam, “Bay Area Part II,” *Strength*, Issue 10.

<sup>51</sup> A burgeoning underground scene exists in Los Angeles as well paving the way for collaborations between the two groups of artists. A couple members of Beat Junkies, one of Los Angeles’ finest and most prominent DJ crews, are also members of San Francisco’s ISP. Likewise, LA’s DJ Babu has appeared in a couple of releases by Peanut Butter Wolf’s Stones Throw (ST) label while the Bay Area based ABB label is home to Los Angeles-based MCs Defari and Dilated Peoples.

Shortly after, it released what is considered the world's first ever turntablist compilation, "Return of the DJ Vol. 1," which included Filipino DJs such as Mix Master Mike and ISP.<sup>52</sup>

Undoubtedly, Bay Area MCs have played a major role in the emergence of a vibrant Bay Area underground hip hop scene. But DJs have also played an important part in the creation of an independent and supportive environment that has come to characterize Bay Area hip hop. It is here that Filipino youth enter the picture because it is largely through their involvement and innovations in DJing that transformed the Bay Area into a DJ mecca and paved the way for the resurgence of DJing. Their involvement in hip hop, however, was preceded by their involvement in the mobile DJ scene. In other words, even before Bay Area hip hop had begun to take shape, DJing was already booming with Filipino DJs leading the way.

### **The Mobile DJ Scene and the Emergence of Filipino DJs**

In the Bay Area, the mobile DJ scene began to take shape in the late 1970s when second generation Filipinos started forming DJ groups as a consequence of their exposure to the club scene. As DJ Apollo notes, mobile DJing quickly became the main recreational activity among Filipino youth. "It was the biggest thing. It was, at least that I knew, what the Filipino community did for activities as far as fun. I mean, everybody had a DJ group, and there were parties all over the Bay Area every week. It was a place for the kids to go, for us to DJ. We would do them anywhere we could."<sup>53</sup> Generally excluded from entertainment and social activities which typically catered to their older siblings (18 or 21 and over), this cohort of young Filipinos looked to create their own distinct social space that was not only accessible but also affordable.<sup>54</sup> Although not old

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<sup>52</sup> Billy Jam, "Bay Area Part II," *Strength* Issue 10.

<sup>53</sup> Quote taken from Oliver Wang, "Mobile Madness: A New Exhibit Looks at the History of Filipino American DJs," *sfbg.com*.

<sup>54</sup> "Tales of the Turntable: Filipino-American DJs of the San Francisco Bay Area," San Mateo History Museum (Sept 29, 2001-Feb 25, 2002).

enough to get in, they nonetheless accompanied their older siblings and managed to sneak into 18 and over dance clubs in San Francisco. This proved to be influential in their decision to become DJs for it was in these clubs that they first got a sense of the power and influence of DJs in terms of controlling and taking command of the crowd. Inspired and motivated, Filipino youth did whatever it took to purchase their own equipment, working multiple jobs and borrowing money from parents.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to club DJs, mobile DJs carried their own equipment from gig to gig, supplying not just the music but also the audio and lighting systems. This meant lugging around fairly heavy equipment yet it also gave them the ability to recreate the club atmosphere and to transform seemingly pedestrian spaces like house garages or high school gyms into pseudo-clubs. Garage parties became especially popular among young Filipinos fueling the demand for and the growth of mobile DJs who played the popular music of the time including disco and hi-NRG (high energy) music later in the 1980s. Mobile DJ crews eventually eclipsed live bands, becoming the preferred form of entertainment at garage parties, high school dances and proms, as well as weddings.<sup>56</sup>

DJing at this time was largely a collective endeavor or enterprise. Aspiring DJs typically learned the basics of DJing from friends and neighbors even before they got hold of their own equipment. They formed DJ crews which were generally comprised of a group of friends who grew up together in the same neighborhood and attended the same high school. These crews became a space where Filipino DJs could hone their skills but also pool their resources including equipment, money, records, and transportation.<sup>57</sup>

Melanie Caganot, curator of an exhibit mapping the history of Filipino DJs in the Bay Area, estimates that by the end of the 1980s, there may have been as many as 150 mobile DJ crews in the Bay Area alone. The more prominent ones include: Sound

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<sup>55</sup> "Tales of the Turntable," San Mateo History Museum.

<sup>56</sup> "Tales of the Turntable," San Mateo History Museum.

<sup>57</sup> "Tales of the Turntable," San Mateo History Museum.

Explosion, Style Beyond Compare, Sounds of Success, Sound Sequence, and Creative Madness. As evidenced by the names they took up, these predominantly Filipino DJ crews were more concerned with setting themselves apart from other crews in a highly competitive environment by developing their own distinct sound and style than affirming their Filipinoness or exhibiting ethnic pride.<sup>58</sup>

Promoters and production companies took advantage of the growing prominence of mobile DJs and sponsored showcases and battles on a regular basis in rented venues throughout the Bay Area—the Irish Center in San Francisco, Centennial Hall in Hayward, and the County Fairgrounds in San Mateo, to name a few—and even Southern California. Mark Bradford, for instance, hosted what was considered the premiere event at the time—Imagine showcases and battles—every four to six months. These events proved to be highly popular among Filipino youth as evidenced by the long lines and overflowing crowds in these functions. Caganot estimates that at the peak of its popularity in the mid-1980s, Imagine events easily drew several thousand people.<sup>59</sup>

Imagine battles and showcases are elaborate productions in which DJ crews competed with one another not only for the best sound but also for the best set-up. This meant trying to outdo the competition by breaking in new music, coming up with innovative quick-mix routines as well as elaborate visual productions in the form of fancy light displays. For the crews involved, then, Imagine afforded them an opportunity to display their skills but also an opportunity to make a name for themselves. A good showing usually meant more gigs in the form of high school dances and parties and

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<sup>58</sup> “Tales of the Turntable,” San Mateo History Museum. This is in contrast to the kinds of names Filipino gangs took up, names such as Pinoy Real (PR) and Mabuhay Pilipino which were more oriented toward the Philippines with an emphasis on the need to cultivate “Pinoy Pride” and retain Filipino cultural practices. See Lakandiwa M. de Leon, “Filipinotown and the DJ Scene: Cultural Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles,” in Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (eds.), *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Bangele D. Alsaybar, “Deconstructing Deviance: Filipino American Youth Gangs, ‘Party Culture,’ and Ethnic Identity in Los Angeles,” *Amerasia Journal* 25:1 (1999): 116-138.

<sup>59</sup> “Tales of the Turntable,” San Mateo History Museum.

ultimately, more money. But beyond the money they could earn from DJing, Filipino DJs were also driven by the desire to gain notoriety among peers and represent their neighborhoods. The competition, therefore, was intense precisely because there was a lot at stake.<sup>60</sup>

One of the means by which promoters advertised upcoming battles and showcases was through the circulation of flyers around the high schools in the Bay Area. In effect, these flyers served as a marquee, affording DJs who got on instant credibility, visibility, and recognition. They usually list the groups involved as well as their local neighborhood affiliations, an indication of how these flyers allowed Filipino DJs to express pride in their neighborhoods but also signal their presence in the Bay Area landscape. The flyer for Imagine 4, for instance, includes the list of competitors for what it dubs as the “DJ Mega-Battle of 1985”: San Francisco’s Legendary ULTIMATE CREATIONS, Daly City’s Hottest UNLIMITED SOUNDS, Hayward’s Jammin’ DMST, San Jose’s Baddest MOBILE WEST, and Oakland’s Best LADDA SOUND. These flyers speak to the scope and magnitude of Imagine events with as many as 15 DJ crews featured as well as the popularity of these events, attracting DJ crews from all over the Bay Area.<sup>61</sup> Davey D sees parallels between the use of flyers in the mobile DJ scene in the Bay Area and in the early days of hip hop in New York. He points out that in the late 1970s, flyers served a similar function promoting upcoming dances and featuring names of major rap groups such as Grandmaster Flash, Grand Wizard Theodore, and Cold Crush Brothers.<sup>62</sup>

Given the centrality of mobile DJing to Filipino youth culture, it is not surprising that influential Filipino DJs including members of Invisibl Skratch Piklz (ISP) started out

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<sup>60</sup> “Tales of the Turntable,” San Mateo History Museum.

<sup>61</sup> For an archive of flyers from the Bay Area party scene in the 1980s, see DJ Slammin’ Sam’s “Classic Flyer Events Gallery.”

<sup>62</sup> Dave “Davey D” Cook, “Filipino DJs of the Bay Area [Why Are They So Successful?],” *Rqap Dot Com Magazine* (July 1994).

as mobile DJs. Apollo, for example, was a member of the mobile DJ crew Unlimited Sounds while Q-Bert was a member of Livestyle Productions. In the following, they reflect on the importance of the mobile DJ scene in the Bay Area.

**Mike:** All of us came from mobiles.

**Q-Bert:** We did everything--you name it. Weddings, high school dances, bar mitzvahs...

**Apollo:** It was real competitive because everyone had the motivation to come up. Every other clique was a DJ crew. I was in Unlimited Sounds. We had Livestyle, Ultimate Creations. It's kind of slowed down now, but it had an incredible impact because a whole bunch of Bay Area DJs came up through that.

**Disk:** I remember DJ battles in San Francisco in Kezar Stadium back in '83 or '84. Turntable Tricksters and stuff. It would be like the Fillmore, Excelsior, Sunnysdale--there was different DJs in each area. Each DJ would go to each party just to hear the different styles, and it would be little battles and stuff. People would learn from each other and shit. Later on Q-Bert was DJing one time at Club Solar System. I didn't even know who he was. I used to see him scratching and shit.<sup>63</sup>

This highly competitive environment fueled DJ innovation as Filipino DJs attempted to get ahead and distinguished themselves from other DJs. More specifically, it afforded them a space to learn from one another and cultivate those skills that would serve them well when they started competing in national and international DJ competitions.<sup>64</sup>

Some point to the Bay Area's relative isolation as an important factor in the emergence of highly innovative Filipino DJs. According to DJ 8-Ball, a prominent Bay Area Filipino DJ, Filipino DJs never looked to the East Coast when it came to trying to develop their own style. Consequently, "When folks like Q-Bert, Mixmaster Mike or myself brought our styles back east, it was something new that they hadn't seen before."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Zen, "Mars Needs DJs," *Rap Pages* (April 1996), 60.

<sup>64</sup> "Tales of the Turntable," San Mateo History Museum.

<sup>65</sup> Quote taken from Dave 'Davey D' Cook, "Filipino DJs of the Bay Area [Why Are They So Successful?]," in *Rap Dot Com Magazine* July 1994.



In Los Angeles, Filipino youth also gravitated toward the mobile DJ scene with mobile DJ crews proliferating throughout the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area in the late 1970s. Like their counterparts up north, they generally performed gigs at garage parties, high school dances and proms, weddings, and other social events in the Filipino community. The more prominent ones include: Unique Techniques, Publique Image Musique, Double Platinum, Ultra Dimensions, Style DJs, and Majestics. Similar to DJ crews in Southern California, these crews generally took up names that accentuated their own distinct sound and style.<sup>66</sup>

At this time, however, it was gangs that constituted the dominant youth grouping beginning in the 1970s and well into the 1980s.<sup>67</sup> Given the popularity and appeal of gang culture among Filipino youth, it is not a surprise that affinities existed between this cultural formation and that of DJing. Gang members were not only avid party goers but also sponsored parties and considered them part of their turf or territory. Conversely, DJs crews performed gigs for gangs and in the process, became identified with them. Moreover, Filipino gangs like Pinoy Real (PR) or Mabuhay Pilipino (MP) were also DJ crews while members of DJ crews were like Majestics were affiliated with gangs.<sup>68</sup>

The late 1980s was marked by an upsurge of gang activity particularly in suburban areas with a sizable Filipino presence such as Carson, Cerritos, and West Covina which then had an adverse impact of the Filipino party scene. Lakandiwa de Leon has characterized this time as a “dry period” in which gang activity effectively disrupted and shut down parties. Thus, Filipino DJs found themselves in a precarious position, avoiding gigs in certain neighborhoods and in some cases, arming themselves at parties where rival gangs might show up. Ray Belling (aka DJ Curse) and his crew, for

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<sup>66</sup> de Leon, “Filipinotown and the DJ Scene,” *Asian American Youth*.

<sup>67</sup> Alsaybar, “Deconstructing Deviance,” *Amerasia Journal*.

<sup>68</sup> de Leon, “Filipinotown and the DJ Scene,” *Asian American Youth*. A similar dynamic may have existed in the Bay Area but scholarship addressing this issue has yet to emerge.

example, used to carry a gun underneath their DJ stand. They also made a concerted effort to make sure that they got along with members of rival gangs as a way to minimize problems at parties.<sup>69</sup>

In the 1990s, gangs declined in popularity and appeal with the emergence of alternative youth formation. Alsaybar suggests that party culture became the dominant youth grouping among Filipino youth because it was able to fulfill many of the same functions as gangs but without the accompanying violence. Party crews, for example, served as a vehicle for meeting girls, competing with one another, and enhancing one's status among peers. Moreover, the commodification of gang aesthetics rendered it safe for consumption and undermined its novelty.<sup>70</sup>

Among Filipino party promoters, there was a realization that in order to bring Filipino parties to established night clubs and run a successful business, they had to create a safe environment for party goers. This meant, among other things, hiring more security, instituting tighter security measures, and waging a "fun-without violence" type of campaign in order to curb outbreaks of gang-instigated violence. There was also an effort to revitalize the party scene as Filipino promoters like Tom Corpus gathered a number of Filipino mobile DJ crews and organized dances in upscale suburban locales such as Orange County and Huntington Beach, locales not affected by gang activity. These crews eventually formed a collective known as the United Kingdom (UK) which carved out a niche for themselves in the party scene through the promotion of peace and positivity. The collective expanded rapidly and started to promote hip hop events at large night clubs but just as quickly, its popularity and appeal diminished with the advent of g-funk or gangsta oriented hip hop. It disbanded in 1993 and with it, many of the mobile DJ crews.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> de Leon, "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene," *Asian American Youth*.

<sup>70</sup> Phrase taken from Alsaybar, "Deconstructing Deviance," *Amerasia Journal*, 128.

<sup>71</sup> de Leon, "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene," *Asian American Youth*.

Likewise in the Bay Area, the mobile DJ scene experienced a decline as Filipino DJs pursued other interests and projects. Clubs were no longer inaccessible while DJ mobile crews grew tired of bringing equipment from one engagement to another. Others attribute the decline of mobile DJs to the emergence of turntablism. DJ Ren, founder of one first Filipino DJ crews (Electric Sounds) in the Bay Area, suggests that the popularity of scratching and in particular Q-Bert, undermined the appeal of mobile DJing. “People started getting into the scratching, and you can’t scratch at a mobile gig, right? No one can dance to it. Those are two totally separate animals, and as turntablism became so popular, the mobile DJ started to fade out.”<sup>72</sup>

By the time the mobile DJ scene experienced a decline, many Filipino DJs had already gravitated towards hip hop, including future members of ISP: “It was pretty rare to hear scratching (over) hi-NRG, so (our) whole mind-set was definitely hip-hop.” In terms of what attracted them to hip hop, Q-Bert recalls:

I liked break dancing a lot. I would not break but I go and watch kids and check it out. The music in the background that they were playing was like, wow, what is all that stuff. It was just the best music I ever heard. Then I started recording all those songs from underground radio stations in the late night. Sometimes they would have scratching and I was like wow...At the time there was “Rockit” and Malcolm McClaren and “Buffalo Gals.” I was really fascinated with that stuff. And I was walking home one day and I seen a kid do it near my house. So I said I got to go home and try that. So I got my turntables in my room. It was one of those stereo components where it has the radio, the tape deck, and turntable. So with the music I recorded I would press the tape button and the phono button at the same time so they would both be mixing right. So I was scratching like that.<sup>73</sup>

In many ways, the experiences of Filipino DJs in the mobile DJ scene made their transition into hip hop an easy and seamless one but it also put them in a position to elevate the art of DJing to a higher level.

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<sup>72</sup> Quote taken from Wang, “Mobile Madness.”

<sup>73</sup> Q-Bert interview with the author, 22 July 1997.

It is difficult to overestimate the formative role of the mobile DJ scene in Filipino DJ history and in the development of Filipino DJs. As Rhettmatic puts it: “All of us mobile DJs were into hip-hop, at least a majority of them were. From here to Frisco, anyone who were Filipino and were DJs, were mobile DJs.”<sup>74</sup> In terms of significance for Filipino DJs in the Bay Area, Caganot makes the following observation: “I think people are shocked that there’s so many (Filipino DJs) coming out of the Bay Area. But if you ask anyone who was actually part of the (mobile) scene, it’s not a shock at all because there were battles every month. If you were there and understand that then it’s not a surprise that Q-Bert and Apollo and all these folks are blowin’ up.”<sup>75</sup> Filipino association with DJing, therefore, cannot be confined to their participation in hip hop. Instead, it can be traced back to the 1970s when they created a vibrant mobile DJ scene and in the process, transformed the Bay Area into a DJ mecca but also put them in a position to play an important role in the revitalization of DJing.

Several factors account for the resurgence of DJing including organized competitions which proved to be a driving force in elevating the status and prestige of DJs. These competitions not only provided a forum where DJs could showcase their skills, but also exposed DJing to a worldwide audience. The more prominent competitions include battles sponsored by the New Music Seminar (NMS), Vestax, and the International Turntablist Federation (ITF). The most powerful promoter of DJ battles today, however, is the Disco Mix Club (DMC). Hosting its first competition in 1987, the DMC organizes individual and group battles international in scope with competitors from countries like Japan, Canada, Morocco, the Philippines, and Belgium. These contests not only helped promote the use of turntables as musical instruments but also afforded DJs opportunities to achieve notoriety by winning or doing well in these competitions.

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<sup>74</sup> Quote taken from de Leon, “Filipinotown and the DJ Scene,” *Asian American Youth*.

<sup>75</sup> Quote taken from Eric K. Arnold, “Pinoy Pioneers: Filipino Americans Deserve Props For Their Contribution to DJ Culture,” *The Source* (April 2002).

Independent record labels like Bomb Hip-Hop and Asphodel also figured prominently in the reemergence of DJs, releasing all DJ compilations at a time when DJ tracks in rap albums were no longer a staple. The “Return of the DJ” series issued by David Paul of Bomb Hip Hop Records, for example, not only set the standards for subsequent all-DJ releases but also demonstrated that DJs could be artists and musicians in their own right and commercially viable. According to Paul, “People said I was crazy and warned me that no one would buy an all DJ record and that DJs belonged in a battle setting and not on record or CD.”<sup>76</sup> Though the first volume only sold moderately well, subsequent volumes have done considerably better in terms of sales. All DJ releases are now fairly commonplace, with their own section in record stores further establishing DJ music, what some call “skratch music,” as a distinct genre of music.

While organized competitions and independent record labels both contributed to the revitalization of DJing, it was Filipino DJs who provided the major impetus to the resurgence of DJs. Predominantly Filipino crews like the Bay Area’s ISP and Los Angeles’ Beat Junkies took the lead in exploring the seemingly limitless possibilities of sounds one can create through the skilled manipulation of sound technology and in advancing the notion of DJs as musicians and of turntables as musical instruments. In pushing the boundaries of DJing, they paved the way for the resurgence of DJs and popularized DJing worldwide. The significance of these groups, therefore, extends far beyond the impressive battle resumes of respective members. Instead, it stems more from the way they reconfigured the meanings and uses of turntables giving rise to an important subculture within DJing that has come to be known as turntablism.

Now disbanded, ISP was considered at the forefront of the turntablist movement. In their hands, the turntable became a musical instrument ala the piano or guitar, to be consciously and deliberately manipulated not to *reproduce* sounds already pressed in

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<sup>76</sup> Billy Jam, “The Return of the Return of the DJ,” *Return of the DJ III*.

records but *produce* new compositions through specific techniques like scratching or beat juggling. Disk, erstwhile member of ISP, describes the difference between a DJ and a turntablist this way: “There’s two sides to this: Being a DJ and also being a musician. To me, a “deejay,” by the definition in the dictionary, is someone who plays records at parties, clubs or on the radio. That’s not what I would consider myself. If you need a word, it’s more like ‘turntablist’. A turntablist is a musician who uses the turntable as an instrument in any kind of musical form-- Hip-hop, rock, whatever.”<sup>77</sup> For Disk, the turntable represents the future of music in terms of the possibilities it opens up. “The turntable is like the most futuristic instrument there is. You can be a drummer, a bass player, anything you want--a violinist, pianist, a turntablist. They talk about CD DJs coming up, like that’s the future. You don’t see CD DJs performing. You see turntable jazz musicians like us performing.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, DJs do more than just play records or other people’s music. Rather they are bona fide artists creating original musical compositions through the skillful manipulation of vinyl.

In addition to advancing the notion of turntables as musical instruments, ISP members were also the first DJs to perform as a band or orchestra, further advancing the notion of DJs as bona fide musicians. In a band, each DJ manipulates the turntable transforming it into a particular musical instrument. Doc Rice, former member of Supernatural Turntablist Artists (STA), describes the notion of DJ bands this way, crediting the ISP with coming up with the concept: “Together they defined the “band” concept of turntablism, with each member taking on the role of separate musicians, such as vocals, drums, etc., and switching off between them. Performing as a team typically involves , but is not limited to, mostly scratching techniques to imitate (and thus become)

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Zen, “Mars Needs DJs”, *Rap Pages*, 58.

<sup>78</sup> Zen, “Mars Needs DJs”, *Rap Pages*, 87.

the different ban instruments.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, within this configuration, each band member represents a type of musician, be it a guitarist, drummer, or vocalist.

In an age when samplers encode sounds, ISP look to retaining and preserving the human element standard uses of technology like sampling computers have removed in the music making process. Shortcut, another former member of ISP, comments that “There are people who come up to us and ask us, ‘What kind of sampler do you use?’ Sampler? It’s all about hands.”<sup>80</sup> According to Q-Bert “We’re trying to bring the human aspect of the music back. Anything on vinyl is a musical instrument to us. We just play things. Also, when we hear something new, we say, ‘Hey, let’s go scratch that.’”<sup>81</sup> In many ways, ISP DJs are extending and engaging in a central practice of hip hop, what Harry Allen refers to as the humanizing of technology and in the process, illuminating the possibilities of sound technology.<sup>82</sup>

In their effort to bring back the human element in the music making process, ISP DJs cultivated their own distinctive style that has come to be associated with Filipino DJs, a style that emphasized the musical aspect of DJing rather than the performative aspect. Kurt B. Reighley, author of *Looking for the Perfect Beat: The Art and Culture of the DJ*, describes it this way:

In 1991, a S.F. crew dubbed FM 2.0 burst onto the national competition circuit. Instead of the flashy acrobatics that were the stock in trade of high-profile competition jocks at the time, members Apollo, Q-Bert, and Mixmaster Mike dazzled judges and audiences with orchestrated scratch routines and tricks developed in the relative isolation of the Bay Area. They took the scene by storm, and after snagging the world championship crown three years in a row, they were asked by the DMC to please bow out of future competitions. Over the course of time, and with the addition

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<sup>79</sup> See Doc Rice, “Essential DJ Fundamentals, Part 2: Tricks of the Trade,” *Rap Pages* October 1998, 40.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Ronald Pineda, “Spin Control,” *Filipinas* May 1988, 30.

<sup>82</sup> Harry Allen, “Invisible Band,” *Village Voice* (October 18, 1988).

of new members, FM 2.0 became the West Coast Rocksteady DJ Crew and eventually Invisbl Skratch Piklz.<sup>83</sup>

For ISP DJs, what mattered more was how they sound rather than on how they look on stage. In their view, too much focus on the performative aspect of DJing, what Reighley describes as “flashy acrobatics,” detracts from the music the DJ performs.

The prominence of the ISP has spurred and inspired youth all around the globe especially Filipino youth to take up DJing. DJ Rhetmatic, a Filipino DJ from another influential DJ crew, the Beat Junkies, assesses the group’s influence this way: “Q-Bert opened a lot of doors for Asians and us Filipinos. It’s hard for Asians and Filipinos to get recognition and respect in hip hop because Asians have been stereotyped as good imitators and not good originators. I think the ISP and ourselves are really making a difference.”<sup>84</sup> Q-Bert and other prominent Filipino DJs have proven to be highly influential among Filipino youth not only because they pushed the boundaries of DJing but also because of the visibility they brought to Filipinos paving the way for the next generation of Filipino DJs.

Today, Filipino youth continue to be a major creative force in DJ culture to the point where DJing has become a signifier of Filipino youth identity. The next chapter explores the circumstances under which contemporary Filipino youth get into DJing including their influences and what it is that attracts them to this expressive form. It sheds light on how Filipino youth go about establishing cultural legitimacy and belongingness in an expressive form considered black. More specifically, the chapter delineates the authenticating claims they make and the authenticating strategies they rely on to position themselves in relation to hip hop’s hierarchy of authenticity predicated on exhibiting signifiers of blackness.

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<sup>83</sup> Kurt B. Reighley, *Looking for the Perfect Beat: The Art and Culture of the DJ* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 177.

<sup>84</sup> Taken from Todd S. Inoue, “Beats Generation,” *Metro* Nov 7-13 1996.



## Chapter IV Reconfiguring the Boundaries of Filipinoness Within the Contexts of U.S. Racial Formations and the Filipino Diaspora

Yeah, I think it's part of Filipino culture because it's what the generation, that's what we're doing here and we're Filipinos. And you know, hip hop is part of growing up. And so yeah, it's definitely part of being in the Filipino culture because it's there. It's around you.

Deeandroid<sup>1</sup>

And plus, I mean I know where it came from and who put it out but then growing up in Vallejo, Filipinos were doing it and that's what I grew up with. So I was not feeling like we're doing a black thing. It is a Filipino thing and even my uncles when I was four who just came from the Philippines, they were breakdancing in the garage. And I remember that, I remember that from long time ago, seeing it around my neighborhood and in my family.

Cellski<sup>2</sup>

My father was Filipino and my mother was African American, and my culture is Puerto Rican.

Joe Bataan<sup>3</sup>

These personal accounts of Filipino DJs suggest that DJing has become an integral part of growing up Filipino in the U.S. and a key site for the articulation of Filipinoness. They indicate that DJing serves as a constituent element of Filipinoness, an expressive form that many from their generation now claim as their own. For Deeandroid, it is as much a part of her life as cultural forms and practices considered Filipino while for Cellski, DJing is as much a “Filipino thing” as it is a “black thing” even as she acknowledges its origins in black culture. In contrast, Joe Bataan, a popular Latin soul artist in the 1970s, claims Puerto Rican culture as his own despite not being of Puerto Rican descent. For Bataan, cultural identification is not a matter of ethnic heritage or parentage but more a matter of being to able to draw upon those sources and traditions

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<sup>1</sup> Deeandroid interview with the author, 19 November 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). 106.

that resonate with his everyday realities, an understanding of culture Deeandroid and Cellski share.

Taken together, these epigraphs suggest that Deeandroid and Cellski are engaging in a practice that is not completely new. Instead, these DJs are building on a tradition when they look to new cultural options and alternatives and claim as their own an expressive form not considered Filipino in a way that speaks to their specific circumstances and concerns. At the same time, the comments bring attention to the complex subject positions and shifting identifications of Filipinos from one era to another and from generation to generation but also the contested and ambivalent nature of this process. They raise questions over what is considered the legitimate boundaries of Filipinoness, the terms by which these boundaries are understood, and to what effects. In the case of Filipino DJs I interviewed, DJing constitutes a means for simultaneously negotiating the terms by which Filipinos have been racialized in the U.S. but also the terms by which the Filipino diaspora has been narrativized.

### **Authenticity and the Racial Politics of Hip Hop**

The DJs I interviewed are very much aware of the racialized discourses that have come to define the contours of hip hop acknowledging hip hop's black antecedents and subscribing to the notion that it began as an African American mode of cultural expression. Yet there is also recognition that the boundaries of hip hop based on its perceived blackness have been in constant flux. In other words, hip hop may have started out as a black phenomenon but it has now evolved into something much more encompassing the participation and contributions of multiple groups. Filipino youth participation in hip hop, therefore, can be read as one of intense cultural negotiation with its perceived ethnoracial scope and authenticating claims based on its purported blackness that has implications for the way Filipino youth define their position and presence in U.S. society.

Rivera has written about this issue in relation to Puerto Rican youth which has been instructive in illuminating how Filipino youth go about claiming cultural entitlement given their location outside the foundational narrative of hip hop. She points out that notwithstanding their formative role in the evolution of hip hop, the cultural legitimacy of Puerto Rican youth has been and continues to be a point of contention. Echoing Paul Gilroy's analysis, she argues that this stems from the racialization of hip hop as an essentially or distinctly African American mode of expression and the conflation of blackness and African Americanness which serves to distort the intricacies of the African diaspora or the racialization of hip hop as a black and Latino cultural expression which serves to obscure the specificity of Puerto Rican youth involvement in hip hop. In either case, Rivera goes on to argue that as a consequence, Puerto Rican youth have had to negotiate their Puerto Ricanness in a way that is not perceived as being too ethnic or Puerto Rican lest Puerto Rican youth are viewed as cultural interlopers in what is considered an African American realm.<sup>4</sup>

Like Puerto Rican youth, Filipino youth have had to negotiate their place in hip hop in a way that is not seen as imitative or derivative of blackness lest they are viewed as being something they are not and therefore lacking cultural legitimacy. And like their Puerto Rican counterparts, these respondents consider hip hop as much a part of their lives as forms and practices commonly identified as Filipino, a constituent element of contemporary Filipino identity and culture unsettling the conventional discourse on ethnic identification.<sup>5</sup> Both groups of youth also take issue with the construction of hip hop as an essentially African American phenomenon because of the way it obscures the involvement of other groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Rivera, *New York Ricans*.

<sup>5</sup> Conventional markers of Filipinoness include language (fluency in Tagalog or other Filipino dialects), so-called indigenous dances (knowing how to do these dances), and food (incorporation of Filipino food in one's diet).

Unlike Puerto Rican youth, however, Filipino youth are not in a position to make ordinary and historical claims as the basis of their cultural entitlement and authenticity. For one thing, Filipino youth were not among the first MCs, DJs, writers, and b-boys/b-girls which could have buttressed their claims of cultural belongingness. In addition, Filipino youth and black youth do not have a sense of shared history and culture, at least not to the same extent that exist between Puerto Ricans and blacks in a place like New York where the two groups have overlapping experiences of racialization, marginalization, and labor exploitation. Also, some Puerto Ricans claim an African/diasporic racial identity. So while hip hop constitutes an important realm of interaction, collaboration, but also conflict between Puerto Rican youth and black youth, it does not constitute the same kind of space for Filipino youth and black youth.<sup>6</sup>

The incommensurability of Filipino presence in hip hop with the Puerto Rican presence—“the absence of a cultural, ethnic, geographical, or historical continuity with the origins of hip-hop”<sup>7</sup>—means that Filipino youth cannot rely on the same set of legitimizing discourses and claims and thus, they have to advance a very different set of discourses and claims and deploy other strategies to bolster these claims. The question then becomes how Filipino youth go about framing their engagement with hip hop and

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to deny that at times, Puerto Ricans have challenged their racialization as black in the U.S. or instances when hip hop does serve as an important realm of cross-racial interaction between Filipino youth and black youth (or between Filipino youth and other youth for that matter) but more to account for the specificities of Filipino youth and Puerto Rican youth and to recognize that Filipino involvement in hip hop is not easily mapped onto the critical frames that hip hop scholars like Rose, Flores, and Rivera deploy for black and Puerto Rican youth respectively. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Rivera, *New York Ricans*. See also Frances Negron-Muntaner, *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004); London: New York University Press, 2004); Roberto P. Rodriguez-Morazzani, “Beyond the Rainbow: Mapping the Discourse on Puerto Ricans and ‘Race,’” in Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres (eds.), *The Latino Studies Reader: Culture, Economy, and Society* (Walden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Juan Flores, “Puerto Rican and Proud, Boyee! Rap, Roots and Amnesia,” in Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (eds.), *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Ian Maxwell, “Sydney Stylee: Hip-Hop Down Under Comin’ Up,” in Tony Mitchell (ed.), *Global Noise: rap and Hip-Hop Outside the U.S.A.* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 264.

establishing cultural legitimacy given their location outside the foundational narrative of hip hop. What kinds of authenticating claims do they make and authenticating strategies do they rely on? How do Filipino youth position themselves in relation to hip hop's hierarchy of authenticity that places a premium on exhibiting signifiers of blackness? On what basis do they generate their own signifiers of authenticity?

The DJs I interviewed carve out a niche within hip hop by attempting to establish cultural legitimacy and belongingness in terms other than proximity to blackness. They do so by relying on a variety of authenticating strategies, strategies which range from efforts to foreground lived experience as the basis of their involvement in hip hop to fidelity to hip hop's core set of values, and from fidelity to the dictates of their cultural identity to efforts to foreground hip hop's transcendent appeal. In making these authenticating claims, my respondents are attempting to present their own narrative of hip hop that is compatible with the standard narrative of hip hop but also claiming a different kind of authenticity for themselves that is not in any way imitative or a derivative of blackness.

One of the ways my respondents attempt to establish and enhance their cultural legitimacy is by foregrounding lived experience as the basis for their involvement in hip hop, what one author terms "experience narratives."<sup>8</sup> In other words, they authenticate their involvement by narrativizing their experiences of growing up with and embracing hip hop at an early age as evidenced by the quotes that open this chapter.

**Rygar:**...That's what mostly Filipinos are into. That's just the way, it's just part of us now cause I mean generations and generations will come, it's just going to go bigger to the point where...I don't even know; it's just part of us already. No one can deny it...I would have to say that DJing cause yeah, whenever people look at Filipinos I'm pretty sure they think of DJing, DJs you know.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

They may not have been there from the start but for my respondents, hip hop is as much a part of their lives as forms and practices commonly identified as Filipino, a widespread practice among relatives and peers within the Filipino community. Within this context then, authenticity is grounded in the specific historical and social experiences of Filipinos and intimately bound up with forms of local knowledge and experience.

Another way my respondents attempt to stake out their cultural legitimacy is by emphasizing that Filipino youth have been true to the principles or values of hip hop. Echoing the statement that appears in the Mountain Brothers' publicity packet in which group members express their "dedication to the art," several of the DJs I interviewed likewise emphasize their "love" and "respect" for the culture and commitment to what they perceive as the true essence of hip hop.

**Soup-a-Crunk:** I think it does matter. I think it's a good thing mainly because it's a part of hip hop and we have a firm hold on it. But really, Filipinos represent in all aspects. It's a matter of recognition. I mean, it's not like we're looking for recognition cause we're gonna be in it whether or not we do. It's just that we're in it because we love it. I think it's important because it shows how diverse it is, how hip hop is, and it represents how it is for the people.<sup>10</sup>

In Soup-a-Crunk's view, it is this emotional attachment to and investment in hip hop that not only legitimizes Filipino participation in hip hop but also makes it possible to transcend racial difference. Likewise, the invocation of "the people" has the same discursive effect, deracializing hip hop and making everything seem equal.

Soup-a-Crunk relies on what Shuhei Hosokawa describes in another context as "rhetoric of an affective connection that makes the particular appeal of a musical style universally relevant."<sup>11</sup> This rhetoric usually takes the form of "respect" and "passion" (or in Soup-a-Crunk's case, "love") for the culture which has the effect of universalizing

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<sup>10</sup> Soup-a-Crunk interview with the author, 18 January 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "Blacking Japanese: Experiencing Otherness from Afar," in David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus (eds.), *Popular Music Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2002), 224.

hip hop. In other words, assertions of belongingness are made on the basis of affective claims which allow anyone to establish cultural legitimacy and become part of a broader community that transcends history, geography, culture and race.

One more way my respondents attempt to stake out their cultural legitimacy is by remaining true to the dictates of their cultural identity—being true to who they are—rather than simply adopting or performing signifiers of blackness. Well aware of the premium placed on individual creativity and originality in hip hop, they look to DJing as a vehicle for distinguishing themselves through the creation of their own distinct style. In the view of my respondents, they are not simply adopting black cultural forms and practices but engaging in creative rearticulations of these forms and practices in a way that resonates with their own experiences. This is especially the case in the realm of DJing which has become an important source of pride and cultural legitimation among my respondents and Filipino youth in general.

Another way my respondents attempt to stake out their cultural legitimacy is by pointing to hip hop's transcendent appeal even as they acknowledge its black antecedents. Soup-a-Crunk, for example, refers to hip hop as a “human thing” while Onetime refers to it as a “worldwide thing.”

**Soup-a-Crunk:** Definitely. I mean it originated from them folks. I mean originally it was a way to keep people out of violence with Afrika Bambaataa. It was a way to speak to the fellows and bring them up and keep them from violence. But then really, it's more of like, it's not just a racial thing; it's kind of like a human thing that spoke to the people rather than just a specific race you know. That's why so many people feel it—it's because it comes down to human qualities.<sup>12</sup>

**Onetime:** I think television, it's all the media cause that's all they show. They don't go to these underground shows where it's total diverse groups, like you see a lot of Latin Americans or Filipino Americans or African Americans, white Americans. They're just like all there peacefully watching a concert. But I think the media plays a big role. They just

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<sup>12</sup> Soup-a-Crunk interview with the author, 18 January 2003.

show like the money and like the fights and everything bad that goes down. But they don't see all these different ethnicities coming together at a party just having fun. So I think hip hop, turntablism is worldwide thing which a lot of people don't know. Like they've got it in Germany, it's really big in Japan and like the UK and people don't know that. They need to be more aware of that.<sup>13</sup>

For both Soup-a-Crunk and Onetime, no one group has a sole proprietary claim on hip hop as they question the notion that ethnic and racial affiliation has a direct bearing on questions of cultural belonging and entitlement.

In effect, Soup-a-Crunk and Onetime are subscribing to what David Hesmondhalgh and Caspar Melville describe as a “utopian discourse of collectivism and equality” predicated on “the breaking down of ethnic, class, and gender differences.”<sup>14</sup> The authors in this instance are referencing the construction of club culture in Britain as a democratizing force as evidenced by slogans such as: “No performers, no VIPS, we are all special.”<sup>15</sup> For Soup-a-Crunk and Onetime, then, hip hop signifies a utopic space of togetherness and inclusion, a kind of populism that has been associated with dance culture. A similar kind of discourse operates within the house music scene in which the club serves as a utopic space. As Brian Currid puts it: “The effects of raced power as they operate ‘within’ this community are erased, as all the dancers of the club, dancing (coincidentally) to a black musical form, enact their ‘togetherness,’ without any consciousness of race, class, or gender difference; in the darkness of the club, the social significances of skin color disappear.”<sup>16</sup>

This conception of hip hop may very well stem from the different ways hip hop is racialized in different parts of the country. Deborah Wong, for example, suggests that

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<sup>13</sup> Onetime interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>14</sup> David Hesmondhalgh and Caspar Melville, “Urban Breakbeat Culture: Repercussions of Hip-Hop in the United Kingdom,” in Mitchell, *Global Noise*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> Hesmondhalgh and Melville, “Urban Breakbeat Culture,” *Global Noise*, 98.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Currid, “‘We Are Family’: House Music and Queer Performativity,” in Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster (eds.), *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representations of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).



East Coast hip hop is more strongly associated with blackness as compared to West Coast hip hop, a dynamic that is reflected in the makeup of audiences that attend hip hop functions on the respective coasts. Theo Chung, a Korean American DJ and MC, makes the following distinction between the two audiences:

That's another problem. I don't think Asian people—at least at Penn—especially on the East Coast—because on the West Coast, hip hop—I mean, I'm glad I was born on the West Coast and lived there because hip hop is much more diverse. For example, I go to all Pharcyde shows on the West Coast—and actually Tray from the Pharcyde is our group's manager—and we went to all the shows, and half, maybe a third of the audience is White, a third of the audience is Asian, a third of the audience is Black. I went to the Pharcyde show here two months ago, and it was *all* Black, you know it's *much* more segregated over here. And all the Asian kids here—you know, if you go to the Asian frat dances that I DJ—like, if I play hip hop, they don't like that, you know? Whenever you go to any quote-unquote Asian party or Chinese Students Association you always hear, like, Euro music, techno. That's the kind of music that, like, I guess Asians are generally interested in. So they just didn't know hip hop, you know.<sup>17</sup>

Chung's comments are instructive because they resonate with the experiences of my respondents who are accustomed to the shared cultural spaces of West Coast hip hop. For them, the association between hip hop and blackness has always been contingent and tenuous based on the diversity of practitioners and audiences attending hip hop functions on the West Coast.

On the one hand, one could argue that in staking out their cultural legitimacy, my respondents are deploying their own notions of hip hop and in the process, reconfiguring the contours of hip hop authenticity. On the other hand, one could argue that in conceiving of hip hop as “human thing” or a “worldwide thing,” my respondents risk reproducing the very logic of a liberal pluralist view of diversity. This deracialized account of hip hop is problematic because it effaces the particular set of circumstances

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from Deborah Wong, “The Asian American Body in Performance,” *Music and the Racial Imagination*, 83-84.

out of which hip hop emerged, the racialized and political specificity of hip hop which accounts for much of its potential as a transformative force. Moreover, reading hip hop within this framework obscures how different groups of youth are racialized in different ways which, in turn, condition the manner in which they negotiate with the racialized discourses and authenticating claims circulating within hip hop. It fails to illuminate the field of racial positions within hip hop and the power asymmetries that underwrite these positions. To borrow from Anita Mannur in another context, this sort of reading divests expressive forms (in this case hip hop) “of any racialized or classed implications.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, a level of equivalence is assumed in which difference is acknowledged only to be reconfigured as part of a colorful mosaic that is hip hop. Likewise, this kind of reading overlooks how culture is differently or differentially experienced and contested within and between groups of youth.<sup>19</sup>

The reading of hip hop as a transcendent space is a familiar argument but is also symptomatic of the ways the discourse of race works in the U.S. as well as the ways this understanding of race informs contemporary articulations of Filipinoness. It can be seen as an instance of a broader discourse about race, culture, and difference that overlooks the ways racialization has played out differently for various groups. The tendency is to shy away from overt identity claims (particularly along the lines of race) and instead resort to claims of liberal pluralism in which “difference” is rendered benign and safe for consumption in the marketplace and elaborated in nonracial or cultural terms, what Virginia R. Dominguez has called in another context as the “culturalization of

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<sup>18</sup> Anita Mannur, “Model Minorities Can Cook: Fusion Cuisine in Asian America,” in Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren (eds.), *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture* (New York and London; New York University Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Leti Volpp makes a similar point in relation to her nuanced discussion of the depoliticizing effects of cultural discourse. See Leti Volpp, “Blaming Culture for Bad Behavior,” *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 12:89 (2000): 89-116. See also Leti Volpp, “(Mis)Identifying Culture: Asian Women and the ‘Cultural Defense,’” in Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Min Song (eds.), *Asian American Studies: A Reader* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

difference.”<sup>20</sup> According to this formulation, then, Filipinoness becomes just another marker of difference, “a kind of difference that does not make a difference of any kind” overlooking the social, economic, and historical contexts surrounding the racialization of Filipinos in the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

This is not to argue that hip hop is the absolute or specific cultural property of African Americans because they created it, what one author has described as the propriety argument, or to argue that the participation of nonblack practitioners and participants have brought about a “dilution” of hip hop as a function of their purported distance from hip hop’s point of origin.<sup>22</sup> Rather, it is to argue for a much more complex understanding of culture, one that probes the limits of intercultural exchange and different modes of cultural engagement. It is to argue that the kinds of exchanges that take place within hip hop cannot be simply conceived simply as a matter of drawing inspiration from or being influenced by black culture for to do so makes it seem as if the traversing of cultural boundaries is a seamless and straightforward process rather than one fraught with tensions and ambiguities.

What sort of power relations are embedded, reproduced, and/or contested in the kinds of intercultural exchanges that take place within hip hop? How should cultural boundaries be constituted and on what terms? What does it mean to deploy the signifier “black” in relation to hip hop today given its diffusion on a global scale? How does one make sense of the global diffusion of hip hop without losing sight of its “black” origins and continued “black” influence? How do we hold these two in a productive tension? What does the appeal to “roots” and “origins” mean in this context and to what effect?

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<sup>20</sup> Virginia R. Dominguez, “Invoking Culture: The Messy Side of ‘Cultural Politics,’” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 91:1 (Winter 1992), 32.

<sup>21</sup> Stuart Hall, “What is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?,” in Gina Dent (ed.), *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>22</sup> E. Taylor Atkins, “Can Japanese Sing the Blues?: ‘Japanese Jazz’ and the Problem of Authenticity in Japanese Rap Music,” in Heide Fenrenbach and Uta G. Poiger (eds.), *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

Does an appeal to roots and origins invalidate forms and practices that do not emerge from the original context of hip hop? Or, to pose the question in slightly different terms, what is obscured by positing the impossibility or irrelevance of origins? What are the politics at stake?<sup>23</sup>

The tendency particularly with regard to black expressive forms and practices is to conceive of the kinds of intercultural exchanges that take place as one simply of appropriation or a cultural “free-for-all.” In other words, black culture is conceived simply as something to be plundered or a level of equivalence is assumed among the different groups of youth participating. In either case, black culture is located outside history and disentangled from politics. Overlooked are the specificities of the groups in question—their status and positionality—as well as the ways culture remains linked to race despite efforts to obscure this connection.

### **DJing, Filipinoness, and U.S. Racial Formations**

Viewed within the context of Filipino invisibility, DJing constitutes an important mode of self-representation, allowing Filipino youth to negotiate the terms of their racialization and render their experience meaningful and intelligible. It becomes a way for Filipino youth to assume their own distinct identity in contradistinction to the racialization of hip hop as black and their categorization as Asian American. This is the backdrop against which Filipino youth define and understand their Filipinoness as well as locate and differentiate themselves within contemporary racial formations. In doing so, they demonstrate that the production of Filipinoness is not done in isolation but in relation to racialized discourses and practices in the U.S.

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<sup>23</sup> This has become a fairly standard move among contemporary cultural critics who, in an effort to provide a more complex understanding of culture, posit the plurality or impossibility of identifying a specific point of origin, a move deemed as essentialist. These same critics point to the syncretic character of cultural forces yet undertheorized are the politics at stake, how this kind of claim is easily recuperated by liberal pluralist discourse. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

DJing confers upon Filipino youth a collective status and public visibility, a status and visibility denied to them through the conventional channels of the dominant culture such as school and the media which generally overlook the experiences of Filipinos. The failure of these institutions to engage with the realities of Filipinos in the U.S. has compelled Filipino youth to look elsewhere for meaningful forms of expression and identification, relying on a more accessible and appealing medium to counteract the low symbolic capital associated with Filipinoness. The turn to DJing, therefore, can be understood as a way for Filipino youth to carve out a space of their own and assert their ethnic/racial identity within the U.S. racial imaginary.

For many of my respondents, DJing has become an important source for the validation and recognition of Filipinoness, a vehicle for the consolidation of cultural capital. Rey-Jun had the following to say about the significance of DJing to Filipino youth in terms of giving Filipinos a name not just within hip hop but also within the broader social and cultural landscape of the U.S.

**Rey-Jun:** I would think so, especially in California and the East Coast because at least for a decade, Filipinos were the top DJs, the top battle DJs in the world. Yeah it would because without it, a lot of people would not know who Filipinos are in terms of the hip hop community, in terms of people in the East Coast, in terms of people throughout the country. DJing really gave us an identity. DJing has given Filipinos a name, especially in the hip hop community. I mean when I started out DJing, Q-Bert was the best DJ out there.<sup>24</sup>

Acknowledged as the best DJs in the world, DJing has afforded Filipino youth the opportunity to forge a culture and develop a style which they could call their own and at the same time, get the recognition Rey-Jun believes Filipino youth have earned. It has provided them with a cultural space they can claim as their domain contributing to a sense of group pride and belonging.

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<sup>24</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

By the same token, DJing enables Filipino youth to contest the terms by which Filipinos are racialized in the U.S. and assert the specificities of their Filipinones. Following Elizabeth H. Pisares, it is a way for Filipino youth to counteract the racial ambiguity that has come to surround Filipinos in the U.S. as a function of their postwar racialization. The popular Pinay dance music artist Jocelyn Enriquez, for example, suggests that the classification of Filipinos as Asian American has proven to be consequential in terms of contributing to a sense of being lost: “Because you know, being Filipino we get lost, people don’t really know what Filipinos are. If you’re Asian, you’re either going to be Japanese or Chinese.”<sup>25</sup>

Enriquez’s comments resonate with a number of my respondents who spoke of the misrecognition that seems to plague Filipinos in the U.S. Onetyme, for example, had the following to say about the absence of Filipino public figures in the U.S.

**Interviewer:** I guess it’s hard to think of someone else.

**Onetyme:** Yeah it really is. There’s other people they say “Oh, she’s Filipino.” I’m like “Really?” It’s like they can’t tell that they’re Filipino or confused into Asian Americans or like Chinese Americans. It’s like we don’t have our own identity. like Filipino thing. It’s like you don’t know who’s Filipino who’s not.<sup>26</sup>

Onetyme, herself, has not been immune from this kind of misrecognition initially thinking that Q-Bert was Chinese because of his light skin. Likewise, her comments speak to the absence of reliable markers of Filipinoness.

Among my respondents, then, there is acknowledgement of the nonrecognition that surrounds the presence of Filipinos in the U.S. For Rey-Jun, this stems from the classification of Filipinos as Asian American which, in his view, constitutes a form of erasure and provides an analysis of why he claims for himself a Filipino identity.

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<sup>25</sup> Quote taken from Pisares, “Do You Mis(recognize) Me, *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*.”

<sup>26</sup> Onetyme interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned earlier how Filipinos are not really Asians. Could you talk a little bit more about why you don't identify yourself as Asian even though a lot of people lump Filipinos with Asian.

**Rey-Jun:** Because it's so broad it does not give us an identity. Compared to Asians, Filipinos are different. We're influenced by Spanish. They lump us with Asians because of region not culture.<sup>27</sup>

In Rey-Jun's view, region or geography serves as a problematic basis for categorizing Filipinos as Asian American because of the way it elides the particularities of Filipinos and their historical placement within U.S. society. Instead, he considers "Filipino" a cultural term, looking to culture as a more meaningful basis of categorization although he does not elaborate on the broader implications.<sup>28</sup>

Rey-Jun's comments demonstrate a self-awareness of his own racialization and that of Filipinos as "Asian American" in contemporary U.S. society as well as the vexed and contentious relationship of Filipinos to Asian American panethnic formations. They speak to how Filipino self-identification is at odds with U.S. racial formations but also how Filipinos have negotiated the terms of their racialization. Furthermore, his comments shed light on the need to conceptualize Filipinoness in much broader and historical terms, in a way that accounts for the singularity or exceptionality of Filipinos in relation to other Asian American groups. And in pointing to culture as a possibly more meaningful basis of categorization, Rey-Jun gestures towards alternative modes of identification that are better suited to speak to the specificities of Filipinos so that they won't be seen, in Pisares' words, "as everything and anything but Filipino."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Rey-Jun's comments resonate with that of Martin F. Manalansan IV's respondents, Filipino gay men who do not relate to other Asians or to an Asian identity and conceptualize Asia or Asian only in geographic terms. Like Rey-Jun, they believe that substantial differences exist between Filipinos and other Asian groups render the category "Asian America" problematic. See Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Pisares, "Do You Mis(recognize) Me, *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*. For a discussion of the contradictions and arbitrariness inherent in the establishment of an identity category like Asian American, see Leti Volpp, "American Mestizo: Filipinos and Antimiscegenation Laws in California," *UC Davis Law Review* 33 (2000): 795-835. For a discussion of Asian American panethnic politics and in particular, Filipino grievance against panethnic formations, see Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1992). Incidentally, Filipinos are not

More to the point, the categorization of Filipinos as Asian American not only distorts the specificities of Filipinos but also the possibility of other modes of group identification that is encompassing of shared histories between Filipinos and other groups. Filipinos may indeed share some affinities with other Asian American groups but in other, more substantive ways, they also belong among other groups. Because of their imperial history, for example, Filipinos could just as easily be grouped with such groups as Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Yet the subsumption of Filipinos within the Asian American category obfuscates these shared experiences of colonization, conquest, and displacement as Filipinoness is seen as categorically distinct from, rather than partially overlapping with these categories. It occludes how Filipinos are linked as much with these groups as with any Asian American group they are generally grouped with.

Within the context of Filipino invisibility, then, Filipinos look to culture as a vehicle to assert and narrate their presence on their own terms. In other words, culture serves as an important marker through which Filipino youth negotiate with the absence of a Filipino American racial discourse. As Pisares suggests, they do so in multiple ways including identification as Asian American, the construction of a racial discourse around the notion of brownness, and the fetishization of ethnic markers as evident in culture shows. She goes on to point out that DJing provides an alternative to these modes of Filipino American identity and cultural formation, an alternative that does not run into the same kinds of problems.<sup>30</sup>

In the case of ISP, Pisares makes the point that rather than assert their Filipinoness through their music, the group engages in a strategic refusal to racialize their

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the only group critical of panethnic politics; South Asians have been critical as well, taking issue with the way they have been marginalized in these formations. See Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth (eds.), *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Pisares, *Daly City is My Nation*.



involvement in DJing. Instead, their aim is to innovate and perfect the techniques associated with this expressive form as evidenced by the following quote from Q-Bert: “We’re not Filipino artists, we’re artists. We’re not from the Filipino race, we’re from the human race...Ever since we started, race didn’t matter to us. As soon as it does matter, there’s something wrong. It never occurred to us that being Filipinos would hinder us in doing what we love. It never crossed our minds. What crossed our minds is we have to practice. That’s what would hinder us.”<sup>31</sup> Pisares goes on to argue that it is precisely because ISP is not bound to a racially defined musical genre or obligated to create music identifiably Filipino that allows them to excel in an artform like DJing to the point where no one can ignore a Filipino presence. In other words, Filipino invisibility has actually opened up a space for Filipino youth to excel in an expressive form like DJing.

Building on Pisares’ arguments Juliana Snapper asserts that Filipino turntablists may very well be engaging in racially subversive practices because of the way they defy reductive ethnic and racial categorizations. This is evident, for example, in the ethnically ambiguous names they take up, their reliance on a medium that makes it difficult to tie them to a racial, subnational, or classed identity, and their refusal to let their Filipinoness overdetermine their music. In effect, Filipino DJs are subscribing to practices that can be described as strategically anti-essentialist, acknowledging their cultural backgrounds and at the same time politicizing their identity on their own terms.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Quote taken from Pisares, *Daly City is My Nation*, 147.

<sup>32</sup> Juliana Snapper, “Scratching the surface: Spinning time and identity in hip-hop turntablism,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7:1 (2004): 9-25.

DJing may vary well represent an advance over other modes of Filipino American representation but as Pisares herself acknowledges, it is far from ideal. For one thing,

The abstract character of music that otherwise lends itself to the creativity of those listening from outside racial discourse impedes the ability of Filipino Americans to confront their invisibility via the turntable (though their massive success has made issues about Filipino American participation in hip hop unavoidable). Indeed, some of the premier Filipino American DJs are adamant about the meritocratic nature of turntablism: hard work and not identity, they argue, makes a battle champ.<sup>33</sup>

Pisares also comments on efforts by Filipino American DJs at self-narration, efforts which are generally oriented towards the future and outer space.

African American DJs easily connect their craft with a history-laden sense of time and place, invoking hip hop's origins in South Bronx housing projects as a response to racial segregation, gang violence, and urban decay. In contrast, Filipino American DJs asked to identify their music's origins and influences speak of future time and outer space. While space ships, eight-armed extraterrestrials, and other figments of science fiction serve as what Oliver Wang calls a "Filipino-futurism," an alternative discourse that compensates for the absence of race, it is not as if Filipino Americans did not have their own neighborhoods, institutions, and social practices amidst racial isolation and hierarchy.<sup>34</sup>

But in resorting to discourses of meritocracy and "Filipino-futurism," Filipino DJs also risk reproducing the logic informing contemporary discourses about diversity, difference, and race in the U.S. that displaces issues of power and renders questions of social and cultural identity benign.<sup>35</sup>

### **Reconfiguring the Boundaries of Filipinoness within the Context of the Diaspora**

The sheer magnitude of the Filipino diaspora has complicated discourses of identity and culture even more, providing ground on which to reconsider their dynamics and contours. It has meant a reconfiguration of the normative boundaries of Filipinoness

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<sup>33</sup> Pisares, "Do You Mis(recognize) Me, *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*."

<sup>34</sup> Pisares, "Do You Mis(recognize) Me, *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*."

<sup>35</sup> This is a point I elaborate on in my discussion of Q-Bert's iconicity and the discourses surrounding his Filipinoness in the next chapter.

as Filipinos in the diaspora now have broad set of options and influences they can rely on including those not considered Filipino to construct their sense of Filipinoness. At the same time, Filipino youth cultural practices in the diaspora have become an important site from which to think through the intricate nature of migration and settlement, the ambiguities of belonging and longing, and the (re)production of culture and tradition. In the case of DJing, a critical consideration of this expressive form shifts the way in which diasporic identity and consciousness is traditionally conceived as predicated on a straightforward identification with the homeland.

In my interviews with Filipino DJs, it became apparent that they do not adhere to authentic notions of “tradition” or “culture” or look to conventional markers of Filipinoness such as language, food, and religion to construct their sense of Filipinoness. By the same token, they do not feel culturally inauthentic because of having been born and raised in the U.S. This is not to suggest that my respondents are completely dissociating themselves from practices and traditions considered “Filipino.” A number of my respondents, for example, expressed a desire to someday visit the Philippines. Instead, it is to suggest that for them, those practices and traditions considered Filipino are what Yen Le Espiritu has described in another context as cursory manifestations of culture that are “periodic and thus have little or no relevance to their daily life.”<sup>36</sup>

In considering DJing as much a Filipino thing as cultural forms and practices considered Filipino (as indicated in the quotes that open this chapter), my respondents are subscribing to a view of cultural identity not predicated on the reification of the homeland as the originary and authentic source of Filipinoness as in the case of culture shows such as PCN. For them, cultural affiliation is not just about identification with the cultural heritage of their parents or adoption of cultural practices passed on from generation to

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<sup>36</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, “The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Class: The Multiple Identities of Second Generation Filipinos” in Pyong Gap Min (ed.) *Second Generation: Ethnic Identity Among Asian Americans* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 33.

generation but a much more dynamic process that is grounded in specific historical contexts and changes over time. Cultural identity, from this perspective, “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’”. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture.”<sup>37</sup>

Following Okamura’ line of thinking, one can argue that these respondents are not evincing a diasporic identity and consciousness precisely because they do not look to the Philippines as the exclusive or primary source of Filipinoness. The turn to black sources and traditions, then, can be perceived as representing a “loss of culture” or a “loss of tradition,” a threat to the cultural integrity and stability of the category “Filipino.” This line of thinking, however, assumes that formations rooted in the Philippines are authentic while formations rooted elsewhere in the diaspora are less authentic. It assumes that “Filipino culture” can be reduced one set of traditions one can turn to at the “appropriate” moment to get in touch with their Filipinoness rather than a dynamic set of social relations contingent on context, history, place and space. In effect, diaspora remains “the bastard child of the nation—disavowed, inauthentic, illegitimate, an impoverished imitation of the originary culture.”<sup>38</sup>

The turn to DJing as a source of Filipinoness, however, can also be understood as symptomatic of the need to expand the frame within which the contours of Filipinoness have historically been defined. It is symptomatic of the need to consider how Filipinoness is transformed and reconstructed in the diaspora referencing not only formations “back home” but also formations in a variety of diasporic contexts. To borrow from Paul Gilroy, the “Critical space/time cartography of the diaspora needs therefore to be readjusted so that the dynamics of dispersal and local autonomy can be

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<sup>37</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds), *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 236.

<sup>38</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, “‘Bombay, U.K., Yuba City’: Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora,” *Diaspora* 4:3 (1996): 317.

shown alongside the unforeseen detours and circuits which mark the new journeys and new arrivals that, in turn, release new political and cultural possibilities.”<sup>39</sup>

Building on Gilroy’s insight, it is no longer adequate to continue to privilege the homeland as the singular originary site of Filipinoness or to conceive of the spatial and temporal cartography of the Filipino diaspora in linear terms because to do so obscures the varied and changing expressions of Filipinoness. Accordingly, the Philippines constitutes just another location in the Filipino diasporic circuit just as “Filipino” cultural practices and traditions constitute just one element that go into the production of Filipino identity and culture. Similarly, the production and maintenance of “culture” is not just a matter of cultural inheritance or nostalgia for an idealized homeland but a much more selective and creative process referencing elements of various cultural sources and traditions including those not considered Filipino. The Filipino diaspora, therefore, should be seen not as reflecting a singular sense of identification but as constituting a space for multiple identifications.

Rather than signifying a “loss of culture” or a “loss of tradition,” then, the turn to DJing could be seen as signifying a reworking of culture and tradition by Filipino youth in an attempt to redefine for themselves what it means to be Filipino at this contemporary moment as well as make culture relevant and meaningful. In other words, it can no longer be assumed that nostalgia, longing, and loss are *the* central themes that define the contours of Filipino diasporic subjectivities and experiences or that they exhaust the kinds of identification available to Filipino youth. Instead, Filipino youth involvement in DJing serves to reconfigure the normative boundaries of Filipinoness predicated on nostalgia and the (re)production of cultural linkages with an idealized homeland. It opens up alternative ways of thinking about Filipinoness—U.S. or diaspora based rather than

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<sup>39</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 86.

Philippine or homeland based—that speak to the complex social locations and shifting identifications of Filipinos in the diaspora.

In addition to an interrogation of the relationship between diaspora and nation, a critical consideration of Filipino youth involvement in DJing also points toward the possibility of redefining the Philippines as the locus not of an ordinary and authentic Filipinoness but of a complex history of anti-colonial, anti-capital struggles and complicities. In the following, Soup-a-Crunk discusses Babu's comments in the film *Scratch* in which he mentions that Filipino youth basically have two role models: their parents and Q-Bert.

I have not seen the film so it's kind of out of context. But just by the quote alone, I think it's funny cause in a way, it's kind of true for the younger generation of Filipinos cause that's what's being hyped right now. I think it's true in a sense. It's not just those two who are role models but definitely they are two strong role models in Filipinos' lives. It's cool to have Q-Bert as a Filipino representative but then he's not speaking on anything about Filipinos. He's just a Filipino who happened to be a DJ you know. But it will be another thing if he was like wearing this (pointing to a t-shirt he's wearing with the map of the Philippines inscribed on it) while he's doing a competition, like he would speak on something about the Philippines or the conditions or the issues there right. But I mean that's not his gig; he's a DJ. Whatever.

While the risk of romanticizing and reifying Philippine politics as well as reproducing First World/Third World asymmetries exists, Soup-a-Crunk's view of the Philippines as a site of political identification is suggestive of alternative readings of the "homeland."

In sum, the narratives of my respondents pose a challenge to the notion of a unified Filipino diaspora and monolithic constructions of Filipinoness predicated, in large part, on the experiences of the immigrant generation. Instead, they engage in a kind of cultural politics not easily accommodated in standard diasporic accounts, a kind of cultural politics that dislocates the Philippines as the privileged site of Filipinoness and disengage questions of cultural belonging from conventional markers of Filipinoness. In

so doing, my respondents render these markers contingent and negotiable and bring to light alternative forms of identification that are also constitutive of Filipinoness, forms that better accommodate their realities and subjectivities.

But Filipino involvement in DJing can also be problematic in the way it reproduces narrow notions of Filipinoness particularly along the lines of gender which is the focus of the next chapter. More to the point, DJ culture constitutes a masculinist space reflecting dominant ideas about gender although the possibility of reconstituting gendered meanings and identities does exist. Nonetheless, when it comes to gender, it is a mainly conservative arena. In looking to DJing as a vehicle for the assertion of a specifically Filipino identity, Filipino DJs almost always resort to conventional articulations of masculinity. The participation of Filipino youth in this expressive form, therefore, can be read as simultaneously reinforcing and rupturing the normative boundaries of Filipinoness recuperating and defamiliarizing conventional markers of Filipinoness. In this sense, diaspora constitutes a contradictory space that disrupts some normative categories while simultaneously reproducing others.

### **DJING AS A HIGHLY GENDERED SPACE**

It definitely helps out picking up girls. When you're doing parties or whatever, that's access to parties. I guess to a certain extent, DJs are in the spotlight, whether it be a club or whatever.

Rey-Jun<sup>40</sup>

It's just, just being in the spotlight is fun you know. Cause when you're a DJ at a party, you're the party you know. You're the one that controls the mood, you're the one that controls what people say you know. Like uh, you can say anything to the crowd. Like if you're doing good, you can manipulate the crowd to make them do whatever you want. I've had that at frat parties, just hell of crazy.

Rygar<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

I notice that when we're spinning, we get these second glances. It's irritating but it's kind of like they don't expect us to play good music. They expect us to play, I don't know. I guess it's hard for some of them to think of women having good taste in music or having knowledge of music. When we scratch, it's always like "Oh shit girl."

Cellski<sup>42</sup>

They're not really supportive. They're just basically chillin'. They don't really have a say in what I'm doing because they don't know I love it so much. They'll say things to me. They try to say things to me about not focusing on it and do school. They used to get mad with me always going to hip hop shows. They did not understand how much it meant to us. They did not really like it at first.

Deeandroid<sup>43</sup>

As a number of feminist critics point out, hip hop is a highly masculinist cultural space as reflected in the predominantly male membership and the gendered and sexualized discourses informing its different elements. Within graffiti and b-boying, for example, young women were rarely welcomed into writers' and b-boy crews and frequently dealt with insinuations from male peers that they are promiscuous or that they do not have the physical capability or strength to excel. To conceive of hip hop as simply a vehicle for the assertion of masculinity, however, overlooks efforts by female youth to carve out a niche and fashion themselves on their own terms. It also obscures how hip hop does not constitute a pre-existing male realm; instead, it is actively constructed as a male realm through the everyday activities that comprise the culture.<sup>44</sup>

Like the other elements of hip hop, DJing constitutes a male domain with different implications for Pinoy DJs and Pinay DJ in terms of their experiences and the way they negotiate their place within the culture. For one thing, the vast majority of DJs are men and depending on the venue, audiences also tend to be primarily male. Furthermore, the broad range of activities that make up DJ culture including purchasing

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<sup>42</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Deeandroid interview with the author, 19 November 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy Guevara, "Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin,'" in Eric Perkins (ed.), *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).



and collecting records, performing in public settings, and mastering the use of sound technology are all considered male activities or coded as masculine which, in turn, serves to bolster male homosociality within DJing and dissuade female youth from pursuing DJing.<sup>45</sup> Not surprisingly, then, there is a dearth of female DJs as DJing remains a sphere largely inaccessible to women. Needless to say, female DJs occupy a subordinate position within the power and status hierarchy of DJ culture.

The involvement of Filipino youth in DJ culture, however, is shaped not only by gendered expectations particular to DJ culture but also by expectations grounded in normative notions of Filipino manhood and womanhood which further serve to delimit Pinay youth participation in DJing. As Cellski and Deendroid both indicate in their comments above, Filipino parents generally view their daughters' participation in DJing as a transgression of the boundaries of Filipinanness in contrast to their sons' pursuit of DJing which is seen as compatible with normative notions of Filipinoness. The presence of Pinay youth in public spaces such as clubs or the streets, for instance, raises anxieties among parents particularly anxieties about female sexual vulnerability. It is within this context that Pinoy and Pinay DJs attempt to carve out their place within DJing and in the process of doing so, adopt but also confound established meanings of masculinity and femininity circulating within DJ culture and deployed in the diaspora.

### **DJing as an Important Site for Constructing a Distinct Form of Filipino Masculinity**

The DJs I interviewed benefit from the aura that has come to surround DJs, becoming DJs at a time when DJs enjoy considerable status, substantial influence, and unprecedented popularity. The reputation of DJs, at one point viewed with some

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<sup>45</sup> The practice of record collecting tends to be male dominated irrespective of the genre of music. For a discussion of the role of record collecting in cementing homosocial bonds within rock culture, see Will Straw, "Sizing up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture," in Sheila Whiteley (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997). For a discussion of this practice in relation to salsa music, see Lise A. Waxer, *The City of Musical Memory: Salsa, Record Grooves, and Popular Culture in Cali, Colombia* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

suspicion, seems no longer in question. This is the case not just for hip hop DJs but also for DJs in other genres of music like house music.<sup>46</sup> Thus, DJs can now legitimately claim to be artist and musician, garnering respect and recognition historically reserved for “traditional” musicians. They have become the main draw, developing and cultivating their own following. For my respondents, this means that they are no longer seen as merely playing other people’s music. Instead, they have become bona fide artists in the eyes of many of their peers.

For my male respondents, DJing serves as a potent source of status and prestige, providing an opportunity to socialize with peers, to meet young women, and to forge networks with other DJs. Echoing the remarks of Rey-Jun and Rygar above, Soup-a-Crunk describes the power and influence that comes with being a DJ this way:

**Interviewer:** People treat you differently because you’re a DJ?

**Soup-a-Crunk:** Yes, they think you’re a rock star. No, I mean really, it’s not that extreme. You know like most people know you’re a DJ, they’re super nice to you because they want you to deejay their party for cheap. You know I’m like “Hey, I heard this game before. Slow down. Put your brakes on.” In that aspect yes but then you know, it’s not like I advertised myself as “Oh yeah, by the way, I’m a DJ.” It just happens. It’s just like, I mean I have mixtapes or whatever but yeah. I mean girls seem to like it too.

**Interviewer:** Talk about that.

**Soup-a-Crunk:** It’s just like the idea. They think you know where the parties are, they think you know hell of people, they think you know this DJ that DJ and they fucking want you to make mixtapes.<sup>47</sup>

As Soup-a-Crunk alludes to, Filipino DJs’ acquisition of subcultural capital is not just based on the kind of services they provide and the kind of skills they possess but also on

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Tony Langlois, “Can You Feel It? DJs and House Music Culture in the UK,” *Popular Music* 11:2 (1992):229-238. For a more general discussion of the ascendancy of DJs in popular culture, see Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000); Kurt B. Reighley, *Looking for the Perfect Beat: The Art and Culture of the DJ* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000); Ulf Poschardt, translated by Shaun Whiteside, *DJ-Culture* (Great Britain: Quartet Books Limited, 1998). In many ways, the proliferation of literature on DJs is a reflection of the increasing popularity of DJs. For the most part, however, these accounts are largely descriptive, providing little or no analysis.

<sup>47</sup> Soup-a-Crunk interview with the author, 18 January 2003.

what these services and skills signify—connections to the right people, access to parties, and knowledge of the latest trends in music. In effect, involvement in DJing serves as a vehicle for Filipino youth to attain local celebrity status among peers.

The subcultural capital embodied by Filipino DJs also stems, in large part, on their ability to develop a distinctive style that revolves around a particular form of masculinity. In the face of limited means of expression, DJing constitutes one of the few arenas in which Pinoy youth find room to articulate a masculine ideal and publicly display styles of masculinity not generally associated with Filipino men. More specifically, Filipino DJs enact and embody a certain kind of masculinity built around the mastery of technical and musical skills. In their hands, turntables are transformed into musical instruments and in particular, into sources of innovation and creativity which then serve as the basis of their gender identity. DJing, in other words, has become an important source of status and prestige among Filipino youth precisely because it serves as a vehicle for the production and performance of an emergent Filipino masculinity that resonates with many Pinoy youth.

In many respects, Filipino DJs subscribe to gender conventions of male performances deployed in other genres of music like rock. In other ways, however, they veer away from these conventions. Compared to rock guitarists who typically deploy the electric guitar as a phallic symbol, for example, DJs engage in much less blatant macho posturing.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, for Filipino youth, the manipulation of turntables has come to signify male power and potency through the public display of brown bodies and the expert manipulation of sound technology. To use Steve Waksman's words in another context, the turntable constitutes "both the instrument and the symbol for a highly

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<sup>48</sup> For a consideration of the masculinist orientation of rock, see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (London: Routledge, 1990).

gendered and racialized form of virtuosity in which the individual player asserted his masculinity as he demonstrated his talent.”<sup>49</sup>

But in looking to DJing to construct their own sense of masculine identity, Filipino youth also engage in a set of practices that serves to distinguish themselves from other men. This is evident in the style developed and popularized by Q-Bert, Mixmaster Mike, and Apollo, a style which has come to be associated with Filipino DJs and a salient aspect of Filipino DJ performance.

In 1991, a S.F. crew dubbed FM 2.0 burst onto the national competition circuit. Instead of the flashy acrobatics that were the stock in trade of high-profile competition jocks at the time, members Apollo, Q-Bert, and Mixmaster Mike dazzled judges and audiences with orchestrated scratch routines and tricks developed in the relative isolation of the Bay Area. They took the scene by storm, and after snagging the world championship crown three years in a row, they were asked by the DMC to please bow out of future competitions. Over the course of time, and with the addition of new members, FM 2.0 became the West Coast Rocksteady DJ Crew and eventually Invisbl Skratch Piklz.<sup>50</sup>

For these Pinoy DJs, the emphasis is on the musical aspect of DJing rather than on the performative aspect, on how they sound on stage rather than on how they look as a way to accentuate their creativity and virtuosity. In their view, too much focus on what Reighley describes as “flashy acrobatics,” a style of DJing that tends to be associated with black DJs, detracts from the musicianship of DJs.

In emphasizing this aspect of DJing, Filipino DJs are cultivating their own sense of masculine identity that is not simply an attempt to replicate black masculine style or appropriate signifiers of black masculinity. Instead, they distinguish their style from black performance style as a way to define themselves as musicians first and performers second which then serves as the basis of an emergent Filipino masculinity. Through their

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<sup>49</sup> Steve Waksman is actually referring to the electric guitar but I find his comments relevant to the ways Filipino DJs make use of turntables. See Waksman, “Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness,” *Popular Music and Society* (Spring 1999), 104.

<sup>50</sup> Reighley, *Looking for the Perfect Beat*, 177.

creative engagement with sound technology, then, Filipino DJs are reconfiguring particular codes and conventions of performance style into signifiers of Filipino masculinity and opening up space for Filipino youth to imagine and affirm an alternative conception of Filipino manhood.

Filipino youth also look to DJing as a means of articulating a distinct sense of gender identity that is not consistent or congruent with the masculinity embodied by first generation Filipino men. As a number of feminist scholars of color have noted, migration brings about shifts in gender as well as generational relations and power including changes in the status of male and female migrants and their children. It restructures family relations, creating opportunities to renegotiate gender roles and expectations including meanings of masculinity and femininity while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchy. On the one hand, women often gain status and power but also shoulder added burdens. Likewise, the children gain status and power. On the other hand, men often lose status and power all the while continuing to benefit from their status as men as they no longer have access to social and cultural resources that had previously underwritten their authority.<sup>51</sup>

For first generation Filipino men, migration often results in downward occupational mobility which, in turn, undermines the basis of their masculinity. This is the case, for example, for Filipino men in the U.S. Navy who have been largely confined to the ratings of officers' stewards and mess attendant which many of them perceive as an affront to their dignity and self-worth. According to Espiritu: "The experiences of these Navy men underscore the fact that for many immigrants, the experience of migration is

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Nazli Kibria, *Family Tightrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); an issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* 42:4 (Jan 1999) focusing on gender and migration with contributions from feminist scholars like Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Patricia R. Pessar, and Yen Le Espiritu; and Espiritu, *Home Bound*.

most often a compromise: although their wages may be higher, their status is not, and their dignity suffers.”<sup>52</sup> Denied access to decent paying and high status jobs and other forms of institutional power, first generation Filipino men fail to live up to established definitions of masculinity. In response, these men look to other spheres to recoup their masculinity, an effort that more often than not reinforces patriarchy.<sup>53</sup>

Within this context, then, Filipino youth participation in DJing can be seen as providing an alternative and a much appealing path to the kind of professional or service work awaiting Filipino men. It offers them with an alternative source of status allowing them to enact a kind of masculinity distinct from the masculinity embodied by first generation Filipino men, a kind of masculinity not strictly associated with or contingent on the kind of work first generation Filipino men are engaged in. DJing, in other words, makes possible the rejection of regulated forms of labor enabling Pinoy youth to experience their bodies not just as instruments of labor but also as sources of pleasure and sensuality and in the process, counteract the low cultural capital historically associated with Filipino bodies.<sup>54</sup>

Q-Bert’s popularity is particularly instructive in terms of illuminating issues of gender identification and masculinity among Filipino youth who hardly have any successful role models whose experiences resonate with their own. In the eyes of Filipino youth, Q-Bert has become a source of racial and masculine pride, a

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<sup>52</sup> Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 131.

<sup>53</sup> In the case of Filipino men in the U.S. Navy, for instance, enlisting has contradictory effects, undermining their masculinity in the U.S. but bolstering it “back home” in the form of monetary support to family and friends and the accumulation of material goods. Espiritu, *Home Bound*.

<sup>54</sup> Linda N. Espana-Maram makes this point in relation to taxi dance halls and how they enabled Filipino workers to redefine the meanings attached to brown bodies—as sources of enjoyment, style, and sensuality rather than exploitable working bodies ideally suited to engage in stoop labor. In many ways, therefore, DJ culture operates in analogous ways to dance halls of the 1920s and 30s. See Linda N. Espana-Maram, “Brown ‘Horde’ in McIntosh Suits: Filipinos, Taxi Dance Halls, and Performing the Immigrant Body in Los Angeles, 1930s-1940s,” in Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard (eds.), *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998).

groundbreaking DJ who elevated the art and practice of DJing and paved the way for the next generation of Filipino DJs. As several of my respondents point out, it is largely through his accomplishments that Filipinos have gained a reputation for being the best DJs in the world. They look to Q-Bert as embodying new ways of being Filipino in the U.S. and foregrounding the potential of DJing as a vehicle for achieving notoriety and credibility. In doing so, he has helped transform DJing into one of the few spaces in which Filipino youth could wield a certain amount of power and authority and represent themselves on their own terms.

At another level, Q-Bert's popularity is grounded in his ability to embody an idealized form of masculinity that resonates with the lives of Filipino youth in the U.S. This is significant in light of the dearth of appealing images of Filipino men. Filipino youth identification with Q-Bert, however, is not just based on his exceptional skills but also on his ability to evoke the "ordinary."

**Rygar:** Well, like someone said at a PAA meeting, Q-Bert is up there; he's the man when it comes to scratching. So, and he represents the Filipino community you know—he's like a typical, short Filipino DJ. But the thing is, he's doing these commercials and people that know him are going to be like "Damn, there's Q-Bert. He came up." He's just representing the Filipinos in the community that, cause him being the best, just basically says that Filipinos like uh, they're pretty much in the hip hop scene you know.<sup>55</sup>

Filipino youth identify with Q-Bert because in many respects, he is "one of them" in terms of physical stature as Rygar points out but also in terms of personal history. Like many of them, for example, Q-Bert grew up in the Bay Area and, until recently, continued to live in the Bay Area even after his initial success. It is this sense of "ordinariness" that, in many ways, serves to underscore his authenticity and validate him as a genuine embodiment of Filipinoness.

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<sup>55</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

Q-Bert's iconicity and the discourses surrounding his Filipinoness, particularly the ways he positions himself in relation to it, are instructive of the contours of contemporary discourse on race. More specifically, an interrogation of his iconicity reveals the convergence of multiple discourses including that of American individualism and liberal pluralism. On more than one occasion, for example, Q-Bert has invoked the notion of "human race" to describe the relevance of his music. "I feel like whatever I do is pretty much not just for the Filipino community. It's for everyone. Real music should be appreciated by anyone, and I'm more on the universal tip as far as the Filipino pride stuff. We're all the same race, the human race."<sup>56</sup> In his self-presentation, then, Q-Bert downplays race as an issue. Instead, he looks to DJing as a race neutral activity, frequently positioning himself as a DJ who just happens to be Filipino. Yet for my respondents and Filipino youth at large, Q-Bert constitutes a potent symbol of Filipinoness despite a concerted effort on his part to downplay his Filipinoness or be seen as an ethnic artist.

In distancing himself from his status as a racialized subject, Q-Bert is reverting to a practice common among artists of color: the practice of disavowing their ethnic and racial background as way to negotiate with expectations to represent the "race" or in this case, Filipinos as a group. But in viewing his popularity within a deracinated context, Q-Bert, in effect, is resorting to the reactionary colorblind discourse that has become the sine qua non of contemporary popular cultural politics. Accordingly, he makes it seem as if his popularity can be reduced to his outstanding DJ skills rather than taking place within a particular set of circumstances in which his Filipinoness plays a prominent role. This kind of disavowal, then, functions to displace issues of race and power rendering questions of social and cultural identity benign.

### **Pinay Youth Exclusion and Marginalization within DJ Culture**

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted from an article written by Ronald Pineda, "Spin Control," *Filipinas* (May 1998), 30.



Like Pinoy DJs, the Pinay DJs I interviewed are drawn to the music, power, and energy of DJ culture. Notwithstanding the similarities, however, their personal narratives reveal profound differences in terms of their experiences within DJ culture, differences rooted in the masculinist orientation of DJ culture but also mainstream gender norms which further serve to delimit Pinay youth participation in DJing. For one thing, men have more mobility and access to public urban spaces than women and therefore have more opportunities to engage publicly in youth culture and to make money. Conversely, women are required to do unpaid labor within the home that is simply not expected of young men. Thus, female youth participation in DJing has been largely confined to that of consumers rather than active producers of the culture.

While the Pinoy DJs I interviewed are quick to acknowledge the dearth of female DJs, they generally do not consider the issue particularly relevant or important. This is in contrast to the Pinay DJs I interviewed who are fully aware of the way gender structures the participation of female DJs in different ways from that of male DJs as reflected in their marginal status within the culture. They are especially conscious and made conscious of those practices and discourses that render their legitimacy contingent and provisional. Nonetheless, like their male counterparts, they look to DJing as a site generating new possibilities for gender identification. In other words, the masculinist orientation of DJing does not preclude the construction of alternative femininities.

Aspiring DJs learn the basics of DJing through collective practices such as a group of friends pooling their resources including equipment, money, and records or an aspiring DJ relying on more established DJs for guidance and mentorship. These practices serve as an important mechanism through which musical knowledge and technological expertise are passed on from one generation of DJs to the next as well as a mechanism through which the status hierarchy of DJs is established, negotiated, and

contested. At the same time, however, this mode of skill acquisition has had profound effects on female youth's participation in DJing.

**Interviewer:** In terms of learning how to DJ, were you taught by other DJs or was it mostly you and your friend picking things up and learning on your own?

**Cellski:** There were not too many people who helped us besides Piklz cause you know a lot of the guys are assholes and would say...

**Interviewer:** Let's talk about that.

**Cellski:** They were assholes. They were not helpful, even my friends who are DJs and they are guys. I learned pretty much on my own. I think that's the only way, to find your own sound. You fuck with it however long it takes to finally come up with your own style.

**Interviewer:** So you asked your DJ friends if they could...

**Cellski:** When I was getting turntables I did not know what to buy. I did not even know there was a difference between direct drive and belt drive. I did not even know that different would get you different things. So I was asking my friend who was a DJ "Oh, what do I need to buy?" And he was shady from the beginning. He was like, "It does not matter. You could get that." With the set I ended up getting, it was the worst set you could ever get. Well he was like "This is good for mixing." It seemed like he was purposely even trying to limit me from what I could do. And then when I got my turntables too, I was like "Oh, I don't know what to do. How do I set it up?" He came over and he was not really helpful. He set it up and he really did not explain it and so I had to figure it out myself.

**Interviewer:** You think if you were guy that would have made a difference? You think these people you asked would have been more helpful?

**Cellski:** Yeah, definitely. I guess with him and some of my other friends, they did not think I'm serious about it. If it was a guy, they'll be more willing to help. With anything though, when it comes to handling technology, there's doubt that women can actually work it, the equipment.<sup>57</sup>

Generally excluded from social networks that have paved the way for the next generation of Filipino DJs, the Pinay DJs I interviewed have had to essentially learn the basics of DJing on their own which serve to ensure that the preponderance of DJs and DJ crews are men.

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<sup>57</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

Record shops constitute a principal location in the cultural geography of DJing; it also constitutes a male terrain where the clientele and workers are predominantly men. DJs gather at these places to not only purchase records and equipment but also to hang out, exchange information and gossip, and watch other DJs perform at certain times of the month. For aspiring DJs, it is a place where they can familiarize themselves with the culture but also meet more experienced DJs and forge social networks. The exclusion of women from these spaces, however, means that their opportunities to become a DJ are limited.

It is not surprising, therefore, to hear female respondents talk about the dearth of female DJs they could look up to and emulate. In the following, Onetyne discusses the influence of one of the few female DJs in the culture but also laments the absence of female DJs.

**Interviewer:** Did Pinay DJs influence you at all, Pinay DJs like Symphony?

**Onetyne:** Kuttin' Kandi. When I first saw her at a DMC, I was like "I want to be exactly like her." And after that, I've never heard about her anymore. It's kind of depressing because all I see are males up there on turntables. There's DJ Shortee and like Symphony, I don't think she's in it anymore. Kuttin' Kandi, I haven't heard anything about her.

**Interviewer:** So Kuttin' Kandi really made an impression on you.

**Onetyne:** Yeah, like once I saw there's a female on turntables, I wanted to be exactly like her. I wanted to be in DMCs, beat juggling and all that. But of course everything changed and I got more into mixing and production. I still want to learn that aspect focusing on production.<sup>58</sup>

The absence of female DJs means that Pinay youth are primarily exposed to male DJs which can serve to discourage them and other female youth from pursuing DJing. In Onetyne's case, seeing a Pinay DJ perform on stage clearly made a difference in her decision to take up DJing.

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<sup>58</sup> Onetyne interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

A common theme that emerges in the personal narratives of Pinay DJs is that they are taken much less seriously than their male counterparts having to deal with a lack of respect for their musical abilities. The female respondents recalled a number of instances in which they had to perform under intense scrutiny from male peers.

**Cellski:** There's a lot of sexism in hip hop period. There's a lot in every element, in DJing too. That's one of the biggest issues that you deal with. We always get comments from guys, comments about... You know people think either we're, they're doubtful of our skills until we get on and do what we do but before that, they have all these questions like trying to test. So we're always getting tested basically, even when we go record shopping.<sup>59</sup>

**Onetye:** From other DJs? They're just really critical. They, every single move you make, every single beat, "Oh, that's off beat. That does not blend well. What is she doing? She can't scratch." They're really critical. When they see a female DJ up there, they're really critical. If they don't know you're a female, like you're upstairs, they'll just... Once they find out, they listen really carefully to your mixing.<sup>60</sup>

Perceived as intruding in a masculine space, Pinay DJs are not accorded authenticity in the same way as their male peers. Instead, they are evaluated more intensely, perceived as not taking the art and craft of DJing seriously and incapable of delivering a technically skilled performance. Within DJing, therefore, authenticity is not something which everyone can claim. Instead, it is defined in masculine terms and remains the prerogative of men.<sup>61</sup>

The kind of authenticity at play within DJ culture is grounded in the notion that female DJs are unable and unwilling to put in the time and effort necessary to excel in DJing. Consequently, Pinay DJs are not evaluated according to the same criteria as male DJs. Instead, they must demonstrate their competence in ways not required of men. This is evident in audience expectations of female DJs as described by Rey-Jun and Onetye.

<sup>59</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Onetye interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>61</sup> A similar dynamic operates in other genres of music like rock. See Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in Whiteley (ed.), *Sexing the Groove*.

**Interviewer:** Have you been to competitions with female DJs competing?

**Rey-Jun:** Yeah, I saw Pam the Funkstress competing at the DMC.

**Interviewer:** Was the audience responding differently to her because she was female?

**Rey-Jun:** Yeah, definitely. Not even Pam the Funkstress but Symphony who's with the Beat Junkies. She was in this thing in LA.

**Interviewer:** So talk about the audience response to them.

**Rey-Jun:** It was more of a shock factor, but it was also support. I think that's why they get so much reaction. They get a lot of reaction and lot of support in their routines because they scratch with their breasts.

**Interviewer:** So when it comes to audience reaction, skills don't matter as much.

**Rey-Jun:** Yeah, just as long as they're trying.

**Interviewer:** So if it was a guy, he would have been booed.

**Rey-Jun:** Oh yeah, but Symphony got skills. I thought she was good.<sup>62</sup>

**Interviewer:** When you're hired, what are the expectations?

**Onetime:** I don't know, I don't know what they expect when they hire us. I have no clue what they expect of us, probably like tits and ass I guess, like that's what they expect to see.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike male DJs, female DJs are evaluated primarily on the basis of their looks and more specifically, what they are willing to show. DJ skills, as both Onetime and Rey-Jun point out, do not seem to matter when it comes to female DJs who are considered only legitimate if they show skin.<sup>64</sup>

Also stemming from the perceived lack of authenticity of female DJs is the notion that female participation in DJ culture is contingent on their affiliation with males and in particular, intimate relationships with men. According to this line of thinking, Pinay DJs are nothing but ancillary members of the culture drawn to DJing only because their boyfriends are involved and therefore, their commitment to the culture is viewed as superficial and ephemeral.

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<sup>62</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Onetime interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>64</sup> This is similar to the way female youth are evaluated in the other elements of hip hop. In her analysis of hip hop music videos, for example, Rana A. Emerson shows that black women are depicted primarily as eye candy which serves to undermine their legitimacy as artists. Rana A. Emerson, "'Where My Girls At?'" *Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos*, *Gender and Society* 16.1 (February 2002): 115-132. For a discussion of the sexualization of female youth in graffiti, see Nancy Macdonald, *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity, and Identity in London and New York* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

**Rey-Jun:** I think a lot of reasons some girls are into it is because their friends are into it or their boyfriends are into it. Like Shortee, her boyfriend was into it big time. That's how they hooked up.<sup>65</sup>

**Tease:** ...I've a hard time getting into a club. I'd be wheeling in my records and security will be like "Where's your boyfriend?" and I'm like "Excuse me? Are you the DJ's girlfriend? No, I'm the DJ. Oh, hold on. Let me call the promoter." So I'm here and he's looking back at the...I'm on the cell phone going "Fucker, get me in. Your security is giving me a fucking hard ass time."<sup>66</sup>

Overlooked, then, are the ways Pinay DJs exercise agency—their own reasons for becoming DJs, how they negotiate with DJ culture's masculinist prerogative in contradictory and complex ways, and the significance of DJing in affording young women a space to call into being alternative forms of womanhood and sexuality.<sup>67</sup>

Another theme that emerges in the personal narratives of Pinay DJs is lack of parental support and encouragement. For the parents of my female respondents, DJing constitutes a male activity and thus, they pressure their daughters to pursue what they as gender appropriate behavior.

**Onetyne:** Support of family I think is a big thing. Cause like a lot of my friends tell me, "Oh, your parents support you. Really?" They're so surprised about it. They're like "My parents would never buy me turntables. My parents, they think it's a waste of money and all that." And like, just basically support cause I think that's why I've gotten so far because a lot of people support me on it, especially my parents. They know it's a male dominated thing. I guess it all falls on their family. "Why do you want to do this? Are you a tomboy cause you're doing this or something." Like I've gotten that from my family before, like my relatives. It's like this is what I love to do. It's like my parents support me on it and that's all I really care about, like what I want to do.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Tease interview with the author, 11 November 2002.

<sup>67</sup> This kind of thinking is in line with what Lisa A. Lewis calls the ideology of sexual favors that has characterized music culture and history and that has functioned to invalidate female musicianship. For a more detailed discussion, see Lisa A. Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>68</sup> Onetyne interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

**Cellski:** There's not a lot of female musicians in the world period. In any music genre, especially in hip hop, there's lack of representation. Maybe because it's that kind of discouragement and women are not encouraged to be creative, Filipinos like my dad saying, "Oh, I need to study. I need to do this and that." There's already this expected lifestyle that we're expected to have and there's no room for any kind of creative expression usually. So I think that already sets a problem up like a lot of women probably don't even think that they can, that they have the time for that, that they cannot do it period. With Filipinas, there's a handful of us. It's already an unsaid...an arena for guys.<sup>69</sup>

As evident in the above narratives, Filipina youth involvement in DJ culture is shaped not only by gender conventions and heterosexual norms within DJ culture but also by parenting practices within the family underwritten by normative notions of Filipinanness. Accordingly, pursuing DJing is viewed as a transgression of the normative boundaries of Filipinanness casting their femininity in doubt.

This is in stark contrast to the parental support and encouragement Pinoy DJs generally receive in the form of permission to stay out all night, money to buy DJ equipment, and encouragement to practice and hone their DJ skills. Statistix's father, for example, bought him sound equipment—an amplifier, speakers, and a turntable—costing about \$3000 after realizing how much DJing meant to him. Likewise, Rey-Jun's parents bought him his first turntables for earning good grades and graduating junior high. Cellski, however, had to come up with the money herself.

**Interviewer:** Going back to how you came up with the money to buy your first set of turntables, it came mainly from working at McDonald's?

**Cellski:**...I had to save it because my parents would not buy it for me. My mom thought I was crazy and my dad said it was for guys. And so I just saved up for myself.<sup>70</sup>

As evidenced by the foregoing, Filipino youth involvement in DJing is almost always met with parental approval because of the way it is seen as compatible with conventional

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<sup>69</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

notions of Pinoy masculinity. On the contrary, the parents of Pinay DJs generally viewed their involvement in DJing with disapproval and suspicion.

According to several of the Pinay DJs I interviewed, their involvement in DJing was often a source of friction between themselves and their parents.

**Cellski:** My dad, he always had a problem with it. He thought it was a waste of time and money. And he also thinks that it's for boys. He always said that to me. My mom, she's a little more supportive. They got used to it because I played music loud anyways before I had the turntables. So it was something my mom tries to get used to but she's supportive of men. My friends would come over and we'll practice and she was cool with it. My dad was like "You need to study. That's not for you. Why don't you play the piano." He said that because before the turntables I took piano lessons but I did not like it. And then my sister played the piano. I would always say "Oh, it's an instrument dad." And then my dad would always say "Oh no, the piano, play the piano."<sup>71</sup>

In Tease's case, her father was generally supportive of her involvement in DJing but not her mother.

**Tease:** My mom, on the other hand, she hated the idea. She was like "No, it's a male dominated thing. DJing is for men. I'm like "Mom, you're tripping." So I guess another reason why I continue to deejay is because I wanted to piss her off...<sup>72</sup>

Perceived by my respondents' parents as a "male thing," DJing becomes a highly contested arena in which to express, debate, and challenge ideas concerning the boundaries of Filipina womanhood.

In many ways, parental objections to the involvement of their daughters in DJing resonate with ideologies of female domesticity which delimit female musicianship within the confines of the family and discourage the pursuit of music as a career. Music, in other words, should only be pursued as long as it fulfills a service function within the home—e.g., entertaining family or guests. Related to this is the coding of particular

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<sup>71</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Tease interview with the author, 11 November 2002.



musical instruments as suitable vehicles for the expression of female subjectivity and creativity. Cellski's father, for example, encouraged her to play the piano, a musical instrument historically coded as appropriate for women because of its compatibility with the ideal of female domesticity. At the same time, he discouraged her to play turntables because he considered it an inappropriate form of female musical expression.<sup>73</sup>

Parental objections to their daughters becoming DJs also resonate with the narrative of female morality valorized in many Filipino families, a narrative underwritten by an idealized image of Filipinanness. DJing is considered an inappropriate activity for Pinay youth to pursue because it means engaging in practices—going out and staying out late, frequenting places deemed “unsafe” and “dangerous” for women, and being around male peers—that purportedly pose a threat to Pinay sexuality. Pinay youth involvement in DJing, then, makes it difficult for parent to control and regulate their daughters' behavior as well as keep tabs of their daughters' whereabouts and confine them to the domestic sphere.

Moreover, Pinay youth pursuit of DJing as a career disrupts the model minority expectations of their parents who expect their daughters to get good grades in school and pursue what they consider is a more legitimate career path. Cellski's parents, for example, wanted her to become a lawyer or a teacher but as evidenced in the following, Cellski does not subscribe to the notion that education is the key to social mobility because of the way it forecloses other possibilities.

**Interviewer:** What does he (father) want you to do instead?

**Cellski:** A lawyer, a teacher. I just told them “Yeah, don't worry. You got ate (older sister) to support you.” With parents, I don't know. My mom is supportive. She knows that it can happen cause she talks to Q's (Q-Bert's) mom. His situation was even worse. He was an “F” student. They were not supportive. They were on his back cause he's the only

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<sup>73</sup> This resonates with the long history of coding of musical instruments as masculine or feminine, see Julia Eklund Koza, “Music and the Feminine Sphere: Images of Women as Musicians in Godey's Lady's Book, 1830-1877,” *The Music Quarterly* 75.2 (Summer 1991): 103-129.

child. Now they are all like happy for him, showing him off. But my mom knows it's what makes me happy. I think that's why she's chill about it.

**Interviewer:** Maybe your dad needs to talk to Q's mom.

**Cellski:** My dad does not get involved period. Mixmaster Mike used to live down the street from my house in Vallejo and I used to go "Yeah, you know Mixmaster Mike? Look at him dad. You see he's Filipino. You see what he's doing. And he said, "Didn't I see him in Vallejo?" I said, "You don't need to have this lifestyle." The working class, they really believe that you could mobilize straight up with education, that you could move from the working class.<sup>74</sup>

For Cellski, it is not about making money or becoming rich but making enough money to survive while doing something she loves. From this perspective, then, DJing provides an appealing alternative to the model minority expectations of her parents.

### **DJing as a Site for Negotiating Gender Conventions and Sexual Norms**

Female DJs' views of themselves are not concurrent with male DJs' or parents' views of them. This is evident in the different ways Pinay DJs have responded to and challenged the masculinist presumptions of DJing in subtle and ambivalent ways. Engaging in their own gendered performances, they have contested preconceived notions of female musicianship and problematized the different criteria by which male DJs and female DJs are evaluated while at the same time challenged idealized notions of Filipinanness. In others words, DJing offers a venue to counteract normative models of Filipino womanhood rooted in DJ culture and the deployment of culture and tradition in the diaspora.

Perceived as intruding in a male realm, female DJs constantly deal with disparaging remarks and furtive looks that cast their legitimacy and credibility as DJs in doubt. My female respondents recounted a number of these incidents developing and using effective one-line retorts. Cellski came up with the following to counteract verbal

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<sup>74</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

forms of harassment from male DJs, forms of harassment that have become routine in DJ culture.

**Cellski:**...There were so many things. “You’re good for a girl but you need to learn how to control that fader more” or things like that, belittling us because they were threatened. That was before. Like now when I get those comments I learn how to quick wit and shoot back at them. Like this year we were mixing and something was wrong with my needle and one of the guys was like “Oh, why don’t you take it out and lick it.” And the way he even said that I was pissed. I just looked at him and said “Why don’t you show me how to do that. I know you know how to do that.” It’s just like learning. A lot of times some of the shows are really sexist and we have to perform at these shows. I just keep in mind a lot of them are ignorant. And I don’t want it to affect how I play. So I’m just mindful...<sup>75</sup>

Accustomed to receiving verbal insults, Cellski has learned to not let these kinds of comments affect her performance. Instead, she has made a calculated and self-conscious decision to respond to disparaging remarks, making sure that male DJs do not have the last word.

In counteracting verbal forms of harassment, Cellski is not only staking out her place within DJing but also negotiating what it means to be Filipina. DJing serves as a means of going against parental expectations and demands of domesticity and upward mobility and asserting an alternative model of Filipina womanhood.

What I learned from Q and them is that you can live like that, you can live a slave to the role you’re supposed to, that everyone expects you to have or you can make a living from something that makes you happy. That’s something my parents never really gave me, that choice. It was just school. It was already expected—get married, have a family. But that’s not what I want to do. I don’t want to go to school and then have a family. There’s so much that you could do and I think music is one of the ways that can take you to experience other things in life. So I think DJing, it’s been something that kept me learning outside of school until I started to learn more—from the music I picked up, from the people around DJing—you learn about music, you learn about the history, you learn about what is it about scratching like...rhythm, syncopation. Even in your philosophy of playing music, you start to apply it to everything else you have in your life. Like

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<sup>75</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

the energy I put into my music, I could put this energy to other things too. It shaped who I am today and through doing music and on my own too because my parents were not there.<sup>76</sup>

Refusing to be confined to the domestic sphere or to be defined by history and tradition, Cellski unsettles the normative boundaries of Filipino womanhood and challenges the gender proscriptions of Filipino culture. Taking up DJing becomes a way to envision a different kind of life for herself, one which does not revolve primarily around school, marriage and having a family. In this light, DJing provides an appealing alternative, offering the possibility of fulfillment and living her life on her own terms.

Like Cellski, Deendroid's participation in DJing enables her to unsettle gender based expectations, what constitutes "proper" and "acceptable" behavior on the part of female youth. In the following, she questions conventional norms of femininity that call for a preoccupation with physical appearance and self-image.

Like uh, there's always been some kind of uncomfortable feelings between Pinays, you know if you don't know them. A lot of Pinays are snobby to each other. I guess it has to do with personal issues too. Growing up you know, being comfortable with yourself and how you look. You know a lot of Pinays focus on how they look and that's what makes them feel good about themselves. I don't focus so much on that but when I see Pinays I know that there's those uncomfortable things so I know what not to do to make beef.<sup>77</sup>

In rejecting a conventional marker of femininity, Deendroid manages to reformulate conventional notions of feminine appeal and appearance. In so doing, she not only expresses herself in non-stereotypical feminine ways but also brings attention to the production and performance of competing articulations of Filipinanness.

In the case of Onetye, she uses clothing to negotiate the masculinist orientation of DJ culture and cultivate an appearance that frustrates expectations of female performance. Her reliance on commodities to carve out a niche evokes a fairly standard

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<sup>76</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>77</sup> Deendroid interview with the author, 19 November 2002.

practice in hip hop as participants strive to claim a higher status through the conspicuous consumption of clothing and other accessories. It speaks to the power of consumption as a means of cultural consumption. In this instance, Onetye's use of clothing not only plays on class distinctions and hierarchies but also gender distinctions and hierarchies.<sup>78</sup>

For Onetye, becoming a DJ does not mean that she has to cater to crowd expectations and show skin as reflected in her choice of fashion and style to negotiate her gender identity and carve out her own niche within DJing.

...we've been to a few car shows, like we deejayed at car shows just like for promotion. A lot of girls in our group dress provocatively; they think they're models or whatever. It's like "Oh wow." My manager even told me, cause usually I dress how I dress, like I dress jeans and a shirt, and she's like "The only reason why a lot of guys came to our table cause like they saw ladies showing their breasts," not showing but you know...<sup>79</sup>

Here Onetye wears clothes she is comfortable in—jeans and a shirt—which are standard gear for male DJs but not for female DJs who are expected to wear revealing clothing. In effect, she uses markers of masculinity and male identity as part of her self-presentation to accentuate technical skills rather than physical attractiveness and to project a different kind of image that does not live up to gendered expectations.

The prevailing gender discourse in DJ culture dictates that female creativity and subjectivity can only be legitimately expressed if female DJs show skin. It is not surprising, therefore, to see provocatively dressed female DJs attract crowds. Nonetheless, Onetye manages to attract crowds on the basis of her skills as the following demonstrates: "Yeah, they're like "The only reason why they came to see us spin and all that...like you have the biggest crowd there and it's like they were listening to your skills and all that and what you were playing instead of just looking at you."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Onetye interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Onetye interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

By adopting “male” gear, Onetye is defying expectations of female performance and challenging norms of female display predicated on showing skin. In her self-representation, she broadens the range of femininities articulated within DJing recasting what it means to be a female DJ and a Pinay DJ in a male dominated realm. By the same token, Onetye demonstrates that physical appearance is not the only source of cultural authority and power in DJing for Pinay youth.

In contrast to Onetye, Tease has made a calculated and self-conscious decision to wear provocative clothing that accentuates the contours of her body. For her, displaying cleavage and presenting herself as eye candy has become a vehicle for self-promotion.

**Tease:** Drunk club heads, especially when I’d deejay and stuff, I’d be total eye candy. I’d show cleavage just to tease the crowd. I don’t give a fuck.

**Interviewer:** So that’s intentional on your part?

**Tease:** That’s intentional on my part, to be like “Hey, I’m a woman hear me roar.” And if they look at it, they look at it. They see it, they would be like “Cool,” just make them think it is cool.<sup>81</sup>

Tease is well aware of audience expectations when it comes to female DJs, exploiting the masculinist orientation of DJing to her own advantage. Her choice of clothing, however, can be read as subscribing to conventional views of femininity in the way she performs a compulsory feminine identity and acquiesces to demands of physical display.

But as evident in the following, Tease also wants to be recognized not just for her looks but also for her DJ skills. Like female musicians in other genres of music, Tease is grappling with the complexities and contradictions of female self-representation in a male dominated realm, wanting to avoid being seen as merely eye candy but also wanting “to be known as a DJ who is good and not because I’m just a girl.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Tease interview with the author, 11 November 2002.

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of female musicians and their struggle with issues of appearance and stage presentation, see Mavis Bayton, “Feminist Musical Practice: Problems and Contradictions,” in Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Sheperd and Graeme Turner (eds.), *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (London: Routledge, 1993).

**Interviewer:** And if people hire you strictly based on looks, that's fine with you?

**Tease:** Hold on, let me think about that. I would be concerned but at the same time, I know that I have the skills. I want to be known as a good DJ, not because I'm a girl. I mean if I get hired because of looks over my skills, that has happened a couple of time. In a DJ lineup, they'll get really good DJs and stuff, but then I'll be hired over this guy DJ because I was a girl. But it's part of the game. The promoter wants to attract people and putting a girl in the lineup is one of them you know. It's a business thing. It's not personal; it's a business. That's one of my lines: it's not personal; it's a business.

**Interviewer:** Isn't showing cleavage going against your goal to be recognized for your DJ skills?

**Tease:** I think I'm using it to my advantage. I mean I want to be recognized as a DJ and I'm female. Sorry, I should've said instead of a female DJ. As I said, I want to be good, I want to be known as a DJ who is good and not because I'm just a girl. And I'm using it to my advantage, me maybe being attractive to come up in the DJ scene and stuff like that. I mean my mix show coordinator told me it's like "Hey, people want to hire you because they heard of a girl DJ but they barely saw you and when they saw you, they're like hell yeah, put her in the lineup."<sup>83</sup>

On the one hand, Tease realizes that wearing revealing clothing is an effective vehicle for self-promotion. On the other hand, she realizes that presenting her self as eye candy and engaging in a performance of sexuality that subscribes to established conventions may work against her wish to be recognized as a bona fide DJ.

In addition to individual acts, Pinay DJs also engage in collective acts in order to carve out a space for female creativity and subjectivity. A couple of the Pinay DJs I interviewed, for example, are part of an all female multiracial DJ crew called Divas of Style Entertainment (DOSE). In the following, Onetime talks about the focus and purpose of the group.

It's called Divas of Style Entertainment. It does not really focus on hip hop. It's focused on mainstream and all that. I'm labeled their underground hip hop DJ, turntablist. I wanted to join the group because it's for females and like I've never seen anything like that before. Like the model I guess you can say we go by is like we don't want to be seen "Oh,

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<sup>83</sup> Tease interview with the author, 11 November 2002.

she's good for a girl." We want to be seen "She's good." And then like they look up and "Oh, she's a girl." That's what I really dig about it. It's like we want to be known for our techniques before even being seen as a girl because like it's a male dominated scene.<sup>84</sup>

As one of the few all-female DJ crews, DOSE functions as both a performing unit as well as a creative unit. It provides a supportive environment in which female DJs could be taken seriously and encouraged to develop and hone their skills disrupting the notion that female participation is contingent on male affiliation. Moreover, the collective serves as a forum in which group members affirm the legitimacy and credibility of female DJs as musicians and active participants in the culture.

DOSE strives to eventually achieve the same level of prominence as SBC and Spintronix, crews which Onetyme describes as the "big boys." However, in the highly competitive field of DJing, DOSE not only has to compete with more established DJ crews but also up and coming DJ crews comprised primarily of male DJs who, by virtue of their gender identity, are at advantage when it comes to securing gigs. Thus, it has not been that easy for the group to get gigs. Moreover, Onetyme points out that the group generally receives lower pay than their male counterparts for providing the same kind of service.

**Interviewer:** As one of the few Pinay DJs out there, what kinds of obstacles have you had to deal with that you would not if you were male?

**Onetyme:** Pay is one thing. Males can get \$200 doallrs more easily over a female.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Onetyme:** Yeah, and like you could be as good as males and all that but they still get a lot more than female DJs do. Our crew, like Divas of Style, they get less that compared to SBC crew. Like they have been around but I think we both have the same latent. And they're still getting like \$1000 gigs and we're over here busting our ass for \$800 gigs and all that. And like, and just how people look at you. It's like "Oh, she's a girl. She can't do it as good as the guy cause she's just a girl." And like we're trying to break that stereotype and all that.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Onetyme interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>85</sup> Onetyme interview with the author, 14 November 2002.



The perceived lack of authenticity of female DJs means that DOSE DJs not only have to deal with skepticism regarding their DJ skills but also lack of financial remuneration relative to their male counterparts.

Yet DOSE members are also well aware of the novelty of women DJs, making a concerted effort to capitalize on the masculinist orientation of DJing by redeploying and rearticulating their sexuality in strategic ways. As Onetime notes, several DOSE DJs don revealing clothing as a way to bring attention to the group, secure gigs, and attract a large following or audience. In this respect, then, the decision of some group members to dress provocatively may very well help the group achieve prominence in the field of DJing. By the same token, it may very well compromise the other objective of the group—to be seen as bona fide DJs or musicians.

Very much conscious of the dearth of female DJs, the Pinay DJs I interviewed have made a concerted effort to encourage and mentor aspiring female DJs.

**Interviewer:** Is there a conscious effort on your part to mentor Filipinas?

**Cellski:**...So like when I meet people when we're doing shows, some women would go up to us, "Oh, you know that was dope. It's cool because they can appreciate the music. I also see how it makes a difference when they see a woman up there. Some of them do get inspired. So it's always like we'll give them our e-mail address and I always tell them, "Yeah, if you guys want to learn, we can help you." And then we also did a workshop for like young women of color. It was like a lot of girls from the projects, not necessarily Filipino. A lot of them were black and Latina. So we did that.<sup>86</sup>

As one of the few female DJs in the culture, several of my female respondents have made it a point to do whatever they to help female youth get into DJing.

Through their efforts to carve out a niche within DJ culture, Pinay DJs have opened up new possibilities for aspiring women DJs, legitimizing the involvement of women in DJing and broadening the range of femininities articulated in DJing. More

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<sup>86</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

specifically, Pinay DJs enact and perform an alternative kind of femininity that, to use Norma Mendoza-Denton's words in another context, "not only confounds wider community notions of how girls should act, dress, and talk, but throws into question the very gendered category that girls are expected to inhabit."<sup>87</sup> They demonstrate that it is possible for women to assert themselves through DJing and that DJing is not simply an inherently male form but its meanings and uses can be appropriated to serve as a source of empowerment for female youth. By the same token, Pinay DJs demonstrate that performance expressions need not be restricted to the domestic sphere and in the process, they open up a space for female youth as active participants in the production of youth culture.

But the personal narratives of Pinay DJs also demonstrate that by engaging in self-definition, they not only unsettle conventional expectations regarding what it means to be a female DJ but also what it means to be Filipina. Just as Pinoy youth look to DJing to construct an alternative form of Filipino masculinity, Pinay youth look to DJing to construct an alternative form of femininity that does not conform to normative models of Filipina womanhood rooted in domesticity and bound up with patriarchal notions of family, sexuality, and gender. More specifically, DJing allows them to defy parental expectations of how a "good" daughter should behave and redraw the boundaries of Pinay propriety and comportment and in the process, broaden the range of identities that Pinay youth can enact.

Through their involvement in DJing, Pinay DJs are able to counteract parental limitations on their autonomy and mobility which often dictate when and where leisure activities can take place. It allows them to counteract burdens placed on Filipina daughters to reproduce cultural traditions. By staying out late, frequenting spaces

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<sup>87</sup> Mendoza-Denton focuses on articulations of a specific kind of femininity among Latina gang members revolving around the use of makeup. See Norma Mendoza-Denton, "'Muy Macha': Gender and Ideology in Gang-Girls. Discourse about Makeup," *Ethnos* 61:1-2 (1996), 48.

considered unsafe, and taking part in activities considered inappropriate, they are able to mitigate parental control over their bodies and the strict moral codes underlying this control. And by challenging their confinement to domesticity, Pinay DJs are able to assert their presence in public spaces and stake out a public identity which, in turn, destabilize the construction of the “home in feminine terms as a ‘safe’ haven and the public sphere of the streets as ‘dangerous’ or ‘male’ terrain.”<sup>88</sup> In doing so, they expand and reconfigure signifiers of Filipinanness so that it would no longer be defined exclusively in terms of chastity, sexual modesty, and dedication to the family.

Another way DJing enables Pinay youth to redefine the contours of Filipinanness is by serving as a vehicle through which they can engage in political work on issues relevant to Filipinos in the diaspora. Cellski, for example, aspires to pursue a career not only in music but also envisions doing some non-profit work. She works closely with Deenadroid and together, they have performed at community events sponsored by such organizations as the League of Filipino Students (LFS). For these Pinay DJs, then, what it means to be Filipino also encompasses commitment to social and political issues.<sup>89</sup>

This is not to say that Pinay DJs do not reproduce many aspects of conventional gender norms or participate in their own subordination at the same time that they challenge it. In their struggles to prove that they belong, Pinay DJs, at times, reinforce rather than provide an alternative to prescribed meanings of femininity affirming the very relations they seek to subvert. The complicity of Pinay DJs, however, says less about the politics they subscribe to and more about the constraints they have to deal with in order to carve out a niche in DJing, and less about the strategies they engage in and more about

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<sup>88</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, “Re-Imagining Chicana Urban Identities in the Public Sphere, *Cool Chula Style*,” in Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem (eds.), *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 78.

<sup>89</sup> LFS is a Philippine based organization comprised of student organizations that strive to protect and expand the rights of both students and the Filipino masses in the Philippines but also overseas.

the difficulty of imagining alternative models of femininity outside the bounds of patriarchy.

## Chapter V Conclusion: Critical Considerations

**Cellski:** It's like people in hip hop, there's not even a lot of people who are black anymore. When you go to hip hop shows, it's all white. There's not even Filipinos. I don't even see Filipinos anymore...I'm aware of, there's a problem in hip hop right now. Why aren't there a lot of black people? Why are there a lot of white people? But I also know it became more universal to people when it became commercial or commodified.<sup>1</sup>

**Interviewer:** Do you consider it part of black culture?

**Rey-Jun:** Yeah I do. I really did not look at it as part of black culture back then. I just thought of it as music. But then now that I look back, it definitely was. Back in the day, native tongues and all that stuff, everyone was trying to be black. It had a major influence on society. It did. If you're into hip hop, you got influenced by black culture because that's how powerful it was then.

**Interviewer:** You still look at like that today?

**Rey-Jun:** I do but it's not like that at all. With the underground it is but today, I would say about fifty percent of rappers, it's all about making money. Back in the day, we were influenced by black culture; today, they're influenced by the money and sex and all that because that's all you hear on the radio these days. You really need to know where it came from or grew up in that era to like really find out the basis of real hip hop music is.<sup>2</sup>

Not all my respondents interpret the broadening ethno-racial scope of hip hop in the same way. Cellski and Rey-Jun, for example, provide an important counterpoint to the reading of hip hop as a transcendent space recognizing that the evolution of hip hop from a "black thing" to a global phenomenon has been far from seamless and unproblematic. For them, the cross-cultural appeal of hip hop is inextricably bound up to its commercial appeal but it has also meant a depoliticization of its black antecedents and continued black influence as reflected in the changing face of hip hop audiences and in the changing influences of hip hop. Cellski's and Rey-Jun's comments demonstrate a politicized understanding of the ways in which blackness is not simply a signifier of what

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<sup>1</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

is considered “hip” or “cool” but also a site of political identification and contestation. In Cellski’s case, she points out that underlying the universalization of hip hop is its mass commodification while in Rey-Jun’s case, he points out that the depoliticization of hip hop is inextricably linked to its mass commodification.

These epigraphs suggest that hip hop constitutes a critical terrain not only for the construction of contemporary youth identities but also racial differences, distinctions, and meanings. They articulate an ongoing tension particularly as it revolves around hip hop’s perceived ethnoracial scope. The epigraphs also suggest that the traversing of cultural boundaries is far from a seamless and straightforward process but one fraught with tensions and ambiguities.

This study represents an effort to make sense of Filipino youth involvement in an expressive form that has become a constituent element of Filipino identity and culture in the U.S. It has enabled Filipino youth to not only carve out a niche within hip hop but also position themselves in relation to U.S. racial formations and the Filipino diaspora. On the one hand, DJing constitutes an important mode of self-representation among Filipino youth allowing them to negotiate the terms of their racialization and render their experience meaningful and intelligible. On the other hand, it has made it possible for Filipino youth to unsettle the normative boundaries of Filipinoness predicated on the evocation of the Philippines as the originary and authentic source of Filipinoness.

While DJing has afforded Filipino youth opportunities to assert their Filipinoness on their own terms, it has also tended to reproduce contemporary discourses about race, culture, and difference. In conceiving of hip hop as a “human thing” or a “worldwide thing,” my respondents reproduce a liberal pluralist discourse of diversity that obscures issues of power and renders questions of social and cultural identity benign. According to this formulation, then, Filipinoness becomes just another marker of difference, “a kind

of difference that does not make a difference of any kind” overlooking the social, economic, and historical contexts surrounding the racialization of Filipinos in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

DJing has also made it possible for Filipino youth to unsettle the normative boundaries of Filipinoness predicated on the evocation of the Philippines as the originary and authentic source of Filipinoness. In considering DJing as much a “Filipino thing” as practices and traditions “Filipino,” my respondents are subscribing to a view of cultural identity grounded in specific historical contexts and changes over time. Diasporic identity and consciousness, therefore, is no longer simply oriented towards some sort of return—symbolic or literal—to an idealized homeland. It also encompasses formations in a variety of diasporic contexts including those not considered Filipino.

Additionally, DJing constitutes a space through which Filipino youth can adopt, generate, and redefine conventional gender and heterosexual norms including established meanings of masculinity and femininity. For the Pinoy DJs I interviewed, this expressive form affords them the opportunity to accumulate subcultural capital which, in turn, serves as to enhance their status and prestige. It allows them to redefine particular codes and conventions of performance style into signifiers of Filipino masculinity, opening up space to imagine and affirm an alternative conception of Filipino manhood. For the most part, however, DJing relies on and reproduces conventional gender and sexual ideologies. As important as DJing is as a source of status and prestige for Pinoy youth, it has not afforded Pinay youth the same opportunities. Instead, the masculinist orientation of DJ culture has made it a highly circumscribed space for Filipina youth in particular and female youth in general.

Nonetheless, like their male counterparts, the Pinay DJs I interviewed look to DJing as a site generating new possibilities for gender identification. More specifically,

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<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall, What is This “Black” in Black Popular Culture?, in Gina Dent (ed.), *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 23.

it affords them an opportunity to rearticulate not only what it means to be a female DJ but also what it means to be Filipina. Pinay youth involvement in DJing legitimizes the involvement of women by demonstrating that women are capable of mastering technology and delivering a compelling performance on stage and at the same time, unsettles models of Filipina womanhood rooted in domesticity and bound up with patriarchal notions of family, sexuality and gender. This is evident, for example, in the way DJing allows Pinay youth to counteract parental limitations on their autonomy and mobility. DJing, therefore, constitutes a contradictory space that simultaneously reproduces and ruptures existing relations of power, generating possibilities but also foreclosing others.

The study is an attempt to intervene in debates about cultural theory and criticism in cultural studies, ethnic studies, and Asian American studies, particularly in the area of youth cultural studies. It represents an effort to broaden the scope of scholarship on race by locating the analysis of identity and group formations in terms of the wider processes of racialization. The project looks to Filipino involvement in DJing as a useful departure point for thinking through the racialization of groups in distinct and historically specific ways but also in relational and mutually constitutive ways without losing sight of existing relations of power and privilege in the U.S.

In particular, this critical engagement with Filipino youth cultural politics is an attempt to unsettle the terms by which contemporary discourse has conceptualized hip hop as either a “black thing” or a multicultural “youth thing.” On the one hand, to consider hip hop as simply an expression of African Americanness obscures the role of black diasporic cultural practices in its emergence and the diffusion of hip hop on a global scale. On the other hand, to consider hip hop as merely a multicultural youth space fails to illuminate the field of racial positions within hip hop and the power asymmetries that underwrite these positions. Instead, a level of equivalence is assumed



among the different groups involved making it seem as if these groups have the same claim on the culture.

In its consideration of issues of power, this study also argues for a much more complex understanding of culture, one that probes the limits of intercultural exchange and different modes of cultural engagement. It posits that the deployment of “culture” to account for differences among groups takes place within a larger social context of racialized inequalities. This study, then, calls for the kind of cultural criticism that takes into account differential histories of power precisely because strategies of disavowal or racial identities are inadequate to engage the transformed racial dynamics of the post-civil rights, post 9/11 era. It suggests that racialized groups do not have the same relationship, historically or structurally, to hip hop and that the involvement of racialized groups in hip hop only makes sense in relation to their specific histories and social locations.

Moreover, the study constitutes an attempt to complicate standard formulations of diaspora based on the experiences of the first generation and oriented towards some sort of return to an idealized homeland. It illuminates how migration and settlement necessitate alternative ways of thinking about the contours of culture, identity, and politics that account for complex social locations and shifting identifications so that the homeland no longer constitutes the site of cultural authenticity. Rather, it constitutes just one element that goes into the production of diasporic identity and culture. A more nuanced account of diaspora, therefore, would account for how migrants and their children engage in new activities and practices that make more sense in their new surroundings.

While the personal accounts of Filipino DJs shed light on contemporary racial formations and processes, the breadth and scope of the study would have been greatly enhanced by a consideration of popular accounts of Filipino DJs in hip hop magazines like *The Source* and DJ magazines like *DJ* and *Tablist* as well as DJ documentaries like

*Scratch.* This body of work is neither innocent nor pure but rather, very much implicated in the construction of the racial discourse of hip hop. It within these accounts that contemporary debates about hip hop's perceived ethnoracial scope are most extensively elaborated, a site where questions of cultural entitlement and authenticity are being articulated, debated, and contested. They also demonstrate the ways questions of culture remain linked to race despite efforts to obscure this connection and the need to situate the study of hip hop within a broader interpretive framework that does not overlook the specificities of the groups in question.

## Appendix A

In many ways, the DJs I interviewed come from families that fit the profile of recent Filipino migrants to the U.S. marked by greater class and gender stratification with the influx of professionals and highly skilled workers and female migrants. Filipina nurses, for example, comprised a significant percentage of contemporary Filipino migration to the U.S. As Paul Ong and Tania Azores suggest, the Philippines has been the major supplier of foreign trained nursing working in the U.S. with at least twenty five thousand Filipino nurses migrating to the U.S. between 1966 and 1985. Given the prominence of this group, then, it is not surprising that the mothers of three of my respondents are nurses.<sup>1</sup>

Deeandroid was born in Oakland, California, in 1980. Her parents were born in the Philippines but met in Iran where her mother worked as a nurse and her father was studying to be an aircraft mechanic. They immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1970s, first to Oakland and then to Vallejo where many of their relatives already lived. This speaks to the significance of transnational networks to Filipino migration and in particular, the dependence of migrants on kin already in the U.S. for assistance with their settlement and adaptation including information about jobs, housing, and schooling for their children. Deeandroid's parents continue to hold the same jobs in the U.S. She has an older brother who is also a mechanic and an older sister who is attending nursing school. At the time of the interview, Deeandroid was working at a public relations company as an office administration assistant. She is a student at San Francisco State University (SFSU) where she majors in business.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ong and Tania Azores, "The Migration and Incorporation of Filipino Nurses," in Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng (eds.), *The New Asian Immigration on Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 164-195. See also Catherine Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2003); Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Deeandroid interview with the author, 19 November 2002.

In terms of class background, my respondents appear to come from relatively privileged occupational and educational backgrounds. Rygar was born in San Jose, California, in 1981. His parents were born in the Philippines; the mother is from Pangasinan while the father is from Ilocos. They met in the U.S. at the University of Washington although Rygar is unsure of the circumstances. Rygar's parents first lived in Fremont before moving to Union City where Rygar spent his formative years. His father is a physician at Kaiser while his mother is a registered nurse who left the profession in order to take care of Rygar and his three younger sisters. He is a student at UC Berkeley where he also teaches a class on the basics of DJing.<sup>3</sup>

Rey-Jun was born in San Francisco, California, in 1974. His parents were born in the Philippines and immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1960s. They first settled in Daly City before they moved to Concord in the late 1970s. Rey-Jun's father graduated from SFSU with a degree in Health Science and has worked at Macy's for about twenty five years as a supervisor while his mother was a nurse in both the Philippines and the U.S. His father continues to work at Macy's whereas his mother runs four convalescent homes—one in Milpitas and three in Concord. Rey-Jun has been attending Diablo Valley College (DVC) intermittently where he has taken administrative and business classes in preparation for taking over the family business.<sup>4</sup>

While it appears that a number of my respondents come from relatively privileged occupational and educational backgrounds, the class status of some of my respondents is a bit more ambiguous. Statistix was born in the Philippines and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of three in 1987 with his mother and older sibling. His father did not rejoin the family until 1997, ten years after the family first immigrated to the U.S. Upon arrival in the U.S., they rented an apartment in San Francisco but eventually purchased their own

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<sup>3</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 25 January, 2002.

home in the Portola District. His father works as a transporter at both Stanford University and at General Hospital but also works for maintenance at the State Building while his mother works for admissions at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and a front desk clerk at a Best Western Hotel.<sup>5</sup>

Cellski was born in Chicago in 1980 but grew up in Vallejo. Her family first immigrated to Norfolk, Virginia, before they moved to Chicago so that they could be close to relatives. The family eventually moved to and settled in Vallejo, California where many of their relatives already lived. Cellski self-identifies as coming from a working class background. Her father does food service at a hospital while her mother works at the post office. Cellski has an older sister who is in dental school in Ohio and a younger brother in Los Angeles. Currently a student at SFSU, Cellski also tutors 5<sup>th</sup> graders and works with at-risk students at Balboa high school in San Francisco.<sup>6</sup>

Tease was born in San Jose, California, in 1981. Her parents were born in the Philippines and immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1970s. Tease's mother first immigrated to the U.S. in 1977 to be followed by the husband two years later, a period which Tease describes as especially difficult for her mother. Tease now lives in San Francisco in order to be closer to SFSU where she is majoring in marketing. She has a younger brother who also attends SFSU and lives with her.<sup>7</sup>

In Tease's case, a fortuitous set of events enabled her family to achieve upward social mobility at a time when the family was barely eking out a living. Tease's father was a bank teller in the Philippines, a job he also held when he first arrived in the U.S. while her mother was a chemistry teacher in the Philippines and worked graveyard shifts at a chemistry lab in the U.S. Tease readily admits that the family's first few years in the U.S. were a struggle:

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<sup>5</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Tease interview with the author, 26 November 2002.

**Interviewer:** Owning and managing a store, is that something your parents always wanted to do?

**Tease:** We were struggling financially. I remember that. We were eating like corn beef everyday and I was just like “What is this?”...They were financially struggling and the (Filipino grocery) store has been in our family since 1981, and actually even prior to that. My uncle, who came here first, he came here first and then he passed it down to his younger brother who passed it down to us...I mean he loved the store don’t get me wrong but he fell in love with this great aunt of mine and it’s like “Oh, screw that. I want a family. Here you go. You can have the store.” It was really big for my parents then.<sup>8</sup>

According to Tease, her parents no longer have to worry about money after taking over the store. They now have the means to live comfortably and do whatever it is they want like investing in property and traveling all around the globe.

Onetyme was born in San Francisco, California, in 1982. Her parents were born in the Philippines and immigrated to the U.S. in their teens. They first settled in San Francisco and have been there since the late 1970s. Her father is a bellboy at Holiday Inn while her mother is an accountant. The only child in the family, Onetyme is a student at UC Berkeley where she majors in Ethnic Studies and teaches a class on the basics of DJing.<sup>9</sup>

Soup-a-Crunk was born in San Francisco, California in 1979. His parents were born in the Philippines. The family immigrated to the U.S. in 1978 and initially settled in San Francisco, California in order to be close to relatives—an uncle and an uncle and grandparents—before they moved to Oakland. His father is a tailor while his mother works for the air quality management district. Soup-a-Crunk is the youngest of six children and is the only one born in the U.S. One sister works at a law firm and another works with his mother at air quality management. Soup-a-Crunk also has three older brothers—one is a mechanic and machinist, another is a security guard, and the third

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<sup>8</sup> Tease interview with the author, 26 November 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Onetyme interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

works at Home Depot. He graduated from UC Berkeley and plans to pursue a career in film.<sup>10</sup>

### **Entry into DJ Culture**

For my respondents, growing up in a DJ mecca like the Bay Area meant spending their formative years around DJs who introduced them to DJing at an early age and encouraged them to become DJs. Cousins, friends, and neighbors already into DJing proved to have had a profound influence on their decision to become DJs.

**Statistix:** I was about 14 years old. It was that summer, a whole bunch of parties was going on. But then I was kind of young so I wasn't into clubs yet. What happened was that I started meeting some other people, people older than me that had interest in DJing. There was one friend that stands out in high school. He asked me if I was a DJ; I just told him I was interested in music and I was thinking about DJing as a hobby. That's when he took me to his house and that's where we started. And I saw his turntables and I had no idea what the best turntables look like. All I know was what a turntable looks like so that when I got to his house he told me to go ahead and mess with them. But I had no idea. I didn't even know how to turn it on. It's not just a light switch that you turn on. It's like a whole bunch of these other gadgets you gotta know how to operate.<sup>11</sup>

**Onetime:** It was like in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade when I first got my first set. I was still really young, like around 10, and my cousins used to do it in my garage, you know, house DJs. They've like the lights and all that flashing, and put up the sound system and I'll just be there. I finally asked my parents for some turntables.<sup>12</sup>

**Cellski:** The sound, the music. Just like when I was little and I used to see cousins mix and stuff, I mean the fact that they could get everyone dancing with the music. I couldn't articulate that but I knew that there was something cool about that when I was little. And also, when we go to garage parties, there would be b-boy battles, DJs were the people I watched. I don't know. It's just like music. I guess it was something I felt. And the scratching, the scratching especially is what really got me hooked...<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Soup-a-Crunk interview with the author, 18 January 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Onetime interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

Even before they had a full grasp of what it takes and what it means to be a DJ, my respondents got a taste of the power and influence of DJs in terms of controlling and taking command of the crowd and the potential of DJing in terms of creating new music. These experiences, in turn, became the basis for their involvement in DJ culture.

DJing is a craft and like any other, it comes with its own set of techniques, skills and procedures. Aspiring DJs, therefore, need to familiarize themselves with the tools of the trade—what turntables to use, which ones are more suited to mixing as oppose to battling, which are the best mixers, the most durable needles, and so forth. This usually involves having to go through some sort of apprenticeship with more established and more experienced DJs—typically older peers and relatives—who serve as mentors and teach my respondents not only the basics of DJing but also “tricks” or “secrets” of the trade. Statistix recalls the following information he learned from an older DJ:

He was just telling me that every time you have a gig, bring two girls. I said, “Why is that?” Because when you first play your song and it’s a good song, don’t waste it. Have those two dance to open up the dance floor. I was like “Oh, okay. Always bring two girls.” So he started sharing his secrets with me. I had nothing to share with him because I did not really have that much experience.<sup>14</sup>

The other DJs I interviewed recounted similar stories of more experienced individuals teaching them the nuances of DJing and what it takes to become a good DJ even before they got hold of their own equipment. Additionally, these experiences foreground the importance of social networks as a way to pass on musical knowledge and expertise.

Although my respondents got into DJing at a time when the mobile DJ scene was in decline, they point to it as an important influence in heir decision to pursue DJing. This is not a surprise given that many of their older peers and relatives were part of the mobile DJ scene. Statistix, for example, considers the well known mobile DJ crew, Style Beyond Compare (SBC), a big influence in his development as a DJ.

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<sup>14</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.



SBC is like my idol man. Those guys are too good. I remember when I first heard their cd, it's like "Damn, I wish I could do that. I wish I could be like them" cause I already got past saying to myself, "Oh, I wish I could be a DJ like them." But it's now "I wish I can do the things that they can do." I mean they're known. They are like known for the way they mix. And then they're doing gigs that's like \$2000 in one night. It just blows me away that they could make a cd like that. It sounds like they're on twenty turntables at the same time and I just wish I could do that too.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, Cellski recounts the influence of the mobile DJ scene on her development as a DJ:

**Interviewer:** Were you influenced by the DJ mobile scene as well?

**Cellski:** Oh yeah. When I was little, seeing them, my cousins who were in some of the crews, seeing it, that's when I realized DJs have power cause they're controlling the party. It influenced me in the sense that I saw that.<sup>16</sup>

The mobile DJ scene not only gave my respondents a sense of the power and possibilities of DJing but also a group of DJs to emulate in terms of their status, prestige, and skills.

In Rey-Jun's case, the influenced of the DJ mobile scene was more direct. He was a member of a DJ crew called Sounds Mystically Divine, a mobile DJ group which generally performed gigs at high school and house parties playing mostly hi-NRG music and hip hop. According to Rey-Jun, the aim of the crew was not necessarily to make money but to get their name out and earn some recognition among peers.

**Interviewer:** So at 7<sup>th</sup> grade you were already part of a DJ crew?

**Rey-Jun:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** What did you guys do?

**Rey-Jun:** We just did parties.

**Interviewer:** What was your crew name?

**Rey-Jun:** Sounds Mystically Divine.

**Interviewer:** Did you guys get to do high school parties as well?

**Rey-Jun:** Basically junior high, some house parties and stuff like that. We go to a lot of house parties. We did a couple of school dances for junior high.

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<sup>15</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

**Interviewer:** What kind of music did you guys play?

**Rey-Jun:** A lot of high energy, Miami bass and hip hop.

**Interviewer:** So at the time it was all about mobile DJs.

**Rey-Jun:** Yeah, like Imagine and all that. It was kind of cool because back then you were so young and you go to watch all those crews battle. It was something to look at. Those battles were mostly like quick mix battles.

**Interviewer:** Did you guys participate in the battles?

**Rey-Jun:** No, we didn't participate.

**Interviewer:** Why not? Were you guys intimidated?

**Rey-Jun:** No. I guess you can say the goal of the crew was to get to know people, to get your name on that flyer, to get some kind of name recognition for your crew.<sup>17</sup>

Rey-Jun not only started out as a mobile DJs in the late 1980s but he also attended Imagine-sponsored events which exposed him to the competitive aspect of DJing as well as what it took for a crew to make a name for itself.<sup>18</sup>

Invariably, my respondents all point to Q-Bert, a renowned Pinoy DJ who grew up in the Bay Area, as a galvanizing figure who transformed the way they look at DJing and foregrounded its creative possibilities. After watching and hearing Q-Bert perform, for example, Deeandroid and Cellski no longer viewed DJing in quite the same way.

**Deeandroid:** Like really really attracted me? It's that show in '97, *Planet Rock* with Shortcut, Q, and Mike. You know I was always exposed to hip hop because my older brother and sister were into it and we had our own dance group before. But I never really looked at DJing the way I did when I saw them that night. Like seeing them that night, seeing them perform, as a group, their energy, that was like, like it really spoke to me but you know I did not really know it then. I was just so amazed by it. But after that, you know that was the beginning of being addicted to it almost.<sup>19</sup>

**Cellski:**...I got my turntables at first to mix. But then I realized or thought it was boring. And then when you saw Q-Bert and them perform, I was like "Oh." From that moment on, that's when everything changed. I don't know, something about playing it. It feels good when you can scratch and stuff. I don't know. I understood it even though I did not really understand what scratches they were doing. And the patterns, I

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<sup>17</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 25 January 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 25 January, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Deeandroid interview with the author, 19 November 2002.

heard the patterns. I heard the rhythm and the rhythm is, I guess, what caught me. I just wanted to be able to play rhythms.<sup>20</sup>

That Q-Bert was Filipino also made a difference helping to further enhance his appeal among my respondents as evidenced by the following.

**Onetime:** Yeah, that's all I knew was Q-Bert. I just seen the movie *Scratch* and Babu said, he was like Filipinos don't have many role models—it's your parents and Q-Bert. And I was like yeah, that is basically true because there aren't many in the media, Filipino role models...Like I always watch his videos, the DMC Finals and all that.<sup>21</sup>

**Interviewer:** Did it make a difference that many of these DJs you're talking about are Filipinos in terms of your involvement?

**Cellski:** Yeah, like later, when I first learned about Q-Bert and them, I was just like "Wow, they're Filipino." Of course, that made me feel like "Oh, this is something I could do too." And plus growing up, there's a bunch of Filipino DJs. It's like something that was already practiced within the Filipino community.<sup>22</sup>

Given the persistent absence of Filipino role models, Q-Bert serves a source of inspiration among the DJs I interviewed not only because of the way he pushed the boundaries of DJing but also because of the visibility he brought to Filipino youth.

For as long as my respondents could remember, hip hop has always been a big part of their lives, an expressive form they can get into at an early age. In many instances, my respondents' involvement in DJing was preceded by their involvement in other elements of hip hop. For Rey-Jun, it was not specifically DJing that attracted him to hip hop but the whole culture itself.

**Interviewer:** Let's talk about hip hop in general. What attracted you to hip hop? What is it about hip hop that you find so appealing?

**Rey-Jun:** I think it's the whole culture, the whole aspect of it is basically what attracted me to hip hop cause when I was young I tried to break and stuff and that did not work. I don't know. I was amazed by all the graffiti and just the music behind it. Yeah, I guess it's basically the whole culture

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<sup>20</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Onetime interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

of the whole thing—hanging out with your friends, trying to decipher songs, lyrics.<sup>23</sup>

In the foregoing, Rey-Jun references hip hop as an integrated set of activities that is not simply interchangeable with rapping.

In Deeandroid's case, she started out as a b-girl in a dance crew thanks, in large part, to her siblings who exposed her to hip hop at an early age. She mentioned that at the time, there was a lot of b-boy crews and nothing else to do in Vallejo. Dancing appealed to her not only because it was something many of her peers were into but also because it was an accessible cultural practice.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Soup-a-Crunk started out as an MC and as a b-boy before he got into DJing. In high school, he used to write rhymes and perform for different high schools as well as break under the name of G-Force. For Soup-a-Crunk, hip hop was not something he consciously set out to participate in but just something he did with many of his peers.<sup>25</sup>

In some cases, my respondents gravitated towards DJing in part because they were not very good at the other elements of hip hop as evidenced by the following.

**Interviewer:** Could you talk about your involvement in DJing?

**Rey-Jun:** I was always into music even when I was young. I got into DJing probably when I was like in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I was part of a DJ crew...I always loved music and I could not break. I tried breaking but I could not break for shit. So yeah, my friends decided they wanted to start up a DJ crew and that's how I got into it.<sup>26</sup>

In Statistix's case, he was involved in both b-boying and writing before he became a DJ. He tried breaking but quickly realized that he was not very good at it.

Well everything that you just mentioned right now, the only thing I did not do was rapping. Breakdancing, I've to give props to one of my other friends, BJ. He was from Mission High. This dude, he'll come to my house weekends and teach me how to break. We'll make videos and stuff. He would come to my house weekends and we'll just start breakdancing

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<sup>23</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Deeandroid interview with the author, 19 November 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Soup-a-Crunk interview with the author, 18 January 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 25 January 2002.

and put a video camera on, put a strobe light on. But it was not the thing for me because I started doing those “crabs” and those “head spins” and I was not good at all. After a while, trying so much, my wrists started hurting, I knew it wasn’t for me.<sup>27</sup>

And although Statistix does not consider himself a graffiti artist, he knows how to do pieces. It is something he has done and continues to do ever since elementary school mainly on regular white paper.

Ultimately, however, my respondents gravitated towards DJing drawn to the music, power, and energy of DJ culture as well as the creative possibilities it affords. For instance, a number of them point to a “feeling,” “vibe,” or “rush” unique to DJ culture that comes from eliciting a strong, positive response from the crowd. This involves the build-up and subsequent release of tension through the careful selection of records, what one author has described as “peaks” within the context of underground dance music.<sup>28</sup>

**Onetime:** It’s like I got a gig, I’m rocking the party and it’s like the crowd is just feeling your vibe and they’re singing every lyric to the song you’re playing. And they’re like responding to you, not even having an MC. They’re screaming when the first break comes on and they’re like “Yeah.” It’s like that feeling is the best feeling in the world. I could never get it anywhere else...<sup>29</sup>

**Tease:** The biggest rush that you could get as a DJ, or the biggest satisfaction is like, looking at the crowd having fun, me spinning at a club, when you get a crowd response from a record, it’s like the best thing. It’s like “Wow, I’m making these people happy. Who am I? I’m just a little nobody.” But honestly, in reality, you being a DJ, regardless of male or female, it’s your job to make them happy. You don’t play what you want to hear. I mean it’s cool and it’s your own taste in fashion but being a DJ, your job is to play what they want to hear.<sup>30</sup>

But being a good DJ is not just about playing what the crowd wants but also knowing what to play at just the right moment. Rygar explains:

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<sup>27</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Kai Fikentscher, *“You Better Work?”: Underground Dance Music in New York City* (Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Onetime interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Tease interview with the author, 26 November 2002.

The crowd, what they know is the transitions that a DJ makes. Like if they're clean, like you basically want to make the transition smooth so that the crowd won't be like "Oh, what just happened" you know. So that and playing what the crowd wants, playing the song after another, you know not playing all hype songs at the same time but keeping a good balance so you could eventually peak at the end of the party it will be so high that it will end and (the crowd) be like "Damn, that was fun" you know.<sup>31</sup>

For my respondents, then, much of the appeal of DJing stems from being in a position to move the crowd and generate a feeling or vibe they do not get elsewhere.

In Rey-Jun's case, he got into DJing in the late 1980s, a time when the mobile DJ scene was in decline but also when turntablism was just beginning to emerge. This transition is significant because it changed Rey-Jun's perception of what it means to be a DJ.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned how an emphasis on the skills got you into DJing even more. Can you talk more about that?

**Rey-Jun:** Because it's a new concept. It wasn't just mixing records anymore. You were actually trying to make sounds, you know, playing with records. It was like playing an instrument, you can say.

**Interviewer:** How did that change your perception of yourself as a DJ?

**Rey-Jun:** Cause it wasn't about the girls or any of that shit, you know what I mean? It wasn't about that. It was about being creative and being original and trying to figure out what you can do on your own. It's like trying to be innovative.<sup>32</sup>

For Rey-Jun, DJing was no longer simply a matter of mixing records or even scratching but playing the turntable as a musical instrument in order to produce original and compelling music.

In addition to their entry into DJing, I asked my respondents how they got their DJ names as well as the significance of their names. In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose asserts that within the context of African and Afrodiasporic cultural forms in general and hip hop in particular, "self-naming is a form of reinvention and self-definition." She goes on to state that "Rappers, DJs, graffiti artists, and breakdancers all take on hip hop names and

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<sup>31</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 25 January, 2002.

identities that speak to their role, personal characteristics, expertise, or ‘claim to fame.’” In the case of hip hop DJs, they typically take up names that signify master of technology and style: DJ Cut Creator, Jazzy Jeff, Grandmaster Flash. Given the lack of access of Afro-diasporic youth to conventional means of status formation, these new names and identities provide an alternative and appealing source of status and prestige.<sup>33</sup>

Typically, the DJ names of my respondents are culled from popular culture such as video games and films but they are also a variation of their own given names. In many instances, a friend or relative came up with these names. Rygar, for example, got his DJ name from a Nintendo game by the same name but it is also a combination of the first syllable of his first name (Ryan) and his last name (Garcia). It was a name given to him by a cousin. In Rygar’s view, the fact that his DJ name is based on a popular video game would make it easier for people to remember his name. For Rey-Jun, DJ names are simply nicknames and he does not place much thought and significance in them. He has had several DJ names and in each case, it was a friend who came up with the name.<sup>34</sup> For my respondents, then, the names they take up are a form of self-definition and self-representation. Similar to the Filipino mobile DJs who came before them, their involvement in DJing allows them to create new identities through the adoption of DJ names and crew affiliations. These names do not necessarily signify mastery of technology but more the individuality and unique styles of my respondents.

As a number of my respondents point out, DJing is an expensive activity to get into particularly as compared to what it takes to get into the other elements of hip hop. First and foremost, DJing requires money to buy equipment but also records. Statistix, for example, remembers being shocked when he first found out how much a turntable costs.

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<sup>33</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 36.

<sup>34</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

**Statistix:** I remember when I asked him, I went into a store I said how much is your intermediate turntable and he said it was about \$200. I was just blown away. I've never seen \$200 at 14 years old. But I started all that milk money for lunch and that's when school started when I eventually bought my very first turntable.<sup>35</sup>

Because of the prohibitive costs of these machines, many of my respondents tried to come up with the money themselves instead of relying on their parents. Typically, they could only afford to purchase one equipment at a time rather than the full complement of DJ equipment—a turntable instead of two—or purchase substandard equipment—a Gemini turntable instead of a Technics turntable which is considered the standard of the field.

The prohibitive costs of DJ equipment, however, did not discourage my respondents from pursuing DJing including those who self-identify as coming from working class backgrounds. Cellski, for example, took a summer job at McDonald's in order to save enough money to buy turntables but also borrowed money from her sister.

**Interviewer:** So you were able to save up enough money from just working at McDonald's?

**Cellski:** Yeah, cause the first set was like, altogether, was probably like \$400. I worked every weekend when I was in high school and so I would just save \$100 checks for about two months. I actually had my sister put it on her credit card and then I had to pay her. But she waited until I gave her \$200 first.

**Interviewer:** And you were able to buy all the equipment you needed?

**Cellski:** Yeah. Before that, I was using my parents' record player, their Sony record player and the tape deck.<sup>36</sup>

The prohibitive costs of DJing also did not stop my respondents from getting into DJing even before they got hold of their own equipment or learned how to operate turntables. Like the Filipino mobile DJs before them, they creatively made use of the available

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<sup>35</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.



technology or someone else's equipment. A number of my respondents, for instance, messed around with their parents' record player at home or their friend's turntable.

DJing is not only an expensive activity to get into but also a time consuming and demanding activity. To become a good DJ means putting in a great deal of hard work to master the fundamentals and nuances of DJing.

**Statistix:**...The only thing about DJing, you just have to have the skills. You just have to know. You can't just wake up in the morning and do it. It takes a lot of practice.<sup>37</sup>

**Rygar:**...Some people don't understand how hard DJing is you know. People who say "Oh mixing, that's easy" but it's actually pretty hard. You gotta put a lot of time into it, a lot of patience.<sup>38</sup>

The DJs I interviewed typically spent countless hours honing their skills often in isolation in one's home or bedroom especially the case in preparation for gigs.

**Interviewer:** Can you talk a little bit about how much time you spend practicing, like before a gig?

**Onetyne:** Once I find out I'm having a gig, I try to practice everyday for at least two hours just to listen to my records, know where all my breaks are like the intros and how a break is or an intro is just so like I'm ready. Like if I don't have a set or lineup, I listen to all the records. I focus on the audience, what kind of crowd is gonna be there and I pick out the records when I know what they like and the records that they like before that. It's like basically research and just learning from old gigs—like what kind of crowd it is and what kind of music do they like. I just pick out and listen to the intro and breaks. And like, not mixing them but just listening to them to know what record fits well with each other.<sup>39</sup>

As evidenced by the foregoing, DJing is a time consuming activity which not only involves a lot of practice but also, as Onetyne puts it, "research" in terms of knowing their audience and what records to play.

Although my respondents do not earn enough from DJing alone to be self-sufficient, it does serve as a valuable source of income, a means to supplement income

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<sup>37</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Onetyne interview with the author, 14 November 2002.

from their other jobs but also an appealing alternative to the kind of work generally available to college age students. Rygar, for example, earns as much as \$800 from one night of DJing which he considers pretty good money but also a much more attractive source of income than your typical 9 to 5 job.<sup>40</sup> In Statistix's case, he gravitated towards DJing in part because of the potential to make money, earning more from four hours of DJing than a month's work at his other job. He started out earning \$200 per gig but he now earns as much as \$750 for a night's work.<sup>41</sup>

Beyond the financial rewards that it offers, DJing also provides my respondents with something meaningful to do, an appealing option out of a limited set of alternatives. To illustrate, Cellski points out that growing up in a working class family meant growing up in an environment in which her parents were not home a lot but also growing up in an environment in which there were only a few outlets for recreational activities.

**Cellski:**...growing in a working class family, my parents were not home a lot. No one was there. You kind of have to figure out what are you going to do as a kid. You're on your own...After the b-boy scene died, there was a lot of people getting into gangs. Some of my friends got pregnant and I was thinking, "Okay, I don't fit into any of this."...And then there's another group of Filipinos "Oh hey, we're still going to do hip hop." And I think that community, that thing kept going that it would put people into it who did not fit into the other crowds, the people who were not gang banging or the people who were not drinking or smoking weed or whatever. People were doing hip hop still. And then that was something that we did because we did not have parents to take us to ballets you know. You need some kind of simulation when you're younger.<sup>42</sup>

Without parental supervision, the onus was on Cellski to figure out for herself what to do. While many of her peers became involved in gangs and some of her friends became pregnant, Cellski gravitated towards hip hop. For a group of Filipino youth, then, DJing served as an alternative to gangs, the dominant social grouping of the time.

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<sup>40</sup> Rygar interview with the author, 03 February 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

With regards to how DJing figures in their career plans, some look to DJing as a hobby or a transitional activity and plan to pursue a career unrelated to music. Tease, for instance, majors in marketing although she admits that she is not very good at it. However, she hopes to use this degree to work in sales in the radio broadcast industry.<sup>43</sup> In Statistix's case, he considers DJing a significant part of his life yet he does not envision himself dedicating his life to it. Instead, he plans to become an electrical engineer and looks to DJing more as a vehicle to help him develop social and technical skills he can utilize in other aspects of his life. In the meantime, however, he hopes to get into the club scene when he turns twenty one before pursuing other interests after he finishes college or when he gets married.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, others look at DJing more as a way of life and plan to pursue a career in music or a field related to music notwithstanding their college education in fields not related to music. In many ways, this group of respondents is taking advantage of the fact that they got into DJing at a time when career opportunities for DJ have expanded, a time when DJs are no longer limited to spinning at parties or clubs as a means of making a living. Instead, they can now make a living producing on their own or collaborating with other DJs and MCs. There are also many more avenues for DJs to circulate their music on both a national and international basis.

Cellski, for example, had planned to pursue a graduate degree in Ethnic Studies and to become a college professor when she started college at UCSD. Once she got into DJing, however, she realized that her passion was not school but music.

**Interviewer:** So you know how some people think, "When I start my career," whatever that is, "I'm going to stop DJing." For you, that's clearly not the case.

**Onetyme:** I'm going to stop going to school, I was gonna go to grad school right after, like this is my last year and I was going to go to grad

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<sup>43</sup> Tease interview with the author, 26 November 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Statistix interview with the author, 22 October 2002.

school. But then I was like “You know, I need to do this.” There’s a niche and it’s something I’m passionate about. I’m more passionate about it than school. And before, I was like “Oh, ethnic Studies.” I was really hardcore into learning so much. But then I started to realize I’m not happy. I started feeling more positive when I started doing music more. It’s spiritual too. It gives me energy.<sup>45</sup>

Through DJing, Cellski has been able to travel and forge social networks on a global scale. She hopes to keep doing music with her DJ partner and collaborator, Deeandroid, and to eventually open their own record store. In addition to DJing, however, Cellski hopes to work in the community, possibly non-profit. She has already performed at benefits and for non-profit organizations like League of Filipino Students (LFS).<sup>46</sup>

Deeandroid’s mother is a nurse and her father is an aircraft mechanic. Likewise, her brother is an aircraft mechanic while her sister attends nursing school. She mentioned that her parents want her to pursue what they consider a stable career like accounting but Deeandroid has set out to pursue a career in music. For her, what matters more is pursuing something she feels passionate about even if it means not making a lot of money. Deeandroid considers herself good at business but she does not plan to pursue it as a career. Instead, she looks at her college education as a secondary option just in case her pursuit of DJing as a career does not pan out.<sup>47</sup>

Rey-Jun’s parents want him, along with his older sister, to eventually take over the family business comprised of four convalescent homes. He feels obligated to do so because, as he puts it, “They built up that business for us, you know, and it’s there and they want us to continue it.” At this point in his life, however, Rey-Jun considers music more of a priority and a more attractive career option. He did take administrative classes in college but for the most part, he found these classes uninteresting. Instead, he hopes to put out music for people to listen and appreciate. For Rey-Jun, being a DJ is a more

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<sup>45</sup> Cellski interview with the author, 06 November 2002.

<sup>46</sup> This is something I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5 when I discuss the ways Pinay DJs like Cellski reconfigure what it means to be Pinay through their involvement in DJing.

<sup>47</sup> Deeandroid interview with the author, 19 November 2002.

appealing alternative because it allows him to be creative and express himself through the production of music while taking care of homes is much more mundane and straightforward. Although he does not see it as a potential source of conflict, Rey-Jun has yet to let his parents know how serious he is about pursuing music as a career. He anticipates his parents not having a problem with it as long as he manages enough money to survive.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rey-Jun interview with the author, 28 March 2002.

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