The Trap Game: Neoliberal Governmentalities and the Origins of Southern Hip-Hop.

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Abstract.

Great deals of scholarship centred on American hip-hop tend to assert its position as one of contrary to the system. It is usually posited as a site of collective representation of the United States' most disadvantaged people, and as one that is seemingly at odds with the American neoliberal system. Those that have touched upon neoliberal elements within hip-hop have focussed on either hip-hop from the East Coast and New York, or on gangsta-rap on the west coast in Los Angeles. This thesis will argue that the hip-hop south is worthy of a great deal of attention as a site for which to analyse neoliberal governmentalities as a key component of hip-hop. It will show that neoliberal governance internalises neoliberal values through a simultaneous appeal to freedom and threat of loss to personal control, which results in a form of neoliberal "reactance" to immediate environmental pressures. It will further assert that hip-hop does not always necessarily represent the great spirit of collective identity that stands in opposition to the American government, but rather uses collective identity as a key component in its authenticity and by proxy its market value. The music still retains elements of social protest against the neoliberal system of governance, yet remains tied to neoliberal values.

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Contents.

Introduction.

It is worth stating that this thesis could well have, and was originally planned to be, three chapters long, the third chapter centred around the origins of the Atlanta hip-hop scene and the inception of LaFace Records. However, given the amount of detail required to fully give justice to the areas of Miami and Houston as predecessors to this particular scene, the decision was taken to leave this chapter out, as Atlanta would likely require another thesis of its own.

The U.S. Hip Hop south in recent years has, almost undeniably, exercised tremendous influence over the current pop music scene. It is almost impossible to turn on the radio without hearing some form of inflection of southern hip-hop flair or influence. Songs such as Ariana Grande's '7 Rings' and 'Break Up With Your Girlfriend, I'm Bored', Ellie Goulding's 'Worry About Me', and Katy Perry's 'Dark Horse' include a multitude of musical characteristics adapted from early Southern hip-hop.

As pervasive as this kind of southern hip-hop production style has been in both hip-hop and modern pop music, lyrical themes, aesthetics and attitudes adapted from early southern hip-hop have somewhat been left behind in the modern popular music scene. Though certainly celebration of monetary gain and the display of particular commodities as markers of this kind of economic success remain a common theme (in both lyrical content and music videos), the themes of working, enterprising, and protecting ones own means of securing such capital gain have seemingly not made the cut in modern radio hip-hop and pop. Tracks like Post Malone's 'Congratulations' seem emblematic of this change in tone; Malone

celebrates having “made it” through lyrics that speak of “jumping out the Bentley”, yet there remains little discussion of the particular steps or choices made to get there. Played out over an archetypal pop-trap style beat, the track is a useful example of how the themes of southern hip-hop have become abstraction from their origins; Malone is only able to celebrate his position, his Bentley, his millions, because of the work that his precursors had to do to get there.

Lyrical themes of the“hustle”, the “grind”, entrepreneurialism and a celebration of the purchasing power one gains from entrepreneurial activities have of course been important in hip-hop prior to the beginnings of Southern hip-hop. As far back as Sugar Hill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight’, hip-hop MCs have frequently included content surrounding “check books, credit cards, mo’money than a sucker could ever spend” (Sugar Hill Gang, 1979) in their tracks. Artists from the East coast like Run-DMC and from the West such as Ice-T both made capital accumulation a significant theme within their music. Yet, it is hip-hop artists from the south whom dove to deeper levels of discussion about capital gains and most importantly the ways in which they go about acquiring them, and those artists who transformed the element of capital accumulation into one that is so integral to the modern hip-hop sound and style. Take for example Scarface’s 1991 track “Money and the Power,” Houston rapper Brad Jordan’s comprehensive tale of the now commonly heard “rags to riches” story in hip-hop. In this track, Jordan relates his difficult upbringing to his exceptional ability to sell drugs - “when I was growin’ up no-one seemed to give a shit, that’s what makes me one hard son of a bitch… Sweet 16, time to stack me up some ki’s, learned the game of hustlin’, fuckin’ over fiends, sellin niggas’ beat, in other

words amphetamines" (Jordan, 1991). The interesting part of this combination of themes is that Jordan seems to perceive his actions as the common sense approach to dealing with a life lived amongst poverty, amongst others who do not care for him. He is for himself the only means of earnings, survival and happiness. He views collaborative efforts with disappointment, stating that he "brought his brother Warren Lee down from New Jersey, he helped for a minute but then he started screwin' up… he can stay broke, but I got dope to sell". Scarface's track paints the archetypal picture of the life of the hustler, player, or gangster that is integral to the identity of southern hip-hop. To Scarface, work ethic is the primary key to escaping poor social conditions, and the self is seen as the sole responsible agent in the process of that escape.

Earlier trap music efforts from those who pioneered the term like Atlanta rapper T.I. placed their greatest focus on the sale of drugs, with a view of the self as a consistently adapting unit of capital accumulation, as figures that have assumed total responsibility and control over their social and economic situation and destiny.

Though not first used to describe a particular kind of music until T.I.s 2003 sophomore effort *Trap Muzik*, "trap" was a commonly understood term amongst socially and economically disadvantaged communities in the American South's primarily black ghettos situated in cities like Miami and Houston. As David Drake of *Complex* magazine writes, "the trap in the early 2000s wasn't a genre, it was a real place" (Drake, 2012).

In an interview on the *People's Party With Talib Kweli* podcast, T.I. pinpoints that the term trap music had not been used to describe a particular musical style until the release of his own album *Trap*

Muzik in 2003 (T.I., 2019). Despite this, T.I. acknowledges that he had originally heard the term "trap" being used in music coming from early LaFace Records artists in Atlanta like Big Boi (OutKast) and Khujo (Goodie Mob).

The manner in which these Atlantan artists used the term referred to a place in which drugs would be sold to consumers, often with reference to the "trap house". Releases from southern hip-hop artists that arrived throughout the 2000s such as Gucci Mane's *Trap House,* Rick Ross' *Port of Miami,* and later Waka Flocka Flame's *Flockaveli*, further popularised and solidified trap as a particular musical style. Its lyrical content makes consistent reference to the drug trade as a career, capital accumulation and self interest, alongside a fierce display of will to protect oneself from those who may try to get in the way of the figures at the centre of the music. As David Drake stated in his review of *Flockaveli*, "Waka's aggression is the survivalist reaction of the powerless, directed toward the threats of the immediate environment" (Drake, 2010).

Drake's argument that the trap was a real place prior to its mass production throughout popular music is true enough. However, I aim to expand further upon this idea of trap as a place. This thesis will argue that not only does the term refer to a particular place, musical style or genre, but codes a relation to a particular mode of living, thinking and activity, that is, a particular kind of *governmentality,* shaped by America's most dominant economic and political project of the last 40 years: neoliberalism.[1]

[1] Various scholars have summarised neoliberalism in different ways. Mirowski and Plehwe (2009), Stedman Jones (2012), and Dean (2014) frame neoliberalism as a free flowing set of ideas and principles rather than a unified ideology. Harvey (2005) suggests neoliberalism is a political project design to reinstate

Neoliberal governance in Miami and Houston

This thesis will analyse two record labels and their resident artists in the period of the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. Each label finds home in the particularly wide-spanning area of the American south: Luke Records situated in Miami and Rap-A-Lot Records in Houston. The distance between these cities may raise questions about a geographically contained idea of the American south, however this thesis will focus more on the spatial-musical conception of the south, particularly as an area of hip-hop production. By the end of the considered time frame, these labels and their respective artists had effectively established an idea of "the south" as a region with its own standout hip-hop identity.

Neoliberal governance in these southern cities has had various transformational effects on their environments, very few of which have been directly beneficial the economic and social development of the southern hip-hop demographic. Throughout the 1980s neoliberal policies in these areas have worked to bring market forces to the forefront of local governance, whilst bringing in ever more punitive measures of policing that were required to deal with the excess amounts of unemployed, uneducated, "sub-class" citizens who were effectively added to the competitive job market by neoliberal policy changes.

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desirable conditions for capitalism to re-concentrate wealth in the power of elites. Wacquant asserts neoliberalism consists of the reorganisation of state, market and citizenship, whereby the state maps market principles onto an increasing number of areas of citizenship (2012).

Disinvestment in social safety nets designed to alleviate issues with poverty, education and unemployment were a key element in Reagan's economic and social policies. In 1981, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) was abolished by the Reagan Administration, essentially adding 400,000 unemployed and unskilled citizens to the job market, whilst cuts to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) added a further 500,000 (Parenti, 1999, p.41).

These systems were instead replaced by market-oriented schemes. The CETA was replaced in 1982 by the Job Training Partnership Act, which suffered from numerous pitfalls. Houston's undertaking of the JTPA in particular was highly corrupt. A policy analysis produced by the CATO institute found that some private sector contractors receiving JTPA funding "did virtually nothing to help the trainees" (Bovard, 1990, p.2). Computech received $643,606 to train participants in valuable I.T. skills such as data entry and word processing. One trainee was employed as a part-time carpet cleaner; Computech listed their job title as "general office clerk". Overall, the analysis found that Houston businesses, for the most part, were simply employing unskilled workers, not teaching them any skills that would allow them to advance much further past minimal wage jobs, and keeping the rest of the money for themselves.

Black Miami residents also did not have the same access to job training programs for the generally already well-educated Cuban migrant community (Stuart, 1983). This caused significant tensions between black and Cuban communities. As Luther Campbell remarks in his autobiography, "the economy was in a terrible recession. No jobs. We had the cops harassing us and killing us on one side, and on

the other side, the thing that makes the black situation in Miami unique… the Cubans taking over, pushing us out… they also got in on the programs that should have been ours" (Campbell, 2015, p.53).

Campbell also makes an interesting remark about black attitudes towards police behaviour in 1980s Miami, stating that "even after hassling us for years and nearly destroying the whole neighbourhood, the cops still wouldn't leave us alone. They prodded and provoked us until one night I ended up starting a riot of my own" (Campbell, 2015, p.59). The event Campbell is referring to took place in 1983 at one of Campbell's Ghetto Style DJ's free concerts in African Square Park. After supposedly "crooked" local white police officer Bachmann began to yell at the attendees and ordering them to leave the park, using racist language. Campbell stirred up anger within the crowd and a riot ensued. This incident offers an opening for analysis into how neoliberalism has changed the processes of policing in the south.

In Miami, Reagan introduced new and increasingly aggressive methods of policing in 1982 through the South Florida Special Task Force. This aggressive model of "War on Drugs" style policing saw an enormous increase in specialised police presence implemented to target drug dealers (Ronald Reagan Library, 2019) worked in closer tandem with local and state police forces. Though the task force was seemingly aimed at high-level drug dealers and offshore threats, the new influx of agents in the Miami area soon turned to more aggressive policing of lower-level dealers and users (Parenti, 1999).

Whilst policing took a turn towards aggressive enforcement of drug laws, the relatively new approach of "community" or "neighbourhood" oriented policing also took place within these cities.

Scholars focussed on neoliberal policing have taken to calling this phenomenon "order-maintenance policing" (Kaplan-Lyman, 2012; Harcourt, 2001) a style of policing informed by Kelling and Wilson's (1982, pp.1-8) "Broken Windows" theory.

Theories of 'neoliberal' policing

The implications of these changes to policing, particularly their effects on poor and largely black communities, point to a support for neoliberalism on multiple levels. Some scholars have pointed to the notion that the implementation of these intense task force units are indicative of a wider trend that zealous political policies tackling drug sales and usage are actually focussed on the financially lucrative returns police forces can generate through busting drug operations (Blumenson and Nilsen, 1998; Parenti, 1999). New legislation largely introduced under the Reagan administration, such as forfeiture proceedings that allowed local and state police units to try narcotics cases in federal courts in exchange for 90% of the seized assets Parenti, p.51), resulted in drug-related policing becoming a neoliberal profiteering project. Police units could become increasingly privatised from community governance, funding their self-activity through carefully considered motivations to tackle dealers and users for economic gain.

On the other hand, there is the element of order-maintenance policing that was used to deal with excess members of said marginalised communities, whose social environments were damaged further through other neoliberal policies such as drastic cuts to public education, job training and welfare programs. Cases

such as those presented by Campbell suggest that police officers in the south were attempting both to disperse the collective activities of poor, black citizens and particularly to maintain an image of social order that was attractive to more middle-class, white citizens.

Theories of neoliberal policing are useful in the case of this thesis. Simon (2007) and Harcourt (2011) both argue that neoliberalism has effectively reduced governmental intervention in terms of social welfare and progressive taxation, whilst encouraging a rise in the rate of incarceration through increased justification of governmental intervention in the field of law and order. Wacquant, Gilmore and Kaplan-Lyman add that this increasingly punitive style of policing was used as a practical means of dealing with unemployed vagrants, as well as for dealing with the inevitable political and social turmoil and instability created by neoliberal policies (Wacquant, 2010; Gilmore, 2007; Kaplan-Lyman, 2014).

Increasingly oppressive policing coupled with shrinking opportunities for work and lack of aid from welfare schemes created conditions in which for some the adoption of neoliberal values and entrepreneurial measures remained one of few options to survive. The importance of making calculated decisions to better ones own position in life is represented in the hip-hop of the south as a new dichotomy of winners and losers; those who remain mired in poverty are viewed as lacking drive and work ethic of the entrepeneurs in the music. In some cases, they are viewed as inferior on a very basic, moral level.

How neoliberalism translates to Southern hip-hop: the inception of a 'neoliberal governmentality'

The Geto Boys 1989 track 'Talkin' Loud Ain't Sayin' Nothin'' is a good example of the measure of neoliberal morality, "Living your life like a big shot, you're not… D gave me the scoop on you tramp, your man's a dope fiend, buy crack with your food stamps". Scarface's cutting lyrics here displays not only disdain for those who pretend to have "made it" without putting in the work or investment in their own human capital to get there, but, as a former drug dealer himself,[2] is veiling a kind of one-upmanship over those who are essentially his customers. The song is representative of Jordan's view of entrepreneurship as morally superior to living in poverty and struggle, and relying on governmental aid to survive.

The combination of all these factors of neoliberalism results in a deadly mix that entrapped many poor black Americans in a cycle of poverty. This thesis then will argue that these neoliberal policies created social and economic conditions that embody the idea of the "the trap", an idea which then found its way into black entrepreneurial activity first through the sale of drugs, then became adapted into the South's hip-hop identity. This idea of the trap in southern hip-hop as a lifestyle, a mode of governing the self by means of constantly seeking personal capital accumulation is perhaps best

[2] In his autobiography, Brad Jordan explains that he was one of few people responsible for "the whole Southside getting on that shit (crack cocaine)" (Jordan, 2015, p.26).

explained through the analytical framework of a "neoliberal governmentality".[3]

The Foucauldian notion of a "neoliberal governmentality" serves as the primary theoretical basis for how actors throughout this thesis will be analysed. Foucault examined a fundamental shift from a classic liberal *homo economicus,* a subject who served a role as "one of the two partners in the process of exchange", to a neoliberal form who becomes an "entrepreneur of the self". Through adoption of a neoliberal governmentality, the neoliberal subject of *homo economicus* becomes "for himself his own capital… his own producer… for himself the source of his earnings" (Foucault, 1979).

How neoliberal governmentality is reproduced in individuals is of great importance to this thesis. David Harvey introduces the idea of a neoliberal governmentality without specifically calling it as such, stating that "neoliberalism… has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world" (Harvey, 2007, p.3). Jason Read explains that neoliberalism consists of a transformation of ideology as well as a transformation in ideology, one that is generated through the experience of the market and transferred to all other aspects of human interaction (Read, 2009). As such, neoliberal governmentality becomes one with the idea of common sense.

[3] Neoliberal governmentality can be understood as mode of self-governing which frames entrepreneurial behaviour as the most effective and moral way to conduct the self (Foucault, 2003; Lemke, 2011; Brown, 2005, 2015; Clarke, 2008; Dilts, 2011; Lorenzini, 2018). As a result, individuals who come to host such form of governmentality become individual units of enterprise; collective action for these individuals gives way to self-centred strategies of capital accumulation and self-improvement (Brown, 2005; Brown, 2006).

Neoliberalism must cultivate the correct conditions to ensure that competition, whether it is between individuals, businesses or corporations, is a stable factor in the market. Not only this, it must create a culture in which competition becomes common sense, and serves to be the only means of reaching any degree of success or stability, and investment in 'human capital' becomes a key component in surviving the neoliberal world. What is further significant is how neoliberalism creates this kind of governmentality not only through an appeal to freedom, but also by strategies of coercion, pressure of obligation and the propagation of fear and loss should one fail to conform to market principles (Foucault, 1979).

Efforts to relate hip-hop to neoliberalism have been varied, but none seem to have focussed upon the South. Nevertheless, their findings are useful: Spence (2012) argues that hip-hop's lyrical tendencies towards celebration of the "hustle" and "grind" – slang terms for ghetto entrepreneurship – make it a linchpin of neoliberal governmentality; Quinn (2004) argues that the emergence of gangsta-rap represented the rise to entrepreneurial individuality that accompanied neoliberalism and Grey (2013) describes rap celebrities as figures who "embody the racial neoliberal regime of difference. Similarly, Jean and John Comaroff (2009) claim that race can be used as an aspect of human capital in hip-hop, which contributes to its marketability.

Quinn (2004) also argues that gangsta-rap signified a decline in protest culture among young black Americans. Whilst hip-hop, and particularly hip-hop in the south, appears to conform largely to the view of the self as an enterprise, the music still retains elements of neoliberal critique, and the music is in itself a kind of protest against

the poor conditions entrenched in deprived areas in America that were exacerbated by the neoliberalisation of urban space. The music frequently comments and reacts against this, albeit whilst still promoting neoliberal values.

Ultimately, the main focus of this thesis is upon how neoliberalism has transformed urban environments and how, in turn, these changes have enforced neoliberal competition between citizens in the fight for survival. By placing ultimate responsibility on the individual, collective political action is considered far less than the focus upon the "hustle" and "grind" to improve ones own conditions. I will argue that the formation of these early Southern hip-hop scenes is a key representation of this phenomenon. These labels and artists embody neoliberal governmentality in an exemplary way, and have in a sense managed to infuse these elements of neoliberalism with an idea of authenticity and identity that has stayed with subsequent releases.

I also aim to show that, although these scenes show a very clear adoption of neoliberal governmentalities, they also represent elements of legitimate social critique and protest against the particular conditions constructed by neoliberalism. For this reason, the cities in question both play an integral role to the analytical framework of the thesis, as they provide very useful case studies as sites of neoliberal urban policy change in the American south, and how this in turn has shaped the formation of southern hip-hop's mentality and cultural identity.

My argument will be that these two elements are not only intrinsically linked, but that the representation and formation of a collective identity is in itself an essential asset required to make the

music marketable. The creation of authenticity is integral to the marketability of hip-hop.

This thesis will provide evidence for this argument through a combination of sources such as the autobiographies of label owners, interviews, albums and magazine articles from the time period, alongside primary data and secondary scholarship on neoliberal policies and urban change in each of the cities within throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s. The first chapter will centre on Luke Records in Miami and the use of bass and sexually explicit lyricism as both selling points and signifiers of authenticity and identity. The second will focus on Rap-A-Lot in Houston, and show how their lyricism, branding and image are representative of the neoliberal ideals of competition and investment in human capital, whilst critiquing symptoms of neoliberalism simultaneously.

Luke Records, Miami Bass, Space, and the Neoliberal Anthropology of the 808

Neoliberal Miami, order-maintenance and Cuban tensions

On December 17 1979, Arthur McDuffie, a black former marine, was beaten to death by five police officers after failing to stop for violating traffic laws. The police officers involved proceeded to run over McDuffie's motorcycle, in an attempt to make it appear as though he had crashed while speeding, thus causing his death and horrific facial injuries. All the officers were acquitted. Riots ensued, with some commentators writing that the situation was exacerbated by the conditions brought on by the Mariel Boatlift, which saw 125,000 Cuban immigrants arrive in Miami at the beginning of the 1980s, whom diverted the attention of both police and governmental resources (McKnight, 2018).

Two years after the killing of McDuffie, Nevell Johnson Jr., a 21-year-old black man, was shot and killed in the Overtown district of Miami. One of the officers, Cuban-born Luis Alvarez, shot Johnson in the head, after claiming that he had reason to believe that Johnson was reaching for his gun. The case spurred another wave of criticism of the police from Miami's black communities. Two days of rioting ensued following the shooting and Ray Fauntroy, then director of the Miami division of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a civil rights organisation, called for the resignation of Miami police chief Kenneth Harms, on the grounds that he lacked "control over patrolmen". Fauntroy asserted that "the officers in the Johnson case came off their beat uncalled and unprovoked" (Civil Rights Leaders, 1983).

The McDuffie and Johnson cases shared much in common, but what is most significant here is that they are both indicative of the kind of policing that was taking its hold in Miami at the time; one that was centred primarily on the maintenance of order. Moreover, both cases highlight a power struggle between black Miamians and Cuban immigrants. Cuban presence in Miami had been significant since the Cuban Revolution in 1959. An article from *The Economist* (2012) aptly summed up celebratory attitudes towards these immigrants, stating that through "generous federal assimilation aid [and] their own entrepreneurial drive" Cubans "turned Miami from a sleepy tourist resort to a dynamic business hub". Scholarship has generally pointed to a phenomenon of Cuban immigrants receiving exceptional treatment from the American government upon their arrival.[4]

The socioeconomic make-up of Cuban immigrants to Miami changed considerably over the years, however. Those who arrived during the period of 1959-1962 (commonly referred to as the 'Golden Exiles', were, on average, middle-class, educated, urban, and lighter-skinned members of Cuban society, who came primarily due to imminent danger to their wealth at the hands of Castro's redistributive policies (Duany, 1999). Those who came during the period of the Mariel Boatlift tended to be young, single males, working class and less educated than previous waves of Cuban immigrants (Ibid). In 1973, three percent of Cuban exiles were identified as black or mulatto, compared to approximately 13 percent of the Marielitos (Ibid). Many suffered greater hardships upon arrival

[4] Henken (2005) and Aguirre (1994) both assert that the US was more generous and accommodating to Cuban immigrants than any other immigrant group, with security checks and evidence of employment or economic independence disregarded to allow Cubans into the country en masse.

in Miami then their predecessors. On average they faced greater issues with unemployment, poverty and reliance upon welfare (Portes, Clark and Manning, 1985).

Despite this, some of the benefits that were afforded to the 'Golden Exiles' were also afforded to the 125,000 'Marielitos'. Once again, these Cubans were accepted on a mass level, a privilege rarely afforded to other immigrant groups coming to the United States. They also retained access to entry programs afforded to previous waves of more affluent Cubans (Henken, 2005). The Fascell-Stone amendment would also reimburse states for the costs of assimilating the Marielitos, making their entry into the United States much easier and reducing state opposition to them (Dominiquez, 1992).

Tensions between Cubans and blacks in Miami are a deeply complex issue. A detailed analysis of these tensions stands beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet it is important to note that the favourable treatment of Cuban migrants and refugees discussed above contributed in a significant way to resident Miamians' perceptions of Cubans. By 1992, Cubans owned 46,900 firms in Miami (Duany, 1999). Many Cubans themselves felt a much greater sense of acceptance and belonging in America than many other migrant communities, and base this belief primarily on their economic success: an article from Pepe Billete (2012) in the *Miami New Times* passionately argues that Cuban immigrants should be referred to as "Cuban Americans" and not Latino or Hispanic, listing impressive statistics about the success of Cubans in America in areas such as business, education, employment, management and arts, and their lower poverty rate when compared with other Hispanic people in the United States.

The success of Cuban migration has led to a perception of Miami as a "Latinoplis" (Yudice 2016). Yudice remarks that Miami is now perceived either as a "city of successful Latin(o) American entrepeneurs, professionals and celebrities… or as a city of destitute immigrants, frequently bearing a Haitian face" (p.36). His statement suggests that Caribbean heritage blacks and African Americans who have lived and worked in Miami since the late 19th century have been stripped of their identity as Miamian citizens while the city is now seen as belonging to the Cuban communities which are posited as the primary reason for its success and image as a Latin business paradise. These elements can also be tied to Miami's construction as a global city and how it has been branded in order to become competitive in the global market.

These Cuban-black tensions are certainly reflected in the autobiography of Luther Campbell. In his recollection, tensions between people in the black Miami community and Cuban community have always been a significant part of the lived Miami experience, and were further exacerbated by the manner in which the city was policed in the 1980s. Campbell gives an account of how black communities perceived the exceptional treatment of Cuban immigrants, writing:

> All the resources that blacks have been denied the government gave to the Cubans… That shit didn't stop with the Bay of Pigs… if you said you were an anti-Castro group, an anti-communist group, the federal government would pretty much write you a blank check… at the same time Overtown [Campbell's

> predominantly black neighbourhood] was being destroyed, Little Havana was being built up (Campbell, 2015, p.53).

The beginning of Luke Records and the role of the 808

These complex factors illustrate the growing influence of neoliberalism in Miami during the 1980s, a development that had a considerable effect on Luther Campbell's perceptions of his immediate environment. Campbell took note of what made the Cubans and the Whites so powerful within Miami: control over their own properties and enterprises. Campbell realised that the most effective means of acquiring security and power was to begin an industry of his own. In his autobiography, Campbell remarks, "I wasn't about getting money to have more stuff, flashy cars and jewellery and all that shit. I'm talking about money as leverage, as power. Who owns what? Who controls who?" (Campbell, 2015). This perception drove Campbell to start what would become the first hugely successful black artist-owned hip-hop label in the American south.

To make his label successful, Campbell had to determine a musical style most conducive to popular interest in Miami. Prominent bass is *the* defining feature of 2 Live Crew's music. Across their entire discography, large volumes of both Roland TR-808 bass and sampled funk bass lines such as those on the 1989 hit single "Me So Horny" are evident. Though the track is regarded as the definitive 2 Live Crew track, it was the release of their 1986 single "Throw The D" which set the blueprint for how Miami Bass would be perceived and remembered for the rest of its history. The huge, rubbery sound

of programmed TR-808 sub-bass is present here in its purest form, perfectly accentuating the beat in a way that makes the music stick.

The record functions almost entirely on the rhythmic elements of TR-808 sub-bass and programmed cowbell sounds, and other pieces of up beat sampled percussion. These give it a momentum that is entirely revealing of 2 Live Crew's attempts to blend a Caribbean bass feel with an upbeat Latin tempo. As Kat Bein affirms, although "Bass Rock Express" by M.C. Ade was the first true 'Miami Bass' track, it was "Throw the D" that earned 2 Live Crew the title of Miami Bass 'poster boys', and they who destined Miami bass to forever be remembered as "urban-centric, sweat-inducing" and featuring "over-the-top sexualisation" of lyrics (Bein, 2014).

The sound of 2 Live Crew was much different from the sound of previous hip-hop users of the TR-808 such as Afrika Bambaata and M.C. Ade. M.C. Ade's "Bass Rock Express" (1986) presented a more bass-oriented version of the electro funk sound Bambaata perfected on "Planet Rock" (1982), but 2 Live Crew's DJ Mr Mixx took this element much further, upping the tempo and adding several different sources of extra percussion into the mix. The primary difference, however, is the addition of rapping courtesy of Fresh Kid Ice – the first artist to rap on a Miami-based track. Though the lyrical content of "Throw the D" is limited to just two verses, both of which finish just before the half way point of the track, the lyrics, indeed the very scarcity of them, communicate two very important things about 2 Live Crew's Miami Bass sound. The first is that the music is primarily tailored for dancing, and in a sexually explicit manner; and the second is that the sound of 2 Live Crew is much more important, even in their view, than what they actually had to say through lyrical

content. The sound in itself did the majority of the communication for them.

In his autobiography, Won very early on makes a point that "speaker power was the force behind everything we did… DJ crews pooled their money to buy speakers in custom boxes, and ghetto rigged the amps to push all that power" (Won, 2015). "Throw the D" was a phenomenal success for 2 Live Crew; Won claims it brought in $100,000 in its first year of release alone. He predicates the success of the record on the power of sub-bass: "it made everything pop off because of the bass on it… we got fame from blowing people's speakers out" (Won, 2015).

Clearly, then, bass was the key feature in setting the blueprint for 2 Live Crew's success and the establishment of Miami Bass and hip-hop. However, to properly analyse how and why this is the case, and how it links to neoliberal governmentality, a greater explanation of how bass functions in the music itself, and the effect it has on listeners, is essential.

Robert Fink argues that Dirty South and Miami Bass music and their usage of large amounts of sub-bass propose a kind of "bass culture", which uses low-register sound to both dominate collective spaces and embody a "musical resistance" that is indicative of Caribbean heritage (Fink, 2018, p.88). Steve Goodman, owner of the Hyperdub label, has posited that to understand bass culture one must move from an understanding of "sound as text" to "sound as force" (Goodman, 2009 p.84), and Julian Henriques similarly has theorised bass culture in Jamaica as one of "sonic dominance" (Henriques, 2011, p.13). Additionally, there is clear scientific evidence that powerful, low-register bass sounds have a tangible effect on the brain

of the listener. A research study from the PNAS[5] reports that usage of heavy low-frequencies in music is effective at keeping listeners in time with the beat, but also makes them much more conducive to active physical participation in a song by means of dancing (Lenc et al., 2018).

Fink suggests that bass has more to do with a euphoric view of unification of people, and that it can act as a signifier of cultural identity. In many respects, this is a persuasive analysis. Bass has a very rich cultural history in Miami. A significant number of Miami's black residents are of Caribbean heritage, many of them Jamaican and Bahamian like Campbell himself (Campbell, 2015). As a result, bass sounds such as those prominent in Caribbean music like reggae and dub were already popular in Miami; as Campbell recalls, when he was younger much of his extra money was made through throwing reggae parties in his back garden, where he would play classic bass records and sell marijuana to those in attendance (Campbell, 2015). The role that bass played in the Caribbean, and particularly in Jamaica, was significant. Lloyd Bradley, in his authoritative work *Bass Culture: When Reggae was King,* describes bass as having a multitude of important social, economic and political functions amongst Caribbean folks. Bass was:

> [A] lively dating agency, a fashion show, an information exchange, a street status parade ground, a political forum, a centre for commerce, and, once the deejays began to chat on the mic about more than their sound systems, their records,

[5] Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in the United States of America.

> their women or their selves, it was the ghetto's newspaper (Bradley, 2001).

The role bass played in the music of 2 Live Crew, then, was one of a cultural service to Miami's Caribbean heritage citizens. Hip-hop has always been built upon a foundation of sound that is considered an authentic representation of both of its creative and target demographic. As Campbell remarks, "everything about what I wanted to do was about being true to Miami" (Campbell, 2015b). Hip-hop, at least in its earliest days, could not promise to be successful without the cultivation of a sound and aesthetic that was deemed "authentic" to its local conditions and background. Therefore, to create a tasteful, respectful and authentic development of music inspired by Caribbean heritage, Campbell felt he must pay attention to the importance of bass in the music.

Despite the clear importance of Caribbean authenticity, however, one point of Fink's work requires some further discussion. He suggests that the use of heavy bass as a tool for the creation of musical resistance and collective action is a poor investment choice, given the expenses that go in to cultivating such a powerful array of speakers and how much energy is 'wasted' (Fink, 2018). In the case of 2 Live Crew and Miami Bass, it is arguable that this sound energy is only "wasted" in the most technical sense of the word. Campbell and 2 Live Crew very quickly more than made up for their initial expenses (Fink himself states that an expensive speaker setup constitutes around $10,000, a sum 2 Live Crew made from the release of "Throw the D" alone). Regardless of the inefficiencies of bass transmission and reception, it was a worthwhile investment

both for its cultural capital in evoking Caribbean heritage and its ability to make audiences feel the music's power, unification, and most importantly, to make them respond physically.

As Font-Navarette puts it, there is clearly something inherently public about large volumes of heavy bass; the sound waves travel further, are more persistent, and are more of an environmental phenomenon than higher frequency sounds. Furthermore, he correctly points out that the deep power of "actual" bass was often dissipated on records played by pirate radio stations, the inner city's primary means of sharing and listening to Miami bass music. These stations relied heavily on compression to boost the volume, which in the process removes the lowest of the low frequencies of bass (Font-Navarette, 2015). In other words, the idea or awareness of a pre-supposed feeling of bass presence and sound was arguably more integral to Miami Bass' localised cultural success than actual low frequency. These elements all added up to create a musical formula that was simultaneously culturally viable and representative, as well as economically successful for the creators.

Another key point in the creation of 2 Live Crew's aesthetic is their popularisation of the Roland TR-808 drum machine to program both their heavy bass sounds as well as their more upbeat percussive sounds, such as high frequency hi-hats, cowbells and hand-claps. The TR-808 has reached legendary status in hip-hop, and most specifically in southern hip-hop and modern trap. Kanye West has named an entire album (808s & Heartbreak (2008)) after the piece of machinery, and you would be hard pressed to find a trap artist who has not yet used the rubbery sub bass sound of an 808 bass drum somewhere in their discography. The 808 was a reliable investment:

it had a relatively affordable price tag, at $1,200, compared to competitors such as the Linn LM-1, which cost $5,000. It was also much simpler to use (Hasnain, 2017). Despite it being a relatively 'cheap' and 'tacky' sound by the time 2 Live Crew came round to employ it, Afrika Bambaata had already established it as an authentic hip-hop sound on his 1982 release "Planet Rock".

The 808 was a valuable investment for 2 Live Crew for a multitude of reasons. To begin with, its cheapness and ease of use made it a useful and profitable investment (Hobbs only paid $300 for his first TR-808 after it fell out of favour with popular audiences), given that bass bins and speaker systems already proved costly for the group. Not only this, but the robotic, futuristic, and less organic sound of the 808, had become desirable in popular music at the time of the group's inception. Andrew Goodwin (1992) comments that by the late 1980s pop musicians and audiences had not only become accustomed to the sound of machine instruments, but also had made a connection between the sounds of these instruments and a sense of communal dancing, partying, and a kind of primal rhythm that is deemed natural in human beings.

Though 2 Live Crew played a part in this change, they had already caught on to the popularity of electronic dance sounds prior to any of their own musical efforts. As Hobbs states in an interview, he had heard it used in hugely popular tracks like "Sexual Healing" (1982) by Marvin Gaye and "Between the Sheets" (1983) by the Isley Brothers and been impressed by its capacity for massive chart success. Even more so, the bass drum of the 808 provided that huge sub sound that was so integral to their own branding of Miami Bass, and that was needed to make their initial records popular (Hobbs,

2016). Ultimately, the combination of the 808's cheapness and accessibility, its very particular futuristic funky sound, and its ability to produce massive bass, made it perfect for 2 Live Crew to build their success on. Hobbs, Campbell and the rest of the group knew that their potential audience in Miami appreciated heavy bass, and that it was practically a requirement for their music to be a success there.

As clarified in the introduction, a neoliberal governmentality is one that assesses all human actions as investments; each decision made is subjected to a cost-benefit analysis, based on how advantageous the decision will be on an individual level. From this angle, 2 Live Crew's use of sub-bass can be understood as a particular kind of territorialism which has numerous outcomes: it captivates large audiences due to its physical-environmental presence; it enhances listeners' enjoyment and makes the music 'stick'; it beats out competing DJ groups in a battle for audience attention and sonic territory; and it is also more widely representative of a collective Miami culture of black Caribbean-Latin heritage. All of these factors combine ultimately to ensure economic success.

As can be seen in the autobiography of Campbell, his foremost motivation to create a Miami-specific strain of hip-hop was his understanding of bass music as the most efficient way to achieve economic and financial prosperity and security for him. Despite this, the exploitation of bass sounds in the music of the group serves a function that, at first glance, seems somewhat at odds with neoliberal ideals of individualism. As we have seen above, bass functions as a collective unifier of individuals who are in its audible-environmental territory. The work of Gayle Wald expands on this notion of

"vibrational unity". She argues, using the concept of "vibrations", that music is a tool that was used by black musicians in the 20th century to protest against an American system that frequently silenced black voices and curtailed black public freedoms. More importantly, she notes that musical vibrations forge a definitive aspect of collective unity between audience members and the artist. She thus frames sound as something that scholars can explore to theorise oppositional consciousness, particularly as it relates to struggles over space and ideas of social "order" (Wald, 2011).

In this sense, bass played a role in formulating reclamation of racialized space in neoliberal Miami. As discussed earlier, Campbell reflected upon feelings of powerlessness at the hands oppressive policing, the lack of job opportunities and exacerbated tensions through the influx of Cuban immigrants who were given special treatment by the government. From this angle, it could be argued that not only was bass a key part of the musical formula that gave 2 Live Crew territorial triumph over competing groups, it also was a particular kind of collective protest through the lens of identity politics. It served to unite a repressed cultural identity of black, economically disadvantaged Miamians, in opposition to the economically powerful white and 'Cuban-American' communities who held a monopoly on wealth and property in the city.

How hip-hop engages with perceptions of social space is of great importance. Tricia Rose defines rap spatially, noting that hip hop and rap music serve to provide a voice for those who are deeply affected by transitions and changes to the organisation of residential and public spaces, framing hip-hop as a means of "seizing" shifting urban terrain (Rose, 1994). The music of 2 Live Crew can be

analysed as a form of protest, in essence against neoliberal policing and its attempts to re-organise and impose social dominance over the resident communities of Miami's black and poor citizens. It does this by using bass as a territorial tool to reclaim a sense of unified collective identity amongst its listeners, and by reinstating a different sense of "social order", one that police officers like Bachmann clearly view as a form of disorder that must be managed. Through their music, and the use of bass in particular, Campbell and his associates attempted to reclaim a localised vision of black, Caribbean-heritage Miami, and refused to be shut down by a neoliberal police force's attempts at social control. Lefebvre (1992) and Forman (2002) contend that social spaces are constructed by their inhabitants. The use of music opens up a process by which subjects can then be brought into relation with one another (Barthes, 1985). In short, the music of 2 Live Crew can be seen as a means by which bass is used to represent and uphold collective identity.

Relating to this background of scholarship are theories of how policing affects and shapes the social order of particular spaces, and in turn, how neoliberalism has had an effect on this phenomenon. Herbert and Brown (2006) theorise the spatial logics of punitive neoliberalism as it relates to "geographies of crime", emphasising that the physical appearance of particular areas sends particular messages to police officers about how particular zones must be policed. Run-down, economically disadvantaged areas of the inner city send a message to police that order must be maintained by force, as opposed to more affluent, usually more white, areas such as the suburbs which maintain their own order, according to police,

because their residents are more morally responsible than the residents of poor areas. In *City of Quartz* (1990), Mike Davis compares the policing style in Los Angeles to the military tactics of "zoning", where particular areas are deemed to require stronger methods of control to maintain social order. In some ways, Los Angeles is quite similar to Miami, in that they are both imagined cities which are sold to middle-class people based on an image of their tropical and exotic appeal. As Yudice writes, "the space and physical attributes of Miami… its skyline, upscale areas and beaches have become settings" (2016, p.38). The strong business and enterprise cultures of the two cities are used as selling points, whilst government largely ignores the on-going struggles of certain subordinated social groups.

For Miami to maintain its attractive image to potential business investors, social order must be maintained within the poorer areas of the city. Which would go some way to explain the deaths of McDuffie and Johnson, the acquittal of their police killers, and the treatment of Campbell and many other young black men by officers like Bachmann, who, as discussed in the introduction, frequently harassed and attempted to shut down the various parties held by Campbell and other Miami Bass artists in public parks – assumedly to maintain Miami's appearance of "social order".

The music of 2 Live Crew, then, can be analysed as a form of protest, in essence against neoliberal policing and its attempts to re-organise and impose social dominance over the resident communities of Miami's black and poor citizens. It does this by using bass as a territorial tool to reclaim a sense of unified collective identity amongst its listeners, and by reinstating a different sense of

"social order", one that police officers like Bachmann clearly view as a form of disorder that must be managed. Through their music, and the use of bass in particular, Campbell and his associates attempted to reclaim a localised vision of black, Caribbean-heritage Miami, and refused to be shut down by a neoliberal police force's attempts at social control.

The sound, aesthetic and musical style of 2 Live Crew can be understood as a complex blend of conformity and resistance. It conforms to neoliberal ideals of market competition, efficiency, individual economic freedom and liberty. It also plays into Miami's existence as a global city; its musical elements represent Miami's 'fun' side, and it does little to address the struggles of poorer Miamians in terms of lyricism. Yet, it also embodies the more collective spirit of black Miamian identity, which served as a protest against increasing attempts to reorganise Miami as a city of global economic success that excluded many black and poor citizens. What is more significant is the sense that these elements cannot exist without each other. The spirit of collective identity is at once an act of protest but also an act of market efficiency; authenticity and collective black identity are just as much a capital investment as they are signifiers of solidarity with a repressed group of Miami residents.

As Nasty as They Wanna Be: The use of sex and the female body as human capital

The overwhelming use of bass in the music of 2 Live Crew was also tied to another distinct feature of their music, as Dave Tompkins writes, "this was the first music genre that seemed to be solely

dedicated to fusing a subwoofer waveform with the human rear end, as if trying to develop a new biotechnology called *Bottom,* making these exaggerations of low end indistinguishable from each other" (Tompkins, 2012). Sexual elements, and particularly the idolisation of the black female body, are inseparable from perceived notions of Miami Bass, due to 2 Live Crew.

Even their earliest work is focussed on this element; with "Throw the D" birthing what is now the world famous phenomenon of "twerking". But it was their 1989 album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* that so effectively conjoined the notion of low bass frequencies with a fetish-like idolisation of the curvaceous black female body. The album cover sees the 4 members of the group lying betwixt the agape legs of four black women in thong bikinis, and among its track list are titles such as "Me So Horny", "Dick Almighty", "The Fuck Shop", and the antiphonal "If You Believe in Having Sex". The album is stacked from back to front with the pre-requisite heavy 808-bass and upbeat Latin percussion, as well as scabrous lyrical content.

Federal attacks on the music of 2 Live Crew were levelled both at their live performances and sale of their albums. In 1990 a federal court ruled *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* obscene, and Charles Freeman, who owned a record store in Florida, was convicted for the sale of the album. 2 Live Crew were acquitted a few days later. Henry Louis Gates Jr., a professor at Duke University who defended the group, said that their music was part of a traditional black culture of "signifying", that it represented a resistance to the oppression of white masters, and that it should be understood as satire, as parody and comedy. Their music, comedic as it may be, did very clearly contain elements that were misogynistic and exploitative of the

female body, though Gates' contention that it represented a resistance to the oppression of white masters is plausible, given the nature of the music's tendency towards themes of social disorder (i.e. hyper sexualisation, rampant partying, and the musical style in itself being deeply rooted in Miami's black culture). Campbell, Won and Hobbs have all said that comedy and parody were the primary aim of their lyrics, rather than overt sexuality (Won, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Hobbs, 2008). However, Hobbs also revealed that Campbell had intentionally antagonised the authorities with the suggestiveness of the group's lyrics, claiming "instead of Luke explaining what it was that we were doing, Luke put more gasoline on the fire, which in turn made these whites that was in power more infuriated… [I]f we would of talked about how the records were being put together, more so from a comedy standpoint… we might not have caught as much flack as we actually did" (Hobbs, 2008).

Campbell used the outrage produced around his releases as both a means for protest, as well as a selling point. He would protest by continuing to do shows in places where their music was banned. Sales of *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* shot from 1.2 million to 2 million after Miami lawyer Jack Thomson began sending copies of the lyrics to the sheriffs of 65 counties in the state of Florida. As Bruce Rogow correctly asserted, "this is the history of censorship. People will fall over cut glass to get what you tell them they can't have" (Rimer, 1990).

Campbell even used the courtroom as a place to further promote his music. On the day of the acquittal, Campbell openly invited members of the court to come and see the group perform on their next tour. During the recess of the first trial, he promoted a new

video of 2 Live Crew. “It’s about how 2 Live Crew gets punished and sent to Cuba and Castro is waiting for them. It’s a great video,” Campbell said, in his attempts to sell the jury on his music (Rimer, 1990). Moments like this are entirely revealing of the entrepreneurial prowess of Campbell and his ability to turn almost any situation into an economic opportunity. From beginning to end, the lyrical choices of his group have been highly geared towards marketing the music. In his interview at the Red Bull Music Academy, Campbell stated that he would release records a week before a high profile release,[6] equipped with an album cover featuring scantily clad women. Moreover, the raunchy song titles on the back of the record were almost guaranteed to further pique customer curiosity and helped to increase the album sales of the group (Campbell, 2015b). These elements see Campbell using bodies as human capital, employing them in order to boost the potential marketability of his products.

This is not the only instance of Campbell’s prowess in the market. Shortly after the successful release of “Throw the D”, Campbell recognised the imminent danger of other Miami hip-hop groups attempting to cash in on his success by imitating his style. To alleviate this danger, he commissioned Mr Mixx to create a sister record to “Throw the D” with his female cousin, Anquette, entitled “Throw the P” (Hobbs, 2016); this attempt to monopolise the Miami Bass market sits perfectly in line with neoliberal rationality and its view of man as having an anthropology comprised of competitive

[6] Campbell does not specify in this interview whether he meant he would release his records a week before the announcement of, or the actual release of another ‘high-profile’ record. It seems to be suggested that he would wait a week before the actual release of another record.

market value. Furthermore, this can also be linked to the "outsourcing" and "franchise" imperatives of neoliberal economics. Campbell not only pre-empted the danger of market competition, but also reached out to other sources in order to increase his area of ownership, and further his earnings.

Furthermore, the lyrical content of *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* successfully appealed to notions of American freedom. Before their acquittal, Campbell's mention of 2 Live Crew being "punished" was very cleverly related to criticism of Castro's communist regime. Campbell aligned himself with America's liberal values of free speech, business and enterprise. He argued that the accusations made against 2 Live Crew threatened to restrict these freedoms, just as they were denied in Castro's Cuba. This reflects the rise of neoliberalism and its place in the mentalities of Southern hip-hop, as an appeal not only to the rights and freedom of individuals to conduct business how they see fit without interference from the state or federal government, but also to the neoliberal idea that individual capital accumulation is morally preferential to state organised and sanctioned economic activity. It also oddly uses the same vein of anti-Castro rhetoric to support the freedom of American business, a cornerstone of the early Cuban immigrants' political ideologies, a group that Campbell himself felt were taking Miami's black resident's governmental aid for themselves.

2 Live Crew's lyrical content served as a clever marketing tactic as well as an open declaration of American free speech and entrepreneurialism. It was also the method by which they solidified the blueprint of Miami Bass and put their own personal stamp on it forever.

Conclusions: Collective identity or neoliberal individualism?

Over the course of the 1980s, Campbell experienced many problems with neoliberal Miami. These included police brutality, neighbourhood surveillance and punitive efforts at enforcing a repressive social order and control. Black Miamians suffered from nationwide cuts to job training and welfare benefits, while money and opportunities were readily handed over to Cuban immigrants. Campbell experienced threats to his sense of personal freedom and control over his destiny that for many Black Miamians resulted from neoliberal governmentality. Yet, from the beginning, his primary goal was perfectly in line with neoliberal philosophy: to assume individual responsibility for his own economic future. He commissioned the members of the 2 Live Crew to produce a big hit for him, going into the business with a great understanding of what would make Miami's music lovers move, and more importantly, spend their money on his products. This outlook was equally reflected by the group members themselves; Wong Won, Hobbs and Marquis all equally understood the importance of heavy bass, of upbeat Latin percussion, and risqué lyricism as the ultimate combination of a new successful, Miami-centric hip-hop style. However, their organisation in terms of Luke Records as a label still placed Campbell on top. Whilst the other group members shared their earnings equally, Campbell took a significantly larger cut of the profits, despite the fact that without 2 Live Crew he would not have likely seen anywhere near the level of success that he had experienced.

As many neoliberal endeavours go, it did not all end well for 2 Live Crew and Luke Records. The fact that the record label bears his name only is indicative of Campbell's project as being a key example of neoliberal entrepreneurialism that is centred on the self. The group eventually grew disgruntled with Campbell when they realised he was taking a much greater cut of the profits than they were. In the end, Campbell was successful in achieving his goal of great economic power and prosperity, but at the cost of his friendships with the group members. Evidently, the neoliberal governmentality of Campbell was corrosive of his friendships with his fellow group mates. He viewed them first as individual units of human capital, each serving a specific purpose in the game of hip-hop entrepreneurialism.

Yet in the process of it all, 2 Live Crew were still successful in creating a site of collective identity for Miami's repressed citizens. They fought against a government which would have seen rights to free speech and enterprise taken from them and reclaimed, at least in part, a particular space in Miami's history and culture for those that seemed destined to be forgotten.

"My masterpiece is my bank account": Houston, Rap-A-Lot and the Neoliberal Politics of Survival and Prosperity.

An introduction to Houston: The proto-neoliberal city

The city of Houston is a very particular case of a southern US city. In many ways, despite the majority of scholarly focus centring on New York City as the archetypal neoliberal city (Kaplan-Lyman (2012), Harvey, (2007), it embodies the tendencies that characterise a particularly American kind of neoliberalism, one that combines the free-market-loving, libertarian approach to private enterprise and its place in dictating governance, with a traditional, more localised sense of social conservatism that was a key part in Reagan's policy making in the 1980s.

A brief overview of the history of Houston's neoliberal city governance is required here to further understand how it came to shape the music of Geto Boys and the Rap-A-Lot label. Houston has always been considered the paragon of free market, big business-oriented governance. Despite its relatively disadvantaged geographical location (the city is only 50 miles from a coast, but compare this with other US global port cities like New York, Miami or Los Angeles and it is in a significantly less advantageous position), the city has, in some ways, became a key player not only the US national economy but also the world economy.

Vojnovic (2003), Ringheim (1993), Feagin (1998), Lamare, (1998), Lin, (1995) and Fisher (1989) have all pointed to Houston as the "free enterprise city" (Feagin, 1988), a city in which redistributive or policies with social welfare components are rejected due to the power of the city's business elites, and where policies of growth are of upmost importance. Vojnoivic asserts that Houston has

always effectively resisted governmental planning, or control that would infringe on business interests in any way. The city was ranked fourth in the US in 1999 for attracting the most foreign investment in the 1990s (Arend, 1999, pp.1088-1094), second in industrial importance (McClenahen, 1999, p.3862) and first for jobs in bio-tech (Nielsen, 1999).

Of course, in some ways these elements reflect governance in the state of Texas more widely. In 1992 Texas ranked the lowest of nine major US states in terms of expenditure in the fields of public welfare, police protection, parks and recreation and general overall expenditure (Vojnovic, 2003). Texas is a classically libertarian state, thus these findings come as little surprise. Despite this, Houston still remains an outlier. Indeed, the cities' own officials and leaders have consistently sung its praises for its efficient use of the free market to become a city of seemingly endless success and possibility. For example, in 1980 the cities' then mayor Louie Welch proudly claimed, "the free market place has functioned in Houston like no other place in America. It has a method of purging itself of slums. Every city has its poor people, but here the opportunity not to be poor is greater than in most cities" (Davidson, 1982).

Indeed, there appears to be an entrenched belief among the city's leaders that Houston is home to a very specific, localised spirit of self-reliance and entrepreneurialism. The city's image in popular culture has been constructed as one of a city of pioneers from cowboys and oil tycoons to spacemen, and, as I will show later in this chapter, of a particular kind of hip-hop celebrity that constructs their image around the idea of the "hustler" and the "game player". Ringheim similarly argues that politics in Houston are dominated by

"a belief in self-reliance and the free-enterprise system" (1993, p.620). This emphasis on self-reliance is indicative of the kind of logic that belongs to a neoliberal governmentality. The assertion that competition is a natural part of human anthropology, that we would be in a sense immoral not to try and make the most of ourselves, whether it is at the expense of others or not, is a key tenet of neoliberalism. It forms a common-sense logic that assumes that our fortunes are entirely within our own control.

This sense of localised exceptionalism is at odds with another key factor in Houston's construction as a site of neoliberalism. Despite viewing itself, as Klineberg puts it, as "another country", the primary reason for Houston's economic success since the 1980s when compared to other Texas cities like Dallas or Galveston has been its place in the world economy and its status as a "global city". Klineberg notes the irony of this; though Houston brands itself as in some way different to other US cities, a large part of its success is due to its participation in the global economy. Indeed, this does appear to be a contradiction in some sense. However, the way the city brands itself is actually a key part of its success in a global economy. Dastgerdi and Luca (2019) contend that city branding is a common component used to improve the competitive advantages of a global city by relying on uniqueness and the particular elements which can set a city up to stand out amongst its competitors in the global economy. David Harvey (2007) further asserts that this is a key part of neoliberal governance and how it responds to, and is a product of, economic globalisation and the rising phenomenon of the global city. Harvey argues that the neoliberalism that arose in the US in the

1980s meant cities began to sell themselves on the world market in order to concentrate capital in the hands of elites.

It is no surprise then that the way cities sell themselves in the globalised marketplace often disregards the realities of the average, working-class city resident (Dastgerdi and Luca, 2019). This is the case for Houston. Despite the consistent praise the city's leaders afford themselves for maintaining the free market as the sole reason for Houston's success, they have consistently failed to mention how much damage this governance style has done to a large majority of the city's residents, particularly those living to the east and south of the main CBD. Certainly, the city has achieved great successes in the global economy; as of 2017, the city was exporting 97 billion dollars worth of goods per year. Yet the city has a significant history of minimal government spending, at least in the area of redistributive policy. In 1980, the city's public budget was 920,000 thousand dollars, a meagre sum for such a large metropolis.[7] Such lack of interest in redistributive policy, zoning and taxation created enormous problems for Houston's poorer communities. By 1995, one in four Houstonians were living in poverty. Houston is also the most income segregated metropolitan area in America, with the greatest percentage of rich living among the rich and the third largest percentage of poor amongst poor (Dong, 2017).

The city has all the elements that make up a global city: diverse ethnicities, a powerful business sector, and a neoliberal governance style which further entrenches the gap between the city's wealthiest

[7] Houston's population boomed in the period between 1970 and 1982. Klineberg (2019) states that 1 million people moved into Harris County within this period due to the surge in the price of oil. Despite this, money set aside for public funding remained less than 1 million dollars in Houston – less than a dollar per person.

and its poorest. Yet, though neoliberalism is often misrepresented as an "as-little-government-as-possible" approach to organising society, what it actually constitutes, and what Houston is a perfect example of, is a particular organisation of government designed to support and protect business interests from political interference. More so, it constitutes a system of governance in which the distinction between politics and business is erased. Governance itself becomes business, and business interests take charge of government. As Slobodian writes, neoliberals seek to "encase" markets; they do not want anarchy, so much as they want the market to be entirely free of any handcuffs that may prevent it from being as prosperous as it can be (Slobodian, quoted by Iber, 2018). This extends further into actively using the state to extend the parameters of market competition into all aspects of social activity. In most cases, certainly in Houston, these handcuffs have been perceived as things such as redistributive policies, zoning, taxation, and government spending on things that do not directly serve the city's business interests.

These factors, then, contribute to Houston's status as the archetypal global city. Global cities, Saskia Sassen (2004) writes, are often home to contradictory and conflicting images. On the one hand, there is an image sold to the rest of America and the global economy of Houston as a uniquely entrepreneurial place where business interests will always be of paramount importance, and where neoliberal governance has been the key catalyst of its economic growth and success. On the other, there are constructions of Houston as a place of stark economic inequality, of danger, decay, poverty and lawlessness. These images are often depicted in the music of the Rap-A-Lot label, which will be analysed within this chapter. Houston, a

global city, is home to conflicting and contradictory views of neoliberal governance, and so too is the hip-hop music produced in the city. This music is complex and conflicted in that it both accepts and utilises neoliberal governmentality while at the same time condemning neoliberalism as a governance style and vividly highlighting the problems that it has created.

Ultimately, Houston is very much home to, and a producer of, neoliberal governmentalities. The city is characterised by competition with other US states and global entities. Its policies (de-regulation, lack of planning, objection to redistributive socio/economic policies as anti-growth and anti-business) promote competition between businesses, employers and employees within its own boundaries. But it also promotes competition through the conditions its local governance policies produce; poverty, disinvestment and decay in the city's poorer areas bring with them high levels of crime, particularly drug-related and violent crimes, as disadvantaged residents compete with each other for survival. The city therefore creates subjects characterised by competitive hustling with others in order to be survivable, a key component to neoliberal governmentality.

Areas like the 5th Ward of Houston are home to the particularly harsh social conditions caused by Houston's neoliberal governance style. In an article aptly entitled "Only the Strong Survive" by Richard West (1979), Fifth Ward is described as being home to "pockets of affluence with well-kept homes, clean streets, trees and space – middle-class neighbourhoods free of garbage and burned out buildings… [But] for ninety percent of the area, poverty is the first fact of life". The poorer residents of the Fifth Ward at that time were

faced with the appearance and possibility of opportunity, affluence and well being, but these were far beyond reach for the majority of the community. At the time, the area was crowded, with a population density of 30.5 persons per residential acre compared to Houston's overall average of 14.4, while 34 percent lived below the poverty line compared to Houston's overall 10 percent average. Houston's relatively high median income of $9876 vastly overshadowed the median income of Fifth Ward, which stood at $5030 (West, 1979). As is apparent, wealth and social class were key determinants of quality of life in Houston. Public services were poor in 5th Ward, encouraged by the city's pro-business governance style, which led to many businesses setting up sites for wastage and other undesirable by-products near these areas. Social tensions and a competitive struggle to survive were therefore inevitable in these areas, particularly when it came to street entrepreneurship. Faced with very little in the way of legitimate opportunity, many young men in the Fifth Ward took to lives of selling drugs to make a decent living.

There is strong evidence for the kind of competitive psychology that neoliberalism produces in citizens subjected to this mode of governance. Theories of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966, Wicklund, 1974, Wortman, Brehm and Berkowitz 1975, Brehm and Brehm, 1981, Brehm 1989) posit that when individuals are faced with a threat to their perceived personal control over their own destiny, there appears to exist a kind of innate response that causes individuals to react with renewed aggression to regain control over their personal situation. Whilst this is usually dependent upon the subject's perception of what is and what is not within the realms of their control, neoliberal governance and governmentality frame

every aspect of social, economic and political life as matters of 'personal responsibility', as being within the boundaries of the subject's own control. In this framework, failure to prosper or advance in material and social terms is understood as personal failure or inadequacy. Citizens in this position are perceived to have lost control over their lives and may experience this as a loss of independence and freedom. Houston's neoliberal governance style, with its disinvestment in redistributive policies and social programs, disrupts the sources of stability that are usually offered by governments to the most precarious citizens. Pyysiainen, Halpin & Guilfoyle (2017) apply these theories of 'reactance' directly to neoliberalism, and assert that it plays a considerable role in the 'responsibilisation', and ultimately the adoption of neoliberal governmentality, within subjects. They argue that though the literature generally points to how neoliberalism appeals to freedom in order to sell itself to its subjects, it also manifests itself in its subjects via "threats to the loss of personal control". As Rose argues, neoliberal governance methods "respond to the sufferer as though they were the author of their own misfortune… the disadvantaged individual has come to be seen as potentially and ideally an active agent in the fabrication of their own existence" (Rose, 1996, p.56). This in turn creates the kind of 'reactance' that is indicated in the psychological studies cited previously; subjects are made to feel as though they are the creators of their own failures, and so they must also be the ones to fix them on an entirely individual basis. Foucault (2008), Lemke, Larsen and Hvidbak (2011) all similarly contend that neoliberal appeals to controllability and stability on one hand is pre-supposed by the possibility of danger, fear and loss on the other,

conditions which neoliberal governance itself effectively creates. In some cases, individuals respond to this loss of control through developing an aggressive relationship with their immediate situation and environment and attempt to regain control by any means necessary, placing full responsibility upon themselves for their situation, as this allows subjects to feel as though their situation remains within the realms of their control.

Localism, Human Capital and the Geto Boys

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of an individual who has adopted such a strong personal 'reactance' to neoliberalism and the loss of control it brings upon subjects is one James Prince, owner and founder of Rap-A-Lot records, established in Houston in 1985. Born and brought up in Houston's Fifth Ward, James Prince lived his early years in poverty. By his early teens, he had already begun his ventures into entrepreneurship, taking jobs doing anything from fixing bikes and mowing his neighbours' lawns to stealing marijuana that was grown by the father of one of his friends and selling it to drug peddlers on street corners for a hefty profit, using the money to pay for electricity in his grandmother's house. Prince asserts, on the first few pages of his autobiography, that his decision to create a hip-hop label stemmed directly from his feelings of hopelessness and loss of opportunity and control over his own future, and that of his family. He claims, "Where we come from (Fifth Ward), hope is just a concept. It's an idea that most of us don't share" (Prince, 2015. p.2) Looking back on the 1975 Arab oil embargo and the rapid pace at which people began to move to Houston, he remarks that in the main centre

of Houston there was a spirit of excess, opportunity and possibility in Houston at the time. As Klineberg states, the attitude towards Houston was "who cares if it's ugly, who cares if it smells, it's the smell of money" (2019). However Prince states that this feeling seemed to pass Fifth Ward by. In Fifth Ward, this sense of opportunity and potential prosperity instead gave way to a focus upon "survival, securing a nine-to-five job, just trying to make it home to your family every night" (Prince, p.21). Prince responded in a similar way. His initial focus was upon survival. However, it went far beyond that of base level survival, and turned to ultimate prosperity, to regain total control over his and his family's financial situation (Prince, p.22). As Prince puts it, "for me, that was all I could think about. I'm addicted to the pace and sound of the hustle, the luxuries in life and the power that goes along with being able to afford those luxuries." Prince understood that to be ultimately successful in the Fifth Ward, entrepreneurship and an individualised business plan were the most likely route to success. Similar sentiments are echoed by Fifth Ward's street dealers: as 'Blue' (a street dealer interviewed by Richard West in 1979) attested, "I will not do 'Eight' for the man… My ladies and reefer pay for everything."

From Prince's account, his adoption of the competitive business mentality was a direct result of this struggle to make ends meet working menial jobs. He struggled to accept his situation and his immediate environment for what it was. Prince understood that in the neoliberal environment of Houston money meant power, social mobility, better opportunities, and the chance to live in generally safe conditions and have a genuine impact on the political make up of the city. Foucauldian ideas of power and neoliberalism place Prince as a

subject of neoliberal governmentality. He constitutes the archetypal "homo economicus", the man who responds to his environment by way of cost-benefit analysis, applied to which decisions should be made in order to become a wealthier individual (Foucault, 2008, p.226). Moreover, his case is an idyllic example of the process by which psychological "reactance" to neoliberalism takes place. Difficult living conditions entrenched by neoliberal governance become compounded by ever increasing governmental measures taken towards removing social safety nets. As a result, the subject internalises neoliberalism as a response to these conditions, favouring individualised methods of capital accumulation to retain control over their lives, as opposed to resorting to collective political action. The ways in which Prince conducted business and his approach to creating Rap-A-Lot were very clearly neoliberal in their nature. As a result, the music produced by his label followed suit.

Perhaps the best example of this is his approach to branding and the production of an image that would be attractive to possible consumers of the music. For Rap-A-Lot, Prince wanted to create a label whose music represented the identity of Houstonians, particularly those in disadvantaged areas such as Fifth Ward and South Park. This was a useful business move for a multitude of reasons. First, the constitution of an image that is perceived to be "authentic" and "real" by hip-hop fans was already a proven method for creating commercially successful hip-hop.[8] Releases from already

[8] It is important to note here that commercially successful hip-hop, particularly at this period of the late 80s and early 90s, did not mean the music saw much play on radio. NWA's "Straight Outta Compton" was rarely played on mainstream radio networks, yet was a platinum record a year after its release. This is evident of the importance of the construction of the "real" and the "gritty" elements of hip-hop in this time; they are key factors in its commercial viability.

established groups in the West and East Coasts such as NWA and Run DMC focussed on these elements of the "real", the "gritty" and the "local", and achieved great success by doing so. James Prince sought to do this with Rap-A-Lot, and particularly with the Geto Boys through both the careful construction of the group and their image, the lyrics and the instrumental content of the music. As Baldwin writes, "rappers are not trying to hold black identity to some place of total opposition to consumption, commodification, or social mobility. They are claiming their U.S. citizenship by partaking in a conspicuous consumption and performing the identities of a U.S. gangsta government and elite-class capitalists" (1999, p.158). Rap-A-Lot and its associated acts embody this in an exemplary manner. They partake in defending the identities of marginalised Houstonians with the competitive neoliberal spirit of entrepreneurialism. Yet these self-interested methods of capital accumulation are in large part a reason for the difficulties faced by locals in poor areas such as Fifth Ward. However, these contrasting elements are crucially interconnected in southern hip-hop and in Houston especially, a city that sells itself on its distinctiveness, whilst holding a key place in the global economy. Not only that, the propensity towards self-preservation, survival and competition and how this plays a significant role in Houstonian local identity is a direct result of such problematic neoliberal governance to begin with. As Richard West writes, in 5th Ward "status is determined less by what you have than by personal qualities of wit and style and by what you know about the basic power structure of the street" (1979). The entrepreneurial, competitive spirit of Houston and Fifth Ward especially is not confined only to interests of capital accumulation. This is certainly an

important factor, given the difficult nature of life in these areas and lack of governmental support. Yet, what is also important is the demonstration of street smarts and how this functions as a representation of localised Fifth Ward identity. Prince then utilised this particular element within the music of Rap-A-Lot in order to further legitimise the label as a site of true hip-hop authenticity, a factor that is key to the success of any hip-hop label at this time. There is something distinctive about the way neoliberal competitive entrepreneurialism is interpreted and put to work "on the street", both in reality and in musical representation. This brings together a greater point throughout the thesis, that is identity and authenticity are key parts of the music's profitability and competitive chances to be successful within the hip-hop market. In short, both the economic aspects of neoliberalism as well as the spiritual made up a large part of Fifth Ward's collective identity. The music of Rap-A-Lot takes these elements and utilises them very effectively, representing them both through a blend of imagery, characterisation and lyricism.

A good starting point to analyse the differing elements of competitive neoliberalism in the products of Rap-A-Lot is the role that Prince, as well as the members of the Geto Boys themselves, played in the construction of their image. Prince sought out each individual member of the group based upon an analysis of what would be the most competitive (both in terms of the market and within the broader spectrum of U.S. hip-hop) image and sound. Each member of the Geto Boys[9] represented a different aspect of the

[9] There have been numerous incarnations of the Geto Boys; however for the purpose of this thesis the group arrangement I will be referencing will be that which were present on the majority of the group's popular material (Willie D, Scarface and Bushwick Bill).

group's overall identity and image; each was selected for their role in building the group's brand, as individuals and as a wider collective. It is important here to note that Prince's methods were indeed very effective. Throughout the span of the Geto Boys (in the form of Willie D, Scarface and Bushwick Bill) 1989-1995 careers, Prince's careful craftsmanship of the group saw them reach huge success following relatively overlooked initial releases. *Grip It! On that Other Level* (1989), went gold in the U.S., *We Can't Be Stopped,* (1991) went platinum, and the group has had considerable impact on other hugely successful American hip-hop artists Some also credit the group with the creation of the "horrorcore" genre,[10] which would later be expanded upon by artists in Memphis such as Three Six Mafia.

Willie D was arguably the most 'Houstonian', or 'Fifth-Ward' member of the group, having been born and bred in the neighbourhood, like Prince. His first solo record, *Controversy* (1989), featured an image of himself on the cover donning a pair of denim dungarees, typical and instantly recognisable attire that represented the importance of Houstonian identity and locality within his music.

[10] Joseph Bruce (Violent J) of Insane Clown Posse cited the Geto Boys' track "Assassins" (1988) as the first "horrorcore" track (Bruce, 2011), a style which the group continued to expand upon with songs like "Chuckie" (1991) and "Mind of a Lunatic" (1989), the latter of which continued a Geto Boys tradition of seemingly attempting to be as patently offensive as possible.

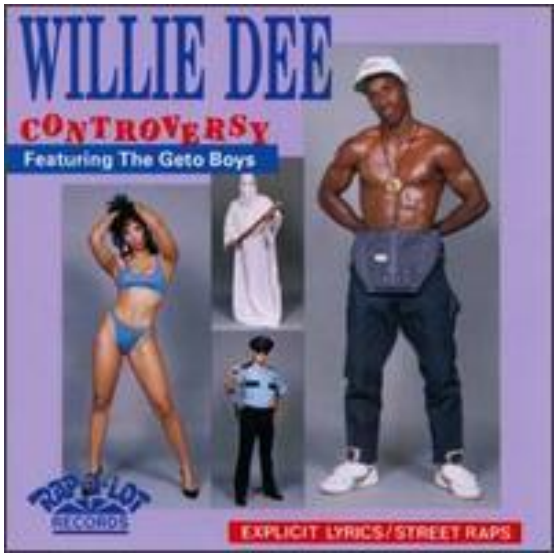

Fig 1: Willie D on the cover of Controversy, released in 1989.

Source: Wikipedia.

He had already carved a reputation as a skilled MC before James Prince recruited him for the Geto Boys. Prince described Willie D as a real "country" boy; his lyrical style was not particularly nuanced or complex, but rather brash, rugged and decidedly honest sounding in nature. His delivery is consistently loud and aggressive and always performed with his deep Houstonian accent. Willie himself has reflected upon this and the balance that his role in the group provided to Brad Jordan's (aka Scarface) cooler and more introspective lyrical style (Willie D, 2017). Willie's role in the group was arguably the one that was most integral to representing the importance of locality in the music of the group; an element that James Prince asserted was key to the label's commercial success. The lyrics of the track "5th Ward" (1989) represent this effectively; Willie dedicates the song to the neighbourhood, going on to describe what one could expect from the area if they visited:

> Crack is sold on the main road, the brothers is bold, the police come around, but they ain't got no control/you can get an ounce, and pops can fade, and you can buy pussy 24 hours a day.

Willie sets the scene for a realistic view of the issues that plague the Fifth Ward, many of which owe their origins to neoliberal governance in the city. Yet he also asserts a sense of pride in his loyalty to his local neighbourhood, dedicating the track to the Fifth Ward and accepting its many problematic social issues. However, Willie still goes on to rap about the fact that there is little to fight for in Fifth Ward besides an individual sense of pride. This dedication to the local is indeed a key part of the Geto Boys' identity and a particular facet of the group's branding that Prince wanted to emphasise throughout the label's existence. What is also evident is the manner in which Fifth Ward is used not only as a way to brand the music with the essential sense of hip-hop authenticity, but also how it is sold to its audience in a similar way to how Houston is sold to the national and global economy. It functions effectively as a microcosm of how Houston functions as a global city; emphasising a commitment to the local and individualism whilst catering to wider global interests.

In counterpoint to Willie D, Scarface's image initially was that of a smooth, menacing, cold and calculating gangster, drug dealer, and efficient dispatcher of potential enemies and threats. Usually seen wearing a gambler's hat and a full black suit, with cane and sunglasses, Scarface presented himself as an achieved and celebrated "player of the game". He effectively represented a different part of Fifth Ward's local identity, which was that of the street-smart hustler

whom Richard West claimed were held in high regard. Scarface was an introspective character, depicting himself as a ruthlessly efficient drug dealer, who cares little for much besides his own financial gain. Yet a frequent theme within his lyrical arsenal is dealing with the threat of death—both the threat to his own life and coming to terms with taking another's. The best examples of this are seen on solo works such as "I Seen A Man Die" (1994), within which Scarface reflects upon the difficulties of surviving on the streets and the anarchy of living in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Houston, where competition for survival is a fact of life. Equally, Scarface takes on this self-reflective tone in the Geto Boys' most successful track "Mind Playing Tricks on Me" (1991), in which he paints a picture of a silent antagonist coming to murder him. The killer "wears a black suit and a cane" just like Scarface himself – it seems most likely that Scarface is talking about himself in abstract. The song is a self-reflection, an acknowledgement of his guilt and an acceptance of the self as a dangerous killer who has done terrible things in order to come out on top in the struggle for survival on Houston's streets. The song's themes of paranoia and anxiety about the self's divided nature are developed further on later Geto Boys records and on Scarface solo releases, with a more reflective tone that places a strong emphasis on Scarface's relationship with mental health issues, the prospect of death and the toll that survival in a difficult environment takes on the self. Linking back to scholarship on neoliberalism and reactance, it can be asserted that neoliberalism in the Fifth Ward may well inflict considerable amounts of psychological trauma. Cain (2018), Schrecker and Bambra (2015) all equally agree that neoliberalism plays a concrete role in issues with both physical and

mental illness, given how it forces individuals to view themselves in relation to struggle and failure. These themes within Scarface's lyrics suggest a considerably emotional toll exerted on subjects of neoliberalism, particularly as the subjects in question have internalised neoliberal ideology and adapted it for the street, where in most cases, the consequences of particularly actions are severe and can often result in death. Scarface's paranoia and struggle to deal with these aspects of life in the Fifth Ward are representative of the great psychological burden placed on subjects of neoliberalism, considering that it places ultimate responsibility on the individual for their fate and encourages competition regardless of whether it impinges on the freedom or wellbeing of others (Mirowski, 2018). The manner in which neoliberalism attempts legitimise the existence of a "natural" hierarchy of winners and losers (Monbiot, 2016; Danilova, 2014) serves to back up Scarface's representation of his actions as necessary means of survival, though still do not stop him entirely from feeling a degree of remorse for those who may have suffered at his hand in the process.

Scarface's brand was a counterpart to Willie D's more upfront and aggressive delivery. He represented the street-smart and savvy attitude that Prince frequently emphasises within his own autobiography as being a key part to his success as a businessman (and, as clarified earlier, is also a key part of the Fifth Ward street hustler identity). Their experience as competitive businessmen began on the streets of Houston, and was applied to corporate America.

Prince constructed the group carefully, and chose particular members according to their human capital (the complex and

individualised make-up of elements which render a person worthy of investment in terms of the market). In the case of Willie D and Scarface, this consisted of a combination of their image, their lyrical content and their delivery style. As Willie D (2017) confirms in a documentary on the Geto Boys, "styles make fights, same thing with hip-hop. Me and Brad (Scarface) was like the perfect contrast to one another". In the case of the Geto Boys' third key member, Bushwick Bill, this investment in human capital is perhaps most clear, displaying a considered approach to the recruitment of personnel based upon their marketability.

Born with dwarfism, Bill was originally a busboy at the Rhinestone Wrangler, where Prince recruited him as a dancer to tour with the Geto Boys. He would come on stage before the group and dance to warm the crowd up; he even made an appearance on the debut album cover despite not having any vocal presence on the record. Prince had already assessed the value of having him open up for the group, yet it was actually Willie D who made the first move in bringing Bill in to join the group as a rapper. As Willie D recalls in a documentary,"if I saw a midget rapping, I'd trip out. Especially if he was talking about kicking some ass, getting some ass." Bill's accession to the Geto Boys came when Willie had a conversation with Bill at the studio about his life and the challenges of living with dwarfism. Willie took Bill's experience and supplemented it with some of his own ideas of a gritty life on the streets, and penned Bill's first solo Geto Boys piece, "Size Ain't Shit" (1989).

Willie has stated that Bill was to function as the group's "comic relief", whilst maintaining those important elements of localism, integrity and gangsta-ism that were crucial for the music to

be taken seriously and to be profitable. The lyrics and the general role that Bill played in the group lived up to this view of his potential. Bushwick Bill was equally enthusiastic about creating this role for himself, as he asserts "you pick your own lane and create your own character, so when I become a rapper, if you hear the name Bushwick Bill and you hear me rapping you'll never forget that you heard me". The track "Size Ain't Shit" consisted of humorous lyricism based on Bill's stature coupled with extreme acts of violence and a general argument that he should not be underestimated because of his size. Lyrics such as "while you getting on ya knees to fuck/a nigga like me still standing up" and "lifting weights will make ya bigger/but lift me you'll be a dead ass nigga" illustrate this blend of humour and reinforcement of Bill's place as a rapper to be taken seriously.

This kind of caricature became increasingly exaggerated as the group progressed. On their third album, *We Can't Be Stopped* (1991), Bill had another track of his own, entitled "Chuckie". A thematic follow up to "Size Ain't Shit" (it opens with the lines, "I told you size wasn't shit/that's why I murdered your nieces") the track sees Bill take on an adaption of the horror film antagonist of the same name. Bill describes himself committing a total of 681 murders, armed with an arsenal of 50 guns, 100 missiles, and 10,000 pencils (to be found in the victims' chest), among many other weapons and methods of grisly murder. The track is a cartoonish take on Bill's original character within the group, further playing up the aspects of humour and shock value.

The album cover of *We Can't Be Stopped* emphasised these elements. It featured a photograph of Bill being carried by Willie D and Scarface down a hospital corridor on a gurney after losing one of

his eyes. The image served to reiterate the group's focus on authenticity and gritty 'realness', but also seems to add to the caricature of Bill as an unstoppable, crazed killer that he frequently plays throughout the group's discography. This speaks to the strange blend of theatricality and authenticity within hip-hop (Quinn, 2004) that the Geto Boys frequently straddled the boundaries of. It is reputed that Bill was trying to persuade his girlfriend to kill him when the incident occurred (Kiersted, 2019), perhaps speaking to the aforementioned issues of psychic and mental costs associated with street-level competitive superiority. In any case, Bill's mental state at the time was clearly fragile – he has told several different versions of the story,[11] but Houston Chronicle writer Tarbox Kiersted claims that he frequently visited Bill in hospital and one element of his story remained stable: "At the apartment where I first met him, he'd been dangling his girlfriend's baby off its second-story balcony. The girlfriend shot him in the eye with a derringer" (Kiersted, 2019). Bill himself claims in one interview that he told his girlfriend he wanted her to kill him because he was "tired" of life (Bill, 1991).

What adds further is the strange manner in which Scarface and Willie D calculatingly wheeled Bill out of his hospital room, removed the dressing around his eye in order for the photo to be taken.

[11] Other versions of the story include Bill trying to claim insurance money for his mother (VICE, 2016) and Bill shooting himself in the eye during an argument with his girlfriend (Cockburn, 2019).

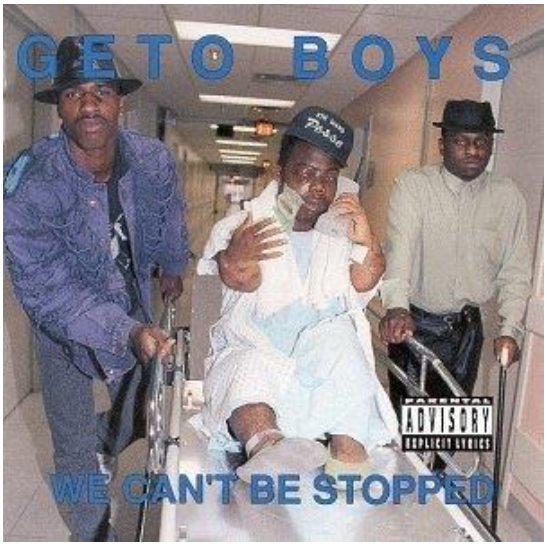

Fig 2: Bushwick Bill on the cover of We Can't Be Stopped (1991), showing eye-injury in full. Source: Wikipedia.

This illustrates a particular level of self-mythologising and mythmaking that contradict yet also support the strive of Rap-A-Lot to create music that is "real" and "authentic"; there is an element of hyper-realism that is rather common in these forms of gangsta rap. What we consider to be difficult topics or shocking incidences of violence tend to be utilised as a qualifier for the music's authenticity. The Geto Boys took these elements to their most extreme with the violence in tracks like Assassins, the aforementioned Chuckie. Yet, when this is challenged by outer sources as potentially harmful to listeners, the Geto Boys were quick to assert that it was all for entertainment purposes (numerous tracks allude to this, such as Scarface's "Hand of the Dead Body" (1995)), in which Scarface compares the music of the Geto Boys to western movies. What stands out primarily about the use of this image however is that it is very obviously influenced by a neoliberal governmentality on behalf of the Geto Boys and the Rap-A-Lot label; their group-mate was very likely suffering from a suicidal crisis, yet the incident is used as a moment

to capitalise on the Geto Boys' macabre image. It was an extremely entrepreneurial move, and it worked; the album sold far more than any other Geto Boys album.

Evidently, branding and an emphasis on the local and on Houston's competitive distinctiveness were key elements that contributed to the Geto Boys' and Rap-A-Lot's success. The group and the label embraced the logic of personal branding and investment in the self as a character that is at the heart of neoliberal ideology. The construction and development of the group members as individual "characters" illustrates how the origins of trap music must be understood in terms of the context of neoliberalism; each Geto Boy plays as a character, an idea that is central to neoliberalism's function, as it places responsibility for success entirely upon the individual and forces them to effectively brand the self to become competitive in the market. This is further emphasised by the lyricism of the group. A common trope in hip-hop and more specifically trap music is the theme of the "game", the "player" and the "hustler". The term "game" can refer to different fields of activity yet usually is reserved for the fields of hip-hop itself, drug dealing, and sex; sometimes, however, it can refer more broadly to life in the ghettos of America's urban areas. Regardless of the reference, Rap-A-Lot's artists invariably frame themselves in the context of the 'game' in terms of their ability to compete and come out as winners: to adapt, overcome and survive based entirely upon their own competitive merits.

The 'Game' and the competitive hustler; Rap-A-Lot artists as hosts of neoliberal governmentality

A good example of this emphasis upon self-reliance and sufficiency comes from Rap-A-Lot's MC Choice, one of the first female hip-hop artists to arrive on the scene, and often cited as the primary influence for modern female hip-hoppers such as Lil' Kim, Nicki Minaj, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion (who also hails from Houston). Her song "I Got My Own" (1990) is a great example of the lyricism of Rap-A-Lot's artists and the emphasis that it places upon competitive ability and self-reliance. MC Choice asserts that she doesn't "need nothing from a man but a god-damn bone… I got my own". Her lyrics assert that because she is self-made and self-sufficient her attention cannot be caught through displays of economic power and success: "flashing your key ring don't mean jack". On other tracks she turns the usual misogynistic hip-hop style of man-in-charge sexual lyricism on its head, objectifying and in some cases humiliating male subjects in her songs. Tracks such as "Minute Man" (1990) are good examples of this, in which Choice remarks on the sexual 'uselessness' of some men and the disappointments that come with this.

These lyrical choices show a particular tendency towards the use of the human body to create branding that is also seen in the kind of character creation that took place in the formation of the Geto Boys. Choice's brand is her body and sexuality; these are what she raps about in order to attain success, as has become fairly commonplace in the music of today's most popular female hip-hop artists. Choice was one of the first to turn this on its head, to

celebrate the sexual prowess of her own self and the power that she holds over men because of it. Scholarship around heavily sexualised female rappers centres on their role as figures who represent both reclamation of their own identities, as well as more neoliberalised takes on these figures as utilising their own human capital. Inman suggests, "Women rapping about how they split, flip and spit is an aspect of hip-hop culture that should never die… Whether a song details experience with sex work or celebrates a risqué rendezvous, every bar matters… the choice to reclaim their identity as both human and sexual… is a powerful one" (2019). Others like Balaji assert that hyper-sexualisation of the self is a means by which these figures can benefit from the commodification of the self (Balaji, 2010).

Ultimately, what ties this branding strategy to aspects of neoliberalism then is the conception of oneself as human capital not just to create a character or a brand, but as a basis for economic self-sufficiency. Choice's songs make apparent her belief in the importance of self-reliance. Those who need to receive economic help from sources outside the self as a unit of capital accumulation are viewed with disdain and disappointment. This is stated blatantly in Willie D's "Welfare Bitches" (1989). Willie D here states the neoliberal approach to self-governance in its purest form: women deliberately have children out of wedlock with absent fathers in order to receive welfare benefits from the government. Moreover, they trade in food stamps - for new stylish clothes. Thus, governments that offer welfare services are inefficient, while receipt of welfare makes citizens lazy and immoral. One particular online commenter on this track called Willie D "The Ayn Rand of Rap"

('thelordofhellaz, 2014), while others comment on its unsurprising unpopularity in areas where public housing is used.[12] The track shows the logic at the heart of neoliberalised urban governance, especially in Houston, a city which views welfare and redistributive policies as not only wasteful but as producers of subjects who are dishonest, lazy and incapable of proper self-management.

However, Willie is not entirely hostile to welfare so much as he is to those who supposedly abuse this form of governmental aid. He asserts that those who abuse this system do so to the disadvantage of others who are in genuine need: "They're the motherfuckers that's makin it hard/for the people who really need the government involved". This is a similar kind of moral distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, an old Victorian trope revived by neoliberals as a standard anti-welfare strategy, used to discredit the benefit system and those who use it as lazy. As John Dixon claims, it plays a central role in the neoliberal attack on citizen rights to a basic social wage, by way of concluding that the poor are work-shy and cannot be trusted with rights to welfare benefits, as they will inevitably abuse them. Further, he asserts that this approach is based around a discourse of human nature, one that is based upon ideology and assumption, and therefore provides ideologically charged approach to anti-welfare policy (Dixon, 2012). Willie D then plays a part here as an archetypal neoliberal. He displays a belief that there may be a need for welfare, yet its receivers should prove themselves worthy of receiving it, and thus, citizens cannot be trusted not to abuse it. This then shows how Willie D has internalised the neoliberal

[12] A commenter by the name of Nile Taylor claimed "U can't play this song loud in the projects" (2018).

doctrines of Houston itself and used them within his music as a signifier of broader Houstonian identity and ideology. As shown in the introduction, neoliberalised job training programs such as the JTPA, (in Houston particularly) sourced money to private firms who barely invested in the program's participants. These participants had to consistently prove themselves worthy of receiving said aid, through entrepreneurially based job training programs that squandered public money.

Willie D then clearly asserts a belief in his own moral superiority over the said "undeserving" poor, despite frequently earning his way through petty crime before joining the Geto Boys. Regardless of whether Willie D believed some people really did deserve access to welfare, the end result remains the same, as proponents of neoliberalism consistently use this argument to ensure that government spending on public aid is reduced. This carries over to the music of other members of the Geto Boys that tackle other subjects, especially street-based entrepreneurialism. In songs that deal with the competitive aspects of street drug hustling, the Geto Boys celebrate and exploit the difficult conditions that existed within the Fifth Ward and other deprived Houston areas in the 1980s and early 1990s. Scarface's lyricism and thematic content is perhaps most representative of how the street hustler internalises aspects of neoliberal governmentality.

For example, "Money and the Power" (1991) sees Scarface paint the picture of himself as ruthless street businessman, who lacks time or patience for inefficient business partners and cares solely about the size of his wallet. Other songs such as "P.D. Roll" (1991) assert similar values:

> I play the game where it's no rules…my own hood is confusing me… I'm steppin' back on my old block/finest bitch in the hood smoking crack rock/even the niggas I was raised with walking round in a daze and shit/got his hands out like I owe him/but I don't owe that nigga/I was growing in the hood until I got bigger… its all about being down with it, shit to be got you gotta go out to get it… the sight of losing didn't thrill me, so I had to go out and steal, G/Just to make a quick one/And I didn't give a fuck who fell short to be a victim/You or your family, bro/Your ass out of line, your ass got P.D. rolled.

This displays a number of tenets that can be attributed to neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality. There is the common hip-hop framing of life as "game", as one with definite winners and losers – the losers being the ones from Scarface's neighbourhood who have not managed to reach the levels of economic success Scarface has through illicit means, and instead expect him to share some of his wealth with them. Furthermore, a focus on the importance of the work ethic (whether this work is legitimate or not) is evident. Those who do not work for their share do not deserve it, just as much as those who are victims of Scarface's methods of capital accumulation do not deserve sympathy. This ultimately reflects the place of neoliberal governmentality in Houston. These lyrics and tracks act as fragments of insight into what constitutes the "street hustler" mentality and how it exists as a direct response to societal ills produced by neoliberal governance. Through its removal of social safety nets and the creation of dire conditions for people in these

areas of Houston, neoliberal governance has enforced a social condition in which subjects are made to feel as though they are responsible for their own struggle. As a result, as what has been observed in the work of Pyysiainen et al (2017), psychological reactance begins to take its place and forge neoliberal governmentalities amongst these subjects. It is for this reason that the music of Rap-A-Lot so consistently frames the position of street hustlers, gangsters and entrepeneurs as morally superior to that of the drug addict and welfare benefactor.

Yet, Scarface frequently returns to the social roots of his competitive and ruthless mind-set. He describes in numerous tracks the difficulties of living in an area that has been stripped of legitimate opportunities to create a decent life for oneself, and how this is the catalyst to further issues that cause people in these areas to turn to lives of crime, drug addiction, joblessness and general despair. In the 1991 Geto Boys track "Ain't With Being Broke", Scarface's verse puts this clearly:

> Let the gunshots ring out/blow my goddamn brains out/if you been there you know what I'm talking about/getting over top's my agenda/the easy way out, is to jump outta the window/but that's a dope fiend move gone left/I'll kill you, but not myself/I tried to do the right things, major/but that didn't put no food on the table… without them dollar signs, its like living and dying at the same time/and you wonder why a motherfucker sells dope? He ain't with being broke.

Similar reflections are made on the solo Scarface track "Born Killer" (1991). The lyrics at the beginning of the track display Scarface's usual braggadocios lines centred on his lack of concern for the victims of his crimes. However as the song progresses Scarface begins to reflect on his state of mind and what may have caused him to become the man he is:

> I'm havin' thoughts of killin' me, but I'm killin' you first/Mr Kindness talks but I don't listen/A victim of society fucked by the system/My whole life's been a see saw/I'm up one day, down and out on tomorrow/… Now I'm livin' where I can 'cause I'm homeless/Can't make important calls 'cause I'm phoneless/I ain't, I'm starvin' duke/I can't go to mommas' house cause momma's starvin' too/Better grab that 12 gauge/'Cause that's the only way a nigga's gonna get paid.

Perhaps if it were not for the funky, high octane instrumental and Scarface's aggressive, confident delivery, the lyrics by themselves could read as a sombre reflection on the difficult social, economic and political realities created by neoliberal governance in Houston. The music then is doubled sided. On the one hand, it demonstrates the internalisation of neoliberal values and celebrates them as key parts of Fifth Ward's reality, yet on the other it comments on the devastation wrought by neoliberalism in poor communities, occasionally featuring elements of critique ("a victim of society fucked by the system" in "Born Killer" (Scarface, 1991); "They got the power to reconstruct, but don't give a fuck, about the ones who are stuck" in "5th Ward" (Willie D, 1989). On "Born Killer" and "Ain't With

Being Broke" (1991) Scarface reveals how the difficult economic climate within Houston's inner city areas left many homeless, without food and shelter, and ultimately turning to a life of crime, particularly as low-paid jobs (which Scarface talks about in "Ain't with Being Broke") often left residents of these areas unable to pay for rent, electricity and food. As Scarface puts it in "Ain't With Being Broke" (1991): "They work you like a dog plus they talk too much shit". In short, certain tracks from the Geto Boys' discography exemplify internalisation of neoliberal values, and in many ways celebrate them. Yet, they also document (albeit with exaggeration and dramatization for market competitiveness) the devastation wrought by neoliberalism in poor communities, occasionally featuring elements of legitimate political critique. Ultimately, it shows how the poor are 'force-fed' neoliberalism as other means of support are withdrawn. One strategy of survival then is to adopt neoliberalism wholly, as opposed to organisation of a political collective.

Evidently then, the flipside to Scarface's adoption of neoliberal governmentality is a simultaneous protest, or at least grievance against, the social deprivation he endured in Houston during his coming of age in the 1980s that was itself a consequence of neoliberalism. Thus the division of people into winners and losers that is prevalent in the rhetoric of the songs is less due to the general moral superiority of certain individuals but rather an effect of their willingness to do what is needed to survive and prosper in a neoliberal environment. As it relates to the psychology of neoliberal reactance (Pyysiainen et al., 2017), some subjects respond to neoliberal environments by essentially swallowing its values whole

and becoming an entire embodiment of neoliberalism; as such, a subject of neoliberal governmentality, or as Foucault calls it, the homo economicus (Foucault, 2008). The music embodies the disenfranchisement and economic struggle of black American youth at the hands of neoliberal governmental policies, whilst adopting the neoliberal principles of entrepreneurialism, personal responsibility for economic wellbeing, the reframing of the self as human capital, and ruthless competition in the marketplace as a key tools in the struggle for survival. The music is simultaneously a symptom of, product of, and critical reflection upon neoliberalism, whilst still retaining its ideological aspects, the artists and label owners often celebrating them as part of their own identity.

Conclusions: Southern hip-hop in flux with collective identity

A focus on these elements produces a somewhat different view of the music in comparison to the arguments about hip-hop and rap music as beacons of collective cultural identity that are often made by cultural studies scholars (Feracho, 2007; Dowdy, 2007). Indeed, certain sounds and aspects of the Geto Boys' lyricism are designed specifically for the purpose of appealing to a particular audience demographic; consistent references to the Fifth Ward and South Park are indicative of this commitment to shared local identity. Yet, the lyricism of the Geto Boys, and Scarface in particular, seems to have a very apparent focus on individualism and exceptionalism, indeed, a separation of the neoliberal self from welfare-using others. His lyrics consistently refer to his ability to play the competitive game of life better than anyone else in the 'hood' can. This celebration of the path

of the individual and the exceptionalism of the self as a winner compared to other members of the 'hood' as losers is indicative of the competitive anthropology of neoliberal governmentality. Even though this might be a response to difficult conditions and lack of legitimate economic opportunity, it does not reflect any kind of collective identity. As I argued earlier, Scarface's and the Geto Boys' musical relation to their local neighbourhood was key to their branding and is indicative of the notion that conceptions of the local are important for the construction of individual and collective identity and authenticity. Local associations allowed Rap-A-Lot to construct a collective identity between the group and their audience based on the sense of shared struggle. However, the particular ways in which the group deal with this struggle within their lyrics are not based on collective effort or solidarity, despite the shared predicament of poverty and disadvantage. Rather, individualised, competitive, and ultimately neoliberalised approaches to addressing the struggle for survival are apparent. Lester Spence argues that this kind of neoliberal turn is evident not just in hip-hop but also in black politics more broadly. He suggests that the arguments of black politicians for residents of disempowered communities to simply just work harder shies away from analysing and addressing the true causes of issues in the ghetto (Spence, 2015), most notably, lack of governmental support and social programs to help those in need, and the increasing power of corporations and business to do as they please with their employees and dictate local policy making. Arguably, Houston is the shining example of this form of political make-up.[13] It is therefore no surprise that a neoliberal

[13] Notable black elites in Houston are groups such as the 'El Dorado Social Club'.

governmentality manifests itself within Rap-A-Lot and its artists, despite their protests against the conditions bred by neoliberalism.

Taking this into account, it is evident that Rap-A-Lot and its respective releases often embody a global Houston. Tracks such as "The World is a Ghetto" (1996) are an ideal example of this. Similarly to how the local is used as a commodity to leverage advantage in national and global markets, so too do the Geto Boys utilise the 5th Ward and other Houston ghettos to generate authenticity, then link this sense of the local to the rest of the world. It is an intelligent move as far as global sales go. Yet there still remains a legitimate element of neoliberal critique within the lyrics too, and the song shows how the members of the Geto Boys have an understanding of the ties between neoliberal policy, globalism, and the general havoc that it wreaks on local, usually black or Latino communities. As Bushwick Bill raps, "Name a section in your city where minorities group/and imma' show you prostitutes, dope and hard times/and a murder rate that never declines" (1996). The lyrics of the track also however function as a legitimisation of neoliberal responses to neoliberal governance to begin with; the sale of human capital in the form of prostitution, or the adoption of street level entrepreneurialism through the sale of drugs.

Their website details their history and goals in Houston; in 1962, the panel of the club stated this as their primary focus, ""We are a dedicated group of men striving to improve the cultural status of our group and to meet the challenges of our community, realizing that there can be no privileges with obligation; a recognition that we cannot as individuals be healthy and cultural unless the community as a whole is healthy and cultural. We are dedicated to a higher standard of conduct" (El Dorado Social Club, 1962). Their focus on a "higher standard of conduct" for Houstonian blacks is perhaps emblematic once again of the neoliberal black elites attempts to "fix" issues of blackness and attributing problems to culture when in reality most of these issues are caused by neoliberal governmental policies.

The label was born from Prince's struggle to regain individual control over his fate; Prince became a responsible (in the most neoliberalised sense) individual, which, according to theories of psychological reactance, can be attributed to the neoliberal governance style of Houston and the ways in which it threatened his personal stability by failing to provide any kind of economic support or opportunity for him. Prince's reactance to neoliberal conditions eventually led him down the path of becoming the typical "homo economicus", or in more hip-hop-centric terms, an "OG", a "player" and a "hustler". His approach to business was ruthlessly efficient and he was particularly skilled in understanding how to take individuals from disadvantaged areas in the Fifth Ward and sell their story, their image and their personas not just to Houston or to the rest of America, but to the rest of the world.[14]

There is clear evidence that neoliberal governmentality was the mode of agency for the figures involved with the origins of Houston's hip-hop scene and the founding of the Rap-A-Lot label. The exploitation of human capital and the use of image and style to brand the music, were central. The representation of the neoliberal Houstonian mind-set within the lyrics was deployed to create a specific brand of hip-hop that appealed to local listeners and on a national and eventually international level. The lyrics also show how neoliberal governmentalities are reproduced within subjects who suffer great hardships as a result of actually existing neoliberal governance. This becomes embedded within the fabric of

[14] "The World is a Ghetto" broke the top 50 in the UK Charts in 1996 (Official Charts), an impressive feat given the hip-hop south at the time was only just coming into its own in the U.S., not to mention that this was the top 50 of all records, not just the R&B or 'Urban' category.

disadvantaged communities, shaping its identity and culture. An individualised and privatised approach to combatting the issues of poverty and struggle is cultivated, as celebrated and partially critiqued in the music of Rap-A-Lot and the Geto Boys.

The music of Rap-A-Lot artists is effective at representing Houstonian identity in so much as it exposes the realities of living in a neoliberal city, but it does not promote alternative modes of governance in spite of such shared struggle. Despite common arguments made around hip-hop as a kind of beacon of collective identity, it is evident in this case that the collective identity in Houston is, paradoxically, the identity of the ruthlessly competitive individual. In this sense, the music of Rap-A-Lot represents Houston and its position as the archetypal neoliberal, global city in an exemplary way. Houston's elites have managed not only to maintain neoliberal governance throughout the years, but have also created such an environment that has rendered the subjects in question as subjects of neoliberal governmentality. Despite the damage that this approach to governance has done to Houston's Fifth Ward and its other ghettos, neoliberalism still persists, not out of any accident, but because it precisely creates the conditions by which a seemingly logical response to neoliberalism is to adopt neoliberalism.

Conclusion.

Neoliberalism has had clearly observable impacts on the formation and governance of the cities of Miami and Houston. For Miami, neoliberalism changed the way space was managed by police (Parenti, 1999; Blumenson & Nilson, 1998), the ways in which police officers co-ordinated themselves (and ultimately became subjects of neoliberal entrepreneurialism themselves), and the way the city became a global entity, particularly in relation to Latin America. In Houston, neoliberalism existed there in spirit arguably well before any other major American city – hence, I have referred to as the "proto-neoliberal city", as Houston has long been home to a particular form of governmentality that renders individuals entirely responsible for all aspects of their lives, from economic status to health and wellbeing. The city has been crafted around a belief in the primacy of individual entrepreneurialism. This has shaped how particular policies are implemented and others are rejected on the basis that they are antithetical to the neoliberal model of growth, despite clear evidence that this has in fact created considerable poverty in particular areas of the city (Vojnovic, 2003; Dong, 2017, West, 1979).

Although neoliberalism is very clearly the primary mode of governance in these two cities, this does not constitute a reduction in the overall size or power of government. In fact, in many ways it constitutes an increase in governmental power. As Mirowski asserts, neoliberals such as Hayek, Buchanan, Posner and Rustow all proposed measures to strengthen the state (2018). It is arguable that in some senses neoliberalism is comparable to fascism in that the state becomes considerably more powerful in the unification of all

towards one specific goal—the extension of market principles into all aspects of social life, and the ultimate dominance of business interests at the level of the city, state or nation. This comes at the expense of the loss of freedom and control over their lives for the average citizen. Neoliberalism does not constitute small government so much as it constitutes a new form of large, strong government, organised around the priorities of business and economic elites rather than oriented towards regular citizens and their wellbeing. Political intervention into the economy and society is not necessarily reduced so much as it becomes focussed upon the needs of businesses rather than on giving citizens security or the means to survive in difficult times. What characterises neoliberalism in practice in Miami and Houston is its tendency to alter the governmental focus from redistributive management of resources to pro-growth, pro-business and pro-globalism policies that drive social inequality and produce extremes of wealth and poverty (Vojnovic, 2003; Yudice, 2016). The focus on local success in the city is related primarily to its success as a global competitor; the governmental prerogative in Miami and Houston is to support international business and sell the city as an investment hub to a global business elite. This is accompanied by a general disregard in both cities for their poorer local residents (Vojnovic, 2003; Yudice, 2016). In turn, ideological emphasis on entrepreneurialism is internalised by many of those residents, including those involved in the creation of the grassroots hip-hop scenes I have analysed in the chapters above.

Theories of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1989) help us understand how neoliberal governance produces individuals as subjects of neoliberal governmentality through an appeal to freedom

and by offering entrepreneurialism as a means of responding to the loss of personal control caused by poverty and economic precariousness (Pyysiainen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017). On the one hand, neoliberal versions of freedom entice subjects through promoting the idea of economic competition as the natural state for human beings to thrive within: competition is the primary route to individual freedom. On the other hand, the reduction of governmental support for disadvantaged citizens in areas such as welfare, healthcare and public housing, coupled with increasingly punitive police measures, creates an environment in which subjects—especially the poor—have little option but to engage with neoliberal principles; other choices would constitute loss of personal control. The neoliberal emphasis on individualism and market competition creates an environment in which subjects are separated into winners and losers, the moral and immoral, the motivated and the lazy (Monbiot, 2016; Dixon, 2012).

This environment is integral to what is referred to as "the game" within Southern hip-hop and is ultimately what leads to the idea of the "trap" as central to it. Whilst poor citizens of Miami and Houston understand and relate to many of their life struggles as issues that have been caused by neoliberal governance, they simultaneously adopt privatised, individualised and competitive approaches to dealing with such issues, rather than other forms of collective action or calls to re-evaluate the government's role in creating such problems. It is important to note that blame or criticism should not be placed on these disadvantaged citizens for adopting neoliberal approaches. This in and of itself would be another symptom of neoliberalism's tendency to blame individuals

for social problems caused by government. Rather, my focus is to highlight how neoliberal subjects are produced and reproduced, and how neoliberal ideology protects governments by shifting responsibility for addressing social problems entirely onto individual subjects through the mantra of 'personal responsibility'.

The focus of the above analysis has been upon how neoliberal governmentality has been a key determinant in the formation of Luke Records and Rap-A-Lot Records and how they are each representative of the particular kinds of neoliberalism that exist within their respective cities. Luke Records reflects neoliberalism in Miami through the way it exploited local conditions to build a market. It achieved control of space, acquisition of significant fan bases and defeat of potential market competitors primarily through the usage of low frequency sound that has become an integral part of Southern hip-hop. Campbell and the members of 2 Live Crew effectively identified how bass sounds could be capitalised on; these sounds represented Miami's Black-Caribbean identity as they have a significant history in that particular part of Miamian culture, whilst serving as effective competitive musical elements with other local groups. This was emphasised by Luther Campbell's business practices – the phenomenon surrounding the release of 'Throw the D' and subsequently the release of 'Throw the P' represented Campbell's ability to utilise neoliberal tactics of outsourcing and market monopolisation to retain a competitive edge within the market. The bass sound also helped the group encourage a very public involvement with the music, increasing the popularity and economic viability of the group. Bass was thus integral both to the representation of collective black Miamian identity as well as the

music's more mass appeal. Additionally, though the usage of bass and these black-Caribbean elements served as reclamation of space in an era where white and more affluent Cuban supremacy reigned in Miami, the group also included elements of Latin style percussion in order to appeal to this market sector as well, falling into similar parameters of trying to brand the music in line with Miami's existence as a tropical, Latino, global city.

The group further appealed to neoliberal notions of American freedom, particularly through their undoubtedly misogynistic, sexually liberated lyrical content and imagery. The group very effectively used sex and the sexualisation of subjects as a musical selling point. This focus on sex as an integral part of the music was so important that it has become a given in the Miami Bass genre.

Campbell himself exerted an explicitly neoliberal form of control of the group, as is evidenced by his eventual exploitation and mistreatment of his peers. Luke Records and the music it produced were specifically designed by Campbell to be economically successful, whilst representing a larger collective black Miamian identity. Indeed, these two aspects, I argue, are inevitably interlinked. In the world of hip-hop, it is difficult to achieve economic success without convincing fans that you have roots in a particular, local community and that your music authentically represents the experience and attitudes of that community.

In a similar way, Rap-A-Lot Records in Houston represented a specifically local style of neoliberalism at its core. What began as a way to escape impoverished conditions created in Fifth Ward by Houston's neoliberal governance style eventually became James Prince's obsession with creating a hip-hop empire. Prince established

numerous principles that were key to creating a successful hip-hop label in the South. Rap-A-Lot had to fill a gap in the market, represent Houstonian identity, and establish and sell the idea of reality and "authenticity" within the music. Thus, he carefully hand-picked the members of the Geto Boys and each formed an individual character within the group. In addition, his input into particular song topics or lyrical choices usually centred around representing the realities of street entrepreneurialism, which both presented a useful example of the existence of neoliberal governmentality on the streets of 5th Ward, as well as playing into the continuation of perceived "authenticity" within the music.

The lyricism of Rap-A-Lot artists always emphasised the importance of self-reliance. From tracks such as Willie D's "Welfare Bitches" to MC Choice's "I Got My Own", self-reliance was presented as the only moral mode of existence. Government hand-outs or relying upon others to provide economic support was looked at as shameful and painted in the neoliberal colours of immorality, despite the fact much of the groups' lyricism centred around illegal means of capital accumulation. The music made it evident that respect in Houston derived from being one's own "business". The ability to "hustle" and provide for oneself is presented in song after song as the key to a moral and successful life. Rap-A-Lot's music and business operations show that this neoliberal "responsibilisation" of subjects in Houston became central to the collective identity of the city's hip-hop community. In celebrating and promoting 'personal responsibility' Prince's groups were able to appeal to collective identity and uphold neoliberal tenets of entrepreneurial individualism simultaneously.

This then raises the question of how neoliberalism is able to persist and reproduce itself despite being quite damaging in many ways to its subjects. It has in the cases of Luke Records and Rap-A-Lot provided pockets of significant individual success, yet this individual success is built upon the back of a representation of collective identity and shared struggle. In many ways, it is indicative of the kind identity politics that black scholars of neoliberalism such as Lester Spence (2013), Cedric Johnson (2020), and Adolph Reed (2016, 2018) are concerned with. They suggest that neoliberalism has taken form in the American political scene in the guise of a new identity politics that has become an alternative to a traditional economic left that focuses on class struggle and universalist principles of downward economic redistribution. Identity politics, as Reed writes, tend to shift the blame for issues that have their roots in economic policy to racial discrimination, leading to the view that racism is the sole or primary cause of problems faced by working-class black Americans. Of course, racism plays a part in these issues, but the deeper cause of many problems faced by black communities is policies that are neoliberal, that reduce support and security for workers and impoverished individuals, and seek to blame them for their own failures. This applies in a similar way to the formation of these labels and their respective musical releases. In many ways, both Campbell and Prince recognise that the issues faced by African Americans in their home cities are the result of poor governance, lack of decent pay and job security, removal of economic support in the fields of welfare and housing, and the subsequent punishment of the poor that accompanies neoliberal governance styles. Yet their response to these issues is to adopting highly individualistic

competitive business strategies and utilise neoliberal tactics to reach personal success, as opposed to promoting collective action and re-organisation of local governments. Often their music seems to celebrate the adoption of these values and display a total disregard for those who fall to be their victims. In the case of Campbell, his attitude towards his group mates in 2 Live Crew eventually led to the dissolution of the group, given the exploitative manner in which he treat them.

Ultimately, this shows how neoliberalism can, and does, present itself in many different forms and discourses. In some ways, it remains clear and unapologetic in its appearance, such as in the music of Rap-A-Lot where the lyricism and utilisation of human capital are centred around self-sufficiency and hostility to reliance on welfare or support from outside sources. In other ways, it manifests itself less obviously in celebrations of collective identity which are used as market leverage, such as in the music of Luke Records' 2 Live Crew. Such celebrations of local identity and authenticity remain ultimately focussed on the success of the individual hip-hop entrepreneur rather than on advancing the material interests of the collective. Scholars of hip-hop might further critically analyse the phenomenon of collective identity in the music, not only as a form of anti-establishment values, but also as a commodity that hip-hop is rarely economically viable without. Somewhere between this celebration and commodification of collective identity on the one hand, and individual, competitive economic success on the other, lays the true spirit of Southern hip-hop, a spirit which encourages artists to remain trapped within the game of neoliberalism. This is a spirit that has come to characterise trap music as it rose to prominence in

the years since Luke Records and Rap-A-Lot put southern hip-hop on the map. Southern hip-hop is one of the key examples of how subjects of neoliberal governmentality are produced and re-produced. Studying it offers a significant insight into the actual processes of the production of subjectivity as it relates to the responsibilisation of neoliberal subjects, and allows us to see how these subjects go on to reproduce neoliberal values through a paradoxical reactance against them.

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