

83. Ramírez Tobón, *Urabá*, 43.
84. Botero Herrera and Sierra Botero, *El Mercado de fuerza de trabajo*, 108.
85. Comisión Andina de Juristas/Seccional Colombia, *Informes regionales de derechos humanos*, 159.
86. See Aviva Chomsky, "What's Old, What's New? Globalization, Violence, and Identities in Colombia's Banana Zone," paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association/Labor Studies preconference Las Vegas, October 2004; Aviva Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories: The United States and Colombia in the Long Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming), chap. 5.

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Hip-Hop and Black Public Spheres in Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil

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A study of transnational black culture would be incomplete without an examination of the emergence and proliferation of hip-hop. Born in the urban centers of North America, the language and aesthetics of hip-hop have not only transformed contemporary popular music but have influenced styles and politics around the globe. This chapter explores the emergence and significance of hip-hop in Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela as a medium of self-expression and as a vehicle for black political protest. Latin American artists often make explicit references to hip-hop's North American roots. Nonetheless, the authors argue that artists in Latin America continue to represent marginalized and disenfranchised black communities in ways that are specifically tailored to Latin American realities.

The rising popularity of hip-hop culture in countries across Latin America and the Caribbean coincides with the politicization of ethnic and racial cleavages, as marginalized groups forge new social identities and demand their political rights.¹ Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil are three Latin American countries where hip-hop has been particularly important. As new forms of inequality and hierarchy develop in Cuba as a result of the growth of tourism and gradual integration into a market economy, black Cuban youth appeal to the promises of racial egalitarianism and employment enshrined in socialist ideology. Social movements in Venezuela that began to gain momentum after the street riots of the late 1980s have reached fruition in the current moment, as the impoverished and marginalized majority demands their share in the wealth of the nation. And in Brazil, the commu-

nities of black activists that began to organize during the unraveling of the military dictatorship in the late 1970s have continued to wage a public struggle against the racist structures of a society in which inequality has intensified during twenty years of democratic governance.

In these three countries, rap music has become an important vehicle for the expression of political demands, the construction of new social identities, and the creation of alternative modes of leisure, survival, and transformation. Hip-hop emerged from the experiences of urban black communities in the United States, and in diverse contexts it has retained its role of documenting struggle and survival at the margins. Urban culture sometimes gives rise to new forms of social identification, often based in figures from the past, social stereotypes, or symbols that are reclaimed by black and marginalized youth. Contemporary contestation is framed in terms of historical struggles for independence and is defined against constraining social norms. The partial snapshots that we provide here of hip-hop culture in three Latin American countries should serve to highlight the positive role that cultural production can play when creative and conscious people use music as part of an effort to reimagine and restructure the very political fabric of everyday life.

In this chapter we explore the resonances and parallel development of hip-hop as a musical form in Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela, but we also address the distinct ways in which rap music takes shape in these various contexts. We invoke the concept of "black public spheres" to call attention to the substantial transnational and diasporic connections that link black communities throughout the diaspora. Hip-hop culture is just one mode of articulation that dispersed members of these communities can use to engender such links. At the same time, by consciously talking about "spheres" (and not a single "sphere") we want to suggest that there are substantial differences in the way that black culture is used and produced in particular locations. Sentiments of pan-African belonging are not enough to do away with the crucial lineaments of national, ethnic, and linguistic difference. Showing how hip-hop culture simultaneously forms the basis for transnational *and* local conceptions of raciality is one of our principal goals here.

The idea of the public sphere is also appropriate as we highlight hip-hop's function as a vehicle for civic dialogue. When hip-hop culture emerged in the Bronx in the 1970s it existed as a form of public utterance, as a way of reconstituting space and reconfiguring history, a creative methodology for subverting regimes of dominance and marginalization.² Communities of diasporic black youth, children of migrants from the southern part of the United States, and immigrants from Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and other parts of the Caribbean used aerosol technology to turn subway cars into canvases that traveled the breadth of New York City; they gave new

meanings to old albums by alchemically transforming the turntable from a playback device into an instrument out of which they coaxed innovative musical languages and sounds; they used microphones to baptize themselves with names that spoke of individual and collective social identities that had never before existed; they devised kinesthetic moves that defied the scripted logics of human anatomy. And to do all these things they drew on the corporeal, sonic, and philosophical foundations of African diasporic culture, using strategies that circulated globally to reenvision the very structure of their own local environment. Remarkably, this all happened as the postindustrial Bronx, ravaged by racist social policies that caused the flight of jobs, capital, and people from the inner city, was quite literally burning. In "the most destitute corner of Babylon" a culture of creativity and optimism emerged out of the intercorporeal collective gestures of African-diasporic youth.³

When hip-hop went global in the early 1980s, a particular strain of the culture retained this critical conception that held public life to be fundamentally transformable. In some of its guises, hip-hop culture in Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil has been used by young people as a portal for entering into the very deliberations over identity and power that constitute the public sphere. Hip-hop culture, in its most liberatory manifestations, is used by marginalized and conscious youth as both a mode of analysis and a program for action. Given the new and highly specific kinds of racial and ethnic cleavages that characterize the Cuban, Venezuelan, and Brazilian public spheres, hip-hop is an important tool that has been used to create rejoinders to the forces that would have communities of color remain on the political margins.

LOCAL RACIAL POLITICS IN CUBA, VENEZUELA, AND BRAZIL

Members of hip-hop communities often use critical analyses of local experience as scaffolding for creative and political action. In fact, one might say that at the aesthetic center of hip-hop creativity is a view that the transmission of ideas and material culture is fundamentally linked to rather radical processes of translation and recontextualization. Hip-hop artists value what is often referred to as *signifyin'*, the out-in-the-open manipulation of cultural codes and artifacts according to local needs and sentiments. As Livone Sansone has suggested, "Global black symbols are selectively reinterpreted within national contexts—each informed by class, age, gender, and local circumstances—and what can't be combined with one's own situation is discarded. . . . The meaning of black objects is not universal and is often contested."⁴ While there is a transnational history that links all African

diasporic communities—what Sidney Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley have called the “critical matrix of forced labor, European hegemony and racial capitalism”⁵—the black public spheres of Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil are marked by rather divergent social histories. The particular (and shifting) ways that racial politics play out in these three countries has an enormous effect on how hip-hop is produced, disseminated, and consumed in each location.

Hip-hop culture in Cuba is shaped by a highly specific set of social and economic conditions, including the demographic restructuring of the urban metropolis and increasing racial inequalities in the so-called special period of economic hardships. Hip-hop culture grew rapidly in housing projects such as Alamar and other areas of high-density housing, occupied by mainly black working-class communities such as Old Havana, Central Havana, Santos Suárez, and Playa. Rapping became especially popular in the context of Cuba, while DJing and graffiti writing have been more difficult due to the lack of turntables, records, spray cans, and other resources. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, black and poorer communities in Cuba were relatively protected from neoliberal processes of economic restructuring. However, the crisis of the special period forced the Cuban government to adopt policies of austerity in order to increase the competitiveness of the Cuban economy in the global economy. Although policies of austerity and restructuring have affected Cuban society as a whole, Alejandro de la Fuente argues that there have also been various racially differentiated effects. The legalization of dollars has divided Cuban society according to those who have access to dollars and those who do not.⁶ Family remittances are the most important source of hard currency for most Cubans, and since the majority of Cubans in the diaspora tend to be white, it is white Cuban families who benefit most from remittances.⁷ Racial prejudice has become increasingly visible and acceptable in the special period.

In a period of increasing racial tensions and racial inequalities, Afro-Cubans find themselves deprived of a political voice. Drawing on discourses of racial democracy, the Cuban revolutionary leadership attempted to eliminate racism by creating a color-blind society in which equality between blacks and whites would render the need for racial identifications obsolete. While desegregating schools, parks, and recreational facilities, and offering housing, education, and health care to the black population, the revolutionary leadership simultaneously closed down Afro-Cuban clubs and the black press.⁸ De la Fuente sees the possibility for racially based mobilization emerging from the contradictions of the current special period: “The revival of racism and racially discriminatory practices under the special period has led to growing resentment and resistance in the black population, which suddenly finds itself in a hostile environment without the political and organization tools needed to fight against it.”⁹ Afro-Cuban

religious forms such as Santería have begun to gain popular support in this period, but rap music has taken on a more politically assertive and radical stance as the voice of black Cuban youth. Although some older black Cubans cannot relate to the militant assertion of black identity in Cuban rap, it is becoming increasingly relevant to Cuba’s youth, who did not live through the early period of revolutionary triumph and are hardest hit by the failure of the institutions established under the revolution to provide racial equality in the special period.

North American rap music is the original source of Cuban rap music, and from the early days Cuban rappers have maintained close ties with rappers in the United States. While the early waves of hip-hop music that came to Cuba were more commercial, by the time of the first rap festival in 1995, Cubans were hearing African American “conscious” rap music. Like the African American activists who visited Cuba during the 1960s and 1970s from Stokely Carmichael to Angela Davis and Assata Shakur, who is currently in exile in Cuba, African American rappers such as Paris, Common Sense, Mos Def, and Talib Kweli spoke a language of black militancy that was appealing to Cuban youth. In an interview, rapper Sekuo Umoja from Anónimo Consejo said that “We had the same vision as rappers such as Paris, who was one of the first to come to Cuba. His music drew my attention, because here is something from the barrio, something black. Of blacks, and made principally by blacks, which in a short time became something very much our own, related to our lives here in Cuba.”

Venezuelan rap has also emerged from a distinct set of conditions brought about by a growing process of urban segregation, a deterioration in the urban services, and a crisis of the state. As the impending collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 precipitated a major crisis in the Cuban socialist system, so too, the introduction of neoliberal market measures in Venezuela led to spontaneous protests, rioting, and looting around the country on February 27, 1989, followed by a massive crackdown by police and the military. As in Cuba, the gradual insertion of Venezuela into a neoliberal global order required new forms of efficiency and competition that put pressure on the state-based developmental model pursued by previous governments. The shift of resources away from infrastructure, health care, education, and other social services led to a sustained increase in social inequality during this period.¹⁰ These changes were also racialized, with those at the bottom of the social scale—mostly the black, indigenous, and mixed race Venezuelans, who form the majority of the population—hit hardest by the changes. The social disjunctions, atomization, and crisis in governance that began in 1989 led to a spiraling in violence, crime, and urban tension. Ana María Sanjuán comments that in 1999, the homicide rate in Venezuela had risen 20 percent from the previous year.¹¹ This number was greater in Caracas, where the number of homicides sometimes

reached the one hundred mark on weekends.¹² In this context of general disorder and crisis of authority, alternative systems of justice such as street gangs and urban mafias grow in importance, contributing to a growing cycle of violence.¹³

The period of the early 1990s also saw the growth of local popular movements in the barrios, shantytowns that ring the hillsides of Caracas. These nonpartisan movements reached a peak in 1998 when the Polo Patriótico, an alliance led by Hugo Chávez Frías, won the general elections and came into power on a platform promising to fight corruption, break away from the U.S.-supported neoliberal agenda, and rewrite the constitution.¹⁴ The political mobilization fostered by Chávez has led to a deepening societal divide, as the lower classes increasingly identify along race and class lines. Juan Carlos Echeandía, a Venezuelan rap producer, said in an interview that the emergence of rap music in Venezuela coincided with the increasing importance of the popular masses in the political process of the country: "In some ways, the popular masses begin to have voice and vote . . . they begin to have much more importance in politics and society. And this is also what happens via the discs." The appearance of a racially and politically conscious discourse in Venezuelan rap has been partly related to a more general emergence of a marginalized minority demanding its social and political rights.¹⁵

Yet the forms of consciousness that are reflected and created through Venezuelan rap are less of the militant black nationalist variety predominant in Cuban rap music and more related to the continuing urban reality of crime, extreme poverty, and death by gang violence. Echeandía has a label called Venezuela Subterránea (Venezuela Underground), and two of the main groups signed to the label are Guerrilla Seca and Vagos y Maleantes. In interviews, rappers Colombia and Requesón, members of Guerrilla Seca, talk about their musical inspiration as coming from African American gangsta rappers such as Tupac. Although Colombia and Requesón do not understand the English lyrics, they say that it is the dark and ominous tones of American gangsta rap that speak to their experiences of a kind of gang life that breeds nihilism, vacancy, and despair among youth in the barrios. In Venezuela, rap music has also given voice to a new kind of racial consciousness among black youth. For instance, Requesón argues for the superiority of the black race: "We are a great race, I think we are a superior race." In a shift from popular historical views of race that denied the existence of racial divisions in Venezuela and placed more importance on national rather than racial identity,¹⁶ rappers have begun to reclaim black identity.¹⁷

Despite the language of a racial democracy that has dominated political rhetoric in Venezuela, rappers point to the underlying racism that exists in Venezuelan society and is now the basis for the politicization of racial and class cleavages. However, unlike in Cuban rap, these reflections on race do

not become demands for racial equality, as people of color in Venezuela still do not have the tendency to see themselves as distinct groups, less still political groupings. These differences are related to distinct histories, particularly the absence of race-based organizing in postcolonial Venezuela. While in Cuba, there were several experiments in racial mobilization, such as the Partido Independiente de Color (see chapter 6), formed in 1908, there have been no corresponding organizations in Venezuela. Race in Venezuela exists less as a category for political mobilization and more as what Raymond Williams refers to as a "structure of feeling."¹⁸ As Echeandía said, "It exists as a reality . . . but it is not openly described as such." Being black or of mixed-race in Venezuela is not generally seen in terms of a political identity; rather it is associated with the lived experience of poverty, violence, and marginality.

Hip-hop culture arrived in Brazil in the early 1980s just as the military regime that had seized power in a 1964 coup began to loosen its brutal hold on Brazilian society. It was during the *abertura* (opening) that marked the transition away from the military dictatorship that Brazilians of African descent, using critical notions of African heritage and black solidarity, created vivid rejoinders to *branqueamento*, or whitening, and racial democracy, the twin ideological pillars of the vast de-Africanization project undertaken by the white elite during the century that followed the formal emancipation of African slaves in 1888. Responding to persistent, heavily racialized inequalities—differential access to basic rights and services, residential segregation, lopsided incarceration rates—black activist groups such as the Movimento Negro Unificado (formed in 1978) began to create what Michael Dawson has referred to as a "black counterpublic," one that promoted an alternative civic dialogue on racial issues.¹⁹ While there had been precedents for race-based organizing and resistance prior to the *abertura* period, Edward Telles has argued that it wasn't until the 1990s that Brazil made a tentative first step away from the debilitating, coded racism of the racial democracy paradigm toward a social system that implemented affirmative action programs as curatives for racial inequalities. "The black movement," according to Telles, "made racial democracy a hopelessly inappropriate concept."²⁰

In many ways, it has been music that has provided a particularly powerful voice for this new articulation of a black public sphere. Using sounds both as a register of black marginalization and as a catalyst to promote social change, black Brazilians have blurred the lines between activism and creative work. Beginning in the mid-1970s in the city of Salvador, *blocos afros* (black carnival organizations) such as Ilê Aiyê and Olodum created socially conscious songs that invoked a pan-African sensibility drawn from knowledge of the anticolonial struggles taking place in Lusophone Africa and the philosophy and sounds of reggae music from Jamaica and black

soul music from the United States. Both of these *blocos* also devoted serious energy to community projects—they founded schools, started newspapers, and labored to give aggrieved black youth a political voice. The use of black music imported from other locations in the diaspora was also a defining characteristic of the funk movement that emerged in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1970s and had an enormous impact on urban black populations all over Brazil. George Yúdice has called Brazilian funk a challenge to “the symbolic production of a ‘cordial’ Brazil”²¹ and, in some cases, funk performers introduced “didactic” political material into their shows in Rio’s clubs.²² The diasporic, antihegemonic political edge of Brazilian hip-hop has crucial precedents in the funk movement of Rio and the *blocos afros* of Salvador.

Brazilian hip-hop developed principally in the favelas of São Paulo, and over its almost twenty-five-year history it has become an important cultural form in many urban areas of Brazil. As in the United States, hip-hop in Brazil is marked by an enormous diversity of styles and political perspectives; not all hip-hop in Brazil is socially engaged, and some of it is plagued by the same crass materialism, misogyny, and stale beats that characterize some mainstream U.S. hip-hop. Members of the hip-hop community in Brazil have, however, consistently placed a strong emphasis on grassroots social activism; in fact, one might say that a principal characteristic of Brazilian hip-hop has been its concern with progressive politics. By the late 1980s in São Paulo, hip-hop manifested itself as a significant channel through which black Brazilians could exert pressure on the dominant public sphere for full citizenship and equal rights. In 1990, only two years after *Hip-hop cultura de rua* and *Consciência black*, the two most important early compilations of rap music, were released, members of the hip-hop community in São Paulo formed the Movimento Hip Hop Organizado, a coalition of local “posses” that mobilized on a neighborhood basis, giving lectures and workshops for schools and nongovernmental organizations and connecting themselves with political parties and the local black movement.²³ This type of articulation between cultural production and political mobilization is extremely common in Brazilian hip-hop.

Hip-hop groups in major Brazilian cities have used rather stark verbal and sonic imagery to reflect the escalating conditions of violence and denigration that black youth face on a daily basis. Between 1988 and 2002, for example, almost 4,000 people under eighteen were killed by firearms in Rio de Janeiro, a number that is higher than in many areas engaged in war (for example, fewer than five hundred children were killed in the fighting between Palestinians and Israelis during the same fourteen-year period).²⁴ In 1988, at the beginning of the real ascendancy of hip-hop in Brazil, 66 percent of blacks in Brazil lived in conditions of “miserable poverty,” while only 14.7 percent of white Brazilians lived in the same conditions. Blacks

have higher rates of unemployment and illiteracy; lower rates of school enrollment (at all education levels); lower life expectancy; less access to potable water and sewage systems, garbage collection, and electricity; and lower rates of ownership of television sets and refrigerators. The list could go on.²⁵ In these circumstances, album and song titles such as *Holocausto urbano* (Urban Holocaust), *Direto do campo de extermínio* (Direct from the Extermination Camp), “Bem vindos ao inferno” (Welcome to Hell) and “Saída de emergência” (Emergency Exit) represent all-too-real evocations of how life is actually lived in contemporary urban Brazil.

HIP-HOP IN CUBA

Afro-Cuban youth have used rap music as a means of contesting racial hierarchies and demanding social justice. Paul Gilroy sees the transference of black cultural forms such as hip-hop as related partly to its “inescapably political language of citizenship, racial justice, and equality,” a discourse that speaks to the realities and aspirations of black youth globally.²⁶ Through their texts, performances, and styles, Cuban rappers demand the inclusion of young Afro-Cubans into the polity and they appeal to the state to live up to its promises of egalitarianism. Cuban rappers, particularly those who identify as “underground,” point out the race blindness of official discourse and the invisibility of the experiences and problems of marginalized communities in a society that has supposedly “solved” questions of race. Given the lack of forums for young Afro-Cubans to voice their concerns, rap music provides an avenue for contestation and negotiation within Cuban society.

Rappers are critical of the silencing of questions of race in Cuban society. In their song “Lágrimas negras” (Black Tears), the group Hermanos de Causa challenges the claims that in Cuban revolutionary society, racism has been eradicated. “Lágrimas negras” is a famous Cuban song, which was created by the Matamoros Trio in the 1920s and has been performed by many other groups since. Hermanos de Causa sample the song, introducing particular racial implications not present in the original song. They say, as long as racist attitudes exist, racism still exists: “Don’t say that there’s no racism, where there’s a racist.” The song brings the reality of lived experience to bear on the rhetoric of racial egalitarianism:

*No me digas que no hay
Porque yo sí lo he visto
No me digas que no existe
Porque lo he vivido*

Don’t tell me that there’s no racism
Because I’ve seen it
Don’t tell me that it doesn’t exist
Because I’ve lived it

The rappers point to the exclusion of blacks from the tourist industry, Cuba's fastest growing source of hard currency, as well as their ongoing absence from television programming and cinema. When blacks do appear, it is in "secondary roles of last resort" or the "classic role of slave: faithful, submissive or the typical thief without morals." *Hermanos de Causa* expose the absence and stereotypes of Afro-Cubans in the media, which is particularly ironic in a society that has claimed to have seen the end of racism.

The group *Anónimo Consejo* draws links between a history of exploitation and a present of racial inequality. According to Gilroy, one of the core themes of African diasporic musical forms is history, a concern that "demands that the experience of slavery is also recovered and rendered vivid and immediate."²⁷ Slavery becomes a metaphor for contemporary injustice and exploitation. In "A Veces" (At Times), *Anónimo Consejo* connects the history of Cuban slaves with the situation of contemporary Afro-Cubans. The rapper begins with his geographical location, identifying himself as "a Cuban from the East," which is considered less cultured than Havana. He is lying in his "poor bed" thinking about slavery and the struggle of black people in his country, when the similarities of the present situation occur to him:

*Hoy parece que no es así,
El oficial me dice a mí,
"No puede estar allá,
Mucho menos salir de aquí,"
En cambio al turista se la trata
diferente,
Será posible gente que en
mi país yo no cuente?*

You think it's not the same today,
An official tells me,
"You can't go there,
Much less leave this place,"
In contrast they treat tourists
differently,
People, is it possible that in
my country I don't count?

The rapper uses the critique of racial hierarchies in the past as a way of identifying contemporary racial issues such as police harassment of young black people and the preferential treatment given to tourists over Cubans by officials. He identifies himself as "the descendent of an African," a *cimarrón desobediente*, or runaway slave, drawing his links to an ancestral past rooted in a history of slavery and oppression.

While male rappers speak about historical problems of slavery and marginality, women rappers talk about how black women face forms of enslavement and marginalization from black men. In "Eres bella" (You Are Beautiful), *Las Krudas* point to machismo as an "identical system of slavery" for women. Just as male rappers point to the exclusion of rap from major media programming, venues, and state institutions, *Las Krudas* challenge male rappers for their exclusion of women: "I have talent and I ask,

how long will we be the minority onstage?" Black women have been made invisible, objectified, and silenced in the historical record, and popular culture is no exception. In "Amiquimiñongo," *Las Krudas* argue that since the time of slavery black women and men have been stereotyped as "a beautiful race," "so strong" and "so healthy," but they point out that black women have never been given a voice: "When I open my mouth, 'poof!' raw truths escape from it, they don't talk of this, they want to shut me up." Women rappers demand inclusion in the hip-hop movement and society more generally. As *Las Krudas* claim, "There is no true revolution without women." Women rappers are "ebony guerrillas" who are fighting for a place in the struggle alongside black men.

HIP-HOP IN VENEZUELA

Cuban rappers promote certain ideals associated with the Cuban Revolution and make demands on the state to meet the promises of the revolution, particularly regarding racial equality. By contrast, Venezuelan youth from poor backgrounds have lost faith in the previous ruling parties to provide social services and protection for their communities and have come to rely on their own forms of survival in the familiar yet increasingly violent terrain of the *barrio*. Through their music, rappers reflect on the conditions and experiences that force them into a life of crime and violence. *Guerrilla Seca*, in "Malandrea negro" (Black Delinquency), argues that it is the poverty, hunger, and desperation of the *barrios* that produce the resort to crime as a means of survival. Trying to find meaningful work for unskilled black youth is practically impossible: "I go on desperately, looking for work is a joke." Even for those who want to find work in the formal economy there are few opportunities: "I look for legal cash, but destiny is changing me." If one needs money and there are no legal opportunities, then they turn to crime and the informal underground economy is the only path, according to the rapper, especially when one has children to support.

Similarly, in their chronicle of street life, "Historia nuestra" (Our History), *Vagos y Maleantes* relate that they began dealing drugs, *empecé en el jibareo*, at the age of seventeen. While the parents of the rapper dreamed of him being an engineer, he dreamed of being a criminal. Scholars have pointed to the decline in stable employment in manufacturing, which was available to a greater extent to working classes in previous decades across the Americas; the rise in unemployment; the growth of an informal economy; and the shift to temporary part-time work.²⁸ It is this lack of viable legal employment that spurs the growth of crime as one of the only options for survival available to marginalized urban youth in Venezuela.

In contrast to the principled gangsters of the past, what the informant Comegato calls "a real *malandro*, a gentleman" who participates in crime for the benefit of his family and his community,²⁹ what dominates today is *chigiirismo*, or killing for money without regard for the other members of the barrio. In "Cuando hay droga y dinero" (When there are drugs and money), Guerrilla Seca describes the *malandro* (delinquent), as a kind of cold-hearted, malevolent individual:

<i>En negocios de droga y dinero</i>	In the business of drugs and money
<i>No hay panas ni nada</i>	There are no friends or nothin'
<i>Esto es malandreo, puro lacreo.</i>	This is delinquency, pure trouble.
<i>El que menos tú piensas</i>	The one who you least suspect
<i>Te mata por plata mi pana,</i>	Will kill you for cash, homie,
<i>Esto es malandreo, es lo que veo.</i>	This is delinquency, it's what I see.

The *malandro* is motivated by a desire for consumer goods and a jealousy of those who have more than oneself. *Malandros* will kill one another for money, fashionable clothes, and Nike shoes. In their negotiations over drugs, nobody can be trusted, and the *malandro* has no friends, as this world is dominated by cruelty and self-interest. Robin D. G. Kelley notes that in the case of Los Angeles's gangsta rappers, the absence of socially responsible criminals is related to the structural absence of job opportunities and is not due to a pathological culture of violence. Yet Kelley acknowledges that at times these distinctions between socially conscious and malevolent gangsters are blurred, and the same voices describing "black-on-black" crime may call for action against dominant institutions.³⁰ Likewise, Guerrilla Seca states in "Cuando hay droga y dinero:" "I have my morals high, assaulting banks and leading the way." Compared with the *malandro* who steals from his own community and would even assault his neighbor, in this part of the song the rapper targets wealthy corporate institutions and rich people, like a modern-day Robin Hood.³¹

Rappers seek to reclaim the social stereotypes of the *malandro* and the *maleante*. The name of the group Vagos y Maleantes comes from a 1956 law entitled *Ley sobre vagos y maleantes* (Law against vagrants and undesirables). According to Patricia Marquez, the law was devised during the military regime of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in order to imprison dissidents and opponents of the regime, but it came to be used as a way of incarcerating those who were considered "undesirables" by the authorities.³² Vagos y Maleantes appropriate this name as a way of revindicating themselves and their lifestyle. Echeandía claims that "In Venezuela, blacks are *malandros* or delinquents, and the rappers via their discs and their music say that: 'Yes, we are, and here we express it, here we scream it.'" Both Vagos y Maleantes and Guerrilla Seca have parental advisory labels on the covers of their discs. On

the cover of Guerrillas Seca's disc "La Realidad mas real," an English-language label reading "Parental Advisory, Explicit Lyrics" is superimposed over the tip of Colombia's middle finger, which is being raised in an obscene gesture. On the Vagos and Maleantes disc, "Papidandeando" there is a label in Spanish, which reads *Pendiente Activo, Grado Maloso* (Attention, Bad Rating). These labels, which originated in North America after senate committee hearings that required the labels for all nationally distributed hardcore rap albums,³³ have come to provide a stamp of authenticity or street credibility in the Venezuelan context.

The traditional figure of the warrior as symbolized in religious imagery is also used as a way of reimagining the role of the modern-day *malandro*. In their song "Destino" (Destiny), the group Santuario describes the world of contradictions that they inhabit, and within this world they imagine themselves as descendents of mythic religious warriors and gods:

<i>¡Yo era valentía de Ochun aja!</i>	I was a warrior of Oshun!
<i>Yo era la valentía</i>	I was the warrior
<i>Del tronco de Legua</i>	Of the arm of Elegua
<i>Yo era Orosineima, Aquereful</i>	I was Orosineima, Aquereful,
<i>Y si están en mi camino de aquí</i>	And if they are in my path,
<i>No van a escapar.</i>	They're not going to escape.

Oshun, Elegua, and Orosineima refer to *orishas*, or deities of the religion of Santería, which has come to Venezuela mainly via Cuba. "Legua" refers to Elegua, the deity who opens paths. The "arm of Elegua" is an allusion to the symbolic arm of the deity. The rapper, Black Soul, seeks to identify his own experiences of street fighting with the bravery of the *orishas*, thereby increasing his own moral authority. In contrast to the derogatory associations of terms such as *malandro*, *vago*, and *maleante*, rappers reclaim these terms and infuse them with older meanings of bravery and justice.

HIP-HOP IN BRAZIL

Michael Hanchard has suggested that "the 1988 commemoration of abolition in Brazil was the single most important event for the black movement in the post-World War II era,"³⁴ and while scholars have cautioned against ascribing too much influence to black activist organizations in Brazil,³⁵ there is little doubt that the substantial protests and demonstrations by the black movement that year marked a new phase in the public recognition of the racist foundations of Brazilian society. Organizers called for an acknowledgement that the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law), the decree of abolition issued by Princess Isabel in 1888, did little for black Brazilians in their

quest for equal rights and the benefits of full citizenship. Musicians in particular did much to articulate to a wide audience the ironies of the centennial celebrations. In the nationally televised carnival of Rio de Janeiro, two *escolas de samba* (samba organizations), Mangueira and Vila Isabel, devoted their parade themes to critiquing the commonly held conception that Brazil was a racial democracy. Mangueira, Rio's oldest *escola de samba*, paraded to a song entitled "100 anos de liberdade, realidade ou ilusão" (100 Years of Freedom: Reality or Illusion), which questioned the notion that oppressive conditions faced by black Brazilians were substantially transformed by abolition.

<i>Será que</i>	I wonder whether
<i>Já raiou a liberdade</i>	Freedom already dawned
<i>Ou se foi tudo ilusão</i>	Or if it was all an illusion
<i>Será, que a Lei Áurea</i>	Could it be that the "Golden Law"
<i>Tão sonhada</i>	Our big dream
<i>Há tanto tempo assinada</i>	Which was enacted a long time ago
<i>Não foi o fim da escravidão</i>	Wasn't the end of slavery

As in the Anónimo Consejo example from Cuba presented above, Brazilian rappers have also sought to examine the continuity between the history of slavery and contemporary conditions in black Brazilian communities. The past is offered up not so much as "what happened already" but as "what is happening still." At times, the superimposition of different historical moments—much like the dense layering of sonic sources that characterizes rap production—is used to highlight the unending crisis facing people of African descent in Brazil. When the group Face da Morte (Face of Death) raps that "they freed the slaves and threw them into misery" (*libertaram os escravos e jogaram na miséria*) on "Mudar o mundo" (Change the World), they too activate a link between past injustice and contemporary desolation and call attention to the false promise of post-abolition "liberation."

In other cases, Afro-Brazilian rappers configure the past as a site of strength, not powerlessness, and look to the long history of black resistance during the slave period to provide inspiration for current battles against the forces that contribute to racial marginalization. For example, the song "Antigamente quilombo, hoje periferia" (Yesterday *Quilombo*, Today Periphery), by the São Paulo-based group Z'África Brasil, draws a correspondence between the struggle for black autonomy waged by Zumbi, the leader of the Palmares *quilombo* in the late seventeenth century, and the battles against poverty and inequality undertaken by inhabitants of the favelas of the late twentieth century:

<i>Zumbi, o redentor</i>	Zumbi, the savior
<i>Agora o jogo virou</i>	Now the game has changed
<i>Quilombos guerreou</i>	<i>Quilombos</i> fought
<i>Periferia acordou</i>	The periphery woke up
<i>Cansamos de promessas</i>	We are tired of promises
<i>Volta pro mato capitão</i>	Go back to the jungle captain
<i>Pois já estamos em guerra</i>	Because we're already at war

In this song, historical continuity is not only realized through the complex textual alignment of past and present; there is also a sonic dimension that speaks to a rich diasporic understanding of African musical traditions from outside Brazil. In the beat that accompanies the verse above, there is an extended slide guitar solo in the gritty delta blues style that originated in the state of Mississippi during the Jim Crow period. Black Brazilian history is sonically extended by Z'África Brasil to include the histories of people of African descent throughout the diaspora.

The mining of black music from the United States has been a common strategy for invoking an African identity in Brazilian rap. In their song "Rap do trem" the group RZO makes great use of the sitar sample from A Tribe Called Quest's 1990 hit "Bonita Applebum" (later used by the Fugees for their remake of Roberta Flack's "Killing Me Softly"). In the same song RZO offers up another pan-African link (quite similar to the Vagos y Maleantes example from Venezuela cited above), this one with Yoruba and the Afro-Brazilian religion *Candomblé*, when they ask the *orixá* (*oricha* or *orisha* in Spanish), or African deity, Oxalá to give them the strength to fight (*E eu peço a Oxalá e então, sempre vai nos guardar / Dai-nos forças pra lutar*). And, to cite another example, in their "Sr. Tempo Bom" (Mr. Good Time), Thaíde and DJ Hum, two of hip-hop's biggest stars in Brazil, employ a looped beat and the "Oh yeah" from Jean Knight's "Mr. Big Stuff," released in 1971.³⁶

Thaíde and DJ Hum, still major figures on the Brazilian rap scene, appeared on *Hip-hop cultura de rua*, one of the two major compilations released in 1988, the year that rap music made a forceful entry into the Brazilian public sphere. On *Consciência black*, the second compilation released that year, the group Racionais MCs (Rational MCs), which would soon become the most important hip-hop act in the country, debuted their "Pânico na Zona Sul," a song that charted out a diasporic connection with the blacks in the United States through the use of a sample from James Brown's 1974 hit "The Payback." The Godfather of Soul's influence on the group was so strong that one of its members, Mano Brown, went as far as to appropriate Brown's surname. In an interview from a program aired on TV Cultura, a São Paulo-based television station, Mano had this to say about hearing James Brown's music when he was a kid:

Man, James Brown . . . It was the most powerful music that I had heard, it really made us proud. Everything that you heard in school about blacks, everything you heard about the neighbors or the wide world in general, when you heard James Brown, you forgot everything. You start becoming proud, you become strong, no? I think this made the blacks at that time in the 1970s in Brazil leave the club feeling like superman after hearing James Brown.³⁷

But "Pânico na Zona Sul" cannot only be reduced to a statement of Afro-diasporic connections and transnational black pride. It also bears witness to the very pervasive local forms of violence that characterize life in the periphery of São Paulo. The sampled sound of a gunshot that explodes out of the middle of the second verse might seem to draw an expressive parallel to NWA's "Straight Outta Compton" (also released in 1988), but there are limits to the kinds of translation that are possible when rap is evaluated cross-culturally; Compton is not Capão Redondo, the favela Mano Brown is from, and the type of escalating racial violence that affects young blacks in Brazil is of an order of magnitude different than that in the United States. Teresa Caldeira has written that in 1999 a full 10 percent of all deaths in the city of São Paulo were homicides, compared with 1.44 percent of deaths in 1984.³⁸ Her research has also shown that in the twenty-year period between 1981 and 2001, the police in São Paulo killed 11,692 people; some years the number was over 1,000, an astonishing average of three murders per day by the police.³⁹ In "Pânico na Zona Sul" the members of Racionais use hip-hop as a potent global methodology for taking stock of local conditions.

This is not to imply that this methodology leads Brazilian hip-hop artists to create uniform depictions or offer up standardized responses. As in the United States, hip-hop culture in Brazil is characterized by divergent depictions of "the real." Facção Central (Central Faction), another hip-hop crew from São Paulo, provides a more gruesome accounting of the violence of the black periphery than Racionais does in "Pânico na Zona Sul." The video to their song "Isso aqui é uma guerra" (This Here Is a War), banned from television by the Ministério Público (district attorney) of São Paulo, graphically shows two murders, a carjacking, and numerous armed robberies. In response to the censoring of their work, Eduardo, one of the members of the group says, "The video doesn't talk about Disneyland, but Brazil, the country with the most deaths from firearms. If it had been made in Sweden then it could have caused surprise. The surprising thing is that someone here would be shocked by this content."⁴⁰

*Isso aqui é uma guerra
Onde só sobrevive
Quem atira . . .*

This here is a war
In which only those
Who shoot survive . . .

*Infelizmente o livro não resolve
O Brasil só me
Respeita com um revolver . . .
Eu quero roupa, comida
Alguém tem que sangrar
Vou enquadrar uma burguesa e
Atirar pra matar*

Sadly, the law is useless
Only with a gun does Brazil
Show me respect . . .
I want clothes, food
Someone has to bleed
I'm gonna aim at a bourgeoisie and
Shoot to kill

And the song continues, emphasizing the relation between the images conjured up in the lyrics and the way life is lived in urban Brazil: "This is no soap opera / There's no love on the screen / The scene exists" (*Aqui não é novela, Não tem amor na tela / A cena existe*).

Of course, rappers need not only depict reality; they have also developed substantial tactics for transforming it. In "Pânico na Zona Sul" Racionais advocates a different method for dealing with the violence faced by black Brazilians. After saying that "Racionais is going to talk about the reality of the streets" (*Racionais vão contar a realidade das ruas*), they go on to emphasize how a critical sensibility can mutate fear into a positive force for change, into self-reliance and what they broadly label "consciousness." In this song Racionais makes a proposition that knowledge can enable survival by prompting citizens to engage actively in the public sphere. As the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote, "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can.'"⁴¹ When rap groups in Brazil talk about consciousness they are not just referring to a state of mind, a filling up of gaps in understanding, but a way of translating knowledge into action. Racionais MCs have been involved in substantial social campaigns for victims of AIDS and for alleviating hunger and the notion that consciousness of social problems can be turned into counter-hegemonic action is a key part of their creative work. "Pânico na Zona Sul" continues:

*A mudança estará
Em nossa consciência
Praticando nossos atos
Com coerência
E a consequência será
O fim do próprio medo . . .
A nossa filosofia
É sempre transmitir
A realidade em si*

The change will be
In our consciousness
Practicing our actions
With coherence
And the consequence will be
The end of our own fear . . .
Our philosophy
Is to always transmit
Reality the way it is

This transmission of reality "the way that it is" becomes pure pedagogy on "Capítulo 4, versículo 3" (chapter 4, verse 3), a song from Racionais MC's 1997 album *Sobrevivendo no inferno* (Surviving in Hell) the largest-

selling independent record in Brazilian recording history. Making a cameo appearance on the introduction to the track, Primo Preto (Black Cousin), a hip-hop producer in São Paulo, gives this eye-opening rundown of the social conditions facing blacks in Brazil:

<i>60% dos jovens de periferia</i>	60% of the youth of the periphery
<i>Sem antecedentes criminais</i>	Without police records have
<i>Já sofreram violência policial</i>	Already suffered police violence
<i>A cada quatro pessoas mortas</i>	Out of every four people killed
<i>Pela polícia três são negros</i>	By the police, three are black
<i>Nas universidades brasileiras apenas</i>	In Brazilian universities, only
<i>2% dos alunos são negros</i>	2% of the students are black
<i>A cada quatro horas um jovem negro</i>	Every four hours a young black man
<i>Morre violentamente em São Paulo</i>	Dies violently in São Paulo
<i>Aqui quem fala é</i>	The person speaking here is
<i>Primo Preto, mais um sobrevivente</i>	Primo Preto, one more survivor

Much like KRS One's notion of "edutainment," members of Racionais have presented eloquent and critical statements that inform their listeners of the problems facing black youth in the favelas of São Paulo. However, as in Cuba and Venezuela, blackness in Brazil cannot be thought as a homogeneous, stable identity; class, gender, location, and generation all play an important role in how race is lived in contemporary Brazil. In "Biografia feminina," Cris, a woman rapper from the group Somos Nós A Justiça (We Are Justice), adds a level of gender awareness not often heard in Brazilian rap, speaking against biological determinism and imploring women to create polemics and then turn rhetoric into action:

<i>Mulheres escravizadas á sua</i>	Women, enslaved to their
<i>Condição biológica</i>	Biological condition
<i>Isso não tem lógica</i>	This doesn't make sense
<i>Bendita sejam aquelas</i>	Bless those women
<i>Que geraram polêmica</i>	Who create polemics
<i>Atitude idealista tem que lutar</i>	Idealistic attitude, you have to fight
<i>Para obter conquistas</i>	To get what you want
<i>É preciso reivindicar</i>	It's necessary to protest
<i>Desigualdade, chega, chega</i>	Inequality, it's enough already
<i>Mas que absurdo 129 mulheres</i>	How absurd, 129 women
<i>Morreram em busca de</i>	Died trying to get
<i>Melhores condições de trabalho</i>	Better working conditions
<i>Pensamento falhos não estão nos livros</i>	Faulty thoughts are not in books

Basta procurar, pesquisar e
Achará escrito

You just have to look, research, and
You'll find it written

Perhaps the most powerful moment of the above excerpt comes when Cris unleashes the salvo about the important role "research" plays for women who want to mobilize. Reaching into the history of the labor struggle in the United States, she presents the example of the Triangle Factory fire that took place in New York City on March 25, 1911, which claimed the lives of 129 young immigrant women, many of whom were part of the unionization movement that sought to correct the deplorable labor conditions of sweatshops like the Triangle Factory. For Cris, local gender politics has an extensity that pushes beyond the geographic limits of São Paulo. Later in the song, saying that she's going to "localize in geography, teach in practice" (*localizar na geografia, ensinar na prática*), Cris brings it all back home, referencing Zezé Motta, Clementina de Jesus, Dona Ivone Lara, and Alcione, all pioneering black women musicians in Brazil. The idea of speaking, of bearing witness to the varied contours of the everyday lives of black Brazilians, becomes a crucial part of the production of counter-hegemonic action, of "teaching in practice."

CONCLUSION

This chapter offers sketches of three immensely complex communities that have organized themselves around hip-hop culture. We have aimed to provide a window into how black youth in Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil use hip-hop in their daily lives, rather than giving a broad accounting of the contested and always-shifting relationships among race, culture, and politics in these countries. Our intention was to project onto these pages a few of the traces that hip-hop has left in the black public spheres of three Latin American countries with vastly different yet interconnected histories. Hopefully, what we have presented will be enough to spur a dialogue on a number of vital issues: how cultural forms are localized in an epoch that has witnessed ever-increasing global flows of products, information, and people; how unequal access to the privileges of full citizenship can prompt young people of color to use the cultural resources they have at their disposal to create critical responses to their own marginalization; how diasporic connections function, always simultaneously, on local and transnational levels; and how the aesthetic dimensions of hip-hop culture can never be disembedded from the valences of racial politics.

All over the world young people use hip-hop to help make sense of, and sometimes reimagine, the very political contours of their daily lives. Capi-



Figure 9.1. Hip-hop artist painting graffiti in São Paulo, Brazil. Source: Sujatha Fernandes

talizing on hip-hop's elegant aesthetic arsenal, its history of transformation and resistance, they can ask tough questions and provide eloquent responses, always taking advantage of a critical methodology developed by marginalized black and Latino youths from the United States and the Caribbean. While hip-hop culture is an ever-mutating, heterogeneous set of practices, the history of the African diaspora is never absent from any hip-hop utterance. As Raquel Z. Rivera has said about the sonic dimension of hip-hop culture, "Rap, therefore, must be understood through the recognition of its intense technological and industrial mediation, its international popularity, its historical context and its continued rootedness in poor communities of color across the United States."⁴² Although hip-hop is a remarkably flexible form, created in vastly divergent circumstances by people with sometimes radically different identities and needs, its primary reference points still derive from the experiences and histories of African-diasporic youth.

Given the legacy of brutal enslavement and enduring forms of oppression and subjugation in Latin America, the articulation of hip-hop culture with blackness takes on heightened resonance for people of African decent

in this region. To be sure, there are substantial differences in the way blackness is lived in Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil; but we want to suggest that the members of hip-hop communities in these countries are all engaged in creating strategies that help render the public sphere more open and pliable for people of color who have been disproportionately hit with the burdens of partial citizenship. Hip-hop is nowhere in the world an endpoint or a final resolution to crisis, but it has been used, at times quite successfully, by young blacks to help forge a critical dialogue within the public spheres to which they have been denied full access.

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NOTES

1. In this chapter we view hip-hop as a constellation of aesthetic and political approaches to cultural production and consumption. This constellation is an always shifting articulation of a number of overlapping dimensions, or elements: the visual (graffiti, fashion, video, advertisements), the sonic (rap, DJ culture, studio techniques, spoken language), the kinesthetic (break dancing, gestural language), the philosophical/ideological (lyrical content, political activism), and the economic (entrepreneurial activity, "bling"). The authors are responsible for all translations into English of the original Spanish and Portuguese texts and lyrics found in this chapter.
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36. In the video to "Sr. Tempo Bom," Thaíde and DJ Hum invoke the visual side of African American soul culture, with their use of clothing and hairstyles from the early 1970s. Incorporation of black fashion from the United States was crucial for the Brazilian funk movement mentioned earlier in this chapter.

37. *Ensaio*, TV Cultura, January 27, 2003. The original text, spoken in Portuguese by Mano Brown, follows: "Nossa, o James Brown. . . . Foi a música mais forte que eu ouvi . . . que deu orgulho mesmo. Tudo que você ouviu na escola sobre preto, tudo que você ouviu sobre os vizinhos ou do mundão geral, quando você ouviu James Brown você esquece tudo. Você passa a ter orgulho, você fica forte, né? Eu acho que isso aí fazia os pretos daquela época dos anos 70 no Brasil saíam do salão se sentindo superman depois de ouvir James Brown."

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10

Unfinished Migrations: From the Mexican South to the American South

Impressions on Afro-Mexican Migration to North Carolina

Bobby Vaughn and Ben Vinson III

The histories of the United States and Latin America have been intertwined since the colonial era. In the modern and contemporary eras, that history has been dominated by U.S. military and political intervention, economic expansion, and investment. Latin America has also influenced the United States, but as in the case of African legacy, that impact has mostly come from below, from conquered or de-territorialized people such as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. By the 1970s, the Latino population in the United States (immigrant and native born) was so large that the United States institutionalized a new ethnic category in its natural census.

In 2003, Latinos officially became the largest "minority community" in the United States, and a host of media outlets reported this data in highly divisive and competitive language vis-à-vis African Americans. Few highlighted the fact that Latinos, who are of many races and ethnicities, are culturally or nationally defined. Indeed, until recently, studies of the Latino populations have largely failed to examine race relations within the Latino community or how the African legacies within Latino communities interact with the African legacies within the African American communities. Students of Latino history are more likely to recognize the African influences among U.S. residents with backgrounds from the Caribbean or from