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N.W.REA? Hip-Hop and Reagan's 'Second American Revolution', 1984-8

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N.W.REA? Hip-Hop and Reagan's 'Second American Revolution', 1984-8.

Contents

Introduction

In 1984, Run-DMC's self-titled album sparked a new era of hip-hop, demonstrating innovation, oozing self-promotion, and including one of rap's first 'diss' tracks. Four years later, N.W.A. received an F.B.I. warning letter for their anti-authority song *F*ck tha Police* on their platinum selling album *Straight Outta Compton*, illustrating hip-hop's increasing popularity and controversy in equal measure. The contradictory social responses came during Ronald Reagan's second term as President of the United States, in which he aimed to complete his 'second American revolution', and his landslide re-election in 1984 – in which he received 58.8% of the popular vote and 525 out of 538 electoral votes – represented a stunning seal of approval for the continuation of his neoliberal agenda. However, while the incumbent President gained more share of the vote than his opponent Walter Mondale in almost every demographic group, three groups voted against him: Blacks, Hispanics, and families whose annual income was lower than $12,500.[1] This reflected the established view that Reagan's free-market economics had widened the prosperity gap and disproportionately disadvantaged poor urban and minority communities. Accordingly, much scholarship on hip-hop has portrayed the rise of the movement in the 1980s as one in opposition to the oppressive socio-economic systems created and exacerbated by Reagan's policies.

This dissertation aims to challenge this existing narrative by examining the music produced in the years 1984-8 and uncover its points of convergence with neoliberalism. Using Youngsoo Bae's redefinition of capitalism as a civilisation where economic power is almost independent of political authority, it will show how hip-hip culture was able to transcend traditional restraints of social conservatism and inequality and embody the rampant capitalism of 'Reaganomics'.

Neoliberal theory is contested, often used as a blanket term for different philosophies including conservatism, authoritarianism, liberalism, or free market economics. However, this work will use David Harvey's definition as a framework, which posits that, at its core, it is a system which believes that 'human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'.[2] This places primacy on the individual, who maximises their 'human capital' as a 'homo economicus'; an autonomous agent who

[1] 'How Groups Voted in 1984', *Roper Center*, (1984), < https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/how-groups-voted-1984> [accessed 2 March 2021].
[2] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

maximises profit through self-interest.[3] The introduction of these policies in nations such as the US, Britain, and Chile in the late 1970s and early 1980s represented the 'neoliberal turn', in direct response to the failure of the post-WWII consensus of Keynesianism in the capitalist west, which prioritised fiscal interventions by the state during depressions and recessions, and had resulted in high levels of stagflation by the 1970s. Stagflation described the combined problems of high inflation and slow economic growth which resulted from the 1973-5 recession, and led to 2.3 million jobs being lost in America in this period.[4] Instead, neoliberalism was influenced by the Chicago School of Economics, whose monetarist ideas stated that market economies were inherently stable, and that depressions only came from government intervention, advocating privatisation, deregulation, and tax cuts.[5] This was articulated by Reagan in his first inaugural address where he told the nation, 'In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem'.[6]

According to capitalism's the theory of stages shown in Bae's work, this represented the shift from state-managed (or social-democratic) to financialised capitalism, which promotes the accumulation of profit for investment and increases the share of financial services in a nation's GDP.[7] In his redefinition of capitalism as a civilisation, Bae demonstrates how economic power becomes almost independent of authority, a feature particularly prominent in the US based on strong property rights.[8] The rearrangement of these power structures is a political process, and Reagan's implementation of neoliberalism represented a shift of power structures which increased economic power relative to other systems, as well as the renegotiation of the individual's relationship with the state. Reviving many aspects of nineteenth century classic liberalism, economic autonomy and individual freedom was predicated on moral 'dignity', with emphasis on the nuclear family and individual responsibility replacing the role of the state to reduce 'dependency'. Frank Meyer articulated this combination of individual liberty and social

[3] Paul Zak, (ed.), *Moral Markets: The Critical Role of Values in the Economy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 158.
[4] Michael Urquhart & Marillyn Hewson, 'Unemployment continued to rise in 1982 as recession deepened', *Monthly Labor Review*, (February 1983), pp. 3-12, (p. 4).
[5] Bernhard Felderer & Stefan Homburg, *Macroeconomics and New Macroeconomics, (2nd ed.)*, (New York: Springer, 1992), p. 180.
[6] Ronald Reagan, 'First Inaugural Address', *Miller Center*, (1981), <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-20-1981-first-inaugural-address>[accessed 2 February 2021].
[7] Youngsoo Bae, 'Rethinking the Concept of Capitalism: a Historian's Perspective', *Social History*, 45:1, (2020), pp. 1-25, (p. 4).
[8] Bae, p. 18.

conservatism through his theory of 'fusionism', which describes, ''utilising libertarian means in a conservative society for traditionalist ends'.[9]

By 1984, the neoliberal revolution had gained large momentum. The Economic Recovery Tax Act (ERTA) and Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA), both passed in 1981, are some of the prime episodes of American neoliberalism, and manifested the fiscal priorities of tax cuts and reduced domestic spending respectively in response to the stagflation of the 1970s, combined with increased military spending in the midst of the Cold War. During Reagan's second term, the Tax Reform Act of 1986 lowered tax rates and decreased the number of tax brackets, representing the 'most sweeping change' to federal income tax since the Second World War. In line with Reagan's political ideology and David Harvey's critical formulation of neoliberalism, it favoured the individual, with individual tax revenue forecast to fall by $15.6 billion by 1990.[10] Steven Hayward has argued that these reforms created a more efficient and prosperous economy, and their cumulative effect and public approval highlights the endurance of the neoliberal momentum from 1984-8.[11] Strong public opinion was key to the implementation of these policies, and Michael Heale is part of a scholarly consensus who have identified Reagan's communication skills as being key to restoration of faith in the Presidency and pride in American exceptionalism during his time in office, allowing him to convey his policies to a more receptive electorate.[12]

However, these reforms disproportionately affected the urban poor, with the reduction of welfare provision under OBRA and budget changes lowering government spending on over 200 domestic programmes by $136 billion from 1982-4.[13] Between 1980 and 1984, the real disposable income of the poorest one-fifth of families declined by nearly 8%, with female-headed and black families suffering the most from this. On the other hand, the real disposable income of the top quintile rose by almost 9%.[14] Whilst some of this downturn was a result of another severe recession at the start of the 1980s, there is no doubt that this wealth gap was exacerbated by the Reagan administrations' monetarist policies. Marxist critics such as David

[9] Eugene Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 161.
[10] Alan Auerbach & Joel Slemrod, 'The Economic Effects of the Tax Reform Act of 1986', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 35: 2, (1997), pp. 589-632, (pp. 589-596).
[11] Steven Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution: 1980–1989*, (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2009), p. 635.
[12] Michael Heale, 'Ronald Reagan and the Historians', in *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies*, ed. by, Cheryl Hudson & Gareth Davies,(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 249-261, (p. 250).
[13] Dilys M. Hill, Raymond A. Moore, Phil Williams, (ed.), *The Reagan Presidency: An Incomplete Revolution?*, (Hampshire: The Macmillan Press, 1990), p. 148.
[14] John Palmer & Isabel Sawhill, (ed.), *The Reagan Record: An Assessment of America's Changing Domestic Priorities*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1984), p. 22.

Harvey argue that the neoliberal turn was an attempt to restore upper-class power which was threatened by post-war social democratic endeavours, whilst Noam Chomsky has argued that it places economic decision making in the hands of a small, wealthy elite.[15] More recently, Katharina Pistor has argued that the law systemically creates and distributes wealth disproportionately, suggesting that primacy of capital under financialised capitalism would generate higher levels of inequality.[16] More specifically to Reagan, Jacobs and Myers have identified neoliberalism's anti-union stance as a key factor behind economic inequality, while Lazzarato's revision of Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism has shown how inequality, insecurity, and a new type of individualisation have all been used to undermine the mutualisation and redistribution achieved before the turn.[17]

At the same time, hip-hop music and culture was flourishing, with the genre experiencing a huge proliferation between 1984 and 1988, triggered by Run-DMC's self-titled 1984 album. Hip-hop began as an underground movement in the minority community of the Bronx in New York in the 1970s, and consisted of four key elements: rapping, DJing, b-boying (a form of breakdancing), and graffiti. Scholars of 1980s hip-hop have echoed Marxist critics of Reagan's neoliberalism, and portrayed it as a movement of resistance against the socio-economic conditions which disproportionately disadvantaged poor urban and minority communities. Writing in the context of the commercialisation of hip-hop during the 1990s, academics presented artists of the 1980s as the torchbearers of a new form of black resistance. Tricia Rose's influential work on the subject outlines the 'social alienation' of the young black artists who formed the nexus of the hip-hop movement.[18] Similarly, work undertaken by researchers from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century highlighted symbolic modes of resistance to the dominant culture, arguing that, 'Rap culture celebrates defiance, as it narrates the experience of social exclusion'.[19] Jeff Chang has characterised the period 1984-92 of hip-hop history as a disapproval of the previous black

[15] David Harvey, 'Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 610, (2007), pp. 22-44, p. 28; James McGilvray, *Chomsky: Language, Mind, Politics (2nd ed.)*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 15.
[16] Katharina Pistor, *The Code of Capital: How the Law Creates Wealth and Inequality*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).
[17] David Jacobs & Lindsey Myers, 'Union Strength, Neoliberalism, and Inequality: Contingent Political Analyses of U.S. Income Differences since 1950', *American Sociological Review*, 79: 4, (2014), pp. 752-774; Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26: 6, (2009), pp. 109-133, (pp. 109-110).
[18] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p. 21.
[19] Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson, (ed.), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain (2nd ed.)*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. xi.

generation's lack of resistance as much as it was a form of resistance against white culture.[20] This focus has led scholars such as Manthia Diawara to view hip-hop culture as a continuity of black resistance, providing a vehicle for young black Americans coming out of the Civil Rights movement to express its limitations, and representing an ideological background through which to vent anger against neoliberal policy draining the resources of America's urban centres in the 1980s.[21] The role of Reagan's neoliberal policies has also been considered by Braxton Peterson, who suggests that the movement came out of the crossroads between the increased promise of capitalism under Reagan, accompanied by the lack of structural and civic resources necessary to achieve this.[22] Many of these works, such as Michael Dyson's, fall prey to an overemphasis on political artists such as Public Enemy, whose messages of black oppression in America further fuel this historiographical trend.[23] As such, scholarship on how hip-hop worked with these power structures, rather than against them, is limited.

That this theory of 1980s hip-hop as a form of resistance has not been revised is down to two main reasons. Firstly, the opulence and mass commercialisation of 1990s hip-hop, starting with 'gangsta' rap and culminating in the 'bling' era at the end of the decade, has diverted much scholarly attention. Lester Spence's thesis that rap lyrics reinforce neoliberalism takes its sources from 1989-2004, highlighting the critical bias for the period.[24] Similarly, the short collection of essays on hip-hop's place within mass culture in *That's the Joint!* are dominated by analysis of these later years.[25] Secondly, the relationship between other musical genres and the political economy in the era of neoliberal capitalism has taken precedence, such as Dale Chapman's study of neoclassical jazz's convergence with neoliberal culture.[26]

Accordingly, the proliferation of hip-hop in the 1980s has largely been left out of this discussion, and this dissertation seeks to correct this, while answering Schloss' call for scholars to demonstrate hip-hop culture's value on its own terms.[27] The rhetoric of hip-hop culture as a

[20] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, (London: Ebury, 2007), pp. 215-353.
[21] Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 237.
[22] James Braxton Peterson, *Hip-Hop Headphones: A Scholar's Critical Playlist*, (New York: Bloomsburg Academic, 2016), p. 167.
[23] Michael Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[24] Lester Spence, *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-Hop and Black Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 23.
[25] Mark Anthony Neal & Murray Forman, (ed.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader (2nd ed.)*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), pp. 631-731.
[26] Dale Chapman, *Jazz Bubble: Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture*, (California: University of California Press, 2018).
[27] Joseph Schloss, *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 156.

mode of resistance neglects some of the more nuanced exchanges between hip-hop culture and societal structures as its rapid expansion brought it into the dominant culture. Close examination of the output of work between 1984 and 1988 dismisses the idea that hip-hop grew in the 1980s in response to social issues for poor, urban minority groups, exacerbated by Reagan's neoliberal turn. Instead, it reveals that hip-hop artists worked within and promoted the capitalist and individualist ideals of neoliberal theory within the rampant capitalism which neoliberal economics had set free. It will show that, under Bae's definition of capitalism as a civilisation, the latest stage of financialised capitalism which accompanied the neoliberal turn allowed hip-hop – as a self-contained movement – to transcend its social barriers due to the elevation of economic power to a near independent entity, highlighting the points of convergence of hip-hop culture and neoliberal principles during Reagan's second term which have largely been ignored.

Methodology

This work will focus on the period 1984-8 as its period of analysis. Commentators agree that Run-DMC's self-titled 1984 debut album sparked a new era of hip-hop, with physical representations of wealth such as cars and fashion, boastful self-promotion, and one of rap's first 'diss' tracks combining with the incorporation of rock music on *Rock Box* to widen hip-hop's appeal and lay a foundation for other artists.[28] Public Enemy's claim that, 'Run-DMC first said a DJ could be a band', seemingly confirms their status as a seminal group and legitimising the evolution from rock to hip-hop.[29] This will form the start of my period of enquiry, which will end four years later, in what was, according to Loren Kajikawa, hip-hop's greatest year – 1988, in which its popularity and status was cemented.[30] This period also dovetails with Ronald Reagan's second term in office, a term in which he aimed to complete his 'second American revolution' and solidify his neoliberal policies.

To assess the relationship between these cultural and political phenomena, this work will use lyrical content as the primary source of analysis, identifying themes in the music which converged with the socio-political norms of the day. Specific attention will be paid to references of freedom, material wealth, and individual enterprise – three of the key tenets of

[28] David Toop, *Rap Attack (3rd ed.),* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), p. xi; Mansel Fletcher, '100 Best Albums Ever', *Hip Hop Connection*, March 2000, pp. 21-42.
[29] *Bring the Noise*, Public Enemy, (Def Jam Recordings, Columbia Records, 1987).
[30] Loren Kajikawa ''Bringin' '88 Back': Historicizing Rap Music's Greatest Year', in, *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, ed. By Justin Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Reagan's neoliberal theory – to illuminate the points of convergence which have largely been ignored in history.

It must also be mentioned briefly the dangers of working with oral sources and cultural artefacts for the historian. The anecdotal nature of oral history from an often-unrepresentative group leaves it contentious mode of enquiry. Similarly, Stuart Hall has demonstrated the contradictory nature of popular culture, as an arena as much shaped by 'established cultural bureaucracies' as it is by popular experience.[31] Therefore, extra care must be taken in order to avoid generalised links to high politics, and this work will instead view hip-hop as a cultural phenomenon in and of itself, drawing conclusions from its intertextuality and individuality within the wider socio-political system.

Structure

The first chapter will consider the concept of freedom and acknowledge the divergence of values between Reagan's social conservatism and hip-hop, before demonstrating the culture's ability to transcend this according to Bae's formulation of the independence of economic power from political authority. The final two chapters will illustrate points of convergence between neoliberalist policy and hip-hop culture through the themes of material wealth and individual enterprise, reassessing its proliferation from 1984-8 as an embodiment of the free-market economics which constituted 'Reaganomics'.

[31] Stuart Hall, 'What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?', *Social Justice*, 20: 1/2, (1993), pp. 104-114, (p. 108).

I

Freedom

'The more it gets accepted, you'll see it won't drop / And you'll be livin' in the world of hip-hop'.[32]

During his second inaugural address in January 1985, President Reagan emphasised 'individual liberty, self-government, and free enterprise' as the key principles of his policy.[33] The term 'freedom' was mentioned 18 times in this speech, and 34 times in his 1985 State of the Union Address only a few days later, demonstrating its centrality in his philosophy.[34] His promise to maintain 'a political system which guarantees individual liberty to a greater degree than any other' was predicated on social conservatism based on morality and family values in an attempt to rebuild American national identity, using moral panics under the 'the paranoid style' of American politics.[35] Commentators have identified the points of divergence and tension between this conservative agenda and hip-hop culture, citing the hardcore and morally questionable lyrics and themes as a primary mode of resistance. This chapter will paint this tension in a new light and show how artists deliberately exploited it in the context of the restructuring and heightening of economic power in relation to other power structures to transcend traditional societal restraints.

Ronald Reagan's rise to power was representative of the proliferation of social conservatives into mainstream politics. This ideology played an important role in policy, with White House officials insisting upon ideological 'vetting' for new appointments to Reagan's administration, which was tasked with reviving American national identity.[36] The ill-fated Vietnam War and the deterioration of Cold War relations at the end of the 1970s had led to a perceived weakness of the US military and their ability to influence world events.[37] Domestically, the growth of the conservative movement was a response to the cultural liberalisation of America, with a 1979 survey showing that 71% of respondents agreeing that, 'many things our parents stood for are

[32] *Living in the World of Hip-Hop*, MC Shan, (Cold Chillin' Records, Warner Records Inc., 1987).
[33] Ronald Reagan, 'Second Inaugural Address', *Miller Center*, (1985), < https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-21-1985-second-inaugural-address> [accessed 2 February 2021].
[34] Ronald Reagan, 'State of the Union Address', *Miller Center*, (1985), < https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/february-6-1985-state-union-address> [accessed 1 February 2021].
[35] First Inaugural Address (1981); Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, (London: Cape, 1966), pp. 3-40.
[36] James Pfiffner, 'The Paradox of President Reagan's Leadership, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43: 1 (2013), 81-100, (p. 83).
[37] Charles Leathers, 'Thatcher-Reagan Conservatism and Schumpeter's Prognosis for Capitalism', *Review of Social Economy*, 42: 1, (1984), pp. 16-31, (p. 22).

going to ruin right in front of our eyes'.[38] Most famously, this moral patriotism was mobilised in the 'War on Drugs', which was accelerated hugely under Reagan. This disproportionately affected minorities, especially the black community, with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 establishing a 100:1 discrepancy in prison terms between crack and cocaine, meaning that 5 grams of crack – largely prevalent in poor, urban, minority areas – carried the same prison sentence as 500 grams of the more expensive but almost chemically identical cocaine.[39] In a similar vein to the model of nationalism which Benedict Anderson articulated in his 1983 work *Imagined Communities*, government and media were mobilised to fortify and rebuild the nation under the socially conservative philosophy in opposition to immoral influences. The racial extent of the moral panic evoked has been shown by Carol Anderson, who found that 76% of articles on crack in 4 major newspapers between 1986-7 referenced African Americans – either directly or through code using words such as 'urban'.[40]

This 'white backlash' against the attempted progressive and liberal approaches to race exacerbated historical racial segregation in society.[41] The Services Readjustment Act of 1944 was passed to help WWII veterans reassimilate with measures like access to education and low-cost mortgages. However, from 1944 to 1955 the Veterans Administration (VA) guaranteed 3,914,535 mortgages, with less than 30,000 (or 0.7%) going to African American veterans. This had long reaching systemic effects, worsening the racial home ownership gap from 19% in 1940 to 28% in 2009.[42] This was because the inequalities of the bill created a new white middle class of home owners, who moved to the suburbs in a process known as 'white flight', or 'white exodus'.[43] Donald Bogue and Emerson Seim were the first to scientifically prove the phenomenon of white flight in 1956, establishing its reality in pushing more black working-class families into inner-city 'ghettos'.[44] While there was some movement of black people into the suburbs from the 1960s, the 1980 census showed that only 8% of black New

[38] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 214-216; Hill, Moore, Williams (ed.), p. 121.
[39] Cheryl Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism: The Story Told by the Congressional Record*, (El Paso: LFB Scholarly Pub. LLC, 2010), p. 143.
[40] Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial* Divide, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 131.
[41] Michael Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s (2nd ed.)*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 12-14.
[42] Louis Lee Woods II, 'Almost 'No Negro Veteran…Could Get a Loan': African Americans, the GI Bill, and the NAACP Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1917-1960', *The Journal of African American History*, 98: 3, (2013), pp. 392-417 (pp. 410-1).
[43] Barry Feld & Donna Bishop, (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Juvenile Crime and Juvenile Justice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 212.
[44] Jack Gibbs (ed.), *Urban Research Methods*, (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1961), p. 119.

Yorkers lived in the suburbs, compared to 40% of the white population. This spatial segregation along race and class lines meant that it was predominantly minority communities who suffered from de-industrialisation from the 1950s and reduced funding for inner-city areas under Reagan's budgets.

Herman Gray has explored this social segregation through his case study of television in *Watching Race,* where he finds that 'blackness' came to the forefront of national debate over morality while creating a fascination for white audiences, shown through the huge success of shows such as *The Cosby Show*. Hip-hop culture was no different, as it evoked uproar and popularity in equal measure as a representation of black expression. Scholars have misread this relationship for two reasons. Firstly, one of the strands of hip-hop from 1984-8 which came from its splintering was political – or conscious – rap through groups like Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions (who transitioned from gangsta to political themes after group member Scott La Rock was shot dead in 1987). These groups criticised the government, police, justice system, media, and ingrained racism to highlight the continued plight for minorities in 1980s America. Public Enemy used samples from political activists and popular culture, such as Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam's claim that, 'The federal government is the number one killer and destroyer of black leaders', or influential black comedian Richard Pryor saying, 'I got a right to be hostile man, my people are being persecuted!', illustrating a continuity of black oppression.[45] Boogie Down Productions, led by KRS-One similarly commented on current affairs affecting the black community, famously claiming that, 'Crack is illegal, 'cause they cannot stop ya / But cocaine is legal if it's owned by a doctor', in response to the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986.[46] As such, commentators such as Tricia Rose and Russell Potter have focused too heavily on these more grand political statements than the subtle nuanced exchanges between hip-hop culture and the dominant culture.[47] Secondly, the rise of 'gangsta' rap in the same period has also drawn a lot of attention but has too readily been portrayed as a deliberately gaudy representation of sex, drugs and violence in response to the social conservatism and moral panics which gripped the nation.[48] It grew during a wider societal movement to increase control over musical content, exemplified by the formation of the Parents Music Resource

[45] *Terminator X to the Edge of Panic, Prophets of Rage,* Public Enemy, (Def Jam Recordings, Columbia Records, 1988).
[46] *Illegal Business,* Boogie Down Productions, (Jive Records, RCA Records, 1988).
[47] Rose, *Black Noise*; Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
[48] For example: Bryan McCann, *The Mark of Criminality: Rhetoric, Race, and Gangsta Rap in the War-on-Crime Era,* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017).

Centre (PMRC) in 1985, which gained funding from Mike Love and Joseph Coors, both of whom had been active in their support of Reagan's Presidential campaigns, showing the political ideology behind it.[49] In the same year, the Parental Advisory label was introduced by the Recording Industry Association of America, with Ice T's *Rhyme Pays* being the first album to display an explicit lyrics warning.[50]

Whilst these points of cultural divergence existed, their meaning in society needs to be revised. In fact, the restructuring of capitalism and power relationships during the neoliberal turn elevated economic power in a way which allowed hip-hop culture to transcend political ideology. By taking hip-hop culture on its own terms and analysing its core themes and intertextuality, rather than using it as a representation of the whole black community or black resistance, we can see that emcees harnessed these personas of resistance and power against authority and leant into their contemporary cultural currents to promote themselves and increase their economic power in line with the new era of capitalism. Ice Cube, who wrote *F*ck tha Police*, said in a 2010 interview of N.W.A.'s popularity that, 'America loves the outlaw, the gangster, from Billy the Kid to Al Capone. It was the same thing with us'.[51] Ice T echoed this sentiment in his ironically titled album *The Iceberg/Freedom of Speech…Just Watch What You Say!*, where he directly addressed the PMRC; 'Hey, PMRC, you stupid f*ckin' *ssholes / The sticker on the record is what makes 'em sell gold'. This was evidenced in sales figures, with *Rhyme Pays* being certified gold for selling over 500,000 copies, while N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* was certified platinum in under a year.

David Ruth's study of the gangster icon which dominated American popular culture between 1918-1934 has shown how this character reflected both the aspirations and anxieties of an urbanising nation, gaining celebration and condemnation.[52] Similarly, the hip-hop artists of the 1980s were rising to prominence in another transitioning society, as the neoliberal turn shifted the nature of capitalism from state-managed to financialised. As such, they articulated the prevailing anxieties of a society who were being offered economic liberalism and social conservatism in equal measure. When Eazy-E says, 'Fill my stash box and start rubbing my

[49] Claude Chastagner, 'The Parents' Music Resource Center: From Information to Censorship', *Popular Music*, 18: 2, (1999), 179–192.
[50] *Rhyme Pays*, Ice T, (Sire Records, 1987).
[51] Rebecca Laurence, 'NWA: 'The World's Most Dangerous Group'?, *BBC Culture*, (2015), <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150813-nwa-the-worlds-most-dangerous-group> [accessed 12 December 2020].
[52] David Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

gat / Feeling good as hell because my pockets are fat', he is playing on the deep-rooted ambivalence of an American society who are striving for wealth under Reagan's unleashed capitalism but have also been primed against this through moral panics.[53] Rappers successfully traversed these opposing anxieties to create an aura which catapulted them to the forefront of culture by exploiting the ideological clashes in Reagan's politics. Indeed, their continued success would suggest that, as Gil Troy has put it, 'consumerism's seductive force' inevitably triumphed over moralist rhetoric.[54]

Drawing on Nietzsche's theory of the 'will to power' – where he articulates that humans have an incarnate predisposition to become predominant, separate from any morality or immorality – the new era of capitalism made economic power almost separate from political ideology, which was exploited by hip-hop artists. The increased popularity of rap music despite the social barriers erected by Reagan's social conservatism and the moral panics which this evoked demonstrates the primacy of economic power under financialised capitalism. Pursuit of profit unleashed by the liberalisation of capitalism superseded issues of social conservatism, which have been overstated by hip-hop scholars. This chapter has instead shown how the genre leant into social tensions, exploiting them by manifesting national anxieties during a transformative period. This work will go on to illustrate, having transcended many of its social barriers, how hip-hop culture converged with the dominant culture, embodying the consumerism and materialism which physically represented the new wave of capitalism, and the individual enterprise which this required.

[53] *Eazy-Duz-It*, Eazy-E, (Ruthless Records, Priority Records, 1988).
[54] Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 204.

II

Material Wealth

I get paid for illin' / Cold makin' a killin' / My pockets keep fillin' / I got dollars to the ceilin'.[55]

When fictional character Gordon Gekko, played by Michael Douglas in the 1987 movie *Wall Street*, gave his infamous 'greed is good' speech, it encapsulated the neoliberal momentum in America which prioritised profit and material wealth.[56] The belief that 'Greed…captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit.', encapsulated the rush for capital under 'Reaganomics'. Indeed, when US Steel changed its name to USX in 1986, chairman James Roderick claimed that the 'X stands for money'.[57] This chapter will demonstrate how capital accumulation became a key motivation in the 'hyper-capitalism' of the Regan era.[58] It will then argue that hip-hop artists from 1984-8 subverted the traditional narrative of economic inequality from neoliberal commentators to engage in and benefit from the profit-driven capitalism which had permeated society.

In 1985, Ronald Reagan announced that 'all minorities will not have full and equal power until they have full economic power'.[59] This highlighted the primacy of financial power – based on property and assets – within American society as a metric of human value at the neoliberal turn. This was heightened by the shift to financialised capitalism under Reagan, as neoliberal theory, according to Harvey, 'seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market', while Chapman has supported this by arguing that a neoliberal culture leaves 'every gesture…subject to the mechanisms of exchange and ultimately held up to metrics of performance'.[60] Bae's concept of capitalism as a civilisation sets the 'love of money' free from traditional restraints and allows it to move almost independently of other types of power.[61] The 1991 novel *American Psycho* demonstrates this relationship which dictated American culture in the 1980s. The novel follows Patrick Bateman, a wealthy New York investment banker and serial killer in the Wall Street boom of the late 1980s. His murders are based on jealousies of

[55] *Squeeze the Trigger*, Ice T, (Sire Records, 1987).
[56] *Wall Street*, dir. By Oliver Stone, (20th Century Fox, 1987).
[57] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 158.
[58] Frances Goldin, Debby Smith, Michael Smith, (ed.), *Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), p. 125.
[59] State of the Union Address (1985).
[60] Harvey, p. 3; Chapman, p. 22.
[61] Bae, p. 7.

ownership, locating them within the material realm. Money both inspires and facilitates his murders with legal fees and expensive tools.[62] This illustrates the centrality of economic power as the key metric of success during this period and the capitalist aspirations which were instilled in the consumerist America of the 1980s, as financial power became the dominant power structure due to the rearrangement after the breakdown of state-managed capitalism.

After the recession and high unemployment at the start of Reagan's presidency, the economy bounced back strongly from 1982, and people began to enjoy the promised fruits of the neoliberal promise. Real life Gordon Gekko's began to spring up over the country, as the number of millionaires rose from 4,414 in 1980 to 63,642 by 1990.[63] This was in conjunction with rises in the stock markets from August 1982 to August 1987, before the 'Black Monday' stock market crash, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average rising from 776 to 2,722, and the average daily number of shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange rising from 65 million to 181 million.[64] Sixty months of continuous economic growth during the same period produced 20 trillion dollars of new wealth.[65] The national mood of profit and luxury was reflected not least in the popular television series *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, which first aired in 1984 and showed the extravagant wealth of the prominent celebrities and business magnates of the era. The catchphrase of the show, 'Champagne wishes and caviar dreams' added fuel to the fire of capital and consumerism which was burning brightly in America by the mid-1980s and reflecting the aspirations of the population as financial power was translated into human value. The momentum of this consumerism into Reagan's second term was clear, and his 1984 election television commercial, commonly referred to as, 'Morning in America' presented this picture of economic renewal and strength as a result of his neoliberal policies, claiming that, 'nearly 2,000 families today will buy new homes', posing the question as to why anyone would want to return to the economic decline of 'four short years ago'.[66]

However, critics of neoliberal theory would argue that this prosperity was unavailable to the majority of the population, evoking a spirit of success and affluence rather than the conditions to realise this fully. A 2016 article in the IMF's journal *Finance and Development* assessed the impact of the neoliberalism which has dominated world politics since the 1980s, and found that

[62] James Annesley, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture, and the Contemporary Novel*, (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 13-16.
[63] Paul Farhi, 'Number of U.S. Millionaires Soars', *The Washington Post*, 11 July 1992.
[64] 'Preliminary Observations on the October 1987 Crash', *United States General Accounting Office*, (January 1988), <http://archive.gao.gov/d30t5/134907.pdf> [accessed 12 January 2021], pp. 14-36.
[65] Troy, p. 208.
[66] *Prouder, Better, Stronger*, dir. by John Pytka, (Levine/Pytka Productions, 1984).

the policies had increased inequality and risk in many places.[67] The roots of this have been firmly established in the Reagan presidency, with a 1992 study finding that during the 1980s income inequality between the poorest and the richest families grew in 43 American states, echoing criticisms by Marxist scholars.[68] This criticism also has a racial aspect, with Arun Kundnani recently arguing that scholars such as Harvey do not go far enough in identifying neoliberalism's specific racial reconfiguration, believing that neoliberal policies exacerbated existing economic barriers and created new ones for minority groups.[69] The stark disapproval of Reagan in black voters, only 9% of whom voted for the incumbent President in 1984, would support this allegation. Quinn has argued that the neoliberal promise of 'trickle-down' income – the theory that benefits for the wealthy will flow into the rest of society – became young black people's 'biggest friend and foe', offering the hope of income but rarely generating it in urban areas blighted by reduced funding, fuelling heightened aspiration and widening inequality simultaneously.[70]

When hip-hop is taken as a movement on its own terms and removed of the trappings of a representative movement of cultural resistance, then analysis of the music from 1984-8 subverts these traditional scholarly assertions. Rappers harnessed the 'greed is good' spirit to maximise their earning potential in the wave of heightened capitalism. This was manifested in their conspicuous displays of wealth, which presented their value in economic terms in line with the prevailing ideology. Cars and fashion were two primary portrayals of this wealth, established in Run-DMC's era-defining 1984 album. As such, Too $hort's 'Caddy' or Cadillac, which is the centrepiece of the cover of his 1987 album *Born to Mack*, or Eazy-E's Chevrolet Impala 64 became synonymous with the rappers and part of their brand of extravagant prosperity. Fashion brands offered a similar function, with the most famous example being Run-DMC's collaboration with Adidas – the first hip-hop artists to sign an endorsement deal with a major corporation and celebrated in their 1986 track *My Adidas*. These looks were universally adorned with the hip-hop trend of 'a whole lotta gold'.[71] Many artists owed their signature looks to Dapper Dan, a Harlem designer who repurposed luxury brand logos such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton for many in the scene including LL Cool J, Eric B. & Rakim, Salt-N-

[67] Jonathan Ostry, Prakash Loungani, Davide Furceri, 'Neoliberalism: Oversold?', *Finance & Development*, 53: 2, (2016), pp. 38-41.
[68] Robert Jackson, 'Income Gap Grew in 1980s, Study Says', *Los Angeles Times*, (28 August 1992), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-08-28-mn-6036-story.html> [accessed 18 March 2021].
[69] Arun Kundnani, 'The Racial Constitution of Neoliberalism', *Race & Class*, (2021), pp. 1-19.
[70] Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 65.
[71] *I Can't Live Without My Radio*, LL Cool J, (Def Jam Recordings, Columbia Records, 1985).

Pepa, Big Daddy Kane, KRS-One and many more. His designs were an example of how hip-hop artists wanted to display their affluence in eye-catching and innovative ways, a metaphor for the new avenue for profit offered by the growth of hip-hop. The value of these conspicuous displays of wealth is demonstrated in the song *Let's Get Busy Baby*, where the Fresh Prince offers luxury things including his 'castle', a jacuzzi, a horseback ride, Dom Perignon, and his private chef in order to impress a lady, emphasising the primacy of money within society. Hip-hop culture's convergence with the dominant consumerist culture in this respect is clear, as Run-DMC's reference to 'Champagne, caviar, and a bubble bath' reflected the national mood of 'Champagne wishes and caviar dreams'.[72]

On the 1984 song *It's Like That*, Run-DMC claimed that 'Money is the key to end all your woes', and this sentiment has informed much of hip-hop culture since this point, as rappers' financial ambitions both informs and is informed by their earning power. Rollefson's upcoming work on Jay-Z and Kanye West's 2011 album *Watch the Throne*, argues that their performance of 'Black excellence, opulence, decadence' subverted the historical underpinnings of capitalism which have relied on racial hegemony.[73] The roots of this performance can be found in the period 1984-8, as artists harnessed and exploited the neoliberal capitalist spirit to take advantage of the financial power that hip-hop culture began to cultivate, converging with and embodying the dominant culture. The title track of Eric B. & Rakim's album *Paid in Full* – the cover of which sees the artists dressed in Dapper Dan designs, gold chains and jewellery on a background of cash – encapsulates this attitude, as they articulate their ability to get 'paid in full' through their music. Ice T echoes this on his album *Rhyme Pays*, a play on words which suggests that rappers can use their music instead of crime to earn legitimate money, as he describes 'fast money, true wealth' as his 'eternal quest', while KRS-One issues a rallying cry for rappers to 'put your hands up if you're out here gettin' paid', illustrating the collective wealth within the genre.[74] As in the consumerist society of 1980s America, getting paid was the primary objective for rap artists, embodied by Schoolly D's 1986 track *Get 'N' Paid.* Too $hort's brag that, 'I'm earning more than the chief of police' encapsulates this analysis in two ways.[75] Firstly, it legitimises hip-hop as a market with huge earning potential, juxtaposed with traditional avenues of income. Secondly, the comparison with the police demonstrates the ways

[72] *Sucker MCs*, Run-DMC, (Profile Records, 1983).
[73] J. Griffith Rollefson, *Critical Excess: Watch the Throne and the New Gilded Age,* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2021).
[74] *Pain*, Ice T, (Sire Records, 1987); *Stop the Violence*, Boogie Down Productions, (Jive Records, RCA Records, 1988).
[75] *Nobody Does it Better*, Too $hort, (Dangerous Records, Jive Records, RCA Records, 1988).

that hip-hop culture converged with the dominant culture in unconventional ways, alluding to the reshaping of power structures in relation to one another under Bae's formulation and showing cracks in the capitalist hegemony which were partially enforced by that very institution.

Hip-hop's convergence with capitalist ambition within the 'greed is good' attitude was a key point of convergence with America's neoliberal framework, and the reference of capitalist people and businesses within songs of the period illustrates the relationship between the two cultures contrary to traditional narratives. EPMD's nod to Donald Trump on *It's My Thing* – released in the same year as Trump's business book *The Art of the Deal* – typifies this, as the group ask him to 'release the code', seemingly a confirmation of their capitalist aspirations. MC Lyte's reference to *Wheel of Fortune* co-host Vanna White on *MC Lyte vs Vanna Whyte* – in which she lists some of the luxury prizes she wants before deciding, 'Take everything back, I want the money' – shows hip-hop's involvement in the ostentatious wealth which Reagan's capitalism promised. Interestingly, MC Lyte says she'd 'Like the dress Vanna is wearing', before deciding instead she wants the money, demonstrating the new and self-contained avenue of earning power which hip-hop provided as the culture grew. Countless capitalist corporations are cited during the period in rap songs, from Kurtis Blow's love of the NBA in *Basketball* to Big Daddy Kane's reference to Ginsu on *Ain't No Half Steppin'* – a knife company which used television infomercials to skyrocket sales between 1978-84, and whose success prompted the book *The Wisdom of Ginsu: Carve Yourself a Piece of the American Dream*, detailing how people could use the unique power of America's capitalism to prosper.

As Chapman has explained, within the neoliberal ideology, 'social experience becomes bound up within a market logic', and each, 'homo economicus maximises her value in relation to other atomised actors'.[76] This was true for emcees of the period, who often articulated their value in monetary terms. An early example of this is in Run-DMC's *Sucker MCs*, where in order to dismiss the competition they boast that, 'You a five-dollar boy and I'm a million-dollar man'. This places economic power at the heart of their masculine identity and illustrates the elevation of financial power as a key domain of black emancipation, as Davis has shown that sexuality is.[77] Rapping prowess and talent became increasingly monetised, exemplified by Too $hort when he raps, 'Won't say who's best, I just tell you the truth / You're not makin' money, so it

[76] Chapman, p. 8.
[77] Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), p. 4.

couldn't be you'.[78] This is supported by MC Lyte's line, 'I am like a stock and my word is my bond', showing the centrality of money in the value of hip-hop artists.[79] Money is intrinsically linked to power and status in the music, echoing Reagan's statement that minorities would not have full and equal power until they had full economic power. For many of these artists, who came from poor urban communities, the wealth which came from the music defined their place in their new community of hip-hop. If you weren't 'Get 'N' Paid', you were just a 'Sucker MC', and this attitude was typical of the neoliberal pursuit of profit which dominated American society in the 1980s.

Kool Moe Dee's observation that, 'I'm making money / And now it's kinda funny / All of a sudden the girls / They want to give me honey', was echoed by Salt-N-Pepa's sentiment that, 'the guy ain't fly, shoot / He can't afford to buy a Fila suit', conveying the fusion of personal value and economic value in American society.[80] The ostentatious displays of wealth and capitalist ambition conveyed by hip-hop artists took Gordon Gekko's 'greed is good' mantra and made it their own, creating a new sphere in which to compete economically with traditionally capitalist avenues. This chapter has shown how rap music and neoliberalism converged in a hugely beneficial way for rappers, and how they embodied the raging capitalist spirit which Reaganomics had brought with it. The final chapter will continue this narrative of convergence between hip-hop culture and neoliberalism through individual enterprise and examine how this economic competition heightened individual autonomy in light of the reduced role of the state.

[78] *Nobody Does it Better*.
[79] *10% Dis*, MC Lyte, (First Priority Music, Atlantic Records, 1988).
[80] *Get Paid*, Kool Moe Dee, (Jive Records, RCA Records, 1987); *I'll Take Your Man*, Salt-N-Pepa, (Next Plateau Entertainment, 1986).

III

Individual Enterprise

But I'm a poet so I own the whole rap industry / I'm like a lion my man, and the streets are my den / It's either kill or be killed, so I kill / I kill again and again and again.[81]

In Bae's capitalist civilisation, the market-based economy creates power based on property, which generates autonomy.[82] Perhaps the most fundamental shift in the neoliberal turn was the emphasis on the individual, with Chicago free-market economics reviving the nineteenth century belief that self-interest benefits society as a whole. Reagan called this, 'a new American emancipation' to 'liberate the spirit of enterprise' and, in theory, give everyone the opportunity for self-improvement.[83] As such, this chapter will focus on another key convergence of hip-hop culture and neoliberalism, illustrating how and why individualism played such a key role in American life in the 1980s, before demonstrating how rappers harnessed this spirit to create a competitive market within the genre, underpinned by self-promotion known as 'braggadocio'.

Having unleashed a capitalist wave of consumerism through free-market economics, Reagan's neoliberalism encouraged individual enterprise and entrepreneurial aspirations to take advantage of this. Taking its ideological roots from classical liberalism developed in the nineteenth century, the prominent policymakers of the 1980s in the US redefined the relationship between the individual and the collective, positing that self-interest would in turn benefit society as whole by driving competition and innovation. This came from key thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek, whose book *The Road to Serfdom* called for the revival of nineteenth century ideals of self-help, initially advocated by Samuel Smiles. In trying to revitalise the American spirit, the Reagan administration looked to this historical individualism which had opened up the frontier and was consistent with their ideology of traditional values.

The liberation of capitalism, which had gained strong momentum by 1984, was done so under a spirit of individualism, placing each 'homo economicus' in direct competition with one another. Neoliberal theory, being dictated by the market, requires atomisation so that individuals can reach their potential without societal restraints. This was particularly pertinent for the Reagan administration, who believed that increased individualism would reduce 'dependency', allowing for greater spending cuts in domestic programmes and welfare. The

[81] *He's the DJ, I'm the Rapper,* DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince, (Jive Records, RCA Records, 1988).
[82] Bae, p. 6.
[83] Second Inaugural Address (1985).

narrative of the 'welfare queen' was popularised under Reagan, which demonised welfare cheats, stereotyped to be black single mothers – the very group which suffered the worst from Reagan's policies. Reagan's assertion that, 'The truly needy suffer as funds intended for them are taken not by the needy, but by the greedy', justifying public spending cuts and increasing the responsibility of the individual in place of the state.[84] In line with the neoliberal theory put forward by David Harvey, this suggested that liberation of the individual was key in self-improvement.

Brown has identified the difference between 'existential individualism', and 'instrumental individualism'.[85] The former describes the commitment to freedom as a means in itself, which she praises. The latter, on the other hand, describes the use of freedom to further the interests of competitive property owners, which Reagan's neoliberalism advocated society to become, and which lays the foundations for domination, echoing Chomsky's criticism that the class barriers created by neoliberalism produces, 'an atomised society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralised and socially powerless.'[86] Scholars who see hip-hop as a form of resistance, such as Bill Banfield, cite it as a cultural response to the decimation of black communities due to urban redevelopment and deindustrialisation, expressed at the height of Reagan's neoliberal revolution, suggesting a rejection of individualism.[87] The social narrative of dependency rooted in race, gender, and class, purported a narrative of increased deviancy in an underclass linked to the ghetto, preying on the moral panics which had further divided American society.[88]

This links with Travis Hirschi's social control theory, which theorises that weakened social bonds increase deviancy.[89] However, this analysis simultaneously describes the opportunity of individualism to overcome social restraints, and hip-hop artists harnessed the autonomy they gained from increased economic power. Instead of resisting the spirit of individualism and self-help which permeated American society, the individual promotion and entrepreneurship which defined the genre from 1984-8 created a competitive sphere in which rappers battled to be the best. The constant innovation of DJs and emcees in response to one another encapsulated the

[84] Ronald Reagan 'State of the Union Address', *Miller Center,* (1983) < https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-25-1983-state-union-address> [accessed 1 February 2021].
[85] L. Susan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism: Liberalism, Liberal Feminism and Anarchism*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993), pp. 3-4.
[86] Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order,* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), p. 11.
[87] Bill Banfield, *Cultural Codes: Making of a Black Music Philosophy,* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009) p. 174.
[88] Hill, Moore, Williams, (ed.), p. 173.
[89] Travis Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2002).

neoliberal theory that self-interest promotes societal development and allowed artists to gain success and notoriety despite the traditional inequality of neoliberal economics.

A key reason for the proliferation of hip-hop music during the period was the entrepreneurship which drove it. Many artists formed their own labels from which to release and promote their music, supporting the neoliberal theory that, in order to prosper in the market, one must manage their own human capital to maximise their individual potential. Perhaps the most famous example of this is N.W.A. member Eazy-E's label *Ruthless Records,* founded in 1987. During the period, the label released N.W.A.'s hugely successful *Straight Outta Compton,* followed by Eazy's solo effort *Eazy-Duz-It.* The former sold over a million copies in under a year, despite limited radio play due to its explicit content, showing the power of *Ruthless Records'* entrepreneurial spirit in creating success for itself and its artists. Embodying the ideals of 'self-help', the success of N.W.A.'s album in particular in bringing the 'underground' to the mainstream, without the help of traditional mainstream outlets illustrates the convergence of hip-hop culture and neoliberal principles. This was aided by Schoolly D's self-released 1986 album *Saturday Night! – The Album, w*hich was a seminal work of gangsta rap, laying the foundations which N.W.A. built upon. In a similar vein to *Ruthless,* The 2 Live Crew's 1986 debut album was released by group member Luther Campbell's *Luke Skyywalker Records,* and whilst it did not gain the nationwide popularity of N.W.A.'s work, it exploded their profile in their home state of Florida. Similarly, Milk Dee of Audio Two's father, Nat Robinson, created *First Priority Music* in 1987 to release his son's music, while also being responsible for the distribution of MC Lyte's 1988 debut *Lyte as a Rock* through a collaboration with powerhouse label *Atlantic Records.* Big Daddy Kane summarises the sentiment that individual enterprise was central in self-improvement in Reagan's America, with the famous line that, 'I work live a slave to become a master'.[90] The analogy of a slave is important here, as the historical subjugation and oppression of black people under the slave trade is juxtaposed with the new opportunities to become a 'master' through hip-hop culture in line with the ideals of self-help.

Consistent with neoliberal theory, this entrepreneurship which Ronald Reagan advocated as the 'core of human progress', took place in a market-centred and competition-driven national environment.[91] This competition manifested in the most consistent theme of hip-hop music between 1984-8: braggadocio, which describes how rappers spoke about themselves with great pride, on topics ranging from sexual prowess to lyrical talent, while the previous discussion on

[90] *Raw (Remix),* Big Daddy Kane, (Cold Chillin' Records, Warner Records Inc., 1988).
[91] Second Inaugural Address (1985).

material wealth can also be inserted into this category.[92]. Run-DMC articulated this competitiveness within the genre with their 1983 single *Sucker MCs* – which was included in their 1984 debut album and represented one of rap first 'diss' tracks. Ultramagnetic MCs 1988 *Critical Beatdown* is a prime example of this, with the whole album exuding self-assurance, established in the opening track, *Watch Me Now,* in which Ced-Gee offers listeners the 'chance to see the world's greatest MC' if they 'just watch me'. Braggadocio dominated hip-hop culture during the period as rappers battled to prove they were the best in different ways. Run-DMC's 1985 album *King of Rock* represented both a mission statement and a boast, as their fusion of rap and rock attempted to bring hip-hop to the mainstream while remaining at the pinnacle of their genre through their innovation and popularity. Eric B. & Rakim's 1988 work *Follow the Leader* served the same purpose, as the duo painted themselves as the self-professed leaders of the genre, while confirming that, 'Competition is none / I remain at the top like the sun' in a similar vein to Slick Rick's assertion that *The Ruler's Back*, whilst Big Daddy Kane brags of his invincibility on his self-affirming album *Long Live the Kane.*[93] The autonomy gained through property-based power inspired a huge body of music from 1984-8, as hip-hop artists celebrated their individualism in relation to other rappers under the ideological advocation of free competition. On Just Ice and KRS-One's first-person account of hip-hop history, *Going Way Back*, even when paying homage to the Bronx pioneers of the culture, Just Ice still presents himself at the best, illustrating the competition in rap as he promises to, 'Kill a MC with the rhyme 'cause I'm the gangster of rap / In fact, exact, I'm the dominant black'.

Innovation was key to these boasts as a means of standing out from the competition, such as Whodini's claim that, 'We've got a style of our own, on the microphone / And when it comes to rocking, we stand alone', or the Treacherous Three's belief that, 'We have a style that so many try to imitate / But they can't make you get up, get up / Like we make you get up, get up'.[94] This theme of imitation, known as 'biting' styles, highlights the centrality of individualism and competition within the culture. The accusation of copying or replicating another artist's style served as a means of dismissing the competition while highlighting the original rapper's prowess. MC Shan was one exponent of this technique to showcase his own talent, most obviously on his track *Another One to Get Jealous Of*, in which he raps that himself and his producer Marley Marl are 'resented', 'because of the beats and rhymes we invented'.

[92] Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 219.
[93] *No Competition*, Eric B. & Rakim, (Uni Records, 1988).
[94] *We Are Whodini*, Whodini, (Jive Records, 1984); *Get Up*, Treacherous Three, (Sugar Hill Records, 1984).

Similarly, on N.W.A.'s *If It Ain't Ruff*, MC Ren battle raps to prove he is the best, claiming that 'when it comes to Ren there's no comparison / And if you try to be me, it's quite embarrasin''. This competition sometimes became more personal, and individual disses, or 'beefs', served to enhance the popularity and publicity of the genre and the artists involved. Famous examples included LL Cool J and Kool Moe Dee's long running feud, or MC Lyte taking aim at Antoinette on behalf of Audio Two in *10% Dis*. Lyte's admission that, 'it was understood completely that it was just business' when referring to this suggests rappers' acknowledgement of direct competition as a way of energising and promoting the genre, similar to the nineteenth century ideology of free competition for the benefit of society which had been revitalised by neoliberal policymakers in the 1980s.[95]

During the period 1984-8, rappers fortified a self-contained market of free competition within hip-hop where they unleashed their entrepreneurial and innovative drive to best and better one another. The boastful braggadocio which dominated the scene was used as a vehicle for individual promotion by using talent to increase their status, with The 2 Live Crew conveying this as they rapped, 'Cause we're generating and demonstrating / All of the talents that we're accumulating / And by doing this we'll go real far / Because 2 Live is what we are', and the mission statement of emcees seemingly being to show 'that we're the kings of the stage'.[96] Once again, the movement converged with the revitalised nineteenth century ideals of neoliberalism to forge a new place in society for those involved. As with the theme of material wealth, rappers used the intertwined principles of economic value and individualism to improve their socio-economic positions as the era of finance capitalism took over the western economy.

[95] Brian Coleman, *Check the Technique: Liner Notes for Hip-Hop Junkies,* (New York: Random House, 2009), p. 261.
[96] *2 Live Is What We Are (Word),* The 2 Live Crew, (Luke Skyywalker Records, 1986); *Showtime*, Stetsasonic, (Tommy Boy Records, Warner Records Inc., 1988).

Conclusion

This dissertation has provided a reassessment of hip-hop during Reagan's 'second American revolution' from 1984-8. Contrary to prevailing narratives of the genre's creation and expansion as a form of resistance to oppressive socio-political systems, this work has aimed to present hip-hop culture's value on its own terms and demonstrate how its artists used the socio-political currents of the Reagan years to its advantage. By focusing on the second term of Reagan's presidency, when neoliberal policy had gained momentum and capitalist power structures had shifted, it has challenged prevailing narratives that hip-hop was created in opposition to the neoliberal turn brought about by Reagan, and that, instead, its rapid expansion was a product of this.

Hip-hop culture leant into the social anxieties of Reagan's America which combined rampant capitalism with a social conservatism predicated on moral panic. That it transcended traditional social restraints and gained popularity demonstrates the elevation of economic power in the rearrangement of power structures as the neoliberal turn marked the end of state-managed capitalism. Artists then embodied the central practices of Reagan's neoliberalism. The material wealth promoted in the 'greed is good' consumerist society was harnessed by artists, whose extravagant displays and boasts of opulence and luxury fed into the economic good mood from 1982. This power created autonomy, allowing emcees to maximise the individual enterprise which was so dearly advocated by government, showing entrepreneurship, innovation and promotional skills which drove the genre forwards and expanded it hugely during the period. Hip-hop artists, on the whole, wanted to showcase their talent to the world and create a better life for themselves by doing so. By taking hip-hop on its own terms and removing its unhelpful links to high politics, this work has shown the accomplishment of their mission.

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