

# More than Noise: How Urban Planners Can Learn from Hip-Hop Music

A thesis

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## Abstract

Urban planners and policy makers have numerous established research methods to understand problems facing communities. However, the arts have traditionally been overlooked in favor of these traditional methods. This thesis attempts to compel urban planners to re-examine the role of the arts in research, particularly the role of Hip-Hop music. Through a narrative analysis of 96 Hip-Hop songs ranging from 1986-2008, I devised a method by which urban planners can successfully access and utilize the information contained in Hip-Hop music. The results demonstrate that Hip-Hop music contains a wealth of local knowledge about their communities, relationships, priorities and world-views that can be of significant interest to urban planners, policy makers and other urban public service professionals. The implications of this research can range from new policy initiatives, re-allocation of resources to support urban art, youth empowerment and increased awareness of the role Hip-Hop plays in the political conversation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Urban planners and policy maker's jobs often revolve around confronting complex issues involving various stakeholders. Among the many challenges they face is how to successfully access and synthesize the various pieces of information derived from numerous sources. Classic resources such as the U.S. Census, academic journals, anecdotal observations and real estate trends are used to establish a base understanding of an issue or problem facing a community. Planners then expand their knowledge through community outreach in the form of surveys and interviews to learn more an issue from the actual people involved. This practice is well established and has served the professional community well. Still, there could be another knowledge base urban planners can tap in to for additional information: Hip-Hop music. This genre of music speaks to many of the same issues urban planners are interested in: urban poverty, racial disparities, drugs, gang violence, police brutality, ghettos, incarceration, welfare, hunger and homelessness. This thesis seeks to explore the viability of Hip-Hop music as an additional resource for urban planners and policy makers.

This research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What knowledge about urban conditions and planning is embedded in Hip-Hop music? (2) How can urban planners access this knowledge? (3) What are some of the possible ways urban planners can utilize this knowledge?

## *Background*

My interest in Hip-Hop music comes from a long relationship with music in general. Like reading a book, music often took me to places I had never been, told stories of people I had never met, and illuminated ideas that were new and exciting. As a youth, I studied music like it was my job, and I was an equal opportunity music consumer. When I began to discover rap, I quickly learned about a different type of story than I was used to growing up in suburban Orlando. I listened to the words as the artists told stories of life in the projects, where gangs were more powerful than police and teachers, and “slinging rock”<sup>1</sup> was a viable profession in a place where other more traditional jobs were not readily available. It was another world, one that existed mainly in the space between my ears. This exposure raised awareness to other places and people, and became the genesis of my interest in urban issues that eventually led me to study urban planning. I always knew that these stories were not entirely accurate portrayals of urban life, but I could not ignore the tales the artists were conveying. Tupac Shakur built a reputation as being a “socially conscious” rapper, as many of his songs were filled with the same ideas from the civil rights movement. I recall listening to his music as he spoke about injustice, racial disparity, desperation, hopelessness, drugs, violence, “street values” and thinking that this was more than just entertainment, this was something worth paying attention to. Tupac became representative of what I call a “crossover” artist, meaning, he was crossing over from the world of entertainment and into the world of social consciousness. He was bridging the gap between the civil rights movement and Hip-Hop music, and

using this increasingly popular movement as a forum to inform and inspire youth of all races. Tupac was just one artist among many who were accomplishing this task, but he was the one artist that really brought this style of Hip-Hop to the mainstream. Over the years I expanded my library of socially conscious artists to include Dead Prez, KRS-One and Mos Def, among others. Each artist reflected differently on what seemed to be a common experience. I explored what these artists were saying about urban communities and their perspectives on life, and what I was constantly amazed at was the messages of *hope* and *unity* as solutions to overcome these common problems. I realized that these artists were doing more than lamenting about poor conditions and unfair treatment; they were calling people to have hope, to dare to dream, and to rise up and make better lives for themselves and their community. I knew Hip-Hop was something more than just noise; it was a forum for a community, and consequently, something that urban planners could greatly benefit from hearing.

My personal interest in Hip-Hop music coincidentally was in line with national trends in music. Hip-Hop has steadily become a strong force within the music industry. Between 1990 and 1998, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) reported that rap captured, on average, 9-10 percent of music sales in the United States. This figure increased to 12.9 percent in 2000, peaked at 13.8 percent in 2002, and hovered between 12 and 13 percent through 2005. To put the importance of this nearly 40 percent increase in rap/Hip-Hop sales into context, note that during the 2000-2005 period, other genres, including rock, country and pop, saw decreases in their market percentage (Rose 2008). In a 1999

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<sup>1</sup> Sell crack cocaine. *Rapdict.org/slang*, *rapdict.org/rock*

cover story, *TIME* reported that with 81 million CDs sold, rap was officially America's top-selling music genre. The boom produced enterprises like Roc-A-Fella, which straddled fashion, music and film and in 2001 was worth \$300 million. It produced moguls like No Limit's Master P and Bad Boy's Puff Daddy, each of whom in 2001 made an appearance on FORTUNE's list of the richest 40 under 40. Along the way, the music influenced everything from advertising to fashion to sports (Coates 2007).

The makeup of this audience isn't just African-Americans; it has spread to whites as well. According to Mediamark Research, Inc., increasing numbers of whites began buying Hip-Hop. Between 1995 and 2001, whites comprised 70-75 percent of the Hip-Hop customer base – a figure considered to have remained broadly constant to this day.<sup>2</sup>

This expansion of Hip-Hop into the suburbs cemented the music as a dominant force within youth of all races and helped fuel its growth. Bakari Kitwana (2005), a prominent Hip-Hop scholar, devoted a book to examining why, *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop*. In it, he enumerates reasons such as: the global economy and alienation in the 1980s that affected blacks *and* whites similarly, a changing music scene in the 1990s, the domestic economy and white privilege in the 2000s, the institutionalizing of the civil rights culture and the impact of black popular culture as possible explanations for this racial cross pollination (Kitwana 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> This statistic was calculated by RIAA on the basis of their consumer profile reports of 1998 and 2006.

Beyond a musical form that has permeated into advertising, fashion and politics<sup>3</sup>, Hip-Hop has become the voice of a generation. Kitwana's other book, *The Hip-Hop Generation*, describes how Hip-Hop was largely born out of, and shares similar themes with, the civil rights movement of the 1960s. This historical relationship has encouraged Hip-Hop to become legitimate field of academic study. According to a 2005 survey by Stanford's Hip Hop Archive, more than 300 courses on the subject are now offered at colleges and universities around the country (Hermanci 2007). Stray sociologists and literary scholars had looked at hip-hop music and graffiti culture since the late 1970s, and critics like Nelson George and Greg Tate (in the *Voice*) and British musician and writer David Toop engaged the subject with considerable intellectual rigor in the 1980s, but a critical mass of university scholars studying hip-hop didn't emerge until the mid '90s. This first generation consisted largely of folks who'd grown up with the culture and applied traditional disciplinary models to their work. NYU historian Tricia Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) is often regarded as the seminal text of this group. Other figures who published books on the subject in the mid 1990s include University of Pennsylvania humanities professor Michael Eric Dyson and literary scholars Houston Baker of Duke and Russell Potter of Rhode Island College (Hsu 2003).

The next section of this chapter explores what knowledge is embedded in Hip-Hop lyrics, followed by a brief discussion of how this knowledge is relevant

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<sup>3</sup> Ludacris and other Hip-Hop artists wrote songs prior to the 2008 election in support of Barack Obama

to urban planners and policy makers, concluded by an exploration on some of the access and utilization issues currently facing urban planners.

### *What Knowledge Is Embedded in Hip-Hop Lyrics?*

Borne out of the South Bronx in New York City in the 1970's, Hip-Hop began largely as urban art form (Rosen 2006). Since Hip-Hop began in the city it often reflected on the dynamics within the city. In the tradition of defiance, of creating "somethin' outta nothin'," they [African-American urban youth] developed artistic expressions that came to be known as hip-hop. Rapping, or MC'ing, is now the most well known, but there are three other defining elements: DJing, break dancing and graffiti writing. For most of the seventies hip-hop was an underground phenomenon of basement parties, high school gyms and clubs, where DJs and MCs "took two turntables and a microphone," as the story has come to be told, creating music from the borrowed beats of soul, funk, disco, reggae and salsa, overlaid with lyrics reflecting their alienated reality. On city streets and in parks, hip-hop crews – the peaceful alternative to gangs – sought to settle disputes through lyrical battles and break-dancing competitions rather than violence. On crumbling city walls and subways, graffiti writers left their tags as proof they'd passed (Ards 1999).

Rap music takes the city and its multiple spaces as the foundation of its cultural production. In the rhythm and lyrics, the city is an audible presence, explicitly cited and sonically sampled in the reproduction of the aural textures of the urban environment. Rap's lyrical constructions commonly display a

pronounced emphasis on place and locality. Whereas blues, rock and R&B have traditionally cited regions or cities (i.e., “Dancing in the Street,” initially popularized in 1964 by the Motown artists Martha and the Vandellas and covered by the rock acts Van Halen in 1982 and David Bowie and Mick Jagger in 1985), contemporary rap is even more specific, with explicit references to particular streets, boulevards and neighborhoods, telephone area codes, postal service zip codes, or other sociospatial information (Forman 2002). Further, the lyrical content of many early rap groups concentrated on social issues, most notably in the seminal track "The Message", which discussed the realities of life in the housing projects (Grandmaster Flash 1976). Kitwana emphasizes Hip-Hop’s role in reflecting urban reality:

“No matter how widely accepted in the mainstream, it isn’t entertainment alone; it’s also a voice of the voiceless. More than just a new genre of music, Hip-Hop since its inception has provided young Blacks a public platform in a society that previously rendered them mute. It has done the same for youth of other cultures as well. This in large part explains Hip-Hops mass appeal” (Kitwana 2002).

The outcome of these artistic expressions is a well-thought out, poetic reflection on places, actors and problems within urban environments. No other musical style or genre represents urban existence quite like Hip-Hop. The relationship Hip-Hop has with cities is unique, and is why this music contains the knowledge that urban planners and policy makers could tap into.

### *Relevance to Urban Planners and Policy Makers*

Planners have begun to establish the value of artistic expression in practice by examining the civic engagement processes in community-based arts. This field of research focuses on the role of an artist within a community, and ways these artists generate art that respond to local problems (Young 2009). Artists – expert in expressing feelings, conveying ideas, and thinking creatively – can be ideally suited to help a disengaged community explore its identity and engage in a problem solving process that builds relationships, empowers people, and contributes to their own neighborhood revitalization (Hall and Robertson 2001). Those interested in better understanding examples of neighborhood revitalization in cooperation with an artist have conducted case studies (Bacon, Yuen, and Korza 1999; Bassett 1993; Cleveland 2005; Harlap 2006; Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison 2005).

Further, professors in universities have begun to teach classes encouraging students to expand the traditional study of cities to include cultural depictions of cities in film (Green Leigh, Kenny 1996). These courses ask: How does the city of our popular imagination influence our response to urban issues and problems? Through a specific curriculum of films that center on the depiction of urban issues, the professors sought to augment the economic and political analysis of cities, that is, the traditional content of an urban planning curriculum, with the subjective perspective of cinematic artists.

Acknowledging that planners already see value in artistic expressions, it reasons that the knowledge contained in Hip-Hop lyrics can be valuable. Hip-Hop

lyrics often contain similar themes that are of concern to urban planners and policy makers, including: urban poverty, racial disparities, drug use, gang violence, police brutality, ghettos, environmental justice, incarceration, welfare, hunger and homelessness. Much like what was observed in the Cinema City course, Hip-Hop lyrics can present a different story than one typically gains from a standard interview or observation, and can add a unique dynamic to understanding a problem. Unlike a standard interview where a person responds to established questions, a Hip-Hop artist observes and reflects on a situation, and thoughtfully creates an image that captures their feelings and beliefs in the true style of a contemplative artist.

#### *Access and Utilization of Hip-Hop Knowledge*

The current hurdle for urban planners and policy makers to tap into this knowledge appears to be access and understanding the music. A formal methodology to facilitate the extraction of specific themes and ideas has not been developed specifically for urban planners. Lyrical analysis of Hip-Hop songs has been conducted in the field of sociology, examining issues related to: alcohol use, depictions of homicide, relationships between urban youth and the “street code,” etc. However, the methodologies used in these studies do not answer questions that urban planners and policy makers would ask about communities. Therefore, a new methodology for coding and extracting relevant themes needed to be developed specifically for the field of urban planning. The value of this methodology is that it can be replicated by planners who are interested in

accessing the Hip-Hop communities' knowledge of local issues. For example, urban planner in New Orleans can learn about how the community felt about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina by gathering the lyrics for songs written in response to the event and analyzing them in a meaningful way. The outcome could be an added understanding and perspective of a situation through the eyes of an artist.

### *Road Map*

Chapter 2 of this thesis presents a literature review of the applicable works related to studying Hip-Hop music and unlocking the themes that are relevant to urban planners, including an analysis of previous methods used to access the knowledge for other fields of study. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in to analyze the lyrics of 100 Hip-Hop songs. Chapter 4 discusses the findings resulting from the lyrical analysis, including in-depth depictions of the urban condition through selected passages from the analyzed songs. Chapter 5 synthesizes the findings with urban planning literature to engender a discussion of the ways planners can utilize the knowledge in their practice, finally, present the conclusion and recommendations for future study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### *Section 1: What Knowledge about Urban Conditions is Embedded in Hip-Hop Music?*

Planning is a dynamic profession that works to improve the welfare of people and their communities by creating more convenient, equitable, healthful, efficient, and attractive places for present and future generations (American Planning Association 2010). The pursuit of these goals often brings urban planners to study the problems impinging on communities in order to develop solutions. A survey of planning literature reveals some of the areas planners frequently study, including: urban poverty (Mitlin 2004, Winne 2008), racial disparities (Delgado 2001), drug abuse (Currie 1993), gang violence (Katz 2006), police brutality (Holmes 2008), ghettos (Fiss 2003), environmental justice (Bullard 2007, Lester 2001) incarceration (Gottschalk 2006), welfare (Handler 2007), hunger (Schwartz-Nobel 2002) and homelessness (Kyle 2005). This sampling of literature represents only a small number of texts dedicated to these issues, and each one of these topics represents a complex and dynamic problem that faces urban communities. Each of these topics is approached in varying ways, from determining why these issues exist, what the impact has on the community, and most importantly, the varying methods to attempt to solve the problem.

Interestingly, the literature that explores the content of Hip-Hop indicates many of the themes that are of interest to urban planners are the same themes that are embedded in Hip-Hop music. One reason for this thematic overlap is due to

the backgrounds of the Hip-Hop artists themselves. Early rappers were regarded as storytellers, disturbers of the peace, and cultural historians who were “testifying” to the lived experiences of urban blacks during a period of political backlash, urban neglect, and stigmatization as a criminal underclass (Powell 1991; Smitherman 1997). There is not a complete agreement among scholars as to whether rap is *still* an expression of real-life conditions (Hunnicuttt and Andrews 2009). One perspective maintains that rap continues to serve as a conduit to voice concerns about the deprivation in the African-American community and to protest existing conditions (Kopano 2002; Stephens and Wright 2001). Rap artists are often viewed as ambassadors of inner-city African American life, especially the gangster life. Kopano calls rap music a “rhetoric of resistance,” primarily to issues of race; a rhetoric belonging mostly to young, African American males.

The conditions inherent in some of the urban neighborhoods created an environment where artists focused on the issues facing their community. For example, NWA’s roots in the struggling, working-class neighborhoods of Compton and South Central manifest in their image and messages. Rampant unemployment, drug dealing and drug abuse, absentee fathers, teen pregnancy, police brutality, and a litany of other inner-city woes are chronicled in the group’s music and captured vividly in the harsh language and intentionality of NWA’s shock-value aesthetic (McDermott 2002).

NWA coined the phrase “reality rap,” a term that reified black male expressions of anger and angst in the late 1980s. If no one else was speaking for urban black men, NWA was, and in voices that were defiantly unapologetic. The

issue of “reality,” for obvious reasons, is subjective and complex. For some social critics and cultural historians, reality within hip-hop is rooted in rap’s lyrical content and street-based narratives; as such, reality in rap becomes more than “just music,” as it is “situated within the lived contexts of black expressivity and contemporary cultural identity information” (Forman 2002).

Barack Obama told cultural historian Jeff Chang that “rap is reflective of the inner city, with its problems, but also its potential, its energy, its challenges to the status quo” (Chang 2007).

Undeniably, one of the most meaningful accomplishments of gangsta artistry has been to open a window on the daily, gritty grind of inner-city living. The social dynamics of the ‘hood were largely obscure to mainstream America until the protestations of hard-core hip hop in the mid to late 1980s. Artists like Ice-T, Schooly-D, N.W.A. emerged from the hip hop underground with the shocking and touching portrayals of life and death. Other performers such as the Geto Boys, Tupac Shakur, Too Short, Warren G, DJ Quik, and Snoop Doggy Dogg began to take us on tours of their blighted neighborhoods, forcing us to witness a devastating procession of human roadkill. Gangsta artists relate to us stories about pimps, pushers, “niggas,” “hoes,” and “bitches,” both real and imagined, who, like deer, are terrified and mesmerized by the dazzling headlights of oncoming perversion and mayhem (Watts 1997).

On one hand, skeptics were convinced that gangsta rappers and the marketers of gangsta rap had “found a pot of gold in selling images of black-on-black crime to mainstream America” (Leland 1993). By contrast, fans and true

believers were more likely to be convinced that gangsta rap's images were accurate depictions of life in many of America's most desperate communities (Woldu 2008).

Having confirmed the financial stability of a hard-core street aesthetic (Straight Outta Compton sold 2 million copies), N.W.A. along with the self-proclaimed "Original Gangster," Ice-T, helped set in motion an impulse to describe and manipulate the horrors of the "United States Ghetto." Thus, artists began articulating a chaotic world where young urban males, locked in the grip of an unrelenting and unrepentant street code, are pressured to become what Compton's Most Wanted refer to as "trigger happy niggas" who are "ready for the apocalypse..." (Woldu 2008).

This question cannot be answered simply by saying that art imitates life, or that the music is just entertainment (Holstein and Jones 1993), or that rappers talk "the real shit" (Shecter 1991). What we need to do at least is to delve into the interstices of popular cultural production. The battle lines in the debate over whether or not hard-core rap possesses insightful commentary or seeks to merely shock and incite are nearly as blurry as the lines between art and life itself in post-industrial American entertainment (Hughes 1993). But we need to understand that this is the only part of the scenario. The fact that so-called gangsta rap narratives are complex collages of social proclamations booming out of previously muffled throats- angry, confused, frustrated voices speaking from what Robin D.G. Kelley calls the "social and spatial fringes" of our society- is a precious one. It is clear

that the literature on Hip-Hop is establishing the connection between the artist and his environment (Kelley 1992).

Taking the connection one step further, the link between artistic expression through music and social organization has already been made. One study reveals that music of any genre has the ability to reach out to youth and provide an opportunity for a unique expression. Hip-Hop is like other cultural movements that expose the inner workings of a group and its surroundings through artistic expressions. Youth subcultures have often been organized around music (Blair 1993). The heavy metal subculture provided an identity and haven for young people who were disenchanted with home, school, jobs and churches, the acceptable institutions of their parents. Lull called these types of movements (including rap) “oppositional” subcultures, because they represent loosely organized resistance to social institutions, values and practices (Lull 1992). There develops a common bond between performer and listener through shared meanings, not only in the lyrics but also in the style and sound of the music itself. In the 1950s, sociologist David Riesman observed that young people were using popular music to create socially shared meanings and common states of awareness. The popular music was a primary source of conversation and predicting the next hit became a way of maintaining status within one’s peer group (Blair 1993).

Hip-Hop literature clearly illustrates the themes present in the music are often those of inner-city life, with bleak depictions of employment, poverty, homelessness and hunger. Violent imagery is laced with expressions of

desperation, fear and bravado. The themes illuminated by the literature could be congruent with the interests of urban planners and policy makers.

### *Section 2: The Matter of Hyperbole*

In any discussion of Hip-Hop, the issue of hyperbole comes up. Where do researchers draw the line between actual reflection on conditions, and exaggerated tales designed to increase street cred, and thus, record sales? One prominent perspective in Hip-Hop holds that rap has become increasingly commercialized, it has been co-opted by capitalist interests (Foreman 2002). Profit industries have turned these cultural symbols into commodities and in the process removed lyrical expressions from their origins of symbolic meaning (Merrin 2005).

It is unlikely that researchers could completely disentangle the social and commercial origins of rap music. Cultural images in the media reflect, produce, reproduce, shape and change social reality (Hunnicuttt and Andrews 2009). Such representations are a “hall of mirrors” (Ferrell 1999), and are profoundly shaped by capitalism.

Watts, a researcher in rhetorical studies at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill has grappled with this very issue. He argues:

“Gagsta rap narratives are treated as testimonials that provoke conflicted strategies for constitution urban African American male identity and social intercourse. I argue that hard-core rap artistry participates in a complex and fluid set of economic exchange relations among the lived experiences of artists, the operations of consumer culture, and the

dictates of rap music industry. The concept of “spectacular consumption” is posited as a discursive template for understanding how rhetorical strategies of self-promotion in gangsta rap artistry alter and are altered by the sophisticated interdependence among private, public and economic spheres” (Watts 1997).

While it would be helpful to know exactly where honest reflections start and the artistic license kicks in, there is no way to specifically determine when this occurs. However, the potentially hyperbolic accounts do not diminish the value of the messages expressed in Hip-Hop. As with all art, the expressions are an interpretation of a situation and not expected to be wholly accurate.

### *Section 3: How Can Planners Access and Utilize this Knowledge?*

Studying the content of rap lyrics in an academic context has been done before (Herd 2005; Kubrin 2005, 2006; Hunnicutt and Andrews 2009). Herd’s objective was to track the change in frequency of the mention of alcohol use; Kubrin was tracking the change of frequency of violent and nihilistic themes; and Hunnicutt and Andrews sought to track the change in frequency of homicide themes. Each of these studies made an important contribution to the academic study of rap lyrics, and together helped to develop the methodology used in this research. Each study’s method to “access” the information held within rap lyrics has merit, however, none of these studies alone provided a way to find answers to the specific questions that are important to urban planners and policy makers.

Herd's 2005 study sought to explore the role of changing images of drinking and alcoholic beverage use in rap music from its beginnings in the United States in the late 1970's to the late 1990's. A sample of 341-rap music song lyrics released from 1979 to 1997 was selected using Billboard and Gavin rating charts. Song lyrics were coded for music genres, alcohol beverage types and brand names, drinking behaviors, drinking contexts, intoxication, attitudes towards alcohol and consequences of drinking. The goal was to establish frequency of the themes and track its change over time. The methodology employed by this researcher has been cited in 17 subsequent studies, relating both to rap/hip-hop and addiction.

Kubrin's 2005 study built slightly on Herd's methodology but sought to explore how structural conditions in inner-city communities have given rise to cultural adaptations embodied in a street code, and how portrayals of violence in rap lyrics serve many functions including establishing social identity and reputation and exerting social control. These issues were examined through content analysis of 403 rap albums that went platinum (that is, sold over 1,000,000 copies) from 1992 to 2000, selected using Billboard rating charts. There were 1,922 songs on 130 albums, of which Kubrin took an initial sample of 632 songs (roughly one-third). Kubrin coded the lyrics of the songs according to six street code elements: (1) respect, (2) willingness to fight or use violence, (3) material wealth, (4) violent retaliation, (5) objectification of women, and (6) nihilism. The first analysis was quantitative and describes the occurrence of violence and other themes (frequency) in the sample; the second was qualitative

and determines how rappers portray violent identities and account for the use of violence in their everyday lives.

Kubrin's 2006 study expanded on his work from the previous year and sought to (1) identify to what extent rap music contains elements of the street code – and particularly nihilism – identified by (Anderson 1999) and others; and (2) examine how do rappers experience and interpret their lives, and how do they respond to issues in their communities. Kubrin again selected the 1992-2000 timeframe, and again isolated albums that had gone platinum. However, he identified his sample using the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). There were 1,922 songs on 130 albums, of which he took an initial sample of 632 songs (roughly one-third). Kubrin used the same codes as established in his previous study; however, he focused solely on the “nihilism” code for this study. The first analysis was quantitative and describes the occurrence of each theme in the sample (frequency); the second analysis was qualitative and specifically examines how nihilism is represented in rap music. This was done by looking for evidence of attitudes such as bleak outlook on life, perceived or real sense of powerlessness, frustration and despair, fear of death or dying, and resignation or acceptance of death.

Finally, Hunnicutt and Andrew's 2009 study aimed to reveal the ways homicide is constructed within rap music and its frequency of occurrence across time. The study analyzed the most popular rap songs over the period of 1989-2000, as determined by Billboard music charts. The goal was to reveal the complexity of homicide-related rap lyrics by exploring their style and hidden

meanings. For the sample, Hunnicutt and Andrew decided to depart from previous research that sought a representative sample of rap music (Herd, 2005; Kubrin, 2005, 2006) and instead employ a sampling strategy that was purposive in that it involved isolating the songs that were at the top of the Billboard charts. The strategy isolates hit singles, not hit albums, despite the potential problem that songs from hit albums may not have become “hit singles” but still have been consumed by a wide audience. To construct the sample, Billboard’s list of “top rap singles” and “hot rap singles” was obtained for each year, which provided between 30-50 rap singles per year. Songs were selected by ranking, pulling the first top 30 songs for each year, which yielded an initial list of 360 songs. The sample was then analyzed by content analysis to determine frequency of the use of homicide.

It is clear that each of these studies took a slightly different approach to conducting research on hip-hop music. In the next chapter, I outline how these four studies influenced the development of the methodology used in this research, and how the methodology utilized in this research could help urban planners and policy makers overcome the current access barriers.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods

### *Section 1: Methodology Formation*

The existing work on Hip-Hop lyrical analysis presented varying approaches on how to conduct the research relevant to this thesis. I established eight main elements that are consistent throughout all four of the studies that I examined to frame the methodology for this study. The eight main elements are: (1) Approach: Quantitative or Qualitative analysis (2) Sample selection source: Billboard, Gavin, RIAA (3) Sampling Strategy: representative or purposive (4) Subgenre Exclusion (5) Year Selection: 1979-1997, 1989-2000, 1992-2000 (6) Unit of Analysis: Single or Album (7) Sample Size (8) Lyrics Source Selection and (9) Codes: A priori or inductive

#### (1) Approach: Quantitative or Qualitative

A quantitative approach would look at the frequency of occurrence of a particular theme or idea. However, I was not looking for how often rappers speak about urban conditions or the change of frequency of a theme over time, both of which would necessitate a quantitative analysis of codes gleaned from the analysis of the lyrics. Rather, I was looking to understand *what* Hip-Hop artists say about urban conditions whenever they do talk about them. Therefore, I took a qualitative approach as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994).

#### (2) Sample Selection: Billboard, Gavin or RIAA

There are three main resources that determine the popular music that can be used to generate a viable sample: Billboard, Gavin and RIAA. Each of these

resources maintains various music charts that track the most popular songs and albums in various categories on a weekly basis. Billboard boasts a long history of charting songs, extensive coverage of different geographic and sociodemographic markets, and the categorical system determined by Billboard that responds to the fact that rap music tends to mix genres so that the boundaries between rap, Hip-Hop and R&B are not always distinct. For decades, Billboard's R&B singles charts were compiled from playlists reported by radio stations and sales reports reported by stores. These airplay and sales reports established the weekly rankings for Billboard's airplay chart and sales chart, and were combined for the compilation of the Hot R&B Singles chart. The chart has been determined by a combination of input from radio stations continuously monitored by Broadcast Data Systems (BDS), additional radio station playlists, and actual point-of-sale information provided by SoundScan, Inc. BDS is a subsidiary of Billboard that electronically monitors actual radio airplay. They have installed monitors throughout the country that track the airplay of songs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These monitors can identify each song play by an encoded audio "fingerprint." Billboard determines weekly rankings according to gross impressions, which multiply each play by the Arbitron-estimated audience for the station at time of play.

The strategy employed by Billboard makes it an obvious contender for determining popular music, as it covers both sales and radio play. However, Billboard is not the ultimate source for determining popularity. The Gavin rating system, unlike Billboard, is based on radio play and incorporates data based on

direct requests from radio listeners *and* audiences attending nightclubs. Gavin's service monitors a wide range of radio stations nationally that incorporate a diversity of listening audiences (e.g. college students, inner city residents, rural residents, etc) (Herd, 2005). The Gavin rating system expands the reach of its tracking and monitoring and includes groups that aren't typically included in Billboard ratings.

The final resource to consider is the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) data. The RIAA collects and compiles information on both shipment and purchasing trends of recorded music in the United States. The shipment statistics for the recorded music industry include key formats (CD's, cassettes, downloads etc.), and both the number of units and dollar values are included as well. This data is an estimate of the size of the U.S. recorded music industry based on data collected directly from the major music companies (which create and/or distribute about 85% of the music sold in the U.S.), and estimates where possible for the remaining parts of the market (RIAA Key Statistics, 2010)

After analyzing the three different source options, I decided the best source for this research to determine what is "popular music" was Billboard. The Gavin rating system is problematic in that no clear database could be located, and it also incorporated music that was popular at nightclubs. It is doubtful that the music played at nightclubs would contain the themes that were pertinent to this particular research topic, as the themes in those songs tend to be "party" or "love/sex." The RIAA rating system was also problematic in that the information was proprietary and needed to be purchased, which was outside of the budget

limitations for this project. The Billboard information has been published in a book that was purchased for a nominal fee.

There are, however, limitations of Billboard. By using Billboard, it is acknowledged that the research is really a study of “commercial” rap music. Rap music is inextricably bound up with the interests of the music industry. This unknown degree of influence by the music industry means that researchers cannot claim that Billboard’s selections are representative of all rap music, nor can it be claimed that it represents all rap music, including authentic rap music. That said, the best-selling songs may have the most pervasive cultural presence by the sheer frequency with which they are heard (Hunnicut and Andrews, 2009).

### (3) Sampling Strategy: Representative or Purposive

A representative sample is established by determining albums released within a given time period, compiling all of the songs contained within those albums and drawing a random sample from that total group. This methodology provides a non-biased set of data from which the researcher could determine the frequency of a given theme.

Another sampling strategy is the purposive sampling strategy (Hunnicut and Andrews 2009). This strategy isolates songs that were at the top of the Billboard charts, reasoning that the top-rated songs were heard by a larger audience and therefore had a greater presence in cultural memory. The goal was to look at the popular music, rather than all music released during a given period of time.

As the goal of this research does not primarily aim to track frequency, I decided to employ the purposive sampling strategy. I also decided to expand my research pool outside of just popularity, but also to include a content-based provision as well. Meaning, my first sample was of popular music, or songs that reached the Top 20 or above on the Billboard charts. I then supplemented this group with content-based songs that were not necessarily popular, but important to this research.

#### (4) Subgenre Exclusion

Within Hip-Hop music, there are clearly defined subgenres, or “song types.” Herd (2005) defines subgenres within Hip-Hop to categorize songs into distinct groups. The following categories were used to classify songs:

Brag raps – focused on asserting the personal power of the rapper and/or his music; gangsta rap – depicting criminal and violent lifestyles; party rap – lyrics with themes focusing on party activities such as dancing, socializing and having a good time; political/cultural raps – songs describing social and political or cultural issues such as poverty, oppression, racial pride or social justice; love/sex – lyrics with a primary theme of finding love, seduction and or sexual prowess.

Only gangsta rap and political/cultural raps contain the type of information that is relevant to this research and therefore were the only types of song included, excluding all others.

### (5) Year Selection

The 1979-1997 time period is important as Hip-Hop as a genre experienced increasing popularity during this time (Hughes 2002). The 1992-2000 time period was important because gangsta rap emerged in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Kelly 1996; Keyes 2002; Kitwana 2002; Krims 2000; Smith 1997; Watkins 2001), but beginning around 1999, it became highly commercialized (Kitwana 1994; Krims 2000; Smith 1997; Watkins 2001). Therefore, the year 2000 represents a turning point in the rap music industry whereby production values more clearly addressed commercial consumption.

However, 1989 is important because it was the year in which Billboard recognized rap music as its own category of music. Before 1989, Billboard lumped rap music into other musical genres, such as dance/disco and soul. 1989 also marked the first year for rap music's year in review also known as the "year in music."

For my popularity-based sample, I concur that 1989 is a good beginning year due to its treatment on the Billboard charts. I, however, reject the ending year of 2000 because my research is not limited to only gangsta rap, and some great political/cultural Hip-Hop was released in 2006 in response to Hurricane Katrina. However, my primary source for Billboard information, *The Billboard Book of Top R&B and Hip-Hop Hits* (Whitburn 2006) contains all of the artists and all of the titles that hit between #1 and #40 on *Billboard* magazine's R&B Singles charts up to year 2004. Therefore, my popularity-based research timeframe was

1989-2004. I added some content-based songs from 1986-1988 and from 2005-2008 to round out my research group.

#### (6) Unit of Analysis: Single or Album

There are two main units when discussing commercial music: the single or the album. A single is an isolated release that is used typically to promote an album. It is selected for release based on its perceived commercial appeal. Billboard tracks singles on the Billboard Top 100 chart. An album is a complete work including numerous tracks, some of which may include a single. Many tracks on an album never receive public exposure.

The question is: which type of track can relay more information about the people who consume the music? Some researchers contend that only what's popular is indicative of what resonates with the public. However, others contend that songs from hit albums that never became "hit singles" may still have been consumed by a wide audience due to the popularity of the album as a whole.

For my research, I utilized a popularity-based criterion (unit: Single) and a content-based criterion (unit: Album) and therefore place importance on both units of music. I began my popularity-based analysis with "hit-singles," defined as songs that were released and reached a position of #20 or above on the Billboard chart. I then supplemented the sample with songs that were not either released as singles or reached a position of 20 or above. The content-based analysis was based on reviewing the playlists used in other articles exploring the lyrical content of Hip-Hop music. I made this decision to expand my sample because an initial review of top 20 songs (popularity-based sample) revealed that

many songs that I wanted to include in my analysis would be excluded from my sample, and songs that did not add value to my analysis would be included. Allowing for an additional selection of songs based on relevant subject matter provides for artists and songs to be included even if they failed to appear on the *Billboard* charts or would not otherwise be classified as “popular.” I acknowledge this selection process was largely subjective, however, I believe it to be the most effective way to garner the subject material that reveal the best results.

#### (7) Sample Size

Since the primary goal of this research was not to determine the frequency of a theme over time, I was not required to obtain a certain sample size to satisfy quantitative analysis techniques. I did, however, want to obtain a large enough sample in order to gain a rich understanding of the themes present in the music. I also wanted to make sure that the split between the popularity-based tracks and content-based tracks were relatively even. Therefore, I decided a sample of 100 tracks would be large enough to obtain a fair representation of both types of songs without being too cumbersome to analyze. My entire sample contained 1,740 tracks, 100 tracks represents roughly 5.7% of the entire sample.

#### (8) Lyrics Source Selection

There are three options for securing lyrics: (1) copy written lyrics from library books that published lyrics, (2) listen to each song and transcribe the lyrics by ear, or (3) search for song lyrics on websites. Option one turned out to be impossible since the more recent songs in popular music moves much faster than the academic machine. The second option was also problematic because many

sections of songs are indecipherable, increasing chances for error. The third option is the most viable as there are many rap lyric archive websites.<sup>4</sup>

The key concern was that fans enter lyrics for many of these websites. Therefore, I began my lyrics search with an established website, Lyrics.com, that contained lyrics published by the record companies in the released material. Not every song in my sample was included on this website, and I then had to reference the other rap lyrics websites the other authors used. In order to eliminate the possibility that the lyrics contained errors, I conducted a validity check by crosschecking lyrics from a variety of websites for all of the songs in the sample.

#### (9) Codes: A priori or Inductive

When it comes to coding, there are two main approaches: A priori and inductive (Miles, Huberman 1994). A priori codes are developed before examining the current material based on a research question, background knowledge and research. For example, Kubrin conducted field and literary research to determine a “street code,” which he then simplified into six codes: (1) respect, (2) willingness to fight or use violence, (3) material wealth, (4) violent retaliation, (5) objectification of women, and (6) nihilism. He then went through the research material and counted the frequency of the presence of each of these codes.

The other approach is inductive coding, where a researcher may have some expectations of what will be present in the research material, but goes

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<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.dapslyrics.com>, <http://www.digital-daydreams.com>, <http://www.digitaldreamdoor.com>, <http://www.lyricsfreak.com>, <http://www.lyrics.com>, <http://www.lyricsondemand.com>, <http://www.oldschoolhiphop.com>, <http://www.seeklyrics.com>, <http://top40-charts.com>, and <http://www.ohhla.com>.

through a small sample of the material and allows the it to reveal what the codes ought to be (Miles, Huberman 1994) I decided to take this approach because the focus of this research is to explore the music through a methodology that urban planners and policy makers could use and to approach Hip-Hop music in a way that is illuminating to them; the codes would change as the research focus changed. For example, an urban planner in New Orleans may want to look at the Hip-Hop coming from Louisiana-based artists to determine what they are saying in response to Hurricane Katrina. The codes for this research may be words like “levy”, “response”, “failure”, “President Bush”, “abandonment”, “Super Dome”, “Katrina”. It would be up to the individual researching using this methodology to determine what codes would be most valuable to their community.

Based on the outcome of the comparative study of existing methodologies, the research guidelines were as follows: I took a qualitative approach to analyzing lyrics; the main source for my popular-based sample was Billboard charts, supplemented by content-based additions suggested by various sources; the sampling approach was purposive rather than representative; I analyzed only gangsta and political/social rap; for my popular-based sample, the timeframe was 1989-2004, with content based additions from 1986-1988 and 2005-2008; I included both “hit singles” and album tracks; the sample size was 100 songs; the main source for my lyrics was Lyrics.com, supplemented by other rap lyric archives; and, my coding approach was inductive rather than a priori.

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## *Section 2: Methodology Execution*

The popular-based sample, which included singles that reached a position of 20 or higher on the Billboard charts between the years 1989-2004 (Whittman, 2006), generated 1,740 titles. I then identified songs within this sample that contained the subjects that were relevant to this research through a content analysis of the song title, followed by a secondary selection process of the artist.

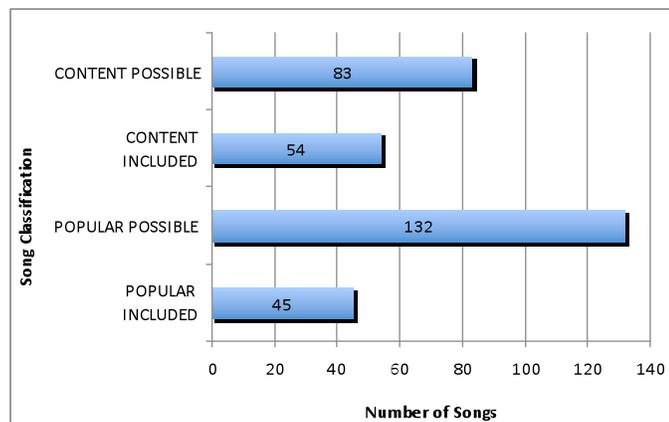
The content analysis of the song title was a simple review of the song titles. I selected titles that included words that seemed to have a relationship with urban issues or problems, including: shackles, street, emergency, police, Compton, money, babies, work, rent, ghetto, Harlem, 911, banned, pressure, trouble, gangsta, thug, “G”, freedom, etc. For the artist selection, I identified artists known for gangsta and/or cultural and political rap. For example, I selected titles from artists such as Ice-T, Kool & the Gang, N.W.A., Heavy D & the Boyz, Public Enemy, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Notorious B.I.G., Bone-Thugs-N-Harmony, Jay-Z, Tupac, etc. I also included the tracks that I knew from my personal knowledge to be relevant, such as the work done by Dead Prez and Mos Def.

This generated list of 132 songs. To narrow the list down to include only relevant songs, I conducted a quick search of the song’s lyrics in Google. I skimmed the content of the lyrics and decided if the song could be classified as “social/political” or “gangsta” as defined by Herd (2005). If it could be classified as “party”, “brag”, or “love/sex”, it was eliminated. I was left with approximately 45 songs.

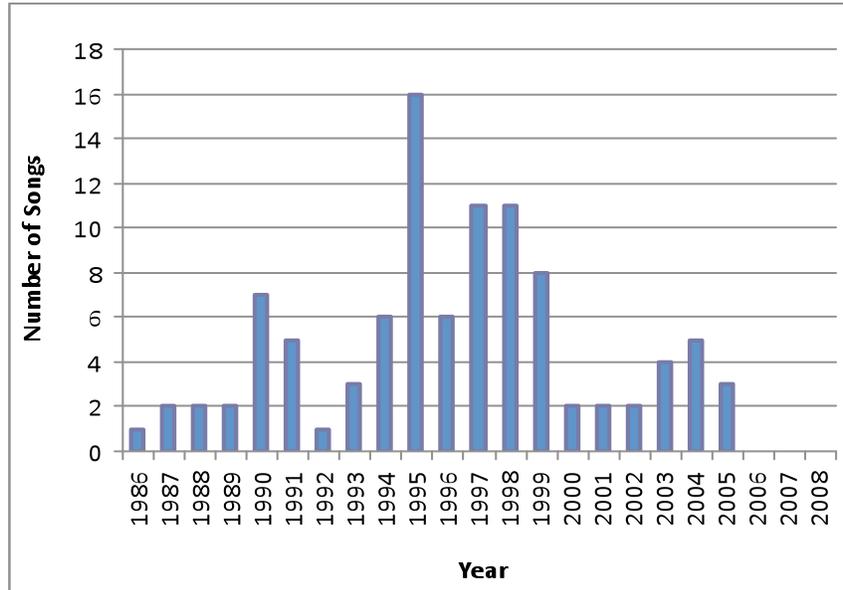
For the content-based songs, I first identified songs from my research playlist that I personally know to have the type of content that is relevant to my analysis, as well as songs that have been determined “influential” by reviews in magazines such as *Source*, *Vibe* and *Rollingstone* via the International Index to Music Periodicals (IIMP). I then supplemented the list with songs analyzed in Herd, Kubrin and Hunnicutt and Andrews’ studies. My initial content-based sample included 83 songs. I replicated the content analysis of the song title process from the popular-based sample. This generated 54 relevant titles.

My final combined sample contained a total of 100 songs, 45% were “popular” songs, and 55% were “content-based” songs. The list can be found in Appendix 1. These 100 songs represented 5.7% of my initial sample (100 songs/1,740 songs). The chart below illustrates the breakdown between possible songs that met the initial selection criteria and actual songs selected for each sample type.

**Figure 3.1: Sample distribution between popular-based songs and content based songs**



**Figure 3.2: Song distribution over time**



**Table 3.1: Song sample data set**

	'76	'86	'87	'88	'89	'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97
TOTAL # SONGS	0	146	154	163	171	169	152	147	90	109	96	99	109
POPULAR POSSIBLE	0	0	0	0	4	8	5	1	6	10	10	10	15
POPULAR INCLUDED	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	1	2	4	5	3	5
CONTENT POSSIBLE	1	1	2	2	4	4	4	1	4	3	16	3	9
CONTENT INCLUDED	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	0	1	2	11	3	6
TOTAL	1	1	2	2	2	7	5	1	3	6	16	6	11
	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	Totals	
TOTAL # SONGS	103	87	83	88	81	79	77	0	0	0	0	1740	
POPULAR POSSIBLE	10	9	9	10	8	12	5	0	0	0	0	132	
POPULAR INCLUDED	4	2	1	2	2	4	4	0	0	0	0	45	
CONTENT POSSIBLE	12	7	1	0	0	0	1	7	0	1	1	83	
CONTENT INCLUDED	7	6	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	54	
TOTAL	11	8	2	2	2	4	5	3	0	0	0	100	

Next, I conducted the search for the lyrics using the aforementioned methodology. I then uploaded the documents into the program Atlas T.I., which is used by researchers to open-code material. I began my coding with four specific

subgroups in mind: Actor, Place, Problem and Solution. I did not come into my analysis with established codes under each subgroup, but I wanted to look for codes that could be categorized within these four subgroups. I selected these four subgroups based on an understanding of what I would encounter in the lyrics. For example, I knew that I would come across actors, places and problems and it seemed logical to arrange the assorted codes under a larger umbrella in order to maintain some organization through the coding process. Based on the inductive coding approach, I began assigning codes to stanzas within songs based on specific keywords. For example, when the word “coke” was mentioned, I selected the lines of text that captured the artists’ portrayal of the drug use and assigned the code “Drug” to the highlighted text. For example, this excerpt was selected to represent “drugs”:

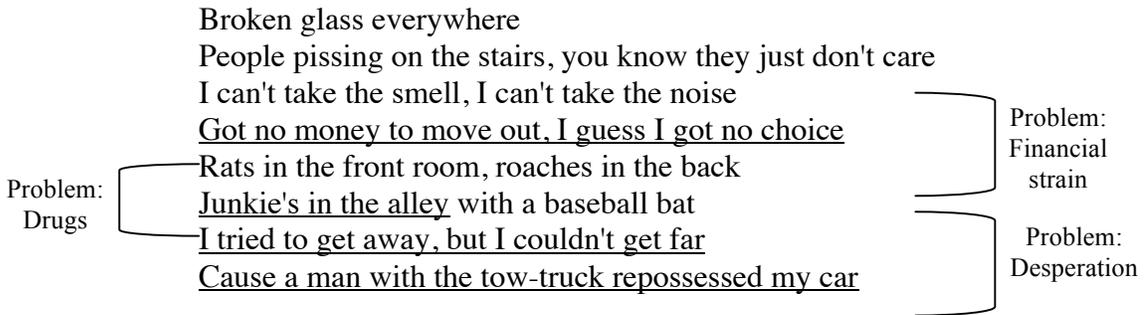
“I remember how it all began  
I used to sing dirty raps to my East Side fans  
Back then I knew ya couldn't stop this rap  
No M.C. could rock like that  
Then the new style came, the bass got deeper  
Ya gave up the mike and bought you a beeper  
Do ya wanna rap or sell coke?”  
*Life is Too Short,*

Problem:  
Drug

The text was selected initially because of the keyword “coke,” which represent cocaine, a drug that is often sold in inner cities. The entire stanza was selected because beyond the specific mention of coke, the idea the stanza represents is the trade-off young people make between artistic endeavors (rapping) and selling drugs, which was an interesting representation.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, one selected stanza within a song often contained more than one code. Consider this excerpt from Grandmaster Flash's

*The Message:*



It is clear that within this one small stanza, many different ideas are represented and overlap with one another. Isolating just one code and taking it outside of its context did not seem to be advantageous to me, so I decided to assign multiple codes to the same stanza in order to maintain the integrity of the narratives. This is known as “co-occurring codes” (Miles and Huberman 1994)

After coding the entire sample, I had collected 34 individual codes under the four subgroups. The definitions of the subgroups and codes can be found below. Also included are some of the keywords I used to identify the Codes.

One point of clarification: Under the “Solution” subgroup, I only have one code, “Hope.” As I was coding the songs, I noticed that there weren't necessarily tangible solutions, but consistent messages of hope. Rather than dissect the messages further and risk devaluing them, I decided to stick with the single message of hope. The grouping was more powerful when kept together under this one code.

To clarify the hierarchy of the subgroups and codes in future discussions, the nomenclature is as follows: Police (Subgroup: Actor), meaning, the code “Police” is part of the subgroup (Subgroup: Actor).

Definitions of Subgroup Groups and Codes

Subgroup: Actor: Person or entity, used without a positive or negative charge. Simply an actor within the narrative

**Table 3.2: Definitions of codes within the Actor Subgroup**

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>Code</b>
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Authority Figure</b>
Definition	A person with a position of authority, not already mentioned in other codes (i.e. a police officer is an authority figure, but it has its own code)
Keywords	Boss, manager, judge, politician, mayor, the authorities, the City (referring to government), D.A.
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Family</b>
Definition	Family members individual or the concept of a family unit; must refer to more than just one parent (Actor: Parent code would be used instead); also refers to siblings
Keywords	Brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, god parent, parents (plural) families
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Gang</b>
Definition	Established group of organized crime
Keywords	Gang, Bloods, Crips, Gang-bangers
<b>Actor</b>	<b>God</b>
Definition	God specifically as a figure, also includes Jesus
Keywords	God, Jesus, Man Above, Lord
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Parent</b>
Definition	Specifically referring to a mother or father
Keywords	Mother, father, mom, dad
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Peer</b>
Definition	Friends, in a gang or not
Keywords	Friends, brother (non-familial), homie(s), pal, bro, buddy, my nigga, crew

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Police</b>
Definition	Police officer, when used without a negative connotation
Keywords	Police, po-po, 5-0, pigs, cops, crusin blue, detectives
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Priest/Religious Figure</b>
Definition	An actor within a church, not a divine entity
Keywords	Priest, Father (non-familial)
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Society</b>
Definition	Society as in it, specifically referred to
Keywords	Society, “they”
<b>Actor</b>	<b>Teacher/Mentor</b>
Definition	Within a school context or any agent of instruction
Keywords	Teacher, leader, educator

Subgroup: Place: Physical surroundings, specific or in general, used without a positive or negative charge.

**Table 3.3: Definitions of codes under Place Subgroup**

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>Code</b>
<b>Place</b>	<b>Streets</b>
Definition	Such as “the streets of Brooklyn” generally referring to the inner city
Keywords	these streets, the corner
<b>Place</b>	<b>Church</b>
Definition	As an institution or physical place
Keywords	Church, place of worship
<b>Place</b>	<b>City</b>
Definition	Can be specific, like New York, or in general, like “The city makes me crazy”
Keywords	The city, New York, Roxbury, the block
<b>Place</b>	<b>Ghetto</b>
Definition	Specific mention of the ghetto, also known as “the hood”
Keywords	The ghetto, the hood, the block
<b>Place</b>	<b>Housing Project</b>
Definition	Specific mentions of the housing projects
Keywords	The projects, Marcy, public housing

<b>Place</b>	<b>Prison</b>
Definition	Physical prison, not mental prisons
Keywords	Prison, the cell, being locked up, jail
<b>Place</b>	<b>School</b>
Definition	As a physical place of learning
Keywords	School, classroom

Subgroup: Problem: Any problem facing the artist and his/her community.  
Problems inherently have a negative charge.

**Table 3.4: Definitions of codes under Problem Subgroup**

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>Code</b>
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Death</b>
Definition	Any mention of death or dying
Keywords	Death, dying, killed, gone forever, murder, capped, die, killed, smoked
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Desperation</b>
Definition	Descriptions of helplessness, disparity, failure, struggle, inability to cope
Keywords	Hopeless, helpless, failure, struggle, pain, alone, left behind, insecurity, feeling down
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Drugs</b>
Definition	Use or sale of drugs
Keywords	Smoke a blunt, sling rock, 8 ball, junkies, weed, crack, dope, push weight, narcotic, dime bag/sack
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Education negative</b>
Definition	Descriptions of the futility of education
Keywords	They can't teach me, I never learned nothin'
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Financial Dependence/Strain</b>
Definition	Descriptions of financial struggles, not necessarily poverty but lack of financial opportunities and/or security
Keywords	Struggle to survive, can't buy, broke
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Injustice</b>
Definition	Descriptions of unjust behavior or activity, including inequity
Keywords	Overtax earnings, ignore us, different set of rules, more of us in jail, targeted by police
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Materialism</b>

Definition	Descriptions of objects or money, in an exaggerated way
Keywords	Love for the dough, bling, make g's, ball out, live large
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Police negative</b>
Definition	Contrast to Police as an actor, which stands as a neutral actor. Police as a problem stands as an actual problem, descriptions include negative attitudes and perceptions of unjust behavior
Keywords	Police, po-po, 5-0, pigs, cops, Feds, L.A.P.D.
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Poverty</b>
Definition	Depictions of poverty, different from financial struggles or strain, but more abject descriptions
Keywords	Hunger, starvation, struggle, being born with less
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Pregnancy Negative</b>
Definition	Depictions of pregnancy in a negative or debilitating situation
Keywords	Womb, baby-mama, knocked up
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Race Relations Negative</b>
Definitions	Depictions of relationships between blacks and whites as negative or adversarial, or descriptions of situations where whites are favored over blacks
Keywords	Negro, brown, minority, nigger
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Religion</b>
Definition	Religion as a problem rather than actor
Keywords	The priest is a crook, God can't save me
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Theft/Crime</b>
Definition	Descriptions of incidences of theft and/or crime, either as a victim or perpetrator
Keywords	Doin' dirt, push weight (sell drugs), do a job, hustle, run game, steal
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Unemployment</b>
Definition	Negative descriptions of unemployment
Keywords	Expressions of: No job, no opportunity, no skills
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Violence</b>
Definition	Depictions of violence, including murder
Keywords	Shot, kill, murder, destroy, inflict pain, steal
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Welfare</b>
Definition	Depictions of welfare as a problem, or negative part of life
Keywords	Welfare, government check

Subgroup: Solutions: Some Hip-Hop artists offer messages of hope as a solution to the problems the raps depict. There are instances of these hopeful and instructive messages throughout the sample.

**Table 3.5: Definition of code under Solution Subgroup**

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>Code</b>
<b>Solution</b>	Hope
Definition	Depictions of hope and/or instructions to the listener on how the community can solve some of the problems they are facing
Keywords	Build up our hoods, advance minorities, do the right thing, heal each other, be real, make changes, work hard, you can be anything, make a difference

## Chapter 4: Results of Lyrical Analysis

### *Section 1: General Discussion*

The final sample included 100 songs, between 1986 and 2004. However, as I conducted the narrative analysis, I needed to exclude four songs from the sample. While these songs initially appeared to contain relevant themes, upon further examination, the songs were actually “brag” songs, not social/political as was originally categorized. The specific songs that were excluded are noted in the Appendix.

Disclaimer: 1) The lyrics quoted in this chapter contain explicit language and were not edited or censored in order to maintain the integrity of the narratives. 2) The lyrics quoted in this chapter contain slang or colloquial language. I did not assume the burden of defining the lyrics. An accurate collection of definitions for Hip-Hop music can be found at [rapdict.org](http://rapdict.org).

### *Initial Findings*

While the initial aim of this research was not to track frequency of a particular code over time, a brief discussion of the number of occurrences of each code is helpful in illuminating the prominent trends within this sample.

The first subgroup was Actor, which contained 10 individual codes. Within this subgroup, the most frequent codes (top 30%) were: God (36 codes), Peer (33 codes) and Police (25 codes). The least frequent codes (bottom 30%)

were: Authority Figure (7 codes), Priest/Religious Figure (4 codes) and Teacher (2 codes). In total, this subgroup generated 161 individual code designations.

The second subgroup was Place, which contained seven individual codes. Within this subgroup, the most frequent codes (top 30%) were: the ghetto (36 codes) and the “streets” (34 codes). The least frequent codes (bottom 30%) were: school (2 codes) and church (3 codes). In total, this subgroup generated 139 individual code designations.

The third subgroup was Problem, which contained 17 individual codes. Within this subgroup, the most frequent codes (top 30%) were: Desperation (124 codes), Violence (120 codes), Death (94 codes), Drugs (87 codes) and Police (49 codes). The least frequent codes (bottom 30%) were: Education (12 codes), Pregnancy (9 codes), Welfare (7 codes), Unemployment (5 codes) and Religion (1 code). In total, this subgroup generated 737 individual code designations.

The final subgroup was Solution, which contained one individual code: Hope. This code generated 54 individual code designations.

Overall, the analysis of 96 songs generated 1,091 individual code designations. What became interesting as the coding process progressed is that many sections of text overlapped codes, also known as co-occurrences. For example, Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) and Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) co-occurred frequently. This co-occurrence reveals interesting relationships between the subgroups, and between codes within the same subgroup. However, enumerating the frequency of these co-occurrences was not particularly helpful to

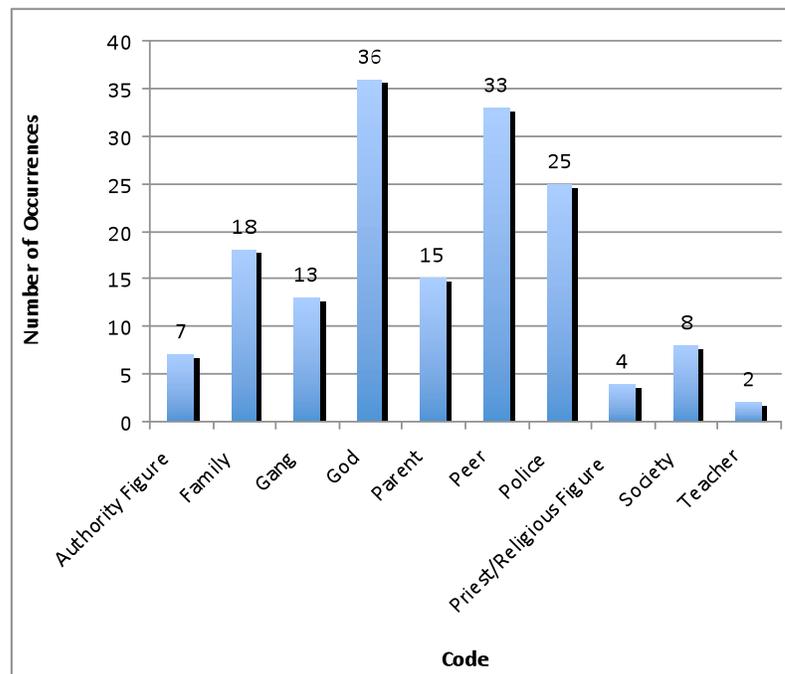
illustrating the objectives of this research. Rather, a discussion of the important co-occurrences takes place in the broader context of each subgroup.

The remaining sections of this chapter detail the analysis on each subgroup separately: Actor, Place, Problem and Solution. This chapter ends with a Conclusion that synthesizes and crystallizes each subgroup in a unified discussion.

*Section 2: Subgroup: Actor*

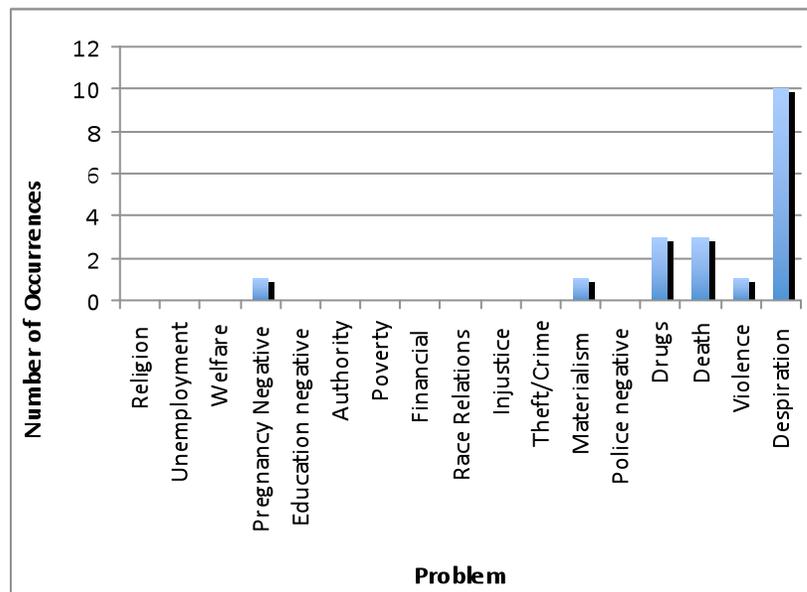
There were 10 individual codes within this subgroup: Authority Figure, Family, Gang, God, Parent, Peer, Police, Priest/Religious Figure, Society and Teacher. Refer to Table 3.2, page 35 for definitions. The frequency of each code is depicted below:

**Figure 4.1: Frequency of Occurrence – Subgroup: Actor**



The most frequent code within this subgroup was God, with 36 specific mentions. Within this code was a frequent co-occurrence between the God (Subgroup: Actor) code and the Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) code. Out of 36 incidences of God (Subgroup: Actor) code, 10 (28%) of the instances also contained the Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) code. This particular overlap frequency was higher than any other for the Actor subgroup.

**Figure 4.2: Frequency of Co-Occurrence: Problem + God (Subgroup Actor)**



The co-occurrence suggests that the purpose of the relationship with God is to ask for alleviation from the desperate situation surrounding the artist. Mo Thugs illustrate this relationship in *Ghetto Bluez*:

“Prayed that this was only a dream  
 Trapped in a slum surrounded by the crack fiendz  
 Meanz of survival I guess  
 Hustle in the hood wear the bullet proof vest  
 Help me Lord I can get no deeper than this”  
 (*Mo Thugs 1996*)

Kanye West also pleads to God to help cope with feelings of desperation, but exposes a fear that God won't listen because of the things he's done to survive:

“God show me the way because the Devil’s tryin’  
to break me down  
The only thing that I pray for is that my feet don’t  
fail me now  
And I don’t think there is nothing I can do now  
to right my wrongs  
I want to talk to God, but I’m afraid because  
we ain’t spoke in so long”  
*(Kanye West 2004)*

In another conversation with God, this artist displays slipping faith because of problems he is facing:

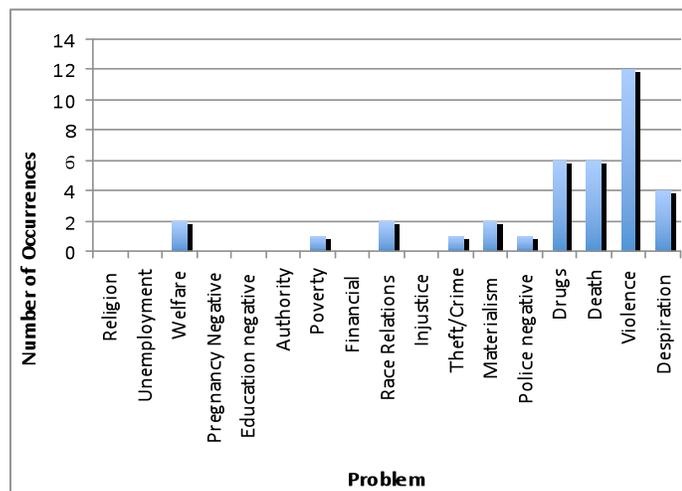
“Lord, I've really been real stressed, down and out,  
losing ground.  
Although I am black and proud,  
problems got me pessimistic.  
Brothers and sisters keep messin' up,  
why does it have to be so damn tuff?  
I don't know where I can go to let these  
ghosts out of my skull.  
My grandma past my brother's gone,  
I never at once felt so alone.  
I know you're supposed to be my steering wheel,  
not just my spare tire”  
*(Arrested Development 1992)*

Finally, it appears that part of the appeal toward God is that he understands the plight people are going through better than anyone else, including authority figures:

“A child is born with no state of mind  
Blind to the ways of mankind  
God is smiling but he’s frowning too  
Cause only God knows what you go through”  
*(Grandmaster Flash 1976)*

The second most frequent code was Peer (Subgroup: Actor). This code was established to capture how Hip-Hop artists viewed their peers. I was looking to determine if peers were helpful or detrimental to the artist. The most prominent overlaps were with the codes Drugs (Subgroup: Problem), Death (Subgroup: Problem), Violence (Subgroup: Problem), Desperation (Subgroup: Problem). There were not any occurrences of more “positive” co-occurrences such as Church (Subgroup: Place) or Hope (Subgroup: Solution). What this reveals is that the artists’ peers appear to be in similar situations, with little support from one another to make better lives.

**Figure 4.3: Frequency of Co-Occurrence: Problem + Peer (Subgroup: Actor)**



When the artists spoke of their friends, it was often in a memorial tone, as many of the friends had died.

“I saw my cousin Navier, eyes bucking out his head  
 Nigga bleeding from his mouth, he shaking, he’s on his way out  
 By this time, I took two hits from behind  
 My nigga John looked in my eyes and said nigga you ready to die  
 Damn, nigga, why”  
 (C-Murder 1998)

The trick is to never lose hope  
I found my buddy hangin dead from a rope, 16 on death row.  
(*Tupac 1997*)

“My childhood years were spent buryin’ my peers in the cemetery”  
(*Scarface feat. Tupac, Johnny P 1997*)

Still, those peers who did survive became sources of competition and sparked feelings of anger and inspired acts of violence as former friends turned on one another:

“Niggas getting jealous tryin to find my stash  
Whip out the nine, now I’m a dive and pump your ass  
Peter picked a pepper, but I can pick a punk  
Snatched him like a bitch, and threw him in the trunk  
The punk thought I was bluffin, but swear I’m nothing nice”  
(*Tupac 1997*)

“Living in the city of the Scandalous  
Shisty motherfuckers can’t even trust my own brothers  
So who can I choose to trust me that’s who?  
Niggas want a piece of the pie, fuck off and die  
(*Cypress Hill 1995*)

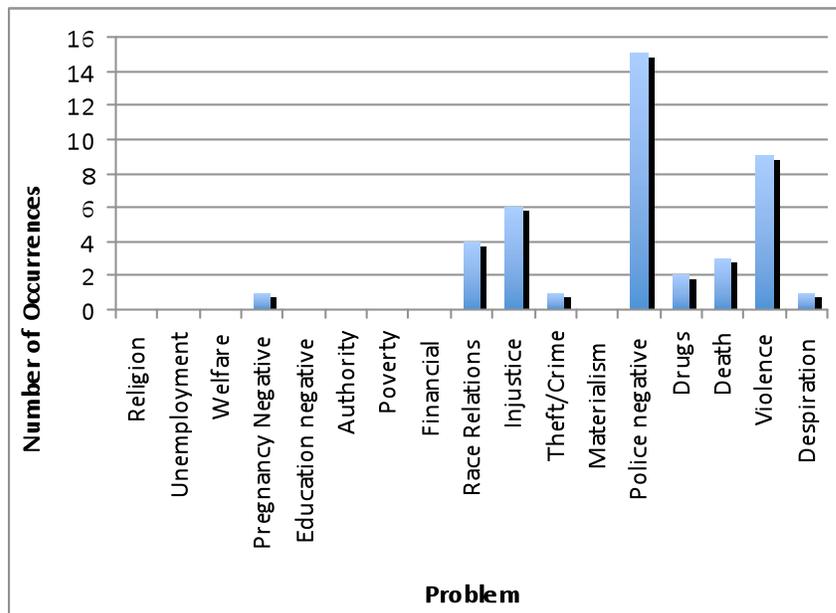
“And as long as I stay black I gotta stay strapped  
And I never get to lay back  
‘Cause I always got to worry about the pay backs  
Some buck that I roughed up way back  
Comin’ back after all these years  
Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat that’s the way it is”  
(*Tupac 1998*)

It becomes apparent through these depictions of peer relationships that the relationships peers have with one another are complicated. On one hand, they share similar experiences, and there is a sense of brotherhood and deep loss when a peer dies. On the other hand, the competition that erupts from fighting for resources and territory lends to peers turning on one another in acts of self-

preservation. These relationships do not seem to engender a sense of support and community.

The third most frequent code was Police (Subgroup: Actor). In this subgroup, Police was used when the police was mentioned simply as an actor in the narrative, not necessarily indicating any negative charge (that would use the Police (Subgroup: Problem) code). There were 14 co-occurrences (56%), combining the use of Police as an Actor as well as Police as a Problem. In the remaining 11 codes, however, Police serve as just a part of mosaic of problems facing the artists, including injustice, violence, death and negative race relations.

**Figure 4.4: Frequency of Co-Occurrence: Problem + Police (Subgroup: Actor)**



In *Growin' Up In the Hood*, Compton's Most Wanted show the role of police isn't as clear as to protect and serve, but also to suspect:

“Now the neighborhood’s on my line  
‘Cause some punk ass fool had drop the time  
5-0 at my doo’ at 8 o’clock  
Rush to the toilet so I could flush the rock  
Out the backdoor, freeze, I heard a shout  
Am I sho’, yo I guess I got no clout  
But it’s murder one, I’m the victim, damn, that ain’t good  
Growin’ up in the hood”  
*(Compton’s Most Wanted 1991)*

In *6 In the Mornin’*, Ice-T recalls waking up to hearing the cops at his door, he’s not quite sure what they’re there for other than to check in on him:

“6’n the morning’ police at my door  
Fresh adidas squerk across the bathroom floor  
Out the back window I make a escape  
Don’t even have a chance to grab my old school tape”  
*(Ice-T 1986)*

The Hip-Hop artists in this sample depict a relationship with police as an adversarial one, where people are presumed to be guilty of crimes, often because of race or suspected gang association. The artists also revealed the relationship between police and injustice. This co-occurrence was significant in that it appeared that police, more than any other actor, served as agents of injustice. This perception is discussed more in the Problem section. Still, realizing that communities have this negative perception of law enforcement is important when considering how to make people feel safe in their surroundings.

The most frequently referenced Actors: God, Peer and Police illustrate complex relationships, with the later two actors failing to be agents of support and safety that one would expect them to be. More traditional sources of support and safety, such as authority figures, priests/religious figures, and teachers, are the least frequently referenced actors in this sample. This failure to mention indicates

the skeptical relationship with these actors, and particularly with authority figures, when the artists did refer to this actor it was in a light of mistrust and inability to help them and their community. For example, Big Pun notes:

“We laid in the slums, made a cake out of crumbs  
Even though the government, tryin’ to take our sons  
Rudy Gulliani tryin’ to blind me, but I see reality  
Was raised with the street mentality  
My strategy’s why my battery never die  
The ghetto keeps me wise, so I would never fall to the lies  
It’s no surprise, but do or die if you want the glamour”  
(*Capital Punishment, Big Pun*)

Authority figures, priests/religious figures, and teachers are typically thought of as agents of assistance and change, people who reach out and help others. When the songs did speak of these actors, there was a real sense of abandonment and isolation. For example, Tupac spoke about a society that left him behind:

“I got beef with a sick society that doesn’t give a shit  
And they too quick to say goodbye to me”  
(*Tupac 1998*)

Tupac goes on further in the same song to further depict the abandonment he felt by a Priest/Religious figure:

“They tell me the preacher’s there for me  
He’s a crook with a book, that motherfucker never cared for me  
He’s only there to be sure  
I don’t drop a dime to God ‘bout the crimes he’s commitin’  
On the poor, and how can those people judge me?  
They ain’t my peers and in all these years, they ain’t never love me”

In a particularly powerful response to Hurricane Katrina, Mos Def lambasted President Bush and the government’s failure to quickly respond to the hurricane victims:

“Listen homie, its Dollar Day in New Orleans  
Its water everywhere and people dead in the streets  
And Mr. President the bout that cash  
He got a policy for handling the niggas and trash  
And if you poor you black  
I laugh a laugh they won’t give when you ask  
You better off on crack  
Dead or in jail, or with a gun in Iraq  
And it’s as simple as that  
No opinion my man it’s mathematical fact  
Listen, a million poor since 2004  
And they got –illions and killions to waste on the war  
And make you question what the taxes is for  
Or the cost to reinforce, the broke levee wall  
Tell the boss, he shouldn’t be the boss anymore”  
(*Mos Def 2005*)

This sense of abandonment, alienation and lack of compassion toward the situations facing African-American communities from traditional protective sources such as authority figures, religious figures and government is an important indicator of the attitude present in this community.

The middle four codes, Society (Subgroup: Actor), Gang (Subgroup: Actor), Parent (Subgroup: Actor) and Family (Subgroup: Actor) did reveal some interesting relationships. The 15 instances of Actor: Parent center around the relationship the male artist had with his mother only, with the only mentions of a father figure was to describe his absence either to incarceration, death or simple abandonment. Census statistics tell us that many children in inner cities grow up in single woman households, but these descriptions give the personal depth to the situation that art brings:

“Every day I sit and wonder why I lost my daddy so young  
Just reminisce think how me and him had so much fun  
Teach me man to man things about the game  
Let me know always let ‘em hang, be bout my change  
Never thought that come close to home I was wrong

Never thought daddy was going away I was wrong”  
(*B.G. 1999*)

Notorious B.I.G recognizes that parents don’t have much power when the street mentality takes over:

“Back in the days, our parents used to take care of us  
Look at ‘em now, they even fuckin’ scared of us  
Callin’ the city for help because they can’t maintain  
Damn, shit done changed”  
(*Notorious B.I.G. 1994*)

The Family (Subgroup: Actor) code expands the idea of examining familial to include siblings and extended family. The 18 incidents of this code reveal numerous depictions of failure, disappointment and pain when discussing the family unit.

“It’s kinda hard comin’ up as a youngster  
Gotta deal with the roof that I’m under  
Even though my moms got it hard  
My daddy passed away, now I’m stuck without a father  
But times have changed bro  
I never ever seen Santa Clause comin’ through the ghetto”  
(*Too \$hort 1995*)

The family unit receives further stress when a child is involved, and the family unit is broken either by death or incarceration of the father, leading to poverty.

“My homeboy’s doing life  
His baby’s mama be stressing  
Shedding tears  
When her son finally asks that questions  
Where my daddy at?  
Mama, why we live so poor?  
Why you crying? Heard you late night  
Through my bedroom door  
Now do you love me mama?  
Why do they keep calling me nigger?”  
(*Tupac 1996*)

Tupac's words in *16 on Death Row* illustrate how growing up in the stressed family unit without a father figure lead him to live a life of crime:

“Dear Mama, these cops don't understand me  
I turned to a life of crime, because I came from a broken family.”  
(Tupac 1997)

Finally, in *1<sup>st</sup> of tha Month*, a track about the day when people get their welfare checks and food stamps, shows the competition between members of the same family for the limited resources they receive:

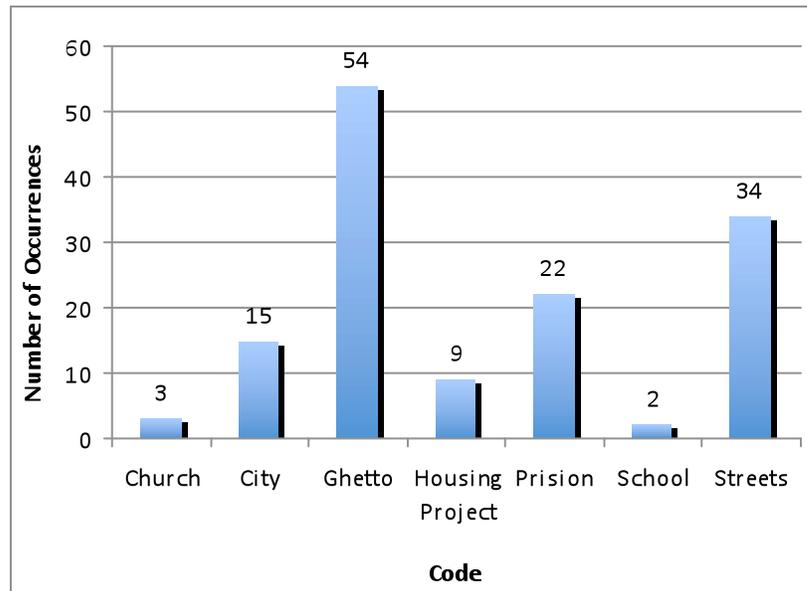
“Wake up and see that my sister's already dressed  
She said, 'I'm gonna run and go get my stamps  
Watch and make sure no one snatches my check'  
Nigga, that's the mailman  
Sort through the mail and put it up in me pocket  
So I be hittin' the 99 to get me a dub  
(*Bone Thugs N Harmony* 1995)

The 10 actors that appear in the narratives demonstrate some of the thoughts and feelings from the artists' perspective surrounding the common relationships in inner cities. The implications of these relationships is discussed in Chapter 5.

### *Section 3: Subgroup: Place*

There were seven individual codes within this subgroup: School, Church, Housing Project, City, Prison, “The Streets” and the Ghetto. Refer to Table 3.3, page 37 for definitions. The frequency of each code is depicted below:

**Figure 4.5: Frequency of Occurrence – Subgroup: Place**

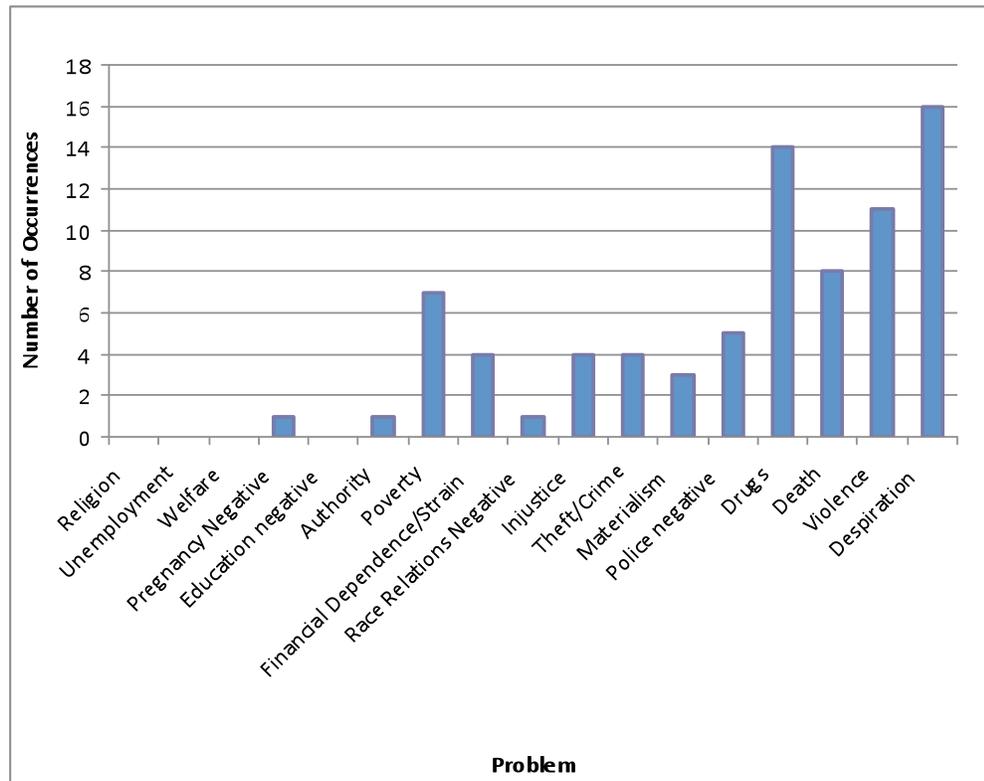


The most frequent code in this subgroup was Ghetto (54 codes) followed by Streets (34 codes). The distinction between these two terms is significant, despite appearing to be similar. The “ghetto” is a place where people live, where the “streets” is a place where activity occurs (Rapdict.org 2011). In all practical senses, these places can be in the same area, but the way each place is referred to necessitated distinct codes.

Within the code Ghetto (Subgroup: Place), there was a frequent co-occurrence between the Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) code and the Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) code. Out of 54 incidences of Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) code, 16 (30%) of the instances also contained the Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) code. This particular co-occurrence frequency was higher than any other for the Place subgroup. However, the co-occurrence between Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) and Drugs (Subgroup: Problem) (26%) and Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) and Violence (Subgroup: Problem) (20%) was almost as high.

These particular co-occurrences suggest that within the place “the ghetto”, the problems of desperation, violence and drugs are particularly significant. Other problems that held significance included: poverty (7 codes), death (8 codes) and negative interactions with police (5 codes).

**Figure 4.6: Frequency of Co-Occurrence: Problem + Ghetto (Subgroup: Place)**



The overlap between Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) and Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) is particularly strong. Many of the artists attribute the surroundings of the ghetto as a core component to their feelings of desperation.

“Bye bye, I was never meant to live  
 Can’t be positive, when the ghetto’s where you live  
 Bye bye, I was never meant to be  
 Livin like a thief, running through the streets”  
*(Tupac 1997)*

“C-Murder ain’t gonna die in vain  
My ghetto ties got me living my life in pain  
See the world knows, we gonna be thugs forever  
You can take me out the ghetto, but you can’t make it better  
See the status of your money done changed  
But the status of your danger remains the same”  
(*C-Murder 1998*)

“Grew up in the ghetto raised by a killa  
TRU across my stomach  
Your neighborhood thug nigga  
Trying to make it out this fucked up environment  
Where niggaz die trying to make a dollar out of 15 cents  
The ghetto got me crazy  
(Tru 1997)

“I’m from Roxbury, the ‘bury  
But not the fruit y’all  
Don’t make me act like where I’m from  
Cause it’s bru-tal”  
(*ED O.G. and Da Bulldogs 1991*)

“My memories bring me misery, and life is hard  
in the ghetto, it’s insanity, I can’t breathe  
Got me thinkin’, what do Hell got?  
Cause I done suffered so much, I’m feelin’ shell-shocked  
And driveby’s an everyday thing  
I done lost too many homies to this motherfuckin game”  
(*Tupac 1995*)

“You grow in the ghetto, living second rate  
And your eyes will sing a song of deep hate  
The plaes you play and where you stay  
Looks like one great big alley way”  
(*Grandmaster Flash 1976*)

“Fresh out of my mind, been 27 years and every day I’ve seen is sad  
Even though I’ve tried ‘till I’ve cried I can’t even stand  
Feels like I’ve died a thousand times but just can’t make it man”  
(*Scarface 1995*)

The ghetto also has a relationship with drugs, including selling drugs,  
doing drugs, or having problems with police over drugs.

“I couldn’t take it, had to make a profit  
Found a block, got a glock, and I clocked grip  
Makin’ G’s was my mission  
Movin enough of this shit to get my momma out the kitchen”  
*(Tupac 1997)*

“Look back on childhood memories and I’m still feelin’ the pain  
Turnin circles in my ninth grade, dealin cocaine  
Too many hassles in my local life, survivin’ the strain  
And a man without focus, life could drive him insane  
Stuck inside a ghetto fantasy hopin’ it’d change”  
*(Scarface feat. Tupac, Johnny P 1997)*

Finally, violence holds a prominent position in the relationship to the ghetto.

“If you’re not from the town, then don’t pass through  
Cause some O.G’s fools might blast you  
It ain’t right but it’s long overdue  
Can’t have peace, till the niggas get a piece too”  
*(Tupac 1997)*

In this sample of songs, the place the artists talk the most about is the ghetto - the environment they live in. When they speak of this environment, the prominent themes are desperation, drugs and violence. Such a bleak view of their physical environment permeates deep into the communities these artists come from, and in turn becomes one of the central backdrops in Hip-Hop music.

However, like a rose growing out of the crack of the sidewalk, there where four incidences of overlap between Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) and Hope (Subgroup: Solution).

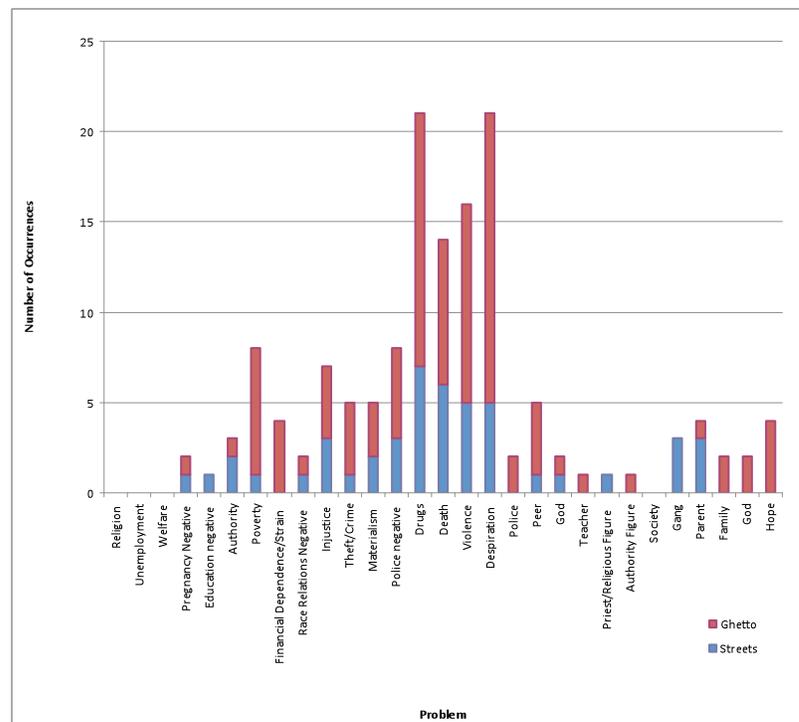
“We was one step away from takin this crack money  
And recylcin it through the ghettos  
And buildin back up our own hoods”  
*(Jay-Z 1998)*

“It seems like they don’t want a young nigga to get rich  
Like we ain’t supposed to leave the ghetto

I know we tied to the ghetto, but, uhh, life's a bitch  
 You know, we was dealt some bad cards  
 But you know, we gotta deal with it  
 Life's hard, so let's show 'em what we're made of'  
 (C-Murder 1998)

The “streets”, while a distinct code, actually followed the same trends of the “ghetto.” The only difference was with the number of occurrences, which was lower for the “streets.” This indicates that the same problems that are prominent in the ghetto are also prominent in the “streets.”

**Figure 4.7: Frequency of Co-Occurrence: Problem + Ghetto (Subgroup: Place) + Streets (Subgroup: Place)**



However, because the streets are different from the ghetto, the way the artists talk about the problems in this distinct context. The streets serve as the place of action, where activity is focused. This is where drugs are bought and

sold, and violence filters into the transactions. The streets also opens the narrative to display the physical surroundings.

“And still I see no changes, can’t a brother get a little piece  
Its war on the streets and the war in the Middle East  
Instead of war on poverty they got a war on drugs  
So the police can bother me”  
(*Tupac 1998*)

“I walk the streets with my converse, khakies and my chrome gack  
Pockets full of drug money and crack, heroin  
Will I ever see the man upstairs I know my chances are slim”  
(*Tru 1997*)

“Felt good in the Hood, being around niggas yeah  
And the first time everybody let go  
The streets is death row  
I wonda if heaven’s got a ghetto”  
(*Tupac 1997*)

In a particularly creative narrative, *Streets Raised Me*, Mobb Deep has a conversation with the streets, recognizing the streets as an entity that was instrumental in his upbringing:

“Why you have to raise me this way,  
You showed me how to survive the concrete  
If I survive only time can say,  
You were a part of me”  
(*Mobb Deep 1999*)

He continues the narrative to include a pictorial of the world he lives in, the people he comes across and the landscape that he navigates through:

“Vision the canvas paint a picture  
Similar to Ernies Barnes nigga  
But mines is more ghetto more guns  
More drugs, mostly thugs  
All my duns, their baby moms daughter and sons  
Dark blocks, with street lamps shot the fuck out  
Park benches broke, a nigga stretched out  
Jumped off the roof to his death its real

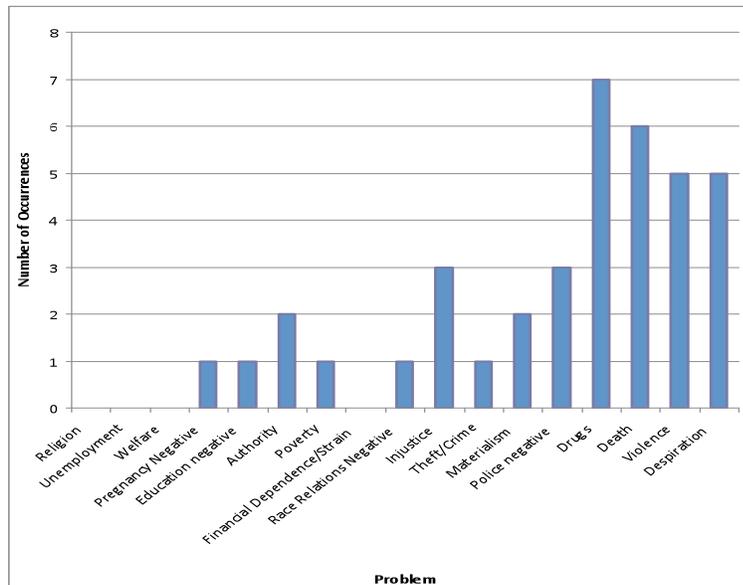
Hand ball walls displayed with R-I-P murals  
Those who sling, play the shadows by the building  
Devils spring, keep em going while the snows blowing  
Grams get dipped, 50's are moked, cookies are broke  
And spliced in large pieces for the fiends to smoke  
The sun set looks over beautiful projects  
What a shame, it ain't the same where we stand at  
If you look close you can see the bricks chipped off  
Sometimes niggas miss when they lick off don't get clipped off  
Street life"  
*(Mobb Deep 1999)*

Even though the streets are bumpy, lights burned out  
Dope fiends die with a pipe in their mouths  
Old school buddies not doing it right  
Every day it's the same  
And it's the same every night  
*(Too \$hort 1991)*

Depictions of the ghetto, where the artists live, and the streets, where business is conducted, illuminate many of the problems facing residents of inner-cities. However, these depictions do not tell the whole story. The third most-popular place in the sample was prison (22 codes, 16%).

Similar to the ghetto and the streets, the prominent co-occurrences include Despairation (Subgroup: Problem) (9 codes, 37%), Violence (Subgroup: Problem) (3 codes, 12%), Death (Subgroup: Problem) (3 codes, 12%).

**Figure 4.8: Frequency of Co-Occurrence: Problem + Prison (Subgroup: Place)**



Tupac’s depiction of prison is particularly haunting but poignant:

“And my cellmate's raped on the norm  
 And passed around the dorm, you can hear his asshole gettin torn  
 They made me an animal  
 Can't sleep, instead of countin sheep, niggaz countin cannibals  
 And that's how it is in the pen  
 Turn old and cold, and your soul is your best friend”  
 (Tupac 1997)

Akon depicts the desperation he feels being inside prison while the world moves on outside:

“My cell mates getting food without me,  
 Can't wait to get out and move forward with my life,  
 Got a family that loves me and wants me to do right  
 But instead I'm here locked up”  
 (Akon 2004)

Beyond the prisons being a place of despair, violence and death, an interesting co-occurrence emerged: Race (Subgroup: Problem). This was the only Place code that had a significant cross with race. The artists depicted prison as a

place that was heavily dominated by blacks, and a clear racial tension emerged when the artists spoke about time in prison:

“It ain't a secret don't conceal the fact  
The penitentiary's packed, and it's filled with blacks”  
*(Tupac 1998)*

“Locked up you get three hot meals and one cot  
Then you sit and rot, never even got a fair shot  
That's where a whole lotta niggas end up”  
*(Dead Prez 2000)*

“Still thugging in this jail cell  
Missing my block  
Hearing brothers screaming all night  
Wishing they'd stop  
Proud to be black  
But why do we act like  
We don't love ourselves  
Don't look around  
buster (you sucker)  
Check yourselves  
know what if means to be black  
whether a man or girl  
we're still struggling in this  
White man's world”  
*(White Man's World, Tupac)*

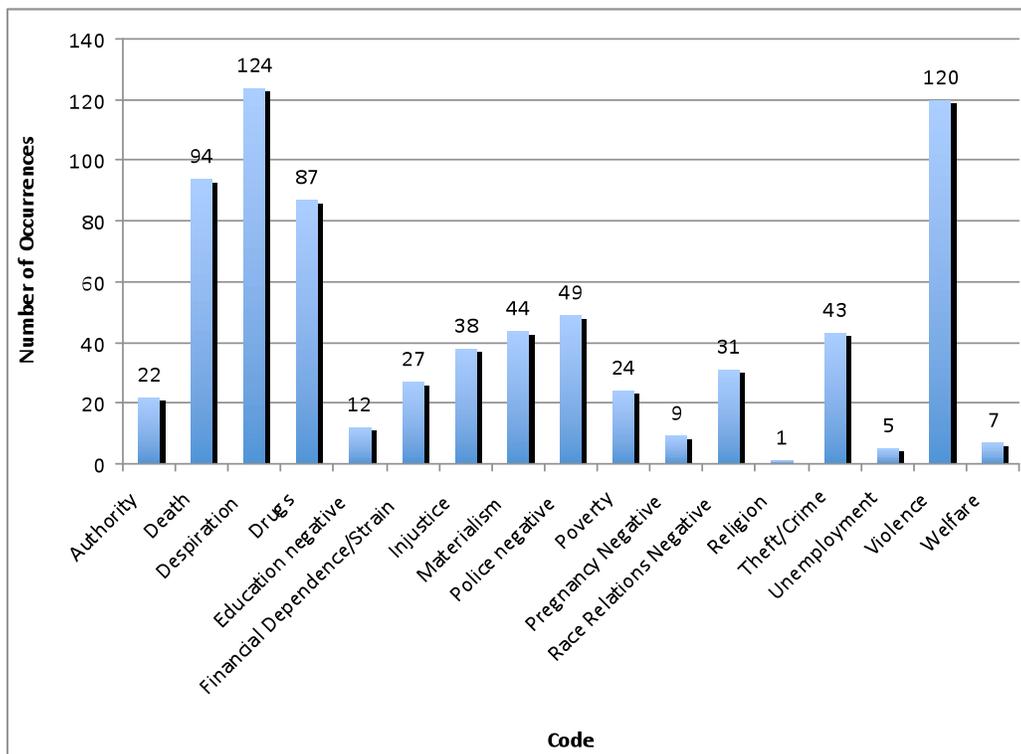
“I think back when I was robbin my own kind  
The police didn't pay it no mind  
But when I start robbin the white folks  
Now I'm in the pen wit the soap-on-a-rope  
I said it before and I'll still taugt it  
Every motherfucker with a colour is most wanted”  
*(Ice Cube 1990)*

While the ghetto, the streets and prison dominate the frequency for Place, the interesting thing to note is what fails to be a frequent place: church and school. These places are typically thought of as supportive of members of the community. The absence of any meaningful mention of these places could demonstrate the lack of interaction communities have with these places.

#### Section 4: Subgroup: Problem

There were 17 individual codes within this subgroup: Authority, Death, Desperation, Drugs, Education, Financial Dependence/Strain, Injustice, Materialism, Police, Poverty, Pregnancy, Race Relations, Religion, Theft/Crime, Unemployment, Violence and Welfare. Refer to Figure 3.4 on page 37 for definitions. The frequency of each code is depicted below:

**Figure 4.9: Frequency of Occurrence – Subgroup: Problem**



Within this subgroup, the most frequent codes (top 30%) were: Desperation (124 codes), Violence (120 codes), Death (94 codes), Drugs (87 codes) and Police (49 codes). The least frequent codes (bottom 30%) were:

Education (12 codes), Pregnancy (9 codes), Welfare (7 codes), Unemployment (5 codes) and Religion (1 code).

As discussed in other sections, Desperation was a prominent co-occurrence with the Actor and Place subgroup, and it is in fact, the most prominent code across all of the subgroups. The feeling of isolation and lack of support by authority figures suggests a prevailing attitude toward authority.

“Yo; I've seen child blossom to man,  
some withered and turned to murderers  
Led astray by the liars death glorifiers observin us  
Watching us close, marketing host is here to purchase, purposely  
overtaxin the earnings  
Nervous, burning down the churches  
They're scared of us, rather beware than dare to trust  
Throw us in jail, million dollar bail, left there to rust”  
*(Big Punisher 1998)*

“Constantly I keep an eye on my enemies  
I'm having dreams of a motherfucker bury me  
I won't rest till I make a bitch nigga bleed  
I'm gettin paid by the gat and the triple beam  
All my love is for the thugs on the block  
Evil thoughts keep telling me to bust on the cops  
Bullet wounds in my back keep me paranoid  
I'm hearing gunshots, ducking behind cars  
Will I end up in the grave or the penitentiary?  
Oh god, don't let the reaper capture me  
I started off as a street thug  
Convicted felon with tatooes and street blood”  
*(C-Murder 1998)*

Beyond the feelings of animosity toward authority figures, sometimes the feelings of animosity turn inward:

“You'd love to hear the story how the thugs live in worry  
Duck down in car seats, heat's mandatory  
Running from Jake, gettin chased, hunger for papas  
These are the breaks many mistakes go down out of state  
Wait, I had to let it marinate we carry weight”  
*(Nas 1996)*

“I smoke a blunt to take the pain out  
And if I wasn't high, I'd probably try to blow my brains out  
I'm hopeless, they shoulda killed me as a baby  
And now they got me trapped in the storm, I'm goin crazy”  
*(Tupac 1995)*

“The level of animosity is stoppin me from thrivin  
FUCK what them niggaz is talkin about, I'm survivin  
Alive and goin through it, but I made my bed  
So now it's in these flames that I, lay my head”  
*(DMX 2007)*

“Breathing in deep city breaths, sitting on shitty steps  
We stoop to new lows, hell froze the night the city slept  
The beast crept through concrete jungles  
Communicating with one another  
And ghetto birds where waters fall  
From the hydrants to the gutters”  
*(Mos Def and Talib Kweli feat. Common 1999)*

Finally, some artists illustrate how the desperation is so strong that they contemplate suicide as a solution to the pain they feel:

“I see no changes wake up in the morning and I ask myself  
Is life worth living should I blast myself?”  
*(Tupac 1998)*

“They're just like crabs in a bucket, these people pull me down  
If I didn't have so many obstacles think where I could be now  
On MTV or BET or in some magazine  
Instead I'm stressin, hooked on codeine, headed to tragedy  
Sometimes I think it's better just to die  
On the verge of suicide, I deeply wish I had a friend  
But even still a good samaritan is Z-Ro's way  
And with that Christian attitude I caught a homeboy case  
I done took too many blows, a punchin bag is how I feel  
The deep depression starts to set, sanity's outta here  
I start my mission tryin to find my fate  
CDC #4 in name I'm feelin oh-so-helpless in this place”  
*(Scarface 1995)*

It was intriguing to read these narratives to discover the way the artists depicted their emotions and outlook on their situations. Also crossed with the Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) code was the Drugs (Subgroup: Problem) code. This co-occurrence amplified the feelings of desperation with drugs, either using drugs to cope with the feelings or the desperation made worse by the artists involvement with selling drugs.

Jay-Z has revealed that much of his current business savvy developed when he was a young drug dealer. Here he wrestles with selling a commodity that gives him money, but also harms those around him:

“Hove is back, life stories told through rap  
Niggaz actin' like I sold you crack  
Like I told you sell drugs...no...  
Hove did that so hopefully you won't have to go through that  
I was raised in the pro-jects, roaches and rats  
Smokers out back, sellin' they mama's sofa  
Lookouts on the corner, focused on the ave  
Ladies in the window, focused on the kinfolk  
Me under a lamp post, why I got my hand closed?  
Crack's in my palm, watchin' the long arm o' the law”  
(*Jay-Z 2001*)

Tupac also illustrates how selling drugs advances the seller but often at the cost of others. This quotation also shows how the alternative routes to making money don't appeal to youth who are looking to make easy money:

“Try to show another way but you stayin' in the dope game  
Now tell me what's a mother to do  
Bein' real don't appeal to the brother in you  
You gotta operate the easy way  
"I made a G today" But you made it in a sleazy way  
Sellin' crack to the kid. "I gotta get paid,"  
Well hey, well that's the way it is”  
(*Tupac 1998*)

Tupac outlines the three places he sees people go who are from the ghetto: hell (the ghetto), jail, or selling crack or other drugs. When these appear to be the only paths in life, it is no surprise that he sees a futility in life.

“Our lifestyles be close captioned  
addicted to fatal attractions  
Pictures of actions be played back  
in the midst of mashin'  
No fairy tales for this young black male  
Some see me stranded in this land of hell, jail, and crack sales  
Hustlin too hard to think of culture  
Or the repercussions while bustin on backstabbin vultures”  
*(Scarface feat. Tupac, Johnny P 1997)*

Nas demonstrates how the money earned from selling drugs allows people to live flashy lifestyles and obtain expensive items, and how this appeals to young kids. He describes how enticing dealing drugs is from a young age:

“Growin up project-struck, lookin for luck dreamin  
Scopin the large niggaz beamin, check what I'm seein  
Cars, ghetto stars pushin ill Europeans  
G'n, heard about them old timers OD'n  
Young, early 80's, throwin rocks at the crazy lady  
Worshippin every word them rope rockin niggaz gave me  
The street raised me up, givin a fuck  
I thought Jordan's and a gold chain was livin it up  
I knew the dopes, the pushers, the addicts everybody  
Cut out of class, just to smoke blunts and drink Notty  
Ain't that funny? Gettin put on to crack money  
With all the gunplay, paintin the kettle black hungry  
A case of beers in the staircase I wasted years  
Some niggaz went for theirs, flippin coke as they career  
But I'm a rebel stressin, to pull out of the heat no doubt  
With Jeeps tinted out, spendin never holdin out”  
*(Nas 1996)*

Seeing through the lens these narratives provide allows one to better understand the complex role drugs play in the lives of inner-city youth. On one hand, selling drugs appears to be the solution to getting outside a life in poverty,

but on the other hand, selling drugs is a serious business that claims lives. The stresses of being in “the game” lead some of the artists to use drugs themselves to cope. When the sale of illegal substances becomes a main source of income for communities, it’s no wonder that the people involved suffer.

Another top co-occurrence in this subgroup was Desperation (Subgroup: Problem) and Death (Subgroup: Problem). Kubrin (2006) studied the relationship between Hip-Hop artists and Death extensively, and demonstrated the feelings of nihilism that is borne out of living in situations where murder is more common. While Death wasn’t the main element of study in this thesis, my analysis did reveal some interesting viewpoints that echo some of what Kubrin found.

First was the many ways the artists experienced death – it was often sudden, violent and senseless. The result of these experiences was mental scarring that reflected in the narratives:

“I cut corners & took drastic measures  
see you niggas life expire right in front of me  
time could never mend what these cold streets  
mentally done to me too often I close my eyes  
and see my own coffin feelin' haunted ready to leave  
this world that I'm lost in my only chance  
to see the seeds I lost through abortion  
when I'm gone y'all niggas better not mourn”  
*(Jay-Z 1998)*

Further, the artists illustrate the futility they see in their own lives – with so many problems, and people dying all around, what’s the point to continue?

“You know, I wonder if they'll laugh when I am dead  
Why am I fighting to live, if I'm just living to fight  
Why am I trying to see, when there ain't nothing in sight  
Why I am I trying to give, when no one gives me a try  
Why am I dying to live, if I'm just living to die”  
*(Tupac 2003)*

Another code that rounds out the story of desperation is Financial Dependence/Strain (Subgroup: Problem). Here, the artists depict the core of why their lives are complicated and full of despair.

“All the pain inside amplified by the  
Fact that I can't get by with my nine to five  
And I can't provide the right type of life for my family  
'Cause man, these Goddamn food stamps don't buy diapers  
And it's no movie, there's no Mekhi Phifer, this is my life  
And these times are so hard and it's getting even harder  
Trying to feed and water my seed, plus  
Teeter totter caught up between being a father and a prima donna”  
(*Eminem 2002*)

“Broken glass everywhere  
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care  
I can't take the smell, I can't take the noise  
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice  
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back  
Junkie's in the alley with a baseball bat  
I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far  
Cause a man with the tow-truck repossessed my car”  
(*Grandmaster Flash 1976*)

“My back is against the wall more bills than money to pay  
but I know just who to call on when I need relief I pray to help me  
fight  
the pressure, the pressure, the pressure, pressure of the world.”  
(*Sounds of Blackness 1991*)

“The story I tell is so incomplete  
Five kids in the house and no food to eat  
Don't look at me and don't ask me why  
Mama's next door getting high”  
(*Too \$hort 1991*)

Finally, the artists describe the injustice they face living in the ghetto, unsupported by society and abandoned by those who are supposed to help them.

“I tell you life just ain't what it used to be  
Between you and me, exclusively  
Everybody's changed, we're losing our minds

The government won't help, cause they refuse to find  
A solution to the problems of the inner streets  
It's a shame what our kids are beginning to be  
Pregnant teenagers, young gun slangers  
There ain't no love, there ain't nothing but anger"  
*(Notorious B.I.G. 1994)*

"Places where you could get murdered over a glare  
But everything is fair  
It's a paradox we call reality  
So keeping it real will make you casualty of abnormal normality  
Killers Born Naturally like, Micky and Mallory  
Not knowing the ways'll get you capped like an NBA salary"  
*(Mos Def and Talib Kweli feat. Common 1999)*

### *Section 5: Subgroup: Solution*

Promisingly, some of the artists find hope in their lives and within their communities. Not all of the narratives were somber depictions of horrible lives in the ghetto. Some offered solutions, others helped put the problems in perspective. Within the solution subgroup, there was only one code: hope. Refer to table 3.5 on page 38 for the definition. These silver linings are important messages to highlight, as many people in Hip-Hop look to these positive messages to get through hard times.

However, what was more interesting than what was said in this subgroup is what *wasn't* said. The Solution subgroup was only able to offer one solution of hope which may not be viewed as practical to urban planners and policy makers. Hip-Hop artists in this sample didn't talk about the ways authorities could help alleviate their problems through typical planning solutions such as master planning efforts or increased funding of certain programs. It is well evidenced that the artists have an adversarial view of authorities, which could be one possible

explanation for their lack of practical appeal. It could also be argued that Hip-Hop artists don't believe that planners or other urban professionals are hearing their message, so they don't bother to gear their music toward this audience. If planners replicated the methodology developed in this thesis and were able to unlock the messages coming from their community's Hip-Hop scene, there could be a potential for a new dialogue that had not previously existed.

The following excerpts provide a sampling of some of the messages of hope coming from the sample. These are broad messages, not really appealing to anyone or any group in particular, but nevertheless presenting a shift within the music from messages of despair to ones with more optimism.

Notorious B.I.G wraps despair with ownership by taking responsibility of the violent lifestyle ultimately is a choice:

“Even though it hurts some days  
This is the game we chose to play  
Not everything in life is gold but it will be okay  
Now a bullet ain't got no aim  
And y'all know bullets ain't got no name  
But this is the life we chose  
And it will never change”  
*(Notorious B.I.G. 1994)*

Sounds of Blackness introduce a relationship with god as one way to ease the pain and find hope in life:

We all have our burdens to carry. I know when mine get to heavy.  
He's always there to bear the load  
Give me strength and comfort any time I need relief  
from the pressures of the world I just believe.  
Playin' on the tension and your weakness are addictions,  
that lure your mind You can fight it. You can win  
For your deliverance, just bow your head and pray.  
*(Sounds of Blackness 1991)*

Tupac and Big Pun both reflect that each person has the power to endure bad times in hope for better times, and encourages the listener to find strength within themselves to survive:

“Livin' in the projects, broke with no lights on  
To all the seeds that follow me  
protect your essence  
Born with less, but you still precious  
Just smile for me now”  
*(Scarface feat. Tupac, Johnny P 1997)*

“We need some unity, fuck all the jeeps and jewelry  
The maturity, keeps me six feet, above obscurity  
The streets are deadly and everybody's a desperado  
I guess the motto we promise to let you homage  
In death your motto  
Like Zorro, I mark my territory with a symbol  
Not with a Z, but a P, cause Punishment's what I resemble!  
I lend you this if it expands yours, for you and yours  
A real man can't fall, he stands tall  
The Man's claws are diggin in my back, I'm tryin to hit him back  
Time to counteract, where my niggaz at?”  
*(Big Punisher 1998)*

Finally, Coolio allows himself to fantasize about an ideal place where he can just live life in peace, and not deal with all of the trials and tribulations he currently faces. He also calls on the individual to take responsibility and better themselves for the good of the community:

“I'm tryin' to find a place where I can live my life and  
maybe eat some steak with my beans and rice, a  
place where my kids can play outside  
without livin' in fear of a drive-by  
and even if I get away from them drive-by killers  
I still got to worry about those snitch-ass niggas  
I keep on searching and I keep on looking  
but niggas are the same from Watts to Brooklyn  
I try to keep my faith in my people

but sometimes my people be acting like they evil  
you don't understand about runnin' with a gang  
cause you don't gang bang, and  
you don't have to stand on the corner and slang  
cause you got your own thang  
you can't help me if you can't help yourself  
you better make a left”  
(Coolio 1994)

### *Section 6: Conclusion*

The in-depth look at the narratives was very revealing to the thoughts and feelings of Hip-Hop artists regarding specific topics. For example, I didn't expect God to be the most prominent actor. Based on the literature and my own knowledge of Hip-Hop, I expected the most prominent actor to be Gang or Peer. I also didn't expect the most frequent code overall to be Problem: Desperation. I knew many of these songs were bleak and outlined struggle, but I had not expected to encounter such an overwhelming sense of futility and lack of trust of authority figures. I realize historically police and African-Americans have not had the best relationship with one another, but I found it to be particularly informative to read how the artists portrayed this relationship with given the license to do so through song. The positive surprise was to see the frequency of the Solution: Hope code. It was refreshing to read solutions, positive imagery and support. This Hope code is discussed in more depth in Chapter 5 as it relates to what urban planners can do to reach members of certain communities.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Study

In the conclusion, I summarize my findings from the lyrical analysis of 96 Hip-Hop songs including policy implications. I then address strengths and weaknesses of the study and offer recommendations on how to deal with these issues. Finally, I present policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

### *Section 1: Discussion and Conclusion of Lyrical Analysis*

#### ***Actor***

The most frequent codes for the actor subgroup were: God, Peer, and Police. The least frequent codes were: Authority figure, priest/religious figure, and teacher. The subgroup: Actor generated 161 total code designations.

I found the actor subgroup's findings to be particularly interesting. The most surprising was first the presence, then the prevalence, of the God code. As I was coding the songs, I was surprised how many appeals there were to God and how prominent the theme of a relationship with God was throughout the entire sample – God doesn't necessarily come to mind when one thinks of Hip-Hop. Also telling was the theme was a relationship with God, but not via an established religion or institution like church. This suggests either a disconnection or disillusionment with the formal instruments of religion. Out of personal interest in this finding, I did some additional research into religion and Hip-Hop, and not surprisingly, I found a number of religious Hip-Hop artists. A suggestion for

further study would be to examine the history of religion and Hip-Hop and what role religion plays in creating Hip-Hop music.

Most poignant were the depictions the artists had about their friends dying on the streets. These stories of watching friends die through violent means invoked empathy and sense of bewilderment over the senselessness of the tragedy. Yet, the sense of competition was present and complicated the depictions of loss of friends. What was missing was a strong sense of community within the peer group – it appeared that friends were not sources of strength, rather agents of continuing and supporting “the game.” Understanding the complicated dynamics of these relationships lends importance to the role that outside influences should play in the lives of youth. Teachers, mentors and priests were not highly mentioned as actors in this sample, but that does not necessarily indicate that youth are not in need of their guidance. In fact, their absence is telling in and of itself. Another research effort focusing on local Hip-Hop could discover mentions of actors outside of their peer group that provide the guidance this sample fails to portray.

### ***Place***

The most frequent codes for place subgroup were Ghetto and Streets; the least frequent codes were school and church. This subgroup generated 139 codes.

The depictions of the places in these narratives were gritty, raw and dark images of broken streets, cracked corners and confined housing projects marked with graffiti and filled with danger. Hyperbole or otherwise, the artistic depictions

of the inner city were insightful and illuminating. It may not be how the inner-city actually *is*, but it shows how the inner-city *feels*, which is very valuable when trying to understand the impact of the urban condition on those who live there.

Also interesting was the difference between the ghetto as a place, and the streets as a place, and its frequency within this subgroup. First, the term “ghetto” is a pejorative word, with roots in racial and social segregation dating back to the times when Jews were compelled to live separately in Venice (Merriam-Webster 2011). The ghetto is not considered a desirable place to live or come from, yet it is depicted quite frequently. I found the use of the word interesting: on one hand, I thought the artists were using the word to own the space, to try to overcome the negative connotation the word carried; on the other hand, I thought the artists were using the word to increase their “street cred,”<sup>5</sup> meaning trying to sell their image as a thug or a gangsta by bragging about the “hard” place they came from. It’s impossible to know what the intention of the artist was when they invoked the images of the ghetto, but the presence and frequency of the word was notable.

The streets emerging as a place to transact business was also interesting. It helped me understand the underground economy that is prevalent in inner cities. The “corner”, or place to buy and sell drugs, emerged as a lynch pin in the transactions. The importance of territory became apparent as the artists spoke about fighting with other people over the space in the street. Understanding the role the streets play in this underground economy could be interesting to urban planners and policy makers. Rather than approaching the known crime problem

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<sup>5</sup> Commanding a level of respect in an urban environment due to experience in or knowledge of issues affecting those environments (rapdict.org)

from the prospective of advocating for increasing police presence or other standard solutions, what value could understanding the importance of this outdoor space in the inner city economy play in devising a better solution?

### ***Problem***

Within the problem subgroup, the most frequent codes were: desperation, violence, death, drugs and police. The least frequent codes were education, pregnancy, welfare, unemployment and religion. This subgroup generated the most codes out of all the subgroups with 737 individual code designations.

Desperation was a surprising code that appeared throughout the process, and surprisingly became the most prominent code of all the subgroups. As I was reading through the narratives, I kept coming across these feelings of hopelessness and loss, and didn't quite know what to call it. After some consideration of various options, I settled on "desperation" because I thought that word best encapsulated the feelings the artists were trying to portray. I knew that Hip-Hop represented negative themes, and didn't necessarily try to portray uplifting messages, but I didn't realize that this feeling of desperation was so pervasive over the course of 20 years. This shows that the feeling of desperation weren't momentary or reflective of a particular time, but was present throughout multiple decades in multiple places. Those who are in the position to intervene must understand that people are feeling defeated, frustrated, chronically overlooked and desperate and should respond with urgency. How long do marginalized people need to feel alone and forgotten?

Violence and death went hand in hand. Depictions of witnessing violence were haunting, as were the depictions of death. Relating to the notion of loss within the Peer (Subgroup: Actor) code, death was an ever-present reality to the artists in the sample. Studies of mortality rates have revealed that African Americans residing in poor, inner-city neighborhoods that are racially segregated have higher mortality rates than other African Americans living in different areas of the same city (Geronimus, Bound, Waidmann, Hillemeier, Burns 1996). Knowing that death is all around, that people you know will die, that your safety and protection is not certain could feed into the futility and desperation that is also depicted in the narratives. A valuable contribution to this research area would be to look at the coping mechanisms currently employed in the inner city. Are there support groups for youth who are experiencing these high mortality rates? What role do existing institutions play in helping people in the community cope with the uncertainty that comes with living in a place where death is more common? What are some new approaches to understanding the problem of death and desperation that could lead to new solutions?

### ***Solution***

The Solution subgroup had only one code: hope. This subgroup generated 54 code designations. I found these little sparks of light to be particularly interesting and enlightening. It was not a surprise that these messages often came from the same artists who crafted skillful depictions of the problem, such as Tupac. His song “Changes” follows Tupac as he contemplates suicide, witnesses

the negative influence of drugs in the community, and describes the pain he feels and sees in his daily life. He then moves from problem to solution with calls to action such as “We have to change the way we eat, change the way we think, it’s on us, to survive” (Tupac 1998). I found these insertions of hope to be the message that I think people respond to. I began to understand that certain artists are using the medium of Hip-Hop to communicate positive messages specifically to youth consumers. Another contribution to this area of research would be to look specifically at artists who are engaging in Hip-Hop to communicate the positive messages that I began to discover in this sample. Urban planners and policy makers could then use Hip-Hop as a way to engage and communicate with the community in a meaningful way.

### *Section 2: Strengths and weaknesses*

One of the principal strengths of this analysis was the systematic and new approach to generating the study sample. By combining two types of samples – popular based and content based – I was able to utilize a larger array of songs for my initial sample. Previous approaches either isolated only popular singles or only content-based songs from albums; and that left out many potentially viable songs from the sample. By combining these two types of songs into one sample, I was able to integrate popular singles with deeper tracks from albums to create a new and varied sample. The benefit of this approach was seen in the variety of stories I was able to extract from the narratives.

An additional strength of this analysis was the innovative approach to the lyrical analysis. By thoroughly studying the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches to conducting lyrical analysis of Hip-Hop lyrics, I was able to create an approach that would work specifically for urban planners and policy makers. I was therefore able to pull out interesting and pertinent codes and themes from the narratives, and analyze them in a new way.

A known weakness in this study was lack of inter-rater reliability. To ensure inter-rater reliability, I would code the sample, and another researcher would code the sample, and we could be able to compare and contrast to determine if the codes were placed similarly across the entire sample. Due to timing and lack of resources, this could not be done. Therefore, there could be some neutrality issues with my coding of the sample. It is unknown if my method of coding would be exactly replicated by another researcher.

The solution to this problem is simply to recruit a fellow researcher to code the sample, and compare and contrast our coding determinations.

Another known weakness in this study was the rather subjective nature of selecting the songs. While I approached collecting the sample in a very thorough way, selecting the songs based on a content-analysis of the song title alone may have led to missing certain songs because the title was not indicative of the content of the song. A solution to this problem would be to pull the lyrics for all of the songs in the initial sample (1,740) and conduct a keyword search across all of the lyrics. However, due to the time constraints for completing this project, this approach was not feasible.

### *Section 3: Recommendations for further research and policy implications*

Based on the limitations on the scope of this thesis, there are a few recommendations for further study. One recommendation for further research is to expand the scope of the sample to include less mainstream artists and more socially conscious artists such as Dead Prez, KRS-One and Common. This change could yield interesting results to a researcher looking to examine the focused efforts of members of the Hip-Hop community who are commenting on social issues specifically.

The outcome of the research revealed some interesting findings that could be interesting to further research. First, is the role of religion in Hip-Hop. The research revealed a strong relationship between the artists and God. It would be interesting to explore this relationship further, perhaps by studying religious Hip-Hop groups like Arrested Development. The second finding that was interesting was the lack of guidance by teachers, mentors and members of the church reflected in the music. There could be a whole sub-genre of Hip-Hop that presents more in terms of these relationships, and the outcome of that research would add value to this discussion. The third finding that would be interesting to further research is the role of the streets in the underground urban economy. The fourth area of recommended research would be into the existing support for people who live in high-crime areas. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is expanding the research into songs that include messages of hope. It is my belief that young, local artists would be the group that expresses these messages most. Looking into local Hip-Hop organizations could yield an interesting outcome.

The policy implications of this research are potentially numerous. First, urban planners and policy makers now have a methodology to gain access to the information inherently embedded in Hip-Hop lyrics. The messages about the urban condition can be accessed and potentially utilized in various ways. For example, an urban planner can review the lyrics for songs coming out of a local Hip-Hop youth organization to figure out the messages and trends present in the music, and understand what is important to members of their local community through their artistic expression. Policy makers could learn to understand the importance of Hip-Hop music, and allocate funding to support local Hip-Hop organizations to support the youth in inner cities. Researchers could continue to explore the relationship between urban planning and Hip-Hop music and devise new policy initiatives that could foster continued artistic expression.

Beyond urban planning professionals, other urban public service professionals, such as social workers and neighborhood-based outreach workers, could benefit from accessing Hip-Hop music in a systematic way. For example, the City of Boston currently engages inner-city youth through a variety of departments and initiatives to provide social, economic and educational support. The Boston Centers for Youth and Children has a Streetworker Program has been hailed as one of the most effective youth prevention and early intervention services provided to Boston's youth, the goal of which is to connect "hard-to-reach" youth to needed services and resources through direct, targeted street outreach (City of Boston 2011). Understanding some of the unique local challenges expressed by this demographic through Hip-Hop could increase the

efficacy of the program. Additionally, non-profit youth centers could provide the space and support for people to create their music, and provide a physical alternative to the street. Local governments and non-profits can work together to support people in creating music to foster communication between members of the community and policy makers.

Hip-Hop has played a large role in politics in recent years. The messages of nationally recognized artists influence people everywhere and have impacted voters in new and exciting ways. Policy makers that have influence in state and national policy can use this research to devise innovative ways to utilize this important trend to reach youth in a more effective and engaging way. They can also determine trends within the Hip-Hop community to derive effective policy solutions to state and federal problems, as well as help to run more effective campaigns for those running for office.

Having access to Hip-Hop through a methodical process has the potential to unlock many previously closed doors, and can have a significant impact for urban planners and policy makers, as well as others who work in public service. Hip-Hop: More than just noise; it's a window into a community.

## Appendix 1: Final Song List

*Crossed out titles indicate the songs that were deleted from the original sample.*

	<u>SONG NAME</u>	<u>ARTIST</u>
1	16 ON DEATH ROW	TUPAC
2	1ST OF THA MONTH	BONE-THUGS-N-HARMONY
3	6 'N THE MORNIN'	ICE -T
4	911 IS A JOKE	PUBLIC ENEMY
5	ALL FALLS DOWN	KAYNE WEST
6	AMERIKKKA'S MOST WANTED	ICE CUBE
7	BANG BANG	DR. DRE
8	BANNED IN THE USA	LUKE FEAT. 2 LIVE CREW
9	BORN AND RAISED IN COMPTON	DJ QUICK
10	CAPITAL PUNISHMENT	BIG PUNISHER
11	CELL THERAPY	GOODIE MOB
12	CHANGES	TUPAC
13	CHILDREN'S STORY	SLICK RICK
14	CONSTANTLY IN DANGER	C-MURDER
<del>15</del>	<del>DANGEROUS</del>	<del>BUSTA RHYMES</del>
16	DE' JA' VU (UPTOWN BABY)	LORD TARIQ AND PETTER GUNZ
17	DOLLAR DAY	MOS DEF
18	DOO WOP (THAT THING)	LAURYN HILL
19	EASE MY MIND	ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT
20	FANTASTIC VOYAGE	COOLIO
21	FOE LIFE	MACK 10
22	FUCK THA POLICE	N.W.A.
23	GANGSTA LEAN	D.R.S.
24	GANGSTA'S PARADISE	COOLIO
<del>25</del>	<del>G'D UP</del>	<del>EASTSIDAZ</del>
26	GEORGE BUSH DOSEN'T CARE ABOUT BLACK PEOPLE	LEGENDARY K.O.
27	GHETTO BLUEZ	MO THUGS
28	GHETTO COWBOY	MO THUGS FAMILY & BONE THUGS-N- HARMONY
29	GHETTO GOSPEL	2 PAC
30	GHETTO TIES	C-MURDER
31	GOTHAM CITY	R. KELLY
32	GROWIN' UP IN THE HOOD	COMPTON'S MOST WANTED
33	HARD KNOCK LIFE (GHETTO ANTHEM)	JAY-Z
34	HEAVY IN THE GAME	TUPAC
35	I AIN'T MAD AT CHA	TUPAC
36	I CAN	NAS
37	I CRY	JA RULE
38	I GOT TO HAVE IT	ED O.G. AND DA BULLDOGS
39	I MISS MY HOMIES	MASTER P
40	I REALLY WANT TO SHOW YOU	NOTORIOUS B.I.G.
41	I SEE DEATH AROUND THE CORNER	TUPAC

42	I SHOT THE SHERIFF	WARREN G
43	I WONDER IF HEAVEN GOT A GHETTO	TUPAC
44	IF I COULD TEACH THE WORLD	BONE-THUGS-N-HARMONY
45	IF I RULED THE WORLD	NAS
46	IF I SHOULD DIE	JAY-Z
47	IS THERE HEAVEN FOR A GANGSTA?	TRU
48	IT AIN'T EASY	TUPAC
49	IT WAS A GOOD DAY	ICE CUBE
50	I'VE NEVER SEEN A MAN CRY (I SEEN A MAN DIE)	SCARFACE
51	IZZO (H.O.V.A)	JAY-Z
52	JESUS WALKS	KAYNE WEST
53	JUICY	NOTORIOUS B.I.G.
54	JUST A WEEK AGO	JAY-Z
55	KILLAFORNIA	CYPRESS HILL
56	LIFE IS... TOO SHORT	TOO SHORT
57	LIFE WE CHOSE	NOTORIOUS B.I.G.
58	LOCKED UP	AKON
59	LOOK INTO MY EYES	BONE-THUGS-N-HARMONY
60	LORD KNOWS	TUPAC
61	LOSE YOURSELF	EMINEM
62	LOVE'S GONNA GET'CHA	BOOGIE DOWN PRODUCTIONS
63	MIND PLAYING TRICKS ON ME	GETO BOYS
64	MISS YOU	NOTORIOUS B.I.G.
65	MO' MURDA	BONE-THUGS-N-HARMONY
66	NATURAL BORN KILLAZ	DR. DRE & ICE CUBE
67	ONE MIC	NAS
68	ONE MORE ROAD TO CROSS	DMX
69	OUTLAW	TUPAC
70	<del>PUBLIC ENEMY #1</del>	<del>PUBLIC ENEMY</del>
71	REGULATE	WARREN G & NATE DOGG
72	RESPIRATION	MOS DEF & TALIB KWELI FEAT. COMMON
73	RIGHTSTARTER (MESSAGE TO THE BLACK MAN)	PUBLIC ENEMY
74	RUNNIN (DYING TO LIVE)	2 PAC
75	SMILE	SCARFACE FEAT. TUPAC
76	SO MANY YEARS	TUPAC
77	SO MUCH DEATH	B.G.
78	STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON	N.W.A.
79	STREETS RAISED ME	MOBB DEEP
80	SWEET DREAMS	NAS
81	TEARZ	WU-TANG CLAN
82	TENNESSEE	ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT
83	THA CROSSROADS	BONE-THUGS-N-HARMONY
84	THANGS CHANGE	TOO \$HORT
85	THE GHETTO	TOO \$HORT
86	THE MESSAGE	GRANDMASTER

87 THE PRESSURE  
88 ~~THE WHAT~~  
89 THINGS DONE CHANGED  
90 THUGZ MANSION  
91 TIE MY HANDS  
92 U.N.I.T.Y.  
93 WANKSTA  
94 WARNING  
95 WE WANT FREEDOM  
96 WELCOME TO THE TERROR DOME  
97 WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME GANG  
  
98 WHERE I'M FROM  
99 WHITE MAN'Z WORLD  
100 WHY?

FLASH  
SOUNDS OF  
BLACKNESS  
~~NOTORIOUS B.I.G.~~  
NOTORIOUS B.I.G.  
2 PAC  
LIL WAYNE  
QUEEN LATIFAH  
50 CENT  
NOTORIOUS B.I.G  
DEAD PREZ  
PUBLIC ENEMY  
WEST COAST RAP  
ALL STARS  
JAY-Z  
TUPAC  
JUDAKISS

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