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**When Hip-Hop and Education Converge: A Look into Hip-Hop Based Education  
Programs in the United States and Brazil**

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## **I. Introduction**

In the 21st century, it is nearly impossible to travel a region of the world without encountering forms of hip-hop music and culture. Since its birth within the streets of New York in the 1970s, hip-hop has been transformed from a local youth movement to an international phenomenon (Boyd, 2002, Chang, 2005, Lamont Hill, 2009, Emdin, 2010). Within urban pockets, hip-hop has become a tool for empowerment for disenfranchised young people who oftentimes, have received inadequate education, poor health care, and low access to quality food. Some scholars interpret the movement of hip-hop culture around the globe as a “hip-hop diaspora” which shares elements of ethnic constructions of diaspora (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). Scholar of Urban Education, Christopher Emdin, argue the fact that hip-hop is the unified language that many marginalized youth share means it must play a part in how these populations are educated (Emdin, 2010). Indeed, the education of urban youth, particularly of youth of African descent, has a long and troubled history within nations like the United States and Brazil. An increasingly globalized economy and the resulting educational challenges faced by urban youth of color has heightened the desire to find innovative models for resolving the enduring impacts of slavery and social exclusion.

One answer to these desires in both the United States and Brazil has been an increased focus on hip-hip and its potential use as a pedagogical tool for primarily youth of African-descent in urban settings. For the last two decades in the U.S. there has been a more recognizable effort to conjoin hip-hop and education, pointing to the greater attention to hip-hop's value as a social “text,” one that “educates listeners” both inside and outside the conventional classroom (Pardue, 2004). For the two decades in Brazil, hip-hip in the form of the State, too, has increasingly accepted hip-hop as a social and political tool to empower Brazilian youth, predominantly youth of African-descent living in favelas<sup>1</sup> (Morgan & Bennett, 2011). In both countries, the turn to hip hop is surprising, if not contradictory, given the history of separating public school systems from other less formalized, popular modes of reaching urban youth—especially those who do not fit the

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<sup>1</sup> In Brazil, racial divisions in Brazil are not clearly defined, class lines are, however, I have decided to take on a strictly American way of viewing this issue.

mainstream model.

How have the U.S. and Brazil overcome negative perceptions of hip-hop as a medium used by gang affiliated, “troubled,” and ultimately, dangerous youth? I am interested in investigating educational projects in which hip-hop is being employed as a pedagogical tool to combat issues of social exclusion for urban youth in the U.S and Brazil—most often for, but not limited to, students of color. To begin, I first ask: How has the “convergence” of hip-hop and education been made possible in both countries? How does this convergence differ in each country? Secondly, I ask: Given this history, how is hip-hop being used as pedagogical tool in the U.S. and how does that compare with its use in Brazil? Last, what are the larger implications of such a comparison in terms of our understanding of how urban youth of color experience race, hip-hop and education?

Beyond doubt, the literature on hip-hop educational projects is vast, being published, for example, by anthropologist or by educators who discuss hip-hop’s use as a tool in the science classroom or its use as a tool for youth activism. In fact, some scholars have found it useful to refer to educational programs that use hip-hop as pedagogical under the umbrella term “Hip-Hop Based Education” (HHBE). HHBE has been represented in four interconnected areas: (a) supplementary/after-school hip hop programs, (b) national hip hop education campaigns, (c) hip hop education products, and (d) not-for-profit organizations (Gosa & Fields, 2011).

For the scope of this paper I focus on supplementary/after school hip-hop programs, using the Pittsburgh-based hip-hop education program— the Arts Greenhouse— as a paradigmatic case. Following a section outlining the convergence of hip-hop and education in the U.S., I describe my research methodology and provide an ethnographic lens on the Arts Greenhouse in order to illuminate the attitudes toward race and class that hip-hop education exposes on the part of young adults. Next, as an attempt to understand similar social, historical, racial problems and some analogous solutions, I’ll take a brief look at Brazil, using texts as my primary source of data to understand how hip-hop and education converge and in what ways. Last, I will discuss the larger implications of my research. My project is a response to the insufficient ethnographic research being carried out on the cultural stakes, as opposed to the academic, of Hip-Hop

Based Education (HHBE). To this end, this inquiry into the convergence between hip-hop and education in the U.S., will help to illuminate our understanding of hip-hop and its role as a pedagogical tool, as well as its wider implications for education, race, and class.

## **II. Education in the Nation-State**

For nation-states, education is a special, deeply political, almost sacred, civic activity. It is not a merely technical enterprise— providing facts to the untutored, inescapably, it is a moral, civic, and aesthetic enterprise —expressing to impressionable minds a set of convictions about how best to live in the world (Parker, 2004). Moreover, this is a venue where access to influence and power is rationed. As a result, the selection of young people to enter formal educational amounts to a visible, high-stakes exercise in civic pedagogy. These “selection rituals” are political acts, with moral overtones (Loury 2000). Their perceived legitimacy is crucial in understanding stratified societies like the U.S. and Brazil, where one's place in the status hierarchy can turn on access to the elite institutions. Both the U.S. and Brazil have a long and complicated history of locking persons of African-descent into social class realities limiting their access to career preparation that still can be felt today (Murakami-Ramalho & Dias Da Silva, 2011). It therefore matters a great deal to evaluate how these two nations have decided to compensate for histories that have denied access to particular populations —not just for the purpose of understanding formalized education, but for a larger understanding of alternative pedagogical approaches. Among these, hip-hop has been outstandingly significant.

## **III. Hip- Hop and Education Converge: United States**

Before discussing supplementary/ after-school educational programs that use hip-hop as a pedagogical tool, a comprehensive discussion of hip-hop's development among youth of African-decent in the U.S. and Brazil is necessary. This will provide crucial insight in understanding why hip-hop may be important, given educational institutions in each country. To do this, I provide a review and analysis of the scholarly literature

dealing with hip-hop culture. To start, I will describe the context in which hip-hop emerges in the U.S. as it relates to education. After analyzing this history, I will use this as a framework to understand the supplementary hip-hop education program, Arts Greenhouse, and later supplementary hip-hop education programs in Brazil.

*The Development of Hip-Hop Among African-American Youth in U.S.*

The largest difference between hip-hop in U.S. and Brazil is the long history hip-hop has had within the U.S. and as a result, the drastic reconfigurations it has undergone through the past forty years. How has hip-hop been reconfigured from a once demonized practice to a tool accepted into in broader U.S. society and later, the field of education? These reconfigurations, often contradictory, can be understood through an analysis of the hip-hop “generations” of urban youth of color.

To begin, the origins of hip-hop within the U.S. are primarily informed by the lived conditions of poor Black and Latino youth in 1970s New York City with roots in an African-American past. Born after Civil Rights movement, these youth faced post-industrial economic downfall, decaying streets and violent public housing (Chang, 2005). They had to live in the shadow of the “sacred generation” but develop a definitively unique voice— this voice indefinitely was expressed through hip-hop (Boyd, 2002). These urban youth of color known as the “Hip-Hop Generation” built upon the work of the Black Power movement, moving away from the sort of passive sense of suffering (the 'We shall overcome' mentality established by leaders like Martin Luther King Jr.) to something “more active, much more aggressive, much more militant” (Boyd, 2002). For education in this period, it remained impossible for hip-hop to be used as a pedagogical tool due to its social and political fervor. However, in the 1970s as the work of leaders like Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation would prove, hip-hop could be used as a tool and institution that could affect social change within communities of color (Rose 1994;Chang 2005). The stated purpose of the Zulu Nation was to battle via dancing, writing, making beats, initiating peace treaties among the various gang members in the Bronx. In a loose sense, the Zulu Nation served as a community-based organization to promote peace, unity, and harmony among battling gangs and peoples (Morgan & Bennett, 2011). Eventually this would set the stage for socially conscious hip-hop in the

U.S. and inspire action in urban youth of color. For example, political and conscious voice was displayed through the lyrics heard in music such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" (1982). The song described life in the inner city and painted a vivid picture of the streets of New York. One of the main lyrics to this song, "It's like a jungle some times it makes me wonder, how I keep from going under" gave a glimpse into not just the physical realities of life in the inner city but also the emotional frustration that accompanies the life of participants in hip-hop—i.e. the harsh conditions of life in African-American housing project (Emdin, 2010).

At the close of the 1980s, the embrace of hip-hop music and culture by urban youth would soon be challenged by the takeover of hip-hop by mainstream America. During the 1990s, hip-hop commercialization led to a new era in which large corporations (more often, large white-owned, white-run recording companies) exploited hip-hop marketing, fashion designers, and entertainers. Chang (2005) makes note of this phenomena:

"Media monopolies favored artists who did not merely produce hits, but synergies of goods. In this new corporate order, a song could become a movie could become a book could become a soundtrack could become a music video could become a videogame... The biggest artists were brands themselves, generating lifestyles based on their own ineffable beings" (Chang, 2005, p. 417).

As a result, hip-hop had become characterized as hyper-masculine, overtly sexual, and criminal and, as such, antithetical to the positive, personal, and academic growth and development of urban youth of color. Furthermore, hip-hop withheld a paradoxical stance in American society. For example, the commodification of gangsta rap pointed to the ironic realities of young black males in the 1990s: As sales are boomed, so too did the death rates of young black males—rap's major audience (Saunders, 1993). The youth who attempted to separate themselves from these forms of commodification and commercialization can be referred to as the post-hip-hop Generation—a generation which searched for a deeper, more encompassing understanding of themselves in a context outside of the corporate hip-hop monopoly (Asante Jr, 10, 2008).

However, ultimately, rapid commercialization ironically led to the legitimization of hip-hop within the mainstream as a tool of instruction, of equalizing opportunities, and

of counteracting discrimination. For example, TIME magazine's 1999 article titled, "Hip-Hop Nation: Lauryn Hill," spoke on behalf of hip-hop's proliferation and its increasing importance by highlighting Hill's five-Grammy-sweep: "[Hip-hop] pulses from the films you watch (Seen a Will Smith movie lately?), the books you read (even Tom Wolfe peels off a few raps in his best-selling new novel), and the fashion you wear (Tommy Hilfiger, FUBU) (Farley, 1999). Many parents and educators see these as "all American" norms that should be fought against, and argue that constructing an emancipatory curriculum involving commercial rappers is likely to be a challenge (Rosa & Fields, 2011). However, many argue that post-hip-hop generation does not accept false type of hip-hop (commercialized rap). It does not truly reflect their culture and urban youth of color demarcate the lines between rap music they listen to because it sounds good, and true hip-hop music that is true to their culture (Emdin, 2011).

#### **IV. Hip-Hop Culture Amongst Urban Youth of Today- The United States**

About forty years after its birth, a contemporary conceptualization of hip-hop has emerged. A new cohort of scholars, cultural practitioners now define hip-hop not a movement or a generation but as a "culture," characterized by the four "elements" of hip-hop: rap, DJ-ing, graffiti art, and the b-boy/ b-girl street dance. Those who are a part of hip-hop move beyond being positioned as victim and into a space where they are valued and respected for who they are (Emdin, 2010). With the most recent reconceptualization of hip-hop as a culture and a form of cultural production, hip-hop and education's convergence has become possible. Hip-hop today has been used in the urban science, social studies, and english classrooms by scholars through the use of "hip-hop pedagogy." Hip-hop pedagogy enhances cultural relevance in the classroom allowing the restructuring of the politics of the classroom (Lamont Hill, 2009; Emdin, 2010). However, I argue that after-school programs, as opposed to the classroom, may be the best site for implementing the convergence, since it is in such sites that instructors may be free of the demands made by a public school systems which are often times discriminatory. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB) places high stakes pressure on schools that serve "disadvantaged students," primarily youth of color, based



on student testing results (i.e. sanctions revoking Title I<sup>2</sup> funding from schools or teacher being fired)— results, often times beyond their control. For example, NCLB does not take into account the natural fluctuations in test scores (Kane 2002, p. 60). As a result, relinquishing Title I funding from low-income, low-performing schools has become a thinly disguised method to maintain the status quo. My ethnographic research into one such program provides an illustration of and argument for the value of hip-hop education. In this light, hip-hop is here to stay and its influence on both students and teachers is profound (Lamont Hill, 2009, Emdin 2010) and worth researching.

*The Arts Greenhouse: An After-school program for youth in distressed neighborhoods--Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

The Arts Greenhouse (A-G) is based in a major research university, exemplifying a recent move in the US to develop programs that are designed to “advance education and employment, reduce juvenile recidivism, and improve environmental and health outcomes among underserved and marginalized communities” (Re-Imagining Teaching and Learning: A Snapshot of Hip-Hop Education, 2010). Like most hip-hop education programs in the U.S., the A-G addresses many of the inequalities experienced by children living in socio-economically deprived neighborhoods, particularly youth of color.

With a population drawn from Pittsburgh’s distressed neighborhoods (with a count 14,000 youth), the A-G attempts to compensate for inequalities in an education system that have profound impacts on future careers.

Methodology

My research within the Arts Greenhouse was a result of my affiliation with the History Department at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and my prior experience working with African-American high-school students in an after-school program directed toward college readiness. My shared interests facilitated entry into the site, and I spent three months doing fieldwork with the program. I attended six A-G sessions held on Saturdays from 1pm to 5pm, all located on the Carnegie Mellon campus. Participants in

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<sup>2</sup> Schools with a large low-income student population meet the definition and requirements for students to be eligible to receive Title 1 funds— financial assistance provided by the federal government (Kane 2002).

the program are predominantly African-American students from low-income backgrounds, ranging in age from 14 through 18. Four participants were White—children of parents who are affiliated with the university. As a young man of color only a few years older than my participants, my interactions with the students were, for the most part, easy-going and fluid. At the same time, my identity as a college student, as someone who grew up with a different ethnic background, and as the researcher (however informal) was not lost on the participants. Both the similarities and the differences in our social positions influenced the course of the fieldwork. Several participants even asked to connect with me via social media networks.

Arts Greenhouse sessions are organized into sections: discussion workshops in a classroom setting led by a coordinator and “breakout groups,” such as the beat making lab, creative writing workshop, and the recording studio sessions. Upon arriving to the discussion workshop setting, I usually set my belongings down, sat in a chair, and pulled out a notebook and pen, while greeting all who made eye contact. I typically remained silent, making observations of participant interactions. After discussion workshops, I carried out informal interviews during downtime between “breakout group” sessions. With the A-G teens, I generally prepared informal questions dealing with hip-hop, identity, and education. Interviews with the A-G youth varied in length and depth, depending on the setting, the timing, and the engagement of the particular individual. My conversations with A-G coordinators and staff took place after sessions.

### *The Allure of A-G*

*Essence:* “A-G is a space where I can be my true self. There is lots of pressure at school from friends and teachers to do things and be things. But I don’t feel those pressures from A-G”

School districts throughout the U.S. are under intense pressure to reform schools, to produce students better prepared for a workforce that must compete in a global market. As an informal education site, the Arts Greenhouse functions outside the demands of public schooling. From my fieldwork, I gathered the elements that make the A-G an overall non-stratified and liberating space. To begin, students felt that A-G was liberating

because it allowed them to be “authentic.” Here, Allie illuminates A-G’s ability to elicit authenticity:

*Allie:* “We (the members of A-G) are not fake. Arts Greenhouse attracts people who are honest. No one is really trying to outshine each other....At A-G we have the freedom to discover the things about ourselves. We already have things in our heads but Arts Greenhouse helps bring it out

By using the phrase “freedom to discover ourselves,” Allie highlights two important aspects of A-G: 1) The openness of the program 2) The freedom to create. The Arts Greenhouse functioned as an “open space” for several reasons. First, A-G teens had the liberty to enter and exit workshops at anytime, for instance, to grab a cup of coffee. They also were able to text on their cell phones, or even bring friends into the space to “hang out.” In addition, students with A-G did not experience any pressure to produce final products such as an exam score. The Arts Greenhouse most explicit goal to have students compose, produce, and record their own music. However, no direct “mission” for A-G exists. The mission is defined as “self-directed” by the students themselves. Here, Curtis, a seventeen-year-old black male compares the stress of public schooling with the openness of A-G:

*Curtis:* “Schools, as much as they give you group projects, they still judge you as an individual. At the end of the day, you are still a number. Your class rank is this, your GPA is this. Your SAT scores is that. And that’s what I don't like about school. They judge you.... In the Arts Greenhouse you come, you get want you want and eventually you leave. Some stay, some stay longer than others. Some don’t last. High school can be like that, but in the same respect, AG’s doors are always open. School is not like that. School is not as open, where they give you a chance to voice your opinion, choose to do what you want to do. But if I came into AG and said let’s make a song about Chicken! Amos [A-G program director] would probably be *down*. That’s really the best thing bout it. The openness. How open you can be and how they try to let you do what you want.”

In A-G, participants have the opportunity to discover themselves because they can write about anything they want to. Free from the pressures from school (Curtis talk of numbers), students can take the skills they find most useful and apply them to way that would like. Even still, Curtis mentions that Amos would be *down*. By down, Curtis is referring to Amos dialogic approach to facilitating a class, which stresses the potential of collaborative group work and peer assistance to promote mutually responsive learning (Wells, 1999). This group collaborative group work was crucial and echoes Allie’s

mention of A-G being an honest space. Honesty played an important role during creative writing workshops where students provided constructive criticism to one another.

### *What's happening in A-G?*

The Arts Greenhouse functioned as a unique place for complex negotiations of identity. This “identity work” often resulted in the exclusion and inclusion of participants through the use of specific mechanism: language, dress, and knowledge of hip-hop culture. Excluding and including often differed from site to site (classroom discussions, beat lab workshops, creative writing workshops, and recording sessions).

### A-G Men in the Discussion Workshops

The discussion workshops offered participants the opportunity to learn about historical and contemporary issues in hip-hop and for my research, served as site for making crucial observations. In particular, upon entering the discussion room, I often took note of the small number of men in the room. From my observations, men in the Arts Greenhouse arrived later in the day— just in time to participate in the breakout groups. As a result, AG coordinators and the female teens dominated the discussion room. This absence of males in the room, I assume to be a response to historical patterns of academic and social disengagement of Black men within the classroom. However, one student who occasionally attended discussions was “C-Dom,” a sixteen-year-old African American male. In my initial observations of C-Dom, I identified him as a “rebel” in the classroom. He seemed to always test how far could push his boundaries in an attempt to grasp the classroom’s attention, though in the most subtle ways. In one sense, his actions showed complete control and agency in the space as he, for example, would gratuitously rise from his chair in the middle of a hip-hop lecture and carry himself to a window just to catch a look outside; or for example, as he tapped his pen on the desk to a slow and steady rhythm, disturbing the discussion circle. C-Dom’s classroom performance may have been brought on by his anxieties of being in a space that resembled a traditional classroom.

However, as I observed him more in the discussion room I paid more attention to his words. With time, I noticed C-Dom become more engaged with discussions. For example, in a lecture on the importance of feedback, C-Dom confidently expressed his views: “Feedback is good because you may realize down the road that what the person was saying was actually helpful.” With more careful observation, I noticed that C-Dom seemed to be more engaged in only particular discussions involving for example, hip-hop and its creation. C-Dom’s engagement can be explained by A-G workshops’ ability to validate knowledge of hip-hop and thus his cultural capital—or his non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means such as valuable skills, talents, and attributes within hip-hop culture. Hip-hop education scholar, Chris Emdin, would refer to C-Dom as a “hip-hop student in the classroom,” who becomes an agent when he is allowed to fully allowed participate in a classroom because his history, tradition, and voice are valued, as opposed to being silenced within schools—which often “adhere to a too-strict curriculum limited to too-few topics that are often not presented in new ways that incite student interest” (Emdin, 2010).

### White Members in AG

From my observations, A-G students all seemed to be fond of Amos, the program coordinator. Although a white, Jewish male in his late-twenties, A-G participants respected Amos, considering him a member of hip-hop culture due to his knowledge of hip-hop history and status as a DJ. In addition, language played a crucial role in gaining acceptance into the hearts of the A-G teens. For example, Amos regularly punctuated his sentences with typically African American slang like “y’all” and “yo.” This language usage helped Amos present himself as more relatable. Although generally functioning as a space of equality, entrance into A-G sites was not fully granted to all white members of the program. Throughout my fieldwork, I counted a total of four white students who I would describe as irregular attendees. These students spoke very little in discussions and took on small roles in the music-making process. One such example was Stefano, a ninth-grade white male. Stefano joined the Arts Greenhouse to learn about the beat making process and eventually wanted to learn how to rap. However, Stefano’s understanding of hip-hop culture was limited. He described himself as not being from a “ghetto”

neighborhood. I asked Stefano what would rap about in his music Stefano responded, “I can’t rap about getting shot in the knee...cause I live in a safe neighborhood. So I would make music, ya know, like Mac Miller<sup>3</sup>. He is from a good neighborhood in Pittsburgh.” Stefano’s “getting shot in the knee” reference illuminates his understanding of the racialized geography of Pittsburgh, as well as his interpretation of Black neighborhoods in the city as violent. Many of the African-American teens did not engage much with Stefano, especially in the recording studio. This can be explained partly by Stefano’s unfamiliarity with hip-hop culture and African American culture. In addition, his lack of use of slang like “y’all” and “yo,” further ostracized him from the group.

### *Impact/effectiveness of the Arts Greenhouse program*

A-G contributes a good deal to increasing the capacities and the confidence of its participants especially in their transitional stage from high school to college. Much of that has to do with the lesson plans, the location, the instructors, use of hip-hop and rap, and the mentoring within the program. I will highlight the experience of two A-G teens to demonstrate how students make cultural gains, and ultimately present themselves as the primary agents in their lives.

Within the Arts Greenhouse, Curtis and Tairey, were most insightful in sharing and demonstrating the long-term cultural gains and outcomes of the program. Both students participated within the program for at least three years and were preparing to graduate from high school. The first cultural gain the men demonstrated was an enhanced sense of agency, specifically in the creation of their music and post-graduation decisions. For example, in an interview with Curtis, I learned about the development process each A-G participant goes through. Three years ago as novice in the program, Curtis described himself as eager and wanting to rap on every track. Today, he is excited to write his own songs that are crafted together with his own ideas so that other students can rap on his songs. Curtis shares that this position of authority comes with experience, and he takes it seriously:

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<sup>3</sup> Mac Miller is a Pittsburgh born rapper with national fame whose music topics include drugs, money, women, family, and everyday life.

*Curtis:* If I am doing my own music, I wanna make a song a certain way. I will do some songs and I will want Linwood to rap on it, but not Sidek. If Sidek sings, I will not have Imani sing. I know what I like out of them as artists. I don't want to make them do something they or I wouldn't like, or something that wouldn't sound right. Like there are some songs that Prince can sing that Michael Jackson can't sing.

*Christian:* \*chuckles\*

*Curtis:* Both great artists! Amazing artists. But there are some things Michael Jackson can that Prince can't do and vice-versa. But if I produce a beat for Prince, I want Prince on it, not Michael Jackson.

Curtis is proud of his ability to make decisions in creation of his music. He is the primary agent in the songs' outcome. Tairey, too, showed that he was an agent in the creation of his music. To start, Tairey showed me the logo he created for his hip-hop group— Black Rebel. For Tairey, the symbols within his logo were important: A Black Power fist placed before an American flag surrounded in a Greek head wreath. As he described it, the fist and flag represented courage strength and history within the American context, while the Greek head wreath spoke to the royalty and importance of the group. Tairey even shared his personal website. Both of these men attributed the ability to make decisions, either in the creation of a song or in the crafting of an artist image, to their experience at the Arts Greenhouse.

However, their agency was not limited to their music creation process, but also in their life decisions and worldviews. For example, Curtis will be attending community college after graduation. He does not know what he want to pursue but in an interview Curtis talked about the lack of economic opportunity in his neighborhood: "It is not fair that all the Black folks in Homewood have to travel to Squirrel Hill [a prominently white neighborhood] in order to purchase our groceries. We need more local businesses Homewood." Throughout his time in A-G, it was clear that Curtis had become more familiar with the racialization and the public spaces, and expressed a desire to one day address these problems. This sort of racial awareness was not unique to Curtis but was a theme that came up in many of my interviews with the youth of the Arts Greenhouse.

In addition, Tairey displayed agency in his ability to balance his personal demands of pursuing a career in hip-hop with those imposed upon him by his parents—going to college, getting a degree, and securing a good job. Although pursuing an engineering degree upon graduation at a sub-campus of the University of Pittsburgh, he described hip-

hop as his first path of interest and engineering as a backup plan: “I know this may seem backwards but it is what I feel is right for me. I will go to college and studying engineering because I like math and science and it makes my parents happy. In the meantime, I will make my music.” Tairey seemed to find a balance of meeting his own expectation and the expectation of his parents.

Mentorship from the A-G staff prepared its participants to live independently and confidently after high school, and realize their goals, especially within the process of transitioning from high school to college. In A-G, it was the students themselves who drove the direction of the program, defining through their music, what the Arts Greenhouse was and what it could be. Within HHBE, it is crucial that students drive the program. However, it is also pertinent that directors engage in techniques that support developing student’s critical thinking skills through critical pedagogy techniques like active exchange and discussion, instead of the passive transmission of information.

## **V. Hip- Hop and Education Converge: Brazil**

Much of the above account is embedded in US policy and practice such as the technocratic demands of policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Obama administration's Race to the Top. What happens when we turn to another nation, with some similar problems and some analogous solutions? In the next section, I’ll take a brief look at Brazil, using texts as my primary source of data. To begin, I will outline hip-hop’s development amongst Afro-Brazilian youth and then discuss hip-hop culture amongst youth today and its role with education, citizenship and the State.

### *The Development of Hip-Hop Among Afro-Brazilian youth in Brazil*

Hip-hop has become a voice for urban marginalized youth across the globe, however its emergence in Brazil is embedded within a Brazilian context involving histories of social exclusion, music, education, and citizenship. To begin, hip-hop did not emerge in Brazil as a hip-hop culture—characterized by the four “elements”: rap, DJ-ing, graffiti art, and the b-boy/ b-girl street dance—rather, in the late 1970s within cities like São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília break dance began Brazilian hip-hop culture. As



cultural anthropologist Derek Pardue, notes: “The persona of b-boy, or b-girl, is one who understands and is able to perform various styles of street dance. These include electric boogaloo, poppin’, lockin’, and breakdance. According to hip hop pioneer DJ Hum (known then just as Humberto), b-boys did not know anything about rap. It was just about the break beats and dance” (Pardue, 2008). Brazilian magnetism to break dance was due largely in part to its widely remarkable similarity to Brazil’s traditional martial art, capoeira. Both forms emerged from African diasporic roots (Morgan & Bennett, 2011). Eventually, b-boy crews, the majority of whom are male favela residents of African descent with little formal education, began to occupy of public spaces and form a strong sense of group organization, just as b-boys in the 1970s in the U.S. (Pardue, 2004).

By the mid-to-late 1980s, hip-hop began appearing on Brazilian TV, and Americans were also introducing it when they traveled to Brazil. Early forms of rap music and hip-hop in the U.S. had already encouraged spaces for expression and various forms of resistance ritual among oppressed youth in the U.S. Brazilians (Neate 2004). An increased appreciation of hip-hop resulted in the hosting of hip-hop parties in working class neighborhood like Madureira of Rio de Janeiro. Madureira had been a neighborhood that always valued black culture, art and music and was a place where youth could go to find black music parties.<sup>4</sup> The use of black forms of expression like hip-hop was not new to neighborhoods like Madureira. For example, Rio is known as the funk capital in Brazil, a genre largely influenced by R&B black soul music of the United States. Funk occupies the space of *anti-samba*<sup>5</sup>, as does hip-hop in Rio. Those genres defy everything that samba claims about Brazil, uncovering embarrassing truths about an unjust country (Dowdy, 2012). Thus, funk, offered more meaning to life than samba.

Within these black music parties, rap began to take a more significant role. For example, starting in 1922, a rap group out of São Paulo called Racionais MCs (translated Rational MCs) would change the role of hip-hop in Brazil forever. As favelados (residents of favelas) of São Paulo Racionais MCs were favelados created lyrics which depicted the racism, poverty, violence, and police brutality within those favelas (Dowdy,

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<sup>4</sup> These parties were referred to as *bola pretas* (Black balls), *charm* balls—parties celebrating soul and funk.

<sup>5</sup> . In Brazil, Samba was (and still is) often associated with narratives of equality and grand discourse of racial and class harmony (Dowdy, 2012). This ideal permeates throughout the country and throughout the annual spectacle of carnival in Rio, masking the realities of urban poor.

2012). Even today, as they have gained national success, their music still addresses social issues, human rights, and black pride. Rappers like called Racionais MCs of São Paulo, helped rap to be seen as a medium to undo harmful social impositions of self, space, and place (Pardue, 2004, a). In this context, hip-hop in Brazil has come to be about reality.

As hip-hop made its entrance into Brazil, one must note the simultaneous developments within public education. The history of hip-hop in Brazil is part of a more general trajectory of information access among marginalized urban youth (Pardue, 2008). Historically education in Brazil has always been the privilege of the elite. For example, in 1972, Brazil expanded mandatory education to include children from 7-14 years of age. But in 1980, the illiteracy rate was still around 25% (OECD, 2009). Only very recently did Brazil start its revolution of universal access to education. In 1988, Brazil passed its current constitution that made education a personal right for every child and young person and created universal access to education. But shortly afterwards, increasing resources for education diminished due to the larger number of participants in the system. Eventually, resources available could not keep up with the demand (OECD, 2009).

Thus, hip-hoppers in Brazil worked along the margins, creating their own information, education, and media, separate from the institution. They organized themselves in groups called “posses” and invested time in developing consciousness. Nino Brown, founder of Zulu Nation Brasil in 2002, has become an advocate of “hip-hop as a theory of culture and a mechanism of popular education.” As Pardue notes, “he is remarkably consistent in his focus on the relationship between culture and consciousness. In particular, as I read over my field notes I found him repeating the statement “We must insist on the term hip-hop *culture*; it’s the *culture* that gets us in touch with each other. We create community and we discover ourselves in the process. This reality is our *consciousness*” (Pardue, 2008).

Brazilian hip-hop’s evolution from being a dance form to a tool for social critique, to now a culture, is crucial in understanding its use as a pedagogical tool. In the past fifteen years, the Brazilian State has viewed hip-hop as a means to educate marginalized Brazilian youth in the sense of self-knowledge and to cultivate a desire to engage in the civil sphere.

## VI. Hip-Hop Culture Amongst Urban Youth of Today: Brazil

Today in Brazil, hip-hop has evolved into a phenomenon involving thousands of participants and consumers. For Afro-Brazilians living in large cities, it is reckoned as a contemporary link in the new Brazilian category of *estilo* and *cultura black* (black style and culture) (Pardue, 2004). However, hip-hop in Brazil has distinguished itself from U.S., by becoming a vehicle for civic education and social inclusion. The use of hip-hop as a pedagogical tool in the hands of the state creates an interesting comparison to view hip-hop education program in the U.S. like Arts Greenhouse. The history of hip-hop's connection with state agencies can be traced to B-boy crews. State agencies were drawn to B-boy crews because of their occupation of public spaces. Starting from 1989 to 1993 hip-hoppers were most effective in organizing neighborhood "posses" and establishing employment channels through hip-hop projects via the department of education (Pardue, 2004, a). For example, hip-hop proposals such as "ABC Rap," "Movimento Hip Hop Organizado (MH20)," "ProjetoRappers," and the publication of the magazine *Pode Crê* argued that education should be articulated to social organization and a more participatory sense of citizenship (Pardue, 2004, a). Since then, many types of hip-hop education projects have emerged.

However, it is important to note that the Brazilian state has a legacy of paternalism, which in practice has discouraged group mobilization in favor of relations of individual dependence; this was a large problem especially during the military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s (Baierle 1998; Williams 2001). Today, this history of paternalism continues to influence how people, especially under resourced Afro-Brazilians, understand their realities and relation to the Brazilian state<sup>6</sup>. Even still, state agencies continue to be the primary funding agency of hip-hop based education programs in urban Brazil. Despite significant changes in the role of the Brazilian state programs often function in problematic ways. For example, to gain employment hip-hoppers have to craft proposals for youth culture programs and lobby for support from the state departments of culture and education.

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<sup>6</sup> When Paulo Freire was appointed as secretary of education and he immediately launched an "education for citizenship" campaign based on grassroots literacy programs (Dowdy, 2012). Hip-hop education program are often based in this Freirean tradition.

One of the largest and most recent hip-hop based programs has been Brazil's Culture Points, an official government program that is helping to spread hip-hop culture throughout Brazil, primarily São Paulo<sup>7</sup> (Rohter, 2007). One of Brazil's most revered pop stars and current minister of culture, Gilberto Gil, is the program's largest advocate pointing out the importance of hip-hop to huge contingents of the population [typically Afro-Brazilian]. He states that a government which "can't perceive this won't have the capacity to formulate policies that are sufficiently inclusive to keep young people from being diverted to criminality or consigned to social isolation (Rohter, 2007). By providing grants to fund local organizations, Culture Points empowers local hip-hop communities to educate and serve Brazilian youth. The organizations are often run by local hip-hop artists (Morgan & Bennett, 2011). In the program, young students can, for example, improve their graffiti techniques and/or learn how to operate digital recording and video equipment, just as students in the Arts Greenhouse program (Rohter, 2007).

## **VII Discussion**

The U.S. and Brazil have experienced similar problems resulting from histories that have denied educational access to populations of African descent. As a result, they have come up with some analogous solutions to resolve inequities through the use of hip-hop as a pedagogical tool. In the United States, hip-hop's convergence with education was made possible by the reconfiguration of the ideological understandings of hip-hop by the mainstream (i.e. entertainment industry and field of education). These shifts have made programs like the Arts Greenhouse possible—programs which act as routes to the future as a way of altering the impact of racial discrimination. In contrast, in Brazil, hip-hop has not yet to fully penetrate the mainstream. Even still, hip-hop remains a pedagogical tool in the states' interest in educating disenfranchised Afro-Brazilian youth as means to inspire cultural awareness and encourage civic engagement. In the next

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<sup>7</sup> Another such program is the Central Única das Favelas (Central Association of Slums) or CUFA which is nationally recognized by the political, social, sporting and cultural spheres in Brazil. It "was created from the union between youngsters from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro – mainly blacks – who sought space to express their attitudes, or simply questioning their will to live" (CUFA, 2013). The NGO uses hip-hop arts to create programs and safe spaces where indigent youth of color could express themselves, be heard, and learn skills for life and work (Dowdy, 2012).

section, I will discuss the lessons and takeaways of examining programs that use hip-hop as a pedagogical tool by comparing hip-hop based education program in the U.S like the Arts Greenhouse with programs in Brazil like Culture Points.

### **Issues of Autonomy: Hip-Hop as an Educational Tool for Whom?**

It is clear that hip-hop culture has its own educational value that “authorizes particular values, truth claims, and subject positions while implicitly or explicitly contesting others” (Lamont Hill, 2009). However, referring to hip-hop as a pedagogical tool suggests that hip-hop is “in fact a strategy that can be picked up and put down as needed” (Hall, 2011). In the case of hip-hop based education programs in the U.S. it is crucial to evaluate who has autonomy over such tools and for what purpose.

In the United States, it is somewhat commonplace in education for policy makers and administrators to often look for temporary solutions that are set up for failure (Noguera, 2008). One such example, fueled by multicultural education,<sup>8</sup> was the Afrocentric education movement, which was designed to strengthen and improve the academic performance of students using principles in ancient Egyptian culture. (Ginwright, 2004). Afrocentric programs failed because while celebrating students’ cultures, they did not acknowledge the oppressive conditions in which young people lived. Currently, hip-hop pedagogy in urban schools has been celebrated and is expected to change African-American youths thinking about community problems (Ginwright, 2004). However, I argue that utilizing hip-hop as a tool in public schools is often problematic because students are expected to meet the demands made by public school systems. Programs like the Arts Greenhouse are successful because they use hip-hop as tool in engaging urban youth of color in critical thinking and creative writing on their own accord, outside the bounds of discriminatory education systems. Students are fully autonomous in developing the mission of their music and the program, as A-G participant, Curtis, demonstrated. Supplementary/after-school hip-hop education

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<sup>8</sup> The goal of multicultural education was to reform schools so that they provide diverse students (racial, ethnic, class, gender, language, etc.) with educational equity (Banks, 2004) and create schools that rejected all forms of discrimination (Nieto, 2009).

programs allow students to reconfigure their own values systems (i.e. surrounding music, race, class).

In comparison, hip-hop education programs in Brazil do not operate within the education system<sup>9</sup>, thus all programs can be considered “supplementary” and are housed within the Ministry of Culture. In general, in Brazil, hip-hop signifies an activism on the part of urban Afro-Brazilians, and to a large extent, has changed the content of what public institutions consider to be worthwhile knowledge (i.e. the Ministry of Culture). However, although state mediation of hip-hop culture has produced an additional sphere of operation and performance as seen through programs like Culture Points, it has also “constrained the semiotic range of hip-hop” (Pardue, 2011). In addition, the extent to which some of these program have “transformed individuals’ understanding and (re)performance of concepts such as *marginal* is inconsistent and difficult to gauge” (Pardue, 2004). Thus, participants in hip-hop based education program in Brazil do not seem to have full autonomy over program mission and goals. Furthermore, for some hip-hoppers and other practitioners of popular culture, the Brazilian state is hopelessly inefficient and not really committed to favela life and social change. These hip-hoppers have attempted to project their autonomy by turning to the market, following many U.S. hip-hoppers through creating brands and commodities such as clothing (Pardue, 2011). Thus, the choice to participate in hip-hop education programs in Brazil present the laborious process of negotiating with state agencies.

### **Goals of Hip-hop Education Programs**

Both the U.S. and Brazilian hip-hop education program in a large sense, hope to provide youth an escape from urban poverty, crime, violence, and of course low access to quality education. In addition, these programs act as places of negotiation between multiple spaces, however for both countries these “spaces” differ drastically.

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<sup>9</sup> Under Brazil's decentralized education system, its 27 federal states have primary responsibility for schooling, in association with the municipal authorities of Brazil's 5,561 municipalities. In 2001, a National Education Plan set out guidelines, goals and priorities for the three levels of government at federal, state and municipal level. In 2007, a federal Education Development Plan combined increased spending in classrooms with performance monitoring to drive improvements (OECD, 2009).

For the Arts Greenhouse, participants are expected to make connections that open “new routes to higher education” (Arts Greenhouse Website). The program accomplishes this implicitly. First, for example, A-G takes place within a university campus, which increases the possibility of a students viewing college as a viable post-graduation option. In addition, through supporting their personal interests in hip-hop, A-G allows participants to see the possibility of pursuing interests in music as well as going to college, as Tairey demonstrated. On the whole, I conclude that programs like A-G increase life opportunities for its participants. They recognize their skills, learning, talents, and attributes as valuable in helping them increase their capital (either economic, social, cultural) and learn how that capital functions throughout separate social spaces such as school or within the Arts Greenhouse.

In comparison, in Brazil, marginalized urban youth who participate in hip-hop education programs typically have few other options for education.<sup>10</sup> Thus, robust state engagement with under0resourced urban communities via hip-hop matters. As opposed to offering opportunities to higher education, program like Culture Points provide an opportunity for students to create a sense of self-knowledge and cultivate a desire to engage in the civil sphere (Pardue, 2011). As the Brazilian sociologist Luiz Eduardo Soares has argued, many young, poor, Afro-Brazilian youth do not exist *socially* (Pardue, 2011). Hip-hop education programs allows these students to exit the sphere of “social invisibility,” to a sphere of public occupation within a city space. Thus in Brazil, hip-hop’s use as a pedagogical tool is to promote “popular culture” so that the majority of the population can build community and feel that they are practicing their citizenship. (Pardue, 2004, a). Furthermore, by considering hip-hop part of Brazilian culture, Culture Points is “democratizing culture.” Culture Points gives a voice to an otherwise largely marginalized people and their art form (Menon, 2013). This places hip-hop and the portion of society it represents on a somewhat equal status with mainstream Brazilian music and society.

### **Race within Hip-Hop Based Education Program**

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<sup>10</sup> In addition, higher education remains a large obstacle. In order to enter the prestigious public universities, students must study for the vestibular— the competitive examination which requires years of intense preparation, usually at a elite private high school, to gain entrance into universities to select their students. (Boston, 2003).

According to Morgan:

“[Hip-Hop] is not mere words and expressions that create a bond among hip-hop followers throughout the world. Rather, it is based on African American language ideology where the words signify multiple meanings and critiques of power. Hip-hop presents African American English (AAE) as a symbolic and politicized dialect where speakers are aware of complex and contradictory processes of stigmatization, valorization and social control. The hip-hop speech community is not necessarily linguistically and physically located but rather bound by this shared language ideology as part of politics, culture, social conditions, and norms, values, and attitude (Morgan, 2009).

Today, hip-hop around the world continues to serve as a symbol associated with African Americans. Both within Arts Greenhouse and Brazilian hip-hop education program, hip-hop helps race become more apparent in many ways.

Within the Arts Greenhouse, students are given the opportunity to draw attention to circumstances or stories that are outside the status quo, often times resulting in enhanced “critical consciousness.” To some extent, the Arts Greenhouse uses mechanisms of social justice pedagogy by *generating enthusiasm for learning* and the *importance of community* (Hall, 2011). According to Freire, when students feel engaged about what they are learning because it is relevant and challenging in a holistic way, they are excited to learn, this is part of the human condition (Freire, 1970). In the long run, students in the Arts Greenhouse started to realize their position in a larger system, i.e. Curtis awareness of the lack of economic opportunities in his neighborhood and his desire to potentially pursue a career in business to change that. However, Curtis was most interested in helping to establish “Black business for Black communities.” Through the A-G workshops, students, not only Curtis, gained a deeper awareness of their race. This ultimately affected how they engaged in the workshops. Stefano’s exclusion from sites within A-G is one such example.

Brazilian hip-hop based education programs, by nature, take on a Freirian approach to education (Pardue, 2004). However, the use of hip-hop illuminates participants’ awareness of race. In Brazil, before the arrival of hip-hop, Samba was (and still is) often associated with narratives of equality and grand discourse of racial and class harmony (Dowdy, 2012). This ideal permeated throughout the country and throughout the annual



spectacle of carnival in Rio, masking the realities of urban poor. Hip-Hop, just as Brazilian Funk music, occupies the space of *anti-samba*, challenging samba's claims about Brazil, and uncovering embarrassing truths about an unjust country (Dowdy, 2012). Hip-hop serves as a “new kind of black movement because of hip-hop's identification with racial stratification.”

## VIII. Conclusion

Brazilian social scientists, Pereira, notes:

“Departing from this verification [concerning] the unequal distribution of educational knowledge, one can observe that the school fits quite well, in an almost perfect circularity, within the law of the return of symbolic capital: the symbolic capital returns to the hands of those who already possessed it... Everything indicates that the practice of school [read: institutional] education cannot be liberational, not because the professors don't want it to be or that they adopt conservative pedagogies, nor can it be attributed to any such blatant statist policy, but rather because this is more or less written into the logic of educational insertion in the process of cultural transmission in capitalist societies” (Pereira 1997)

In this essay, I evaluated the “convergence” of hip-hop and education in the United States and Brazil. In specific, I evaluated the use of hip-hop as a pedagogical tool among supplementary/after-school hip-hop programs, using the Pittsburgh-based Arts Greenhouse program as a paradigm case. By briefly comparing A-G to hip-hop education program in Brazil, I attempted to illuminate how this convergence has manifested itself.

As noted earlier, education is a special, deeply political, almost sacred, civic activity where access to influence and power is rationed. Some scholars, like Pereira, believe that popularizing education, such as in the way Arts Greenhouse or Cultural Points does, is impossible and “illogical” in a capitalist society. The experimental inclusion of hip-hop into realms of education and culture is significant in this light. For, Brazil and the United States hip-hop has become a powerful force to combat issues of social exclusion for urban youth of African descent. The largest difference of this convergence has been the United States' emphasis on “schooling” and pathways to higher education, in contrast to Brazil's emphasis on “learning” and acquiring sense of citizenship. In both, the involvement of the state differs. However, implementing such

programs is complicated, specifically when considering issues of autonomy. Since hip-hop is the primary avenue for voice among urban marginalized youth across the globe, educators and practitioners should resist the urge to develop, implement, and critique educational projects in the absence of youth. Furthermore, although hip-hop based education programs provide participants with significant gains ranging from critical consciousness to increased awareness of opportunities, one must note that they will not provide a solution to structural inequities, or other societal ills such as poverty or racism within the United States and Brazil. Hip-hop based education programs are just one piece of a larger equity agenda. For both the U.S. and Brazil, this may be difficult given the persistent inequalities that grip each nation. Despite this, the relative success of programs like Arts Greenhouse and Culture Points is relevant, especially in tracking the complicated relationship between hip-hop, race and education as we progress into the twenty-first century.

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