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Bounce: Rap Music and Local Identity in New Orleans, 1980-2005

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**An abstract of
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Abstract

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Through a detailed, chronological examination of rap's emergence and establishment in New Orleans, this dissertation shows how music and a sense of place are engaged in a dynamic relationship of mutual influence. Comparative analysis of sound recordings, interviews, and music journalism shows how rap in New Orleans evolved within the context of contested and shifting ideas of local identity and debates about its influence upon and expression through popular music. Guided by a phenomenological approach to the study of local cultural production, the dissertation periodizes and analyzes the efforts of successive and overlapping waves of rappers, DJs, producers, record label owners, and audiences, who through processes of innovation, collaboration, contestation and appropriation shaped the stylistic and thematic dimensions of the New Orleans rap scene. The practices and preferences that emerged around rap and the local subgenre called 'bounce' are framed within the city's history of popular music production and within its ongoing, wider cultural environment, which includes deeply-rooted traditions like "second line" parades and Mardi Gras Indians, as well as more quotidian activities in nightclubs and at neighborhood block parties. The dissertation argues that rap in New Orleans was shaped by multiple and interconnected factors, including the city's political economy, geography and cultural context as well as its peripheral location with regard to the national music industry.

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Responding to the query, "*Why do you think local rap music often has difficulty making it on the national scene?*" in 1997, Bryan 'Baby' Williams, co-owner of Cash Money Records, opined, "A lot of the (rap) music that comes from down here sounds the same and when people from out of town come to New Orleans and listen to the radio they hear a lot of the same type of shit" (Cortello 1997b, 33). At the same time, he asserted, "We need to let people know that we have a unique sound, a different sound." By this logic, Williams sought to strategically separate the desirable aspect of the local scene—stylistic distinctiveness and a grounding in place-based authenticity—from the very processes of repetition, imitation, and appropriation that fostered it in the first place. Williams' notions regarding the marketing of New Orleans rap to wider audiences seem more significant in light of the fact that, within a few months of this statement, his company had sealed a deal worth \$30 million with Universal to distribute its distinctive, danceable gangsta rap, which had dominated the local market for several years.

His observations illustrate the essentially paradoxical nature of what I call rap's "local-global nexus", the points of intersection (real and imagined) between the everyday culture of a specific place and wider markets or audiences and the major music companies that cater to their trade. The assertion that the rap music from a given city should have a distinct sound, a musical brand that captures its distinctiveness, without everyone producing "the same type of shit," speaks to the elusive nature of creating predictable or profitable intersections between the rap genre and local identity. The following dissertation tracks close to thirty years of such efforts by New Orleans-based artists, who participated in a process of collective creation and imagination of socio-cultural identity in the realms of musical style, lyrical content, and public discourse.

Introduction

Rap music has been a commanding presence on the U.S. cultural scene for thirty years now, remaining recognizable as a genre through certain core approaches to lyrical performance, narrative voice, and instrumentation. Rap has experienced remarkable stylistic and thematic diversification, achieving a market share and a level of geographical dispersal that no one thought possible in the early 1980s. In the genre's formative years, aspiring performers, producers, and entrepreneurs outside of rap's centers of production looked to New York-based pioneers for inspiration and leadership; over time, local rap scenes and distinctive stylistic interpretations emerged as the cumulative result of these initially derivative efforts. The extent to which these local scenes were able to connect to national audiences largely depended upon their geographic distance from the centers of rap music production.

This dissertation presents a case study of such a local rap scene as it emerged in New Orleans, a city with a rich history of popular music and vernacular expressive culture. My goal is to more fully understand the dynamic evolution of rap as a genre and cultural practice in a particular local setting. I offer detailed and periodized analysis of the contributions of many successive waves of rappers, producers, record label owners, club and radio deejays, and audiences, all of whom helped challenge and define prevailing stylistic conventions on the local and regional levels. The present work encompasses a wide-ranging exploration of the rich and complex results of the adaptation of the rap form in New Orleans, a city that was already associated (within the U.S. context) with a unique set of cultural traditions in which music figured centrally. Rap music in New Orleans represents the intersection of two distinct but interrelated phenomena; a mass-mediated, highly commercialized popular music

genre, and a place with historically rooted and distinctive forms of popular music, public spectacles, and everyday culture.

Rap music in New Orleans focuses a range of questions related to the relationship between expressive culture, place, and identity. Part of the rationale for an in-depth investigation of New Orleans's rap scene is that such a project is necessary to fully assess the extent to which conclusions about rap at a national or regional level—its stages of evolution, its relationship to wider cultural phenomena, the nature of its engagement with established music corporations, the ways in which it reflects or effects changes in mentalities and ideologies—can be scaled down and applied to a particular local context. The story of New Orleans rap sheds light on the processes which contribute to musical change, as well as the ways in which local participants understand, define, and exploit a sense of local place identity and its expression through music. The analysis and conclusions will, I hope, be useful to all readers interested specifically in New Orleans's cultural and musical traditions, as well as scholars in several disciplines—ethnomusicology, sociology of music and culture, cultural geography, African American studies—who seek to understand the transformative and dynamic intersections of place, popular music, and identity,

My dissertation responds to the following questions: How did a local rap scene evolve in New Orleans? How can its history be periodized? What individuals, groups, and companies were central to its development? What was the nature of its relationship to the rap music industry and audience at the national level? What (if anything) makes the rap music produced in and around New Orleans different from (or perceived as different from) that produced in other cities? What sort of stylistic, thematic, or organizational influence can be attributed to the wider cultural and socioeconomic context of New Orleans?

Discussion of these questions prepares the ground for the exploration of more abstract concepts: What is the relationship between popular music production and a sense of place? What are the specific ways in which a sense of place is created, reinforced or referenced within the musical, textual, and visual dimensions of rap music? What are the effects of scale (local, regional, national, global) upon the musical, lyrical, and ideological content of rap music? These questions are explored with the intention of understanding the dynamic and contested relationship between a sense of place and popular music.

Popular music in New Orleans has been an alluring subject for scholars and journalists alike over the years, and rap made in the city is no exception. However, the existent literature on New Orleans rap is still woefully underdeveloped, especially in the realm of scholarly publications. Ruth Finnegan observed that "the local foundation of overall cultural patterns . . . is often overlooked, not just at the local level, but also in wider studies of the functioning of our society in general" (1989, 331), and to a significant extent this is true as it relates to New Orleans rap. Works on the wider genre have generally ignored, oversimplified, or otherwise marginalized the New Orleans scene and style, while works on the general cultural or musical environment of the city have either taken rap for granted or framed it as an invasive, alien and pathological feature of the local music landscape (Burns 2006, 8).

Journalism and scholarship on New Orleans rap often operates under a series of interrelated assumptions: 'New Orleans has a distinctive cultural orientation within the United States'; 'Rap music from New Orleans draws on this historically-based distinctiveness'; 'Rap music from New Orleans has its own stylistic and thematic conventions'. My project is the first to give these assertions the time and critical scrutiny that they deserve. In addition to offering detailed,

historically-situated examples and analysis where others have provided only vague generalizations, the most important contribution of my project is its basis in an understanding of the dynamic and contested nature of the relationship between rap music, the place in which it has been produced, and the perceptions and mentalities of the people who live there.

This dissertation is the first work to take on the topic of New Orleans rap from a phenomenological perspective, exploring the historical context of its emergence and the internal politics that shaped its evolution over time. Building on the existing scholarship and journalistic coverage, I hope to contribute a more nuanced, periodized, and complex rendering of the emergence of rap in the Crescent City. To a large extent, I expect that my work will ultimately confirm many of the assertions and assumptions of previous scholarship; however, without such a detailed and comprehensive investigation, our understanding of New Orleans rap and its relationships to both the local cultural-social environment and the wider, national-level music industry will be necessarily anecdotal and incomplete.

Framing Rap, Framing New Orleans

What constitutes an adequate historical and contextual background for understanding the emergence of a local rap music scene? This question becomes more complicated in the case of New Orleans, where a distinctive local cultural sensibility, carried forward through collective celebrations and everyday vernacular entertainment, has strongly influenced the style and content of various genres of commercial music over the last hundred years. The qualities that distinguished New Orleans rap as it evolved over time were not predetermined, but they were also far from random. Both conceptually and

stylistically, they were influenced in important ways by the city's social geography, its racially-inflected political-economic realities, and the collective memory of the city's black residents, which informs and is animated by expressive cultural forms like block parties and 'second line' parades.

The culture and music of black New Orleans forms part of a wider (hemispheric, national, or regional) African American culture, but they are marked by their own particularity—'black culture' does not exist as a monolithic presence across geographic space. As my preliminary discussion of the city's history of expressive culture shows, "many of the things that make New Orleans special and admirable cannot be duplicated by other urban places in the United States" (Lewis 2003, 4). This uniqueness rests on the fact that the city has remained, in spirit, "the most African city in the United States," a wellspring of Afro-diasporic expressive culture within "a historically heterogeneous cultural landscape" in southern Louisiana (Hall 2007, 1049; Spitzer 2003, 58).

If a distinctive 'New Orleans sound' exists over time (and I argue here that it does), what are the forces and phenomena that shaped and maintained it? Stephen Feld observes, "the dialectic between musical structure and extramusical history is central to the study of human musicality in evolutionary, cross-cultural, and symbolic perspective" (Keil and Feld 1994, 94). For this reason, in addition to providing an overview of the historical evolution of vernacular musical practices and styles in New Orleans, I have also laid out some of the most prominent "extramusical" events or phenomena which influenced this process. I have tried to limit my discussion to the most important of the various interlinked events, process, phenomena and ideologies that contributed to the particular cultural and social reality of New Orleans over the years; even so, there are many to consider. The city's existence in itself is a product of its strategic but

troublesome geography, and its residents continue to be challenged by a semitropical, swampy environment. The everyday lives and experience of blacks in New Orleans were influenced by wider ideological, political, economic, and geographic realities that affected them in particular ways. As much or more than any other group, though, blacks also claimed their place in New Orleans through social organization and public cultural expression.

The cultural, social, and geographic particularity of New Orleans impacted the stylistic and organizational dimensions of rap produced there in complex ways. The local identities claimed by rap artists and their audiences are often constructed and imagined in relation to other contemporaneous rap scenes within a mediated and commercialized national-global youth subculture, but they also frequently build upon earlier forms of historically grounded local cultural identity (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 7-8). Likewise, the stylistic qualities of their interpretation of the rap form are also shaped by the local cultural context. This influence was not uniform over time, but instead responded to changes within the opportunity structures of rap at the regional and national levels. Local participants in the rap scene adapted their strategies at specific times in response to their perception of wider developments; their activities in turn helped to guide changes in the rap genre at the local, national and global levels.

Place and music

The ability of people and ideas to move across geographic space has always queered the possibility of any sort of monolithic, isolated, or pure form of place-bound music. With the spread of sound recording and reproduction technology, the pace of musical interchange, exposure and influence between groups of people in disparate places has accelerated exponentially. But the

imposing presence of national or global entertainment culture should not eclipse the fact that the local context—including its ethno-cultural, economic, historical, and even climatic dimensions—still exercises a considerable amount of influence upon the material produced within its orbit.

The way that the politics of place and identity in rap music have evolved over the last twenty years seems to confirm Steven Feld's contention that "music's deep connection to social identities has been distinctively intensified by globalization" (2001, 189). Tricia Rose concluded that "identity and location" were "rap's primary thematic concerns," and some eight years later Murray Forman made the claim that "in the past ten years there has been a strong turn towards place-based value statements that inform individual and collective identity affiliations" (Rose 1994, 10; Forman 2002, 343). While these identities and the music that contributes to their formation are strongly tied to the local context, once established they share a common potential to contribute to "the key capitalist goal of unending marketplace expansion" (Feld 2001, 190).

Music plays an important and active role in the process of forging a sense of place and the forms of identification that it encompasses. The perspectives that inform the scholarly work on music, place, and identity can be roughly divided into two models: 'reflection' and 'construction.' As an example of the former, Jason Berry asserts that "popular music . . . springs from an organic culture: the lyrics, rhythms, and dance patterns reflect a specific consciousness, the values of a given place and time" (Berry et al. 1986, xiii). This view is shared by Sara Cohen, who writes, "music reflects social, economic, political, and material aspects of the particular place in which it is created. Changes in place thus influence changes in musical sounds and styles" (1998, 287).

Other scholars have questioned the assertion of "'organic' relationships between music and the cultural history of [a] locale," and have called attention to the ways in which participants appropriate "music via global flows and networks to construct particular narratives of the local" (Bennett and Peterson, 2004, 7). This process results in music "styles which are the result of an 'interlocking of local tendencies and cyclical transformations within the international music industries" (8). However, the lines between 'reflection' and 'construction' of local music identity begin to blur in a case such as New Orleans, where the "local tendencies" present in rap are specific, historically rooted and surprisingly compatible with or reminiscent of those that distinguished previous genres of popular music.

In their work on music and identification at the level of the individual, Negus and Velazquez argued, "the enduring tension between so-called reflection and construction theory of identity" can find resolution in an understanding of "the 'mutual constitution' of musical and social self [which] might allow for retention of insights from both perspectives" (2002, 133). The analysis in this dissertation is based upon an extension of this concept to the collective level in the specific context of New Orleans. My analysis is guided by the notion that the relationship between rap music and local identity in New Orleans encompasses both "reflected" and "constructed" dimensions, which intertwine and interact dynamically, and are contested by participants on the individual and group level.

It is important to understand that the relationship of popular music to its wider social and cultural context is dynamic and complex. A sense of place in itself is, as Steiner and Wrobel observe, "in a constant state of flux" (1997, 17). More specifically, Andy Bennett described "the 'local'" as "a highly complex but also a highly contested space, subject to the surge of struggling and often

oppositional ideals" (1999, 80). Stuart Hall's similar understanding of "black popular culture" in general as "a contradictory space . . . a site of strategic contestation" applies equally to the specific, local context of New Orleans-based rap music, a phenomenon shaped by the dynamic interaction between artists, audiences, and companies and defined by complexity, multiplicity, and contestation in the realms of musical style, lyrical context and critical discourse (1993, 26).

Basic effects of scale have certainly contributed to the evolution of divergent strategies on the part of national-level artists and companies and their local equivalents; however, while the values and messages of New Orleans rap overlapped substantially with those of audiences, artists and companies at the national level, they also drew upon the distinctive social and cultural dimensions of the local environment, where rap music and a sense of place interacted in a catalytic fashion. Artists, producers, and companies drew upon local social geographies and expressive cultural forms for inspiration and content; in turn, their efforts, when successful, reinforced, elaborated, and updated a sense of local cultural and social distinctiveness.

Rap in New Orleans has, from the early 1980s onwards, involved the negotiation of an emergent, mediated popular music form at the national level and a particular (but nevertheless dynamic) local musical consciousness and identity. This New Orleans musical sensibility has been shaped and perpetuated through annual carnival celebrations and the related proliferation of groups and traditions which focus on the creation of public spectacles of music, dance, and costume. It informs rap music produced in New Orleans in diverse ways, both in response to local audience demand and as a way of marketing local identity in the wider rap industry. Explicit references to the city's carnival and parade traditions

often serve to construct a sense of the local in rap, but the influence of New Orleans's expressive cultural forms and historically-rooted traditions is not limited to the use of specific musical devices or lyrical themes; it also resonates on more general levels of conceptualization and experience. Along with many of its musical qualities, the social dimensions of rap in New Orleans were informed by prior ideas about collective enjoyment, expressive culture, and public space in the local context and structured to an important extent by the particular political-economic realities of the city.

Sources and methods

Primary sources for this dissertation consist of a core group of six oral history interviews, hundreds of sound recordings, and an equally large number of journalistic articles from inside and outside of New Orleans. Secondary sources include a wide range of works on the cultural, historical and social context of New Orleans and selected texts dealing with the history and criticism of rap music.

Between 2005 and 2008, I recorded and transcribed in-depth interviews with a small selection of New Orleanians involved with the music or cultural scene, who represent diverse perspectives in terms of their age, attitudes and relationship to New Orleans-based rap music. They include individuals from generations that predated rap's advent; interview subjects born in the 1940s or 1950s include Ronald Lewis, a resident of the lower ninth ward who has participated in and documented a wide range of activities in black carnival societies and second line clubs, and Isaac Bolden, a producer, songwriter and label owner since the mid-1960s, who relocated to Atlanta after Hurricane Katrina.

Other individuals born in the 1960s and early 1970s represent generational cohorts for whom rap was an early and primary frame of reference within popular music. They include club and party DJ Charles "Captain Charles" Leach, a fixture on the local scene since the mid-1970s; Travis "T-Hustle" Lyons, an aspiring performer, brother of local rap legend Warren Mayes, former inmate of Angola Penitentiary, and founder of a non-profit organization dedicated to reducing youth violence; Dartanian "MC Dart" Stovall, a rapper, producer, and record label owner active in New Orleans in the late 1980s and early 1990s; and Herbert Michael "Ice Mike" Scott, a musician and aspiring rapper who became one of the top local producers in the first half of the 1990s.

While my own interviews constitute a limited sample, they are augmented by a large amount of material gleaned from journalistic sources, including many articles about or interviews with rappers, producers, label owners, and rap listeners in New Orleans. Up until the mid-1990s, this coverage was limited to local publications like the *Times-Picayune* (the city's paper of record, with in-house music critics Scott Aiges and, later, Keith Spera) and the monthly music magazine *OffBeat*, where rap was covered in the "Street" column by Karen Cortello. However, as the No Limit and Cash Money record labels rose to national prominence after 1996, articles proliferated in rap-oriented publications like *The Source*, *XXL*, *Vibe*, and *Murder Dog*. The New Orleans rap scene was covered in trade publications such as *Billboard*, and was further documented by critics like Neil Strauss and Kelefa Sanneh (among others) in national level media outlets like the *New York Times* and *The Village Voice*.

With such a wealth of material to work with, it has been important to use these sources strategically and comparatively. In each chapter, I examine cases selected for their potential to contribute to a more developed understanding of

the intersection of rap music and local identity in New Orleans. I have contextualized my "thick description" of the careers or biographies of participants, the musical and lyrical dimensions of sound recordings, and other influential phenomena with general, overarching historical narrative when necessary. While my broader perspective is informed in important ways by the work of other scholars and critics, I also challenge several aspects of the dominant narrative of New Orleans rap, including specific assertions about musical style and lyrical content as well more general shortcomings related to periodization and contextualization.

I look at the idea of local musical identity from multiple perspectives, tracking the shifting understandings and attempts to represent the local in rap music in New Orleans over several decades. The resulting periodization of the New Orleans scene is based on the complementary or reciprocal interaction of two phenomena; first, the imagination of audience or market on the part of artists, producers, and record label owners from New Orleans; second, the perception of New Orleans held by national/global-level audiences and the companies that hope to sell them music.

Potential contribution of the present work

For the most part, the treatment of New Orleans rap in scholarship and in journalism remains incomplete, anecdotal, and oversimplified. This project offers a more complete chronology and periodization of the subject, especially with regard to its shifting relationship to the dual contexts of the national rap industry and the city's specific cultural and political-economic context. It is also the first to understand this relationship as influenced by both "organic" processes of cultural exposure and reproduction (represented by collective musical experiences in

carnivals, parades, and block parties) and "constructed" through self-conscious and strategic manipulation of discourse by privileged participants.

This dissertation extends work on the particular cultural contributions of New Orleans in the field of popular music. Prior genres of music from the city have been extensively described, documented, and analyzed by scholars, journalists, and participants. Some of the particular works that inform my understanding include *Jazzmen* (Ramsey and Smith, 1939), autobiographies of musicians such as Louis Armstrong (1954), Baby Dodds (1992), and Danny Barker (1998), and Lomax's *Mr. Jelly Roll* (1973), based on interviews with Jelly Roll Morton. The historical context of New Orleans jazz has been illuminated by recent scholarly work by Carney (2006) and Jerah Johnson (2000). Brothers (2006) explores jazz's relationship to New Orleans's rich variety of vernacular music and expressive cultural forms, while Hersch (2007) examines the relationship between jazz and the racially-structured social order of New Orleans, arguing that jazz emerged from and contributed to an environment marked by fluid and contested racial subjectivities.

The New Orleans rhythm and blues scene has also been the subject of detailed investigation by scholars and journalists, including Palmer (1979), Hannusch (1985), Broven (1988), and Berry et al. (1986). Articles by McKnight (1988) and Stewart (2000), as well as interview-based biographies of Earl Palmer (Scherman, 1999), Little Richard (C. White, 1984), and others, have helped fill in the picture of these important years. Other important sources include Mabry's 1990 case study of Ace Records and Ward's 1998 work on the sociopolitical dimensions of postwar black popular music (esp. 253-259).

Oral histories collected by scholars and participants have contributed to my understanding of New Orleans's vernacular cultural traditions and the wider

cultural and socioeconomic dimensions of African American life in the city during the twentieth century. These include the Federal Writers' Project material that informs Saxon, Dreyer and Tallant (1945) and Shane White and Graham White (1998, 2005), as well as more recently collected material. The publications of the Neighborhood Story Project have provided a forum for black New Orleanians to engage in self-documentation; the 2006 book compiled by members of the Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club is one of the most useful for my purposes.

Scholars have made valuable contributions to the understanding of New Orleans's grassroots, vernacular music and cultural traditions. George Lipsitz's work on the cryptic spectacle of the Mardi Gras Indians was complemented by subsequent work by Michael Smith (1994). The city's expressive cultural traditions also formed the subject of Shane White and Graham White's *Stylin'* (138-152). Regis's 1999 essay interrogates the multivalent nature of the city's black parade traditions, which bear divergent meanings for African Americans and white, tourist-business elites. Scholars such as Michael White and others have focused on the remarkable resurgence of brass band music in the city, which has recently been the subject of a book by Mick Burns (2006).

The early New Orleans rap scene and the rise of bounce were chronicled by local critics Scott Aiges, Karen Cortello, and Keith Spera, and in the subsequent decade several helpful historical investigations of the genre have appeared in rap-oriented publications (Green 1999a; 1999b; Wade and Braxton, 2001; Ross, 2003). Scholars and journalists working in longer formats have also explored the specific history of rap in New Orleans. Some authors have focused briefly on the topic in scholarly books of wider scope (Forman 2002, 333-341, Keyes 2002 113-114; Richardson 2007, chapter 5). Atlanta-based journalist Roni Sarig's two chapters on New Orleans in his book on southern rap remain the most

serious attempt to understand the city's rap scene and style as a distinct cultural phenomena, and makes an admirable effort to explore its complex and rich history. To date, the only book to focus exclusively on New Orleans rap is *Triksta*, by the peripatetic British author and would-be music impresario Nik Cohn (Sarig 2007: 76-92, 250-271; Cohn 2005). Highly impressionistic and otherwise problematic, the memoir nevertheless adds to our understanding of the city's rap scene on the eve of Hurricane Katrina.

A recent group of publications deals with the specific cultural and temporal context within which rap music initially emerged in New York (Chang 2005: 1-211; Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Kugelberg 2007). It is my hope that this dissertation will build upon these efforts and form part of a growing body of work dedicated to documenting and understanding rap scenes in diverse places, with attention to the interaction of economic and conceptual developments at various levels of scale.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1. History, Culture, and Music in New Orleans: From Slavery to the Jazz Era

In chapters one and two, I provide a basic overview of influential events, phenomena, individuals, and groups in the cultural and political-economic history of New Orleans, based upon the understanding that they inform the city's contemporary cultural and social realities. New Orleans's strategically advantageous location, its challenging natural environment, and its nodal role in trade for a variety of commodities (including enslaved Africans and their descendants), all shaped the city's economy and spatial geography, and, by extension, the everyday experiences of its inhabitants.

The city's supremely complex demographic history, which included contributions from a variety of Native American, African, and European cultures, fueled a chaotic and dynamic process of creolisation. Numbers, sequence of arrival, and position within intertwined ethnocultural and class hierarchies determined the nature and extent of the influence that these groups exercised. The creolisation process touched every aspect of life in New Orleans, and the synergistic combinations that it produced in the field of music were merely one facet of a larger cultural whole. When the United States took possession of Louisiana in 1803, a protracted struggle began to make New Orleans conform to the cultural and social norms of Anglo-Americans, who faced a formidable challenge in changing the character of the city's deeply rooted Creole culture and society.

Chapter 2. History, Culture, and Music in New Orleans: The 20th Century and Beyond

Chapter two focuses on the political-economic and cultural developments that shaped life in New Orleans over the twentieth century. The perspective and horizons of young black New Orleanians in the rap era exist within the context of the social realities of the preceding decades, many of which—e.g., segregation and later, suburbanization—served to impoverish and isolate the city's black poor and working class. However, expressive cultural forms and collective celebrations have, to some extent, mediated the psychic effects of oppression, and the vibrant and highly musical vernacular culture of New Orleans has thrived during some of the hardest economic times. As the rap era dawned in New Orleans, the number of "social and pleasure" clubs—parading mutual aid societies rooted in the city's black neighborhoods—was expanding, a process linked to the increasing proliferation of brass bands. These phenomena influenced local rap in direct and

indirect ways, contributing specific musical ideas and providing a model of self-determined cultural organization and enjoyment.

Chapter 3. "The City That Is Overlooked": Rap Beginnings (1980-1990)

In its formative period, the New Orleans rap scene was heavily dependent upon biographical, thematic or stylistic connections with rap's New York origins. Efforts at localizing the form involved the cultivation of basic competence and a slow and halting process of experimentation with local musical style and content. Producers and record label owners who had established themselves in earlier genres of black popular music like soul and funk enabled the earliest rap releases in the city, but as the 1980s progressed they were joined (and, eventually, superseded) by an increasing number of younger participants whose careers developed and expanded along with rap generally over the next two decades. The chapter documents and analyzes the emergence of local groups, venues, and record labels during the decade of the 1980s. Their contributions set the stage for the dramatic and relatively sudden rise to dominance in the local context of a highly localized interpretation of the rap form.

Chapter 4. Bounce (1991-1994)

In late 1991, several club DJs in New Orleans began performing in an idiosyncratic style that involved a preference in the lyrical dimension for chanted refrains rather than extended narratives, and the use of several core samples to form the backing music. The style (which became known as "bounce") achieved enormous local and regional popularity, and radically changed the equation for local success. The most promising rappers from the years immediately preceding bounce's emergence faded into the background, eclipsed by the runaway popularity of a new generation of artists catering to an ultra-local focus in lyrics,

musical style, and artistic personae. Established producers and record labels owners had less trouble changing with the times, and generally profited from the expansion of local rap that bounce entailed, which produced sales that often surpassed those of national artists. However, the style was heavily contained within New Orleans and was seen as unlikely to spread beyond the city and its hinterlands. Those who wished to participate in New Orleans's rap scene had to negotiate this division between the local and the national in terms of musical style and lyrical content.

Chapter 5. "Bout It": New Orleans breaking through (1995-2000)

In the mid-1990s, a pronounced shift occurred in the conceptual geography of rap music on the national level. Artists and labels from some southern cities began to rise to the level of mainstream success that had once been the exclusive province of New York or L.A.-based artists. Two record labels associated with New Orleans—No Limit and Cash Money—played key roles in this process after signing lucrative and advantageous deals with national companies based on their impressive sales in regional and "underground" markets. Important differences existed between these two companies, with regard to the music they produced and its conceptual underpinnings and marketing. Still, they shared important features: their early success depended heavily upon rappers and producers drawn from New Orleans's grassroots rap music scene, and their transition from regional to global dominance provided a highly selective infusion of wealth and fame. This exercised a significant impact upon the New Orleans scene, inspiring various and interconnected changes in musical style and in the mentalities or horizons of participants.

Chapter 6. Stagnation, Decline and the Resurgence of the Local (2001-2004)

While the early success of No Limit and Cash Money depended heavily upon local artists and producers, their connections to the New Orleans scene became progressively more tenuous as their national exposure and wealth increased. Access to national companies and audiences was monopolized by these powerful local independents, a situation that suited the interests of the national music industry more than it did those of the local, grassroots rap scene. As it became clear that the exposure and profitability of New Orleans-based companies and artists on the national level had reached its limits, a new generation of independent labels emerged to supply ultra-local rap music to New Orleans audiences. So-called "sissy rappers"—openly gay men—played an important role in the resurgence of locally oriented rap music, and achieved wide popularity with New Orleans audiences. Like the "bounce" artists of the early 1990s, the careers of these rappers were tightly constrained within the local market.

Conclusion

In late summer of 2005, Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding of the city of New Orleans caused massive devastation and displacement. The historically-rooted correlation between low socioeconomic status and residence in low-lying or flood-prone areas, combined with the concentration of black poverty produced by suburbanization and job loss, meant that black New Orleanians suffered a disproportionate share of the destruction and heartbreak that Katrina unleashed. At the time of writing, much of this damage remains to be remedied. Future investigations of rap in the local New Orleans context will determine how the Katrina disaster effected the music's production and conceptualization, as well as the role that rap might play in the reestablishment and transformation of the city's distinctive, musically-inflected identity.

Chapter 1. History, Culture, and Music in New Orleans: From Slavery to the Jazz Era

Introduction

In this and the following chapter, I hope to provide a basic overview of some of the most influential events and developments in New Orleans's history and culture, based upon the understanding that the city's contemporary cultural and social realities are the cumulative result of long and interconnected processes. This will serve as the departure point for a discussion of the particularity of New Orleans's expressive culture generally, which necessarily informs an analysis of the city's rap music.

This chapter is the first of two which will offer a detailed investigation of New Orleans's musical culture and history. Drawing upon scholarship in the fields of history, African American studies, and music, I move chronologically between discussion of musical and extramusical phenomena, exploring the ways in which the city cultivated its own distinct musical and social forms while remaining connected to developments elsewhere. Creolisation is the concept upon which this narrative turns; blacks in New Orleans and Louisiana incorporated a complex mixture of influences to create a meaningful cultural life and identity amidst the chaos of changing political and socioeconomic conditions.

In a general sense, these chapters are concerned with understanding what makes New Orleans *New Orleans*—why is it characterized as distinctive? The events, phenomena, ideologies, groups and individuals discussed in these two chapters have all exercised important and lasting influence over the city's cultural and social realities. The chapter attempts to answer the following questions: what are the major themes in New Orleans's history as they relate to the production of musical genres, styles, scenes, or subcultures? In what ways did the particular

cultural, political, and economic dimensions of various historical periods shape the evolution of forms and styles of expressive culture? It is my hope that these chapters will lay the necessary foundations for an understanding of the connections that exist between rap in New Orleans and other prior or contemporaneous forms of African American expressive culture in the city.

The present chapter begins with an overview of the colonial period in New Orleans, when West Africans endured oppressive social and environmental conditions to help build a remote French colony. New Orleans's blacks gravitated towards autonomy in the realm of expressive culture, converting an open space into a legendary market and performance venue now known as "Congo Square." The French tolerance for such practices, and their less rigid approach to black social, economic, and civic participation, persisted during a period of Spanish rule. When the United States purchased the territory in 1803, a protracted struggle began to make the city conform to American racial and cultural ideologies.

Before the U.S. Civil War, New Orleans became a hub of the slave system, and afterwards it became a magnet for English-speaking blacks from the rural hinterlands, who brought religious, linguistic, and cultural values which were distinct from their "creole," urban, Franco-African counterparts in the city. Both groups resisted the oppressive efforts of whites, using legal means (such as those which resulted in the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, which established 'separate but equal' as the law of the land) or expressing their anger through violent outbursts, like the black militant Robert Charles. However, even as New Orleans seemed to be coming apart at the seams, a dynamic and compelling new form of music-making (eventually labeled 'jazz') arose from the city's vernacular spaces in response to the demands of working-class black audiences and habitués

of the 'sporting life.' All of the abovementioned developments and processes responded to the particular historical and geographical realities of New Orleans; they also played formative roles in shaping the city's distinctive character and cultural life in the twentieth century.

Colonial New Orleans

With regard to music, New Orleans has been and remains one of the most vital and dynamic spaces within the United States. The reasons for this lie in the rich and complex histories of contact between cultures, classes, and societies that unfolded there. In turn, the reasons for the particular evolution of human history and culture in this city have everything to do with its geographic location. The strategic value afforded by New Orleans's position at the intersection of the Mississippi River Delta and the Gulf of Mexico drove the development of Louisiana as a French colony, a process which began in 1718. Amongst the vast tracts of low-lying, swampy Delta lands, French explorers under Bienville's command were pleased to find a naturally-formed high ground "between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, 107 miles from the mouth of the river" which would become the colony's anchor (WPA 1983, 3). Its ability to control and exploit the vast network of rivers leading from the continental interior to the Gulf held out tantalizing possibilities in terms of political and economic power, but its conversion into a productive component of the French empire was a difficult and ultimately unsuccessful process.

The city of New Orleans developed with the essential contributions of enslaved Africans, who in the initial phases of colonization were largely composed of Senegambians with knowledge of rice cultivation (Gomez 1998, 44; Hall 2007, 1054). Slaves introduced the cultivation of rice and indigo in colonial

Louisiana, built the port of New Orleans, and performed a myriad of other essential tasks such as clearing swamp and forest land and fighting hostile Native Americans. The new French colony was heavily dependent upon the labor and skills of enslaved Africans and (to a lesser extent) Native Americans for its survival.

The contemporary African American culture of New Orleans bears a strong imprint from the city's colonial past, when lower Louisiana was the site of "an unusually cohesive and heavily Africanized culture" which Gwendolyn Midlo Hall labels "the most Africanized slave culture in the United States" (1992a, 161). The African influence in New Orleans is the product of a series of changes, including inflows of populations with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and radical shifts in political and cultural dominance: as Hall notes, "the foundation was laid for multiethnicity and diversity from the very beginnings of the colonization in Louisiana. A creole population and culture emerged during the early years of colonization" (2007, 1050).

The pronounced cultural continuity and cohesion of enslaved Africans was facilitated by several central dimensions of the pattern of introduction of slaves in early eighteenth century Louisiana. In her work on the early colonial history of Louisiana, Hall writes, "During the earliest, formative years of New Orleans, Africans arrived in a compact mass from a particular place," and during the French colonial period, "almost all the slaves brought to Louisiana . . . arrived within a twelve-year period following the founding of New Orleans." Not only did the slaves come "directly from Africa" rather than through the Caribbean, but "two-thirds of these Africans came from Senegambia from a limited number of nations living in a relatively homogeneous culture area" (G. Hall 1992b, 66, 68).

These circumstances provided for the development an unusually stable and influential Afro-Creole culture. Hall concludes,

"the fragmentation of language and culture communities associated with the African slave trade and slavery in the Americas was limited among slaves in Louisiana . . . [and] calls into question the common assumption that African slaves could not regroup themselves in language and social communities derived from the sending cultures" (G. Hall 1992a, 159).

Her view is shared by Gomez, who writes, "there is every reason to believe" that slaves from the same ethnic group "were kept together" in many cases, especially those like Louisiana where white colonists were counting on Africans not only to work but also to organize and implement plantation operations (1998, 173 ; Fiehrer 1999, 86). Colonial Louisiana represents a prime example of the ways in which, for Africans, the oppression and violence of slavery could exist simultaneously with a high degree of cultural cohesion, mutual intelligibility, and mutual aid, aspects that were only helped by the numerical strength of enslaved Africans during the French period.

In their attempts to develop a staple-based plantation economy, the French faced numerous challenges, not the least of which was the semitropical environment. The process of clearing and converting this type of land to agricultural purposes was already a difficult one; matters were complicated by the ways in which it impeded surveillance and control of subject populations. The landscape made the elimination of threats posed by Native Americans more difficult than it otherwise might have been; they in turn helped enslaved Africans exploit the possibilities for autonomy and escape held out by the vast swamplands and the system of bayous and waterways running through them.

While French authorities sometimes used armed blacks to fight hostile Native Americans, a shared opposition to white dominance and forced labor

regimes often spurred resistance, cooperation, and solidarity between the two groups. Blacks who had escaped plantation life formed "maroon" colonies, which were often allied with native groups (G. Hall 1992b, 64). Within the growing colonial capital, "the interaction of the Indian and African communities formed one of the most notable characteristics of New Orleans's colonial history." This interaction encompassed multiple dimensions, including economic, cultural, and biological. As Jerah Johnson observes, "there developed an unusually high degree of intermixing that, by the end of the nineteenth century, had resulted in the absorption of the local Indian populations into the New Orleans black community" (1991, 126-127).

For these reasons, among others, "white control was relatively feeble," and it was not long into the colony's history that it was put to the test (G. Hall 1992b, 77). In the 1729 Natchez Rebellion, Native Americans and their black allies killed "over 200 French settlers, more than 10 percent of the European population of Louisiana," which prompted a retreat from the colonizers' previous strategy of development and expansion to one of basic and limited occupation (Berlin 1998, 88). The slave trade between Senegambia and Louisiana was halted, a move which isolated and effectively stabilized the population of Africans who had already been taken to the French colony. Blacks were able to develop and sustain material and cultural adaptations at a level that would have been impossible in a more successful (from the perspective of the white colonizers) plantation enterprise characterized by constant growth and expansion, and were able to develop a distinct Creole culture that encompassed every aspect of daily lives and consciousness (G. Hall 1992a, 159).

The French colonists were undoubtedly disappointed by the failure of Louisiana to thrive, but the enslaved Africans who built and maintained the

colony largely benefited from it. A less onerous labor regime which also involved a large amount of independent, unsupervised work on the part of slaves, gave them more time and liberty to follow their own pursuits. This, combined with "the high degree of tolerance and accommodation the French in the New World accorded sub-cultures generally," led to a situation in which black slaves "came early to be recognized as having the right to use their free time virtually as they saw fit, with little or no supervision" (J. Johnson 1991, 146). As Jerah Johnson observes, "such a conception, much less such a practice, never prevailed anywhere in the rest of the South" (1991, 124). While the restrictions placed on their existence by the French *Code Noir* of 1724 and other mechanisms should not be minimized, it remains the case that, once established in Louisiana, "Africans and their descendants were competent, desperately needed, and far from powerless" (G. Hall 1992a, 155).

Congo Square: African Music in New Orleans

The presence of a strong, visible, and, of course, *audible* African-derived realm of expressive culture is certainly one of "the essential patterns of New Orleans culture [that] took shape early and remained apparent throughout the city's history" (G. Hall 1992b, 58). Given the central role of music in West African cultures, it should come as no surprise that it formed a central avenue through which this Africanization was achieved and maintained. As a result, Jerde writes, the city "served as the site of some of the earliest and most extensive Afro-American music development of any urban community in the nation" (1992, 18). This development was a complex and multilayered process that occurred at various levels of formal organization. It drew upon the world of antebellum African-American folk music, which included secular forms such as work songs,

field hollers, and street criers, as well as sacred music including spirituals and 'ring-shout' religious services in which collective movement and call-and-response fostered a participatory, communal ethos.

The establishment and perpetuation of a localized African American folk musical culture relied upon highly diffused and small-scale practices as well as larger and more organized venues. One of the best known of these was Place Congo, a large open field at the edge of town (located off of what would become Rampart Street) where slaves and free blacks would congregate on Sundays. Known after the American takeover by the name "Congo Square," Place Congo was one of several public markets in the city where slaves were allowed to sell their own produce, socialize, and engage in a variety of cultural practices including music and dance. These markets served as a gathering place for slaves and free blacks from within New Orleans as well as those who had come from more remote areas of the city's rural hinterland (Berlin 1998, 206; J. Johnson 1991, 122).

One of the most striking features of Congo Square—both to modern researchers as well as contemporaneous observers—is the regular presence of "neo-African drumming" and dancing performed by blacks (grouped according to their tribal affiliation and including recently arrived Africans and West Indians alongside the native-born) until the mid-1800s, despite such practices having been "effectively outlawed" in other parts of the United States (Manuel, Bilby and Largey 2006, 11). While Jerah Johnson reminds us that "the famous, dancing, playing, and singing represented by-products of the square's market function," it remains the case that, with regard to music and dance, Congo Square served as an important venue for the perpetuation and transmission of African-derived cultural values and practices (1991, 121). Ben Sandmel provides an inventory:

polyrhythm: the simultaneous use of several different, yet-related rhythms, unified by a dominant rhythm known as the time line; syncopation; improvisation: the spontaneous creation of lyrics and/or instrumental parts; call-and-response: an interactive dialogue between a leader and a group of vocalists and/or instrumentalists; emotional intensity; the use of the human voice as a solo instrument, rather than to simply tell a story with lyrics; and the use of bent, slurred, or deliberately-distorted notes" (2003).

On the level of musical technology, slaves and free people of color maintained familiarity with African-originated instruments like the banjo and a vast range of percussion instruments, such as those sketched and described by Latrobe after a visit to Congo Square in the early nineteenth century. Instruments derived from the European tradition included guitar, harmonica, and fiddle, among others (Sandmel 2003; Southern 1997, 44-46).

Congo Square's status as an early tourist attraction of sorts and its later literary description by George Washington Cable both increased its exposure and added to its mythical status. As the longest-lived and most visible manifestation of the continuation of African-derived cultural practices in the United States, Congo Square has accrued a level of symbolic significance that may be out of proportion to its actual historical role (to the extent that this can be quantified) within the diverse and multilayered evolution of African American vernacular music in New Orleans and the wider contexts of the United States and the "New World" in general. Nevertheless, scholars generally agree on the historical importance of the Sunday gatherings off of Rampart Street and other analogous spaces, where collective, autonomous, and African-oriented practices contributed to the formation of an important cultural institution that is regarded as "probably the major point of origin . . . of modern American dance" (J. Johnson 1991, 120).

The early generations of slaves brought to the colony between 1720 and 1731 benefited not only from their high degree of compatibility with regard to

cultural and linguistic background, but also from the vulnerabilities of the French colonizers in a remote and dangerous frontier. As we have seen, the early Louisiana slaves found various ways to empower themselves. The relative autonomy blacks achieved in Congo Square and other places in French New Orleans aided in the perpetuation of expressive cultural forms and styles with clear West African roots, while the cross-cultural contact that New Orleanians experienced provided black Creoles with exposure to European cultural forms and musical technology and gave fascinated white observers a window into a world of distinct cultural values and practices.

New Orleans under Spanish Rule

Louisiana passed to Spanish governance during the last three decades of the eighteenth century, before briefly returning to the French just prior to its purchase by the United States. This change from French to Spanish administration certainly added to the cultural, demographic and linguistic variety of the colony, but it caused relatively little social or cultural upheaval in New Orleans. Day-to-day existence for the city's enslaved blacks and free creoles of color changed little; as Jerah Johnson notes, the "years of Spanish rule saw the local slaves' market flourish" (1991, 131). While the numbers of newly imported enslaved Africans soared, those of free blacks also grew rapidly, as "Spanish manumission policy proved even more lenient than that of the French," and "Spanish officials encouraged slaves to purchase their freedom" (Berlin 1974, 109). The position of blacks in this period was further strengthened by the fact that "the black militia played an even larger role in Spanish Louisiana than it had under the French" (Berlin 1998, 211).

The thirty-four years of Spanish rule at the end of the eighteenth century also saw sugar rise to become a central pillar of the Louisiana economy. Until around 1800, "indigo, tobacco, and rice were the chief commercial crops of the Louisiana colony," but key technological and political developments in this period—specifically, the introduction of new varieties of sugarcane, new methods of processing, and the fall of Saint Domingue—allowed Louisiana to develop a profitable sugar industry that "[required] for its own expansion the proliferation of the slave labor system" (Fiehrer 1999, 87). As Berlin writes, "the swift ascent of sugar and cotton moved the lower Mississippi Valley from the periphery of the plantation to its center," reenergizing the slave trade at the dawn of the nineteenth century (1998, 325). These developments set the stage for the contemporary reality in New Orleans with regard to the exploitation of black labor and the city's position at the center of a vast Delta hinterland.

The numbers of Louisiana-born blacks who achieved their freedom under the Spanish were augmented by large numbers of free blacks immigrating from the Caribbean, "waves of gens de couleur and ex-slaves" who arrived just before, during and after the assumption of control by the United States in 1803 due to the upheavals surrounding the revolution in Saint-Domingue (later Haiti), which began in the 1790s, as well as Cuban émigrés (M. Berry and Blassingame 1982, 36; J. Berry 1998, 5). Cultural affinity and a more liberal policy than the Anglo-American seaboard states regarding free black immigration made Louisiana a frequent destination for these refugees. By the early 1800s, as Ira Berlin writes, "most of the free people of color in Louisiana were natives of the West Indies." The result was that, "by 1806, the free Negro population Americans had inherited with Louisiana had almost doubled in size" (1974, 115-116). Taken together, black

slaves and free people of color formed a numerical majority over whites in Louisiana between 1760 and 1840 (J. Johnson 1991, 146).

Many of the African slaves brought to Louisiana during the period of Spanish control had direct experience of Africa, despite having passed through the West Indies, and one of the most significant aspects of the Spanish period is the "massive re-Africanization" (G. Hall 1992b, 84) that occurred as a result of the resumption and expansion of the importation of slaves into the colony. While Senegalese Bamana and closely-related cultural groups exercised a majority influence during the formative years of the Louisiana Creole culture, in later years their descendants were joined by slaves drawn from other cultural origins. As Gomez writes, "the substantial number of Fon-Ewe-Yoruba, their early presence and steady replenishment over the years, their notoriety in New Orleans, and their resonance with both Bambara and Congolese perspectives help explain their apparent and eventual cultural preeminence" (1998, 153).

Under French and Spanish political control and cultural influence, the colony had developed a "three-tiered, multiracial social [structure] in which a class of marginal status and frequently mixed origin was inserted between blacks and whites" (Hirsch and Logsdon 1992, 189). In French Louisiana, this took the form of the 'creole,' which Hall states "referred to locally born people of at least partial African descent, slave and free, and was used to distinguish American-born slaves from African-born slaves when they were listed on slave inventories" (G. Hall 1992a, 157). As Spitzer observes, the term (its evolution also discussed at length in Campanella 2006, 205-208) is currently used "in a variety of ways as an ethnic designation in many Caribbean societies where cultural elements of mostly African and Mediterranean origins persist in new arrangements and densities." The term also took on a more general meaning "associated with populations of

mixed ancestry in the slave trade and plantation sphere of West Africa and the New World" (2003, 59).

The Louisiana Purchase and Americanization

During the years of French and Spanish rule, New Orleans had evolved from a remote and sparsely populated colonial outpost to a large and prosperous port. This transformation was replete with economic, political, and environmental challenges. However, the city "never had to deal with anything like the numbers, assertiveness, determination, or sheer foreignness represented by the American invasion" initiated in the early years of the nineteenth century, when the Louisiana Purchase (1803) brought New Orleans into an expanding United States (J. Johnson 1991, 135). The change involved much more than a mere administrative transfer; basic linguistic and religious differences were tied into a wider clash of ideologies regarding social, cultural, spatial, and sexual/biological mixing of "races".

A defining element of the "sheer foreignness" represented by the new American regime was the Anglo-Protestant racial ideology, which existed within a much narrower and less nuanced structure than its analogue in colonial endeavors initiated by the French, Spanish, or Portuguese. When white Americans began their political takeover of New Orleans in the first decades of the nineteenth century, they were made to feel "extremely nervous" by the presence of "large numbers of free people of color, some bearing arms and most consorting intimately with slaves, who themselves appeared to enjoy a freedom of movement and action unprecedented in the rest of the South" (J. Johnson 1991, 140). The treaty ceding Louisiana to the United States had guaranteed the

political and civil rights of free blacks, but American authorities soon took steps to curb the latitude they enjoyed under French and Spanish rule.

With a comparatively high level of education and economic achievement, free blacks in eighteenth-century Louisiana had much higher expectations than their Anglo-American equivalents in terms of political and economic participation. Further, Louisiana was the only state in which blacks were not barred from militia duty (M. Berry and Blassingame 1982, 298). The new American authorities, like their French predecessors, could not entirely eliminate the need for their services in military endeavors such as the War of 1812 (Blassingame 1973, 15). For these reasons, among others, the assimilation of New Orleans's racial order to the prevailing American racial ideology was a slow and torturous process lasting more than a century.

As a result of cultural and political tensions between French-speaking creoles, both black and white, and newly-arriving Americans, the city was divided into three municipalities, creating separate political and civic control structures for "American" and "French" sections, which were separated by the boundary of Canal Street. The so-called American side, known as "uptown," was located southwest of Canal Street and included neighborhoods such as the Garden District, the rough "Irish Channel" near the river (named for the large numbers of Irish immigrants who arrived in the 1830s), and the Audubon Park area, among others. Blacks, whites, and people of mixed race who had a predominantly Franco-American cultural orientation congregated in "downtown," to the Northeast of Canal, which included the French Quarter as well as Faubourg Tremé and the Seventh Ward. (Campanella 2006, 12; Lewis 2003, 45; Spain 1979, 87).

Over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, "New Orleans became the cultural center of the South," during a period in which dominant whites were increasingly obsessed with exerting control over both free and enslaved blacks and violently quashing any public debate about the merits or ethics of chattel slavery. Sectional tensions and the ever-present fear of slave rebellion contributed to a worsening racial situation in the city as the Civil War loomed on the horizon. As the South's main port, New Orleans, "more than any other city of the South, depended upon slavery and the cotton crop for prosperity" (WPA 1983, 28-29). This dependence had grown over time; with the expansion of the United States into new territories after the 1848 Mexican War, the city became the "gateway to the West"—"the commercial center from which the slave system expanded into the Southwest during the nineteenth century" (G. Hall 1992b, 60).

The decades before the Civil War saw the eventual triumph of "the American, i.e., English-speaking, political faction," which, after decades of struggling for control of the city, finally succeed in 1852, when it "broke the faltering grip of the French-speaking Creole faction and took full control of municipal government," putting an end to the system of separate municipalities (J. Johnson 1991, 150). Tensions were ratcheted up another level by the passage of city government "into the hands of the Know-Nothings," a political movement of militantly anti-immigrant and racist white Protestants, who "determined to recast the city in the image of their nativist American ideal" (J. Johnson 1991, 151). The situation was complicated by changes in both black and white populations. English-speaking black migrants from the surrounding Mississippi Delta region, French-speaking refugees fleeing the Haitian Revolution, substantial Irish immigration in the 1830s and Sicilian immigration in the 1870s

all added layers of complexity to the mixture of race, class, religion, linguistic tradition, and national origin in New Orleans.

Social Life and Culture under American Rule

The wider cultural differences that structured the city's politics and ethnic geography after Americanization extended to all levels of society in New Orleans, and resulted in the emergence and persistence of two distinct African-American social groupings (Hirsch and Logsdon 1992, 98; Hair 1976, 71). On one hand, descendents of pre-1803 black inhabitants, along with most of the newer West Indian arrivals, formed a group "commonly called Creoles, or black Creoles, but more accurately called Franco-African . . . , a French-speaking Catholic group who lived mostly in downtown New Orleans, i.e. the area of the city down-river from Canal Street." (J. Johnson 2000, 43). For the most part, blacks from an English-speaking, Protestant background lived across Canal Street, in the less desirable "back-of-town" parts of the uptown, American section.

As Jerah Johnson notes, each of these communities had their own cultural traditions, including distinctive musical practices, and the catalytic nature of their interaction is central to the emergence and development of jazz in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "language, religion and musical tradition" of the downtown Franco-African community "combined French, African, and Caribbean elements," while that of the uptown Anglo-Africans "came mostly from the rural South" (J. Johnson 2000, 243). However, as Johnson cautions, the differences between these groups must be understood in their proper context: "these two communities were defined by cultural traits, not by colour, or by class, or by status . . . Before the Civil War, both groups included

slaves as well as free people, and after the war, both groups included all classes" (247).

In terms of the ways in which racism and white supremacy affected the daily experience of members of either of these groups, it is important to understand that "Race relations in antebellum New Orleans were so complex that one has to be extremely careful in drawing generalizations" (Blassingame 1973, 15). Miscegenation was "pervasive," and both black and white populations were crosscut by fluid and proliferating divisions of status and social classification (Blassingame 1973, 17; G. Hall 2007, 1053; Hollandsworth 1995, 4-5).

Few areas of life in New Orleans were unaffected by the demographic and political changes taking place during this period, and, as Jerah Johnson asserts, "the Louisiana Purchase inaugurated the second and most important phase of Congo Square's history" (1991, 135). It continued to serve as a site for social and economic activity under the American regime, but the attitudes of the new elite were much less tolerant than those of the previous colonial governments; "the Sunday dances at Congo Square . . . served, more than any other single facet of New Orleans life, to focus the Anglo-American concern and indignation" (140). The intensity of these reactions escalated along with tensions related to slavery, abolition and black rebellion in the years preceding the Civil War.

However, Congo Square as a social and economic phenomenon had built up significant momentum, and it continued to be a gathering place "through the 1830s and 1840s" (1991, 148). The decades between Americanization and the Civil War were characterized by important shifts in the cultural orientation of blacks in the city, as generations with direct experience of West Africa were superceded by American-born Creoles, and English and French speaking blacks increasingly mixed together. Jerah Johnson writes that "the 1820s saw the

balance between traditional African dances and developing Afro-American dances tip in favor of the new forms" at Congo Square (135, 140, 148, 146).

Located firmly within the 'downtown' side, Congo Square was distant for most uptown 'American' blacks and therefore enjoyed a predominantly Afro-Creole audience base (J. Johnson, 1991, 139). The connections between Congo Square, dynamics of cultural autonomy and continuity, and the city's French-oriented creoles of color were further cemented with the construction of the Faubourg Tremé "back of Congo Square in the 1830's" (WPA 1983, 34). The newly constructed neighborhood was home to residents of all races, but formed a hub of Afro-Creole culture and progressive social organization: "In the Faubourg Tremé most of the free-colored population not only lived but also established the city's major free-black schools, benevolent associations, social clubs, and literary and musical societies." By the time of the Civil War, the number of free people of color in New Orleans "had grown to nearly 19,000, far and away the largest concentration in the Deep South." (J. Johnson 1991, 139).

New Orleans and the U.S. Civil War

Louisiana seceded from the United States in 1861, and the majority of the state's white residents (and even a few free blacks) enthusiastically embraced the Confederate cause (Hollandsworth 1995, 5). New Orleans's status as a regional economic hub—"the commercial capital of the South . . . [and] the largest *exporting* city in the world" and its strategic position at the head of the Mississippi made the city a key strategic holding of the Confederacy (Pollard 1866, v.1 326). However, rebel naval forces failed to adequately defend the city, and it surrendered peacefully to the federal fleet under Farragut's command in the first year of the war, leaving Union forces in "control of New Orleans, the

South's largest city, as well as the nearby sugar region" (Foner 2005, 60). While the Confederacy lost a central strategic holding, the white elite of the city was permanently cut off from the "region's slave based plantation economy, which [had] enriched white New Orleanians since colonial times" (Campanella 2006, 14).

Federal forces occupied the city until the end of the war, and were commanded by Major General Benjamin Butler, "whose harsh regime earned him the nickname 'The Beast'" (C. Long 2006, 88). While New Orleans's white elite resented "the brutal and indecent despotism of this vulgar tyrant," the experience of blacks was more mixed: one Confederate apologist reported that "the conduct of the negroes in New Orleans became intolerable to their owners" during his administration (Pollard 1866, v.1 370). Although confiscated slaves were often "compelled to work under the bayonets of Yankee guards," they also "were fed, clothed, and quartered by the Yankees, who fraternized with them generally in a shameful way," according to one contemporary white observer (370).

The period immediately following the war in New Orleans was extremely turbulent and violent. Whites used every means at their disposal to resist changes in the racial order. A deadly attack by a white mob upon black and white participants and supporters of a constitutional convention at the Mechanics' Institute in 1866 put the city at the center of the national debate around postwar policy in the South. The riot was the subject of congressional hearings and spurred legislative action in the form of "the Reconstruction Acts and the Fifteenth Amendment [which] soon followed" (WPA 1983, 32). New Orleans again became a city occupied by federal troops; whether this was perceived as an intrusive or necessary intervention depended largely upon one's position in the racial hierarchy.

The presence of federal troops in New Orleans during the decade following the Civil War added to African Americans' ability to protect and extend some of the important achievements of the antebellum era. The free people of color in New Orleans had distinguished themselves from similar communities across the United States by the size and extent of their property and capital, and their establishment in skilled occupations: "New Orleans had more entrepreneurs than any of the other cities surveyed and engaged 62 percent of its free men of color as artisans" (Hirsch and Logsdon 1992, 100). With all of its problems, New Orleans—"at once one of the shabbiest and most alluring of American cities"—remained a beacon for blacks from all over the Mississippi River valley (Hair 1976, [69]). In the years after the Civil War, it retained its status as the South's largest urban center, with a "population near 300,000" and a "complexity of racial and ethnic groupings [that] stood unmatched anywhere in Dixie or the nation" ([69]).

With the political power of the former Confederates temporarily restrained by the Federal occupation, New Orleans settled into a period of relative calm. During the Reconstruction period, black-white interactions resembled a "mosaic . . . without design," formed by "confusing swings of the race relations pendulum" as whites and blacks came to terms with the new political reality with varying degrees of resentment, resistance, resignation, apathy or enthusiasm. Inconsistency was the order of the day as far as race relations were concerned: Blassingame writes, "Negroes and whites sat indiscriminately in city streetcars, [but] blacks were barred from hotels with a white clientele. Saloons serving all customers without regard to race often operated on the same street as soda shops which would not admit any black man" (1973, 173).

Federal troops protected the basic rights and safety of blacks in the city until their withdrawal in 1877. However, the 'redemption' of the city by former Confederates that followed was still limited in its success at reducing blacks to a uniformly abject position. Jerah Johnson notes, "when Reconstruction ended in 1877, segregation was imposed in most parts of [the public sector], but "for nearly thirty years during and immediately following Reconstruction, [a less rigid approach to segregation] continued, indeed with lines of racial demarcation in many ways much less clearly drawn even than before" (2000, 248, 243). The rights that free people of color had enjoyed in previous eras, the diverse mixture of cultural, ethnic, and class backgrounds that continued to prevail in the city, and "the inherent indeterminacy of racial classifications, particularly apparent in New Orleans," worked against the assimilation of the city to the starkly dualistic American racial order (Hersh 2007, 10). The city's black residents often resisted its imposition in sophisticated and strategic ways.

To a significant degree, this resistance was rooted in the historical experience of black New Orleanians, who enjoyed the highest numbers, wealth, and educational attainments of any group of urban blacks in the South at this time (DuBois 2007, 125-126; Hollandsworth 1995, 4). Many of these successful blacks came from the city's established black Creole population, rather than from the ranks of the generally poorer and less educated, English-speaking 'American' blacks. Emancipated slaves flowed into the city from the rural hinterland of the Mississippi Delta, contributing to the city's growing population, and, for the most part, joining the ranks of English-speaking American blacks living in the uptown section (Campanella 2006, 14; J. Johnson 2000, 249). The cultural and social orientation of these rural migrants differed from the cosmopolitan black Creoles, as did their musical sensibility, although both groups were equally diverse in

terms of their inclusion of a wide range of social class and occupational status (J. Johnson 2000, 247).

Even after the Civil War, important cultural and religious differences persisted between the downtown Franco-Africans and the uptown Anglo-Africans, but the two groups "had been growing together, in a slow, gradual process, since well before the Civil War. That coming together was accelerated after the war," as the influx of rural migrants helped establish English as "the prevailing language in New Orleans" (J. Johnson 2000, 249). As the twentieth century approached, the two groups were increasingly united in their opposition to attempts to segregate the population on the basis of skin color.

Black Creoles' traditions of education, civic and military participation, and cultural autonomy put them at the forefront of efforts to resist the imposition of segregation. These Creole activists included Rodolphe L. Desdunes, publisher of the *Crusader*, and Homer Plessy, a light-skinned descendent of free people of color whose arrest formed the basis of a challenge to laws mandating segregation in public transportation. The case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of a 'separate but equal' doctrine that would remain in place until the mid-1950s. The segregation of public facilities represented merely one area of many in which the rights that blacks had enjoyed in New Orleans and other parts of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast were being gradually eroded. The last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth saw the disenfranchisement of blacks and their almost complete exclusion from access to public education, as European Americans of various political and sectional persuasions united in pursuit of 'white supremacy.'

The Emergence of Jazz

While Congo Square developed as a result of the particular circumstances that obtained in the eighteenth century, a new set of demographic and cultural changes characterized the nineteenth century. As we have seen, these changes involved the arrival of English-speakers of various skin colors and social classes and their integration into a culturally and spatially divided city. While white supremacists and Know Nothings fostered divisions during the 1890s, other factors pushed in the direction of cultural interchange and blending. It is this process of mixture that produced the city's best-known cultural innovation: "a new music, designated 'ratty' or, later, 'jazz'" (Hersch 2007, 4).

Jazz emerged from the cultural mix of turn-of-the-century New Orleans, specifically the blending of the more blues-based, rural music of English-speaking blacks who after emancipation had poured into the city from all parts of the lower Mississippi Valley with the more European-influenced music of the black Creoles, who through their widespread access to band instruments and their high level of social organization had nurtured a community of competent musicians (Hersch 159). While members of this latter group were usually able to read notated music, the recent arrivals from Delta plantations brought with them an ear-playing style which prioritized the ability to "rag" a tune—that is, to embellish a familiar melody (from a variety of genres) in a way that "undoubtedly included many of the gestures associated with blues—bending pitch, subtle details of phrasing, and vocalized timbre, whenever appropriate" (Brothers 2006, 159).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, New Orleans was the site of a wide variety of musical practices and styles. On the European side, "orchestral concerts, recitals, musicals, and operatic performances all flourished, as did

military bands" (Sandmel 2003). While educated or middle-class blacks and members of the city's white elite often shared an appreciation for "high culture" in the European mold, the evolving forms of band music—drawing upon both the rural string band tradition as well as military marches—were more widely popular. As Blassingame notes, "there were several Negro brass bands in New Orleans during this period Playing at conventions, in parades, at parties, dances, and funerals, these bands created what is now known as jazz" (1973, 140).

A distinct but closely related phenomenon which preceded the rise of jazz was the emergence of Ragtime as one of the early commercialized genres of popular music. "Ragtime arose when musicians and composers like Scott Joplin used African devices to signify upon a variety of musical styles and forms including vaudeville, minstrelsy, and, most important, the march" (Hersch 2007, 155). As Hersch explains, these "African-based signifying devices—improvisation, bluing, syncopation, and polyphony—" had been preserved in black religious traditions. "Ragtime's most notable feature was its syncopation, its distinctive feeling the result of superimposing syncopated rhythms on top of the march's duple pulse, creating tension between the ground rhythm and offbeats" (154). While the meaning of "ragtime" in the wider contemporary and historical context has been linked to the genre of popular music pioneered by Joplin, the term encompassed more expansive meaning in the late eighteenth hundreds when the music was invented; as Brothers notes, "both Ragtime, the popular genre, and ragtime, the uptown New Orleans performance practice, derived from the plantation tradition of ragging a tune. But the connection to the plantations was much more direct for the New Orleanians" (2006, 157).

The emergence of jazz as a distinct genre was a self-reinforcing process that involving the transformation of playing style and repertoire through the use

of African music devices like improvisation and "rhythmic and tonal alterations" (the latter including "'dirty' blues sounds—bent notes, growls, and smears—and a 'hoarse and crying' tone") (Hersch 2007, 159-160). As the new style took hold, new ways of organizing musical performance evolved, with written scores replaced by a reliance upon "improvisation, called 'head music' or 'ratty' music, with the first cornetist playing the melody straight and the second, the 'hot man,' polyphonically adding embellishments or harmony parts" (160). The change in style both depended upon and encouraged the formation of "new kinds of brass bands . . . —'ratty' or 'barrelhouse' bands—that played entirely by ear" (160).

The blending of rural, Protestant African-American culture and traditions with those of the city's black creoles was a key feature of the "uniquely fertile social climate" that enabled the emergence of jazz. As this synthesis was coming to fruition in the decades between 1890 and 1910, however, segregation was solidifying its hold in New Orleans and across the South. During this period, black New Orleanians lost the right to vote and were slowly deprived of almost all access to public education. As they relegated blacks to second-class citizenship and inferior 'Jim Crow' accommodations and services, whites attempted (with some success) to erase prior divisions of class and status among African Americans.

The overlapping chronologies of the invention of jazz—which depended upon the social and professional intermingling of Anglo-Africans and Franco-Africans in New Orleans—and the implementation of strict racial segregation has led several generations of historians to assert a misguided causal relationship between the two phenomena (J. Johnson 2000, 246). The narrative, which Johnson traces back to the earliest generations of jazz historians and writers, asserts that Creole blacks segregated themselves professionally and socially from

American (English-speaking) blacks until segregation produced a leveling effect, forcing contact and intermixture between the two groups and leading to the development of jazz.

Jerah Johnson ably points out several fundamental problems with this narrative, including the fact that Franco- and Anglo-Africans had already been interacting and mixing extensively for many decades by the time jazz came into being. Additionally, comprehensive segregation was not achieved until after the turn of the century. Johnson shows how a facile assertion that jazz came about because of segregation is not only wrong but completely opposite of the actual historical fact:

"Jazz had its origins . . . in the assimilative tradition of easy interaction of peoples that prevailed in New Orleans, undiminished by the three Jim Crow laws of the 1890s. Jazz is a music of urban civilisation and complexity, not a music of cultural isolation or of racial singularity . . . in short, the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s had no direct influence on the origins of jazz" (2000, 249).

Not only did the musical form bring together several distinct but essentially compatible and complementary cultural traditions, jazz also evolved in diverse contexts and at many different levels of scale. The "street and saloon" culture of the city included bars, brothels, and dancehalls which flourished in Storyville, the city's legally recognized "sporting district" between the years of 1897-1917 (Jerde 1990, 22). While Storyville had its share of high-end establishments, it also featured many smaller and rougher venues, and provided work for musicians of various levels of skill and sophistication, from anonymous blues players to accomplished entertainers like Tony Jackson (Lomax 1973, 50-51). As clarinetist "Big Eye" Louis Nelson recalled of his days playing in Storyville, "all kinds of people come through those joints—longshoremen, roustabouts,

cowboys, Yankees, and every kind of woman in the world. I seen plenty of knife-and-pistol play. Killings was a common affair" (Lomax 1973, 91).

Storyville was a central node in the economy of local music in New Orleans, but it was also only one aspect of a wider local economy of popular music, one which had its respectable side in the form of weddings and formal dances. Parades and performances at large, outdoor venues such as Lincoln Park (a private enterprise where black crowds could enjoy a variety of amusements, ranging from musical performance to hot air balloon launchings) exposed these bands' music to wide segments of the city's population (Barker 1998, 6-23).

In the jazz era, the common practice of hauling wagon-based bands through the city to advertise upcoming performances or other events created a venue for celebratory, rowdy public expression. In these settings, bands not only played out their own sense of professional and stylistic competition, but also mediated and focused the rivalries between different neighborhoods or parts of town, especially when they moved through urban space in the context of public, mobile performances. The fiercely competitive nature of the New Orleans vernacular music scene found one of its most charged and confrontational expressions when two of these wagon-based bands met in the street: "wagons stopped and musicians blew long and loud in a ritual of artistic competition" (Berry et al. 1986, 4). Louis Armstrong's gleeful recollections of these confrontations reveal the volatile nature of the interaction between musician and audience that they entailed and the ways that stylistic inflection in itself could evoke enthusiasm or derisive scorn in this context:

"When they found themselves on a street corner next to another band and another wagon, Joe [Oliver] and Kid Ory would shoot the works. They would give with all that good mad music they had under their belts and the crowd would go wild. When the other band decided it was best to cut the competition and start out for

another corner, Kid Ory played a little tune on his trombone that made the crowd go wild again. But this time they were wild with laughter" (1954, 97-98).

It was in circumstances like these that Buddy Bolden, a working-class uptown black cornetist and bandleader, developed the composition and performance techniques that would earn him the sobriquet 'the first man of jazz.' Distinguished by his "powerful solo technique", "Bolden emerged as perhaps the most important single musician in early jazz history as the music began seeping out of the black community" (Carney 2006, 303-304). More specifically, he was a key figure in the development of the "relatively unique" New Orleans practice of "melding of the blues and ragtime in the small group ensemble" (Hersch 2007, 161)

Born in rural Mississippi in 1877, Bolden's career was nothing if not mercurial—he was a local legend in New Orleans by 1900, but had virtually retired by 1906 "due to an onset of severe headaches" (Carney 2006, 304). His health problems, which eventually led to his admission to a state mental hospital where he later died, were exacerbated if not caused by advanced alcoholism. Many of the concrete details of Bolden's biography remain unclear, and his historical legacy is colored by speculation and myth-making. The exact features of his musical contributions are also unknown, as he never recorded his seminal strain of 'hot,' improvisation-oriented cornet playing. From the recollections of his contemporaries, however, Bolden was obviously a central figure in the New Orleans music world of the time, an artist who embodied the revolutionary creativity and exuberance of jazz by tailoring his compositions to the tastes of New Orleans's black working-class audiences.

Jazz: Diffusion and Development

Bolden's importance is indisputable, but he was far from the only person contributing to the new art form that was taking shape. And, while Bolden's music was oriented to the tastes of rowdy crowds in the streets and dancehalls, this was not the only demographic sector that was involved in the creation of early jazz. The first few decades of the twentieth century saw participation by artists from the city's black Creole community like Sidney Bechet and Jelly Roll Morton, as well as white players such as Nick La Rocca and his Original Dixieland Jass Band, who in 1917 were the first group to record the style; their song "Livery Stable Blues" sold one million copies during the first year of its release by the Victor Talking Machine Company, later RCA Victor (Russell and Smith 1939, 22; Jacques 2001, 71; Lopes 2002, 50).

In ways that resembled New Orleans itself—"with its traditions of music, racism, and racial mixing"—jazz was "never singular but always multiple," representing a fruitful intersection of the cosmopolitan and the rural, the sacred and the secular, the West African and Western European (Hersch 2007, 11-12, 8). The emerging musical sensibility in New Orleans relied upon the relatively fluid and complex nature of the city's social culture in terms of race, space, and class (Hersch 2007, 12; J. Johnson 2000, 249). In the era of jazz's emergence, when "anybody could go any place they wanted to" in New Orleans, there were many opportunities for the music to spread beyond the limits of the uptown black milieu in which it had taken shape. The music was adopted by different groups in order of their proximity to the uptown blacks on the social hierarchy; black Creoles and whites from marginal groups (principally Italians) contributed greatly to the early generations of musicians who developed the style in New Orleans.

While La Rocca's group was the first to record, "it wasn't until 1923 . . . that record buyers were able to hear the master creators of the sound that became the dominant style of jazz." Recordings by Joseph 'King' Oliver's Creole Jazz Band mark a moment when "the prehistory of jazz ends and its real history begins." The "liveliness and excitement" of Oliver's recordings was rooted in their identity as "an exemplar of the ensemble-style playing that was a hallmark of the New Orleans style" (Jacques 2001, 72). While the individual soloist would become the norm in later decades, in its New Orleans period jazz was dominated by "collective improvisation" and a "characteristic . . . polyphony, which in its more complex manifestations became a dissonant counterpoint that antedated Schoenberg" (Russell and Smith 1939, 10). This style reflected more than a simple lack of discipline or unbridled enthusiasm; "the cooperative or group nature of New Orleans jazz" articulated a philosophy of collective creation and spontaneity (Gara in Dodds 1992, xvi). While record sales and concert tours spoke to the music's widespread popularity, jazz was also seen as a potent cultural threat in these early years. A 1918 editorial in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* labeled it "noise" from "the basement hall of rhythm" and an "atrociousness in polite society," warning that "its musical value is nil, and its possibilities of harm are great" ("Jass and Jassism" 1918).

New Orleans's location at the end of a vast river network helped jazz spread to other parts of the country. Steamboats carried musicians and musical style to river towns like St. Louis, Kansas City, and Chicago. New York and Los Angeles, already central in the emerging national popular music industry, were a natural destination for these traveling groups (Dodds 1992, 25-29). In the first decades of the twentieth century, New Orleans-based groups including Freddie Keppard's Original Creole Orchestra and King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band toured

the country and helped to popularize the new style. The imposition of increasingly strict and demeaning racial segregation in New Orleans and the wider South drove many musicians to leave the city once they had achieved some level of success, bound for northern or western cities where the money was better and the racial order less rigidly enforced (Russell and Smith 1939, 20).

In terms of understanding what features of jazz's history contribute productively to a study of New Orleans's rap music, it is helpful to focus on the ways in which the music's emergence and public reception occurred along and across lines of race, caste, and class. While the music was eventually embraced by black Creoles, marginal whites such as Italians, and finally white Americans in general, it retained a strong association with the black migrants from the plantations, who "provided a key link between the blues music of the rural Mississippi Delta and the more ragtime-influenced syncopation of the city" (Carney 2006, 303). While many of the black Creole musicians in New Orleans learned to read music notated in the European fashion, few of these plantation refugees had done so, out of a combination of denied opportunity and their own allegiance to a musical practice that did not include the need for written notes.

The initial response of many Creole musicians to the increasingly popular jazz style played by people like Bolden reflected the biases against the culture of these rural, unsophisticated blacks: as bass player Paul Dominguez recalled, "my daddy, he was recognized king bass player in this town, but he wouldn't play *ratty*. He wouldn't play unless you put his part up in front of him" (Lomax 1973, 84). Tensions around musical style and practice tied in to a more generalized prejudice against the poorer, English-speaking blacks, with prominent racial overtones: "When . . . the Creoles heard rough uptown musicians, they heard lack of skill . . . [and] an inability to control passion and aggression, which also

manifested through promiscuity and problems with the law" (Brothers 2006, 182). The particular social and cultural circumstances under which jazz emerged in New Orleans involved a volatile cultural politics which often played out over the uptown/downtown division of the city.

Despite the professional and cultural animus that sometimes characterized the relations between uptown black and downtown Creole musicians, however, the two groups experienced frequent mixture and interaction of various kinds, musical and otherwise. The city's most famous jazz player, cornetist Louis Armstrong, was the product of a mixed Creole-American marriage (J. Johnson 2000, 249). Born in the rough "back of town" area of uptown New Orleans, Armstrong grew up surrounded by a variety of vernacular musical influences, from rag-and-bone men who advertised their services by playing on tin novelty horns, to the many established brass bands—among them the Onward, the Excelsior, and Frankie Dusen's Eagle Band—that performed around the city. Armstrong soon began his career as a professional musician by playing the blues for prostitutes, gamblers, and other habitués of the dives and 'honky tonks' (illegal gambling establishments) that incubated the city's lowdown culture (Brothers 2006, 112). The ideas and techniques learned during these experiences served Armstrong well as he graduated to playing aboard touring riverboats which plied the waters of the Mississippi. His mentor, fellow uptown black Joe Oliver, finally convinced him to relocate to Chicago, setting the stage for Armstrong's rise to the status of a nationally-beloved musical celebrity.

Recording technology and the growth of the commercial music industry facilitated the adoption and transformation of the genre by musicians from other places, and this fact in combination with the steady exodus of African-American musicians from New Orleans contributed to the increasing marginalization of the

city as jazz moved into a more commercialized form in the late 1920s and '30s. While New Orleans's prominence in the jazz world had plummeted by the '30s, the cultural resources that inspired and informed many of the musical ideas and performance practices of jazz—street parades, carnival societies, brass bands, 'saloon culture' and the 'sporting life,' street vendors' cries and music, blues and other plantation-based musical traditions brought to the city by rural migrants, and a tradition of musical instruction amongst the Creoles—persisted, and served as a self-renewing resource for future generations of audiences and music makers.

Conclusion

As a European colony, New Orleans was always liminal and problematic. The city's geographic position connecting the vast North American interior to the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean held out tantalizing possibilities of dominance of trade and territory, but its remoteness, semi-tropical climate, and the related difficulty of social control presented daunting challenges. Slavery and colonization had devastating results for Africans and Native Americans, but members of these groups also exploited the weaknesses of colonial powers and the fluidity of boundaries that was possible under French and Spanish rule, by rebelling and escaping or by attempting to secure their freedom legally through military service or self-purchase.

Though structured by the prevailing power relations, contact and exchange within the wider Caribbean sphere informed a process of "cultural creolization," which Spitzer describes as "the development of new traditions, aesthetics, and group identities out of combinations of formerly separate peoples and cultures—usually where at least one has been deterritorialized by emigration,

enslavement, or exile" (Spitzer 2003, 58). This dynamic process of creolisation and cultural cross-influence between and among different groups of blacks as well as across ethno-cultural, religious, and class lines was already underway by the time the city became part of the United States. The influx of white Americans and English-speaking Protestant blacks to New Orleans further complicated the equation, even as white supremacists and nativists worked to make the city's heterogeneous and polyglot culture conform to a crudely dichotomous Anglo-American understanding of racial identity.

The creolized society of New Orleans and southern Louisiana operated according to a particular logic of privilege, skin color and racial classification that had been built up over time, reinforcing and replicating itself in ways that ultimately extended and complicated its replacement by an alternate ideology. Free blacks embodied a challenge to the logic of slavery before the Civil War; in the Reconstruction era, their descendants often led initiatives for civil rights, drawing upon their traditions of mutual aid, education, and cultural autonomy. Blacks worked to develop economic self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship. Musical expression existed in a dynamic and mutually influential relationship to black efforts in the political and economic realms, communicating autonomy, inviting participation, claiming public space and ultimately challenging the dominant ideology of white supremacy.

Nevertheless, the political transfer of Louisiana to the United States introduced profound and disruptive changes to the society, culture and urban geography of New Orleans. With the Louisiana Purchase, New Orleans began the transition from a far-flung outpost of the French and Spanish empires to the United States' most important Southern port and the critical nexus point enabling the spread of African slavery westward into the newly acquired

territories. In the nineteenth century, New Orleans embodied a paradoxical mixture. Its political and cultural heritage, its economic and geographical identity as a port city, and the presence of large numbers of Irish and Italian immigrants, all served to differentiate the city from the rest of the U.S. South. However, as a central hub of the slave trade tied in to the sugar and cotton industries and, later, the westward expansion of slavery, the city's social and economic life was structured by the 'peculiar institution' and the system of racial classification upon which it rested. The end of slavery saw the rise of a new era of white resistance, in which legal means and extralegal terrorism were employed to enforce segregation and the subordinate status of blacks.

Cultural practices—syncretic, creolized forms based on the dynamic reorganization (according to stylistic sensibilities rooted in West Africa and the Caribbean) of ideas and technologies present in the local environment were central to African Americans' creation of independent psychic and social spaces within the New Orleans context. Over the course of the nineteenth century, vernacular forms of black expressive culture coexisted with and informed more explicitly commercial forms. While brass bands and other types of performers made a decent living locally in the late 1800s, it was not until the emergence of jazz as a commercially viable genre of popular music that New Orleans's expressive culture was fully connected with the mass entertainment industry on the national (and, to some extent, global) level.

Jazz embodied all the complexity and contradictions of New Orleans during this period. Home to both expressions of refined sophistication and gut-bucket rural blues, the city enabled the fusion of several distinct strains of black musical experience into what was identified early on as one of the most important American contributions to the world of music. But, while jazz defied the ideology

of black inferiority and crossed racial and class boundaries, its commodification relied upon an erasure of the black origins of the music, as it passed from a rowdy, subcultural milieu to a wider, more middle-class, and whiter national audience. Still, the particular conditions that allowed jazz to emerge from New Orleans—the mixture of urban and rural, West African, French, Anglo-American, and West Indian, the celebration of carnival and the related importance of public and participatory musical events rooted in a lively street and saloon culture and its "ratty" preferences—remained vibrant, and contributed to important developments in the city's musical culture and history in the twentieth century. In the next chapter, we will see how these cultural traditions and the sense of community that they fostered helped New Orleans's black residents managed the turbulence of the twentieth century and contributed further to our national musical culture.

Chapter 2. History, Culture, and Music in New Orleans: The 20th Century and Beyond

"It is the tension between the cultural fracture produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip hop"—Tricia Rose (1994, 21).

Introduction

This chapter continues the work of the previous one in that it grapples with the relationship between popular music production and a sense of place. I attempt to understand the interplay of forces that shaped New Orleans social, economic, and cultural life over the twentieth century by moving between important musical and "extramusical" features of the city's history. The chapter begins with an overview of New Orleans's African American carnival traditions, in which the European holiday was infused with expressions of resistance and autonomy and related African-derived musical values, features which would influence the wider realm of musical production in the city. The earliest black carnival societies came into existence during a period in which the forces of racial segregation tightened their control over the daily life of New Orleanians, a development that contributed to the demise of the city's standing within the increasingly commercialized and nationally-diffused world of jazz. In a period in which they were largely ignored by the mainstream music industry, New Orleans-based African American performers, arrangers and producers—and the audiences that supported their efforts—helped lay the groundwork for another highly successful popular music genre, rhythm and blues (R&B). New Orleans made central contributions to the genre's development and popularization, but by the 1960s it found itself again a nearly forgotten outpost.

As legal segregation died a slow death in the 1950s and '60s, black New Orleanians faced numerous other challenges. The city's economic fortunes in the postwar years were generally bleak, despite a period of war-related prosperity in the 1940s and a brief but intense oil boom in the '80s. Whites left the city in droves in the 1960s and '70s, resettling in suburban parishes; their departure further weakened the city's tax base and by extension its struggling public school system. The number of skilled jobs also declined in the urban core. As the 20th century came to a close, New Orleans saw the growth of concentrated black poverty, especially in the city's numerous public housing complexes. Many of these 'projects' suffered from a combination of remote location, massive scale, crime and neglect. Along with decreased educational and economic opportunities, these conditions helped usher in an era of spiraling murder rates in the city, which, towards the end of the century, gained notoriety as the nation's "murder capital" (C. Rose 1995; Farber 1999; Floyd 2003; Sarig 2007, 76). New Orleans's rap scene emerged from a context in which these challenges increasingly strained the fabric of family and community life. When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, the city's preexisting social and economic problems enabled devastating consequences, as New Orleans's poorest residents bore the brunt of the storm's effects.

New Orleans's Black Carnival Culture

As in other places in the circum-Caribbean like Cuba, Brazil or Trinidad, the West African-derived enthusiasm for syncretic appropriation found a receptive medium in the form of the pre-Lenten carnival, and the city's carnival culture represents a central axis for the development of distinct musical and expressive cultural forms. Despite a variety of efforts by white elites to maintain

control over the celebration, its appropriation by blacks was inevitable, and once entrenched formed a part of the generally pervasive influence of West African-based cultural practices and attitudes in the city that was impossible to ignore. Not only did blacks take advantage of the 'world upside-down' spirit of carnival to engage in symbolic acts of resistance and rebellion against the dominant order, they also adapted the celebration to their own pleasurable ends, using the European holiday as a starting point for creative expression and the claiming of public space. Music—public, loud, and enthusiastically supported by a lively, participating audience—was a crucial component of both of these impulses.

Black carnival culture spanned a continuum in terms of its levels of organization. The Zulus, formed in 1910, are the oldest formal black carnival organization, one of many 'social and pleasure' clubs rooted in the black communities of the city. Originally drawn from "the humblest strata, porters, laborers, and a few who live by their wits," the Zulus appropriated imagery of African primitivism (minstrel-style makeup, grass skirts, coconuts, characters such as 'Witch Doctor,' 'King') to mock white notions of black 'savagery' and inferiority and also to provide ironic commentary on the spectacles presented by elite white "krewes" like Comus or Rex (Saxon, Dreyer and Tallant 1945, 5; S. White and G. White 1998, 144). Their parade also features parodic representations of white authority figures such as policemen, for the amusement of the black masses whose oppression they perpetuated, although these subversive messages were likely lost to most of the white onlookers. White civic leaders came to see the Zulu parade as an important part of the tourist-friendly spectacle of Mardi Gras; their support for its continuation often caused consternation among middle-class and educated blacks who considered the parades to be an exercise in self-degradation.

Second Line Parades

Before he left the city at the age of twenty-two, Louis Armstrong's teenage and young adult years coincided with a period in which "New Orleans had become, for black people, a city of parades" (S. White and G. White 1998, 139). His description of a large parade in the late 'teens or early 1920s mentions twenty-two participating groups, whose names in themselves serve to underscore the ways in which these mutual aid organizations and the events they staged represented a vital arena for the dynamic expression of ideas of black pleasure ("The Money Wasters, The Jolly Boys"), economic or social organization and empowerment ("The Cooperatives, The Economys"), masculine bravado ("The Bulls"), or playful fantasy ("The Turtles," "The Hobgoblins") (Armstrong 1954, 225; In her 1999 review of contemporary second line club names, Regis also finds "a distinctive intervention in the discourse of blackness," 484).

These groups invested substantial time, effort, and money into their events. Visual spectacle—"full dress uniforms, . . . beautiful silk ribbons, . . . fine horses, . . . white felt hats, white silk shirts . . . and mohair trousers"—and mobile music provided by a "brass band . . . shouting a hot swing march as everyone jumped for joy" were combined into an "irresistible and absolutely unique experience" (Armstrong 1954, 225). In his memoir, Armstrong emphasizes the energizing and uplifting effects of these events for onlookers: "When all the clubs paraded it took nearly all day to see them pass, but one never got tired watching" (226). Spectators often became participants in the parade, a practice which became known as the 'second line.'

The term was also used as a verb; as Armstrong writes, "I had spent my life in New Orleans, but every time one of those clubs paraded I would second-

line them all day long" (1954, 225). It is to the New Orleans second line that we now turn as a practice and institution that is one of the most loosely structured in a formal sense, but which is extremely important in terms of the ways it informs both specific musical techniques and practices, as well as more general adaptations of the structures of feeling and stylistic values that the events entail (which include an exciting participatory experience as well as one of intense, aesthetically-inflected competition between neighborhood-based groups.)

'Second line' encompasses a range of meanings in New Orleans. In its most general sense as a noun, it refers to a large, inclusive musical parade that features a brass band. Though they have been strongly linked to funerals in the national imagination, these parades are also staged for other reasons, including the anniversary of one of the many African American 'social and pleasure' organizations in the city (Regis 1999, 473). 'Second line' is associated with the spontaneous participation of paraders who are neither paid musicians nor members of the sponsoring organization: "the raggedy guys who follow parades and funerals to hear the music" (Armstrong 1954, 143). These informal participants engage in highly expressive dance, which has engendered the verb 'to second line,' and can also add musical contributions by singing, clapping, or playing on tambourines or improvised percussion instruments. Historically, the phenomenon has borne a strong association with youth—as a writer recalled in 1939, "the funerals and parades always had a 'second line' which consisted of kids who danced along behind," drawing inspiration from the bands, who "had a way of strutting, of swinging their bodies, and of turning corners in spectacular fashion" (Russell and Smith 1939, 27). As Armstrong's reference to "raggedy guys" suggests, it has also been defined by the participation of "street people of a lower socioeconomic class" (Larry Wilson in NTSPC 2006, 45).

In recent decades, so-called 'social and pleasure' clubs like the Scene Boosters, the Lady Buck Jumpers and Joe Black and the Revolution have flourished, and take to the streets regularly during the "season," (roughly May through November), a spectacle which provided many a Sunday afternoon's entertainment for the city's residents. The music of brass bands and the vibrant costumes and choreographed parading of club members both fuels and feeds off of the enthusiastic participation of a rowdy crowd. A second line event, then, involves the dynamic interaction of several distinct groups. The result is a fusion of aesthetic and social power; as Helen Regis observes, "these parades transform urban space, creating an alternative social order that private clubs actualize by 'taking it to the streets' in those very neighborhoods ordinarily dominated by the quotidian order of inner-city poverty and spatial apartheid" (1999, 472).

The exuberant and celebratory tone of these events should not be misunderstood to construe an absence of tension or conflict. In fact, the genesis of the second line (in its meaning as a group of ad-hoc participants) had as much to do with defending musicians from the attacks of partisans of other neighborhoods as it did with collective participation for its own sake. The strong alignment of second line groups with particular parts of town meant that these parades were potentially dangerous events, with volatile neighborhood rivalries underlying their festive music and colorful costumes (Larry Wilson in NTSPC 2006, 46). Jelly Roll Morton's recollections of the parades of his youth include a rowdy second line, not behind the band but "out in front of everybody . . . armed with sticks and bottles and baseball bats and all forms of ammunition ready to fight the foe when they reached the dividing line" (Lomax 1973, 12).

For much of the twentieth century, participating in these efforts required a willingness to scrap; in 1939, one writer claimed that "only the tough kids

joined the second line" (Russell and Smith 1939, 28), while in Larry Wilson's recollections of the 1950s, "second lining was a small, sub-cultural thing. Everybody just couldn't get out there and buck jump unless you was tough" (NTSPC 2006, 46). While significantly calmer in present times, the second line retains martial associations, relating to the possibility of tension between groups or neighborhoods, as well as the physical stamina required by the events; in 2006, one participant recalled "a second line saying, 'Parading for four hours is like going to war'" (Raphael Anthony Peter Parker, Jr. in NTSPC 2006, 96).

These features understandably discouraged participation from the more respectable segments of the black community in New Orleans, and any participation by whites—now a relatively common feature of such parades—was out of the question. While contemporary parades are much less rowdy than at earlier times in the twentieth century, they are still sometimes marked by violence, as they form a community gathering place where enemies can be located and scores settled (Linda Porter in NTSPC 2006, 217; Aiges 1990d). This dimension of second line events has been referenced many times in lyrics by New Orleans-based rappers, in songs including "Second line jump" (1995) by 2 Blakk and Juvenile's 1997 "That's how it be happenin'."

Mardi Gras Indians

At a less formal level than social and pleasure clubs, working-class and poor blacks of New Orleans have initiated a variety of other kinds of carnival societies and practices which further testify to the creative dynamism of diasporic culture as it has historically existed in the city. A prime example of this grassroots activity around carnival is the emergence of the so-called 'Mardi Gras Indians' in the late nineteenth century, probably inspired by the touring 'Wild West' shows

of the period (Lipsitz 1990, 237). The Indian maskers are working-class blacks organized along neighborhood and family lines who parade during carnival season dressed in riotously colorful feathered costumes, with intricately beaded elements, including panels which frequently depict the ruthless vanquishing of whites by Native American warriors (236). While the costumes have evolved over the years, becoming larger and more elaborate, they have consistently represented a stereotyped 'Plains Indian' look seen through the prism of an Afro-diasporic visual sensibility. Like the second line clubs referenced above, their names—"Black Eagles," "Wild Tchoupitoulas," "Golden Star Hunters"—serve well to represent the highly imaginative ends to which these ideas have been taken.

During Carnival and on St. Joseph's Day (a holiday appropriated from the city's Italian immigrants), groups of Indians gather at sites within the city's black neighborhoods, walk the streets and engage in confrontational encounters with one another (Lipsitz 1990, 235). In earlier times, these meetings between Indian 'gangs' were often marked by physical violence, but currently take the form of "a contest centered less on territorial than on aesthetic superiority" (Vennman 1993, 88; Lipsitz 1990, 245-246). The Mardi Gras Indians are the most well-known aspect of a wider and dynamic culture of informal black carnival organizations (often referred to as 'gangs'). These include the 'Skull and Bones' gangs, who walk the streets early in the morning in skeleton costumes and often carry items with occult connotations such as butchers' bones with sinews and scraps still attached. Another infamous group, The Baby Dolls, originally consisted of prostitutes who would engage in a carnivalesque reversal of ideologies of virtue and (sexual) maturity by parading in infant apparel with accoutrements such as giant lollipops (Kinser 1990, 132-136, 242; Jackson 2005, 68; Saxon, Dreyer and Tallant 1945, 8-9, 11; Schindler 1997, 141).

In addition to spectacular visual and performative presentations involving costume and dance, these groups' practices often include important musical dimensions. The Mardi Gras Indians are especially known for their music—"some of the most purely African folk music to be found in North America"—which generally consists of group-based call-and-response accompanied primarily by tambourines and idiophones ("instruments made of any material capable of producing sound") such as glass bottles, cookware, or scrap metal (Palmer 1979, 6; Southern 1997, 10). As Michael Smith observes, the music of the Mardi Gras Indians has exercised a significant influence over New Orleans music for at least the last fifty years; its privileging of chanted call-and-response phrases in distinct melodic patterns, and its emphasis on the rhythmic rather than the melodic dimension, have "affected New Orleans's black music "profoundly and fundamentally" (1994, 66; Palmer 1979, 7). Direct musical appropriation of lyrics, instrumentation, or rhythmic approaches are the most obvious testaments to the Indians' importance, but they also wield a more general and diffused influence as one of the primary local models of spectacular expression, the integration of audience and performer through the privileging of call-and-response-based collective musical practice, and the use of expressive culture as an arena for competition between social groups.

While the "'Indians' are the rhythmic heart and soul of New Orleans," the related genre of brass band-based parade music is also widely understood as central to the New Orleans aesthetic (Palmer 1981). The music featured in second line parades—and "the seductive, propulsive rhythmic device called the 'second line beat'" at its core—has exercised considerable influence over the vernacular music culture of the city (Burns 2006, 2; Broven 1988, xx; McKnight 1988, 115). The parade beat is described by Mick Burns as, "in simple terms, . . . a syncopated

pattern on the bass drum that may be phonetically rendered as "Dah, Dah, Dah, Didit, Da!" (2006, 2).

This parade beat, "a particular rhythmic feeling, a certain syncopation or 'backbeat' that seems to have been infused into the city's collective unconscious," forms a "rhythmic kernel" for music produced in the city, one which "may be traced through New Orleans's parade or 'second line' tradition back to African or West Indian origins" (McKnight 1988, 115). As John Broven has written, "whether it's rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, soul, or modern jazz, the parade beat is the ubiquitous common factor, the foundation" of New Orleans's vernacular music (1988, xx). It is this second line beat that saxophonist Alvin Tyler recalled: "all the older musicians, the musicians I came up with, in the back of their minds they constantly hear the second line beat and it's all from the bass drum. . . this is where the groove is" (quoted in Broven 1988, xxii).

Robert Palmer claimed that "the most basic New Orleans rhythms are provided by the carnival societies that flourish in the black neighborhoods" (1981). After a lifetime of listening, "most of the city's black musicians, and many whites . . . have learned a great deal from these rhythms, but they have also absorbed a great deal without thinking about it very much." The result is "a local rhythmic sensibility that is more reminiscent of the Caribbean or West Africa than of any other part of the United States." The influence of New Orleans's carnival culture upon other areas of cultural production and social organization has been felt along multiple registers and levels of consciousness. On a more abstract level, the traditions and institutions of carnival culture created and sustained by African Americans in New Orleans provide a model of creativity, collective effort, self-determined enjoyment, and the claiming of public space that has general relevance across a broad range of cultural and social activities.

History and Political Economy in the Prewar Era

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, black New Orleanians—especially those with some level of education and property—had resisted, and, to some extent, forestalled the alignment of New Orleans's politics, commerce and society with the ideology of Jim Crow segregation. While black resistance at various levels doubtlessly served as a source of inspiration and encouragement to others, it could not conquer the marshalling forces of white supremacy and segregation in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Whites reversed the hard-won black progress of the Reconstruction era, and by the mid-1920s had succeeded in imposing a starkly dualistic racial apartheid in New Orleans.

The city retained its distinctive and complex mixture of cultures, religions, and skin tones, but in terms of legal rights and social treatment, the first few decades of the twentieth century saw the city move towards fulfilling the segregationist goals that white supremacists had been pushing since the end of the Civil War; "increasingly, in its race relations, New Orleans became very similar to other American cities in the south" (Logsdon and Powell 2003, 59). On the national level, this development coincided with the dawning of a period of aggressive neocolonial expansion, nationalism, and militarism. A constrained physical geography, a culturally diverse population with a large percentage of recently arrived immigrants—New Orleans was "the only southern city with any substantial number of new European immigrants"—and various forms of resistance engaged by blacks all combined to present diverse challenges to the forces of segregation and racism (Lewis 2003, 45-46).

The complexity of New Orleans's population in terms of ethnicity, skin color, and social class evolved over centuries, and was never fully reconciled with the polarizing demands of segregation, which were vigorously contested by

blacks. However, as the Jim Crow regime became progressively more entrenched across the South, life for people of color in New Orleans was increasingly constrained. As Jerah Johnson notes, "Full segregation took hold in New Orleans . . . around the time of World War I. During the two decades between 1900 and 1920 . . . a long series of Jim Crow laws and local ordinances were enacted" (2000, 249). These laws, which

"called for segregation of all hotels, theatres, bars, soda fountains, restaurants, social clubs, whorehouses, churches, streetcars, courts, libraries, parks, playgrounds, drinking fountains, restrooms, hospitals, insane asylums and cemeteries . . . were not systematically enforced until near or during World War I" (249).

Like African American men from all over the United States, many black New Orleanians served in World War I, an experience that both confirmed their patriotism and laid the foundation for direct and indirect challenges to white supremacy. But, as Woodward observes, "the war-bred hopes of the Negro for first-class citizenship were quickly smashed in a reaction of violence that was probably unprecedented" (1957, 100). Across the South, the 1920s and early 1930s were a period in which "Jim Crow laws were elaborated and further expanded," reinforcing blacks' second-class status (102). In response, during the 1920s, black hopes and frustrations found an anchor point in the black nationalist movement of Marcus Garvey, which used militaristic spectacle and discipline to promote an ideology of black cultural pride and economic empowerment. "Louisiana was far and away the most thoroughly Garveyite state, with a total of seventy-four branches," writes Martin, and "nowhere in the Jim Crow South was the influence of the movement more visible than New Orleans" (1976, 16; Harold 2007, 29). Five thousand of Garvey's followers attended his forced departure for exile in the West Indies from the port of New Orleans (Martin 1976, 17).

With regard to racially inflected residential patterns, the early part of the twentieth century also saw the introduction of dramatic changes in New Orleans. Until the 1920s, the city's development had evolved along the lines of natural high ground on the banks of the Mississippi and bayous Metarie and Gentilly. The prior inability of the city to expand into the lower-lying backswamp areas had resulted in a comparatively lower level of residential segregation than most other southern cities (Lewis 2003, 52; Campanella 2006, 9, 308). Despite important differences in the quality of the housing available to them, blacks and whites lived in relative proximity to one another. As Jelly Roll Morton recalled, "there wasn't no certain neighborhood for nobody to live in in New Orleans, only for the St. Charles Avenue millionaires' district, and that's why anyone could go anywhere they wanted to" (quoted in Lomax 1973, 52).

This situation changed in the 1920s with the introduction of the Wood pump, which allowed for brackish areas to be drained and developed, extending the possibilities for settlement well beyond the natural levees for the first time in the city's history (Lewis 2003, 66). The amount of available residential land increased dramatically, although the newly-drained areas were less stable and more prone to flooding than the natural high grounds. Blacks were pushed into the lowest-lying areas, including most prominently the mid-city neighborhood, which prior to draining had been known as 'back of town,' while whites populated newly created suburbs like Gentilly and Lakeview (Campanella 2006: 18). Before this development, black life in New Orleans was already marked by neglect and poverty—now, these problems were made more pronounced by the increasing concentration of African Americans in the geographically undesirable low ground of the former swamps. Ultimately, "the Wood pump . . . was a powerful agent to accelerate racial segregation in New Orleans" (Lewis 2003, 67)

The Great Depression and then World War II delayed the full exploitation of the malign possibilities held out by the Wood pump, and "brought new development to a virtual halt" (Hirsch and Logsdon 1992, 199). The period also saw the advent of an era of progressive social and economic reforms under governor Huey Long. During the decade of the 1930s, the "Works Progress Administration and Public Works Administration [executed] numerous projects citywide" (Campanella 2006, 18). And, while Long was not above pandering to the racist sentiments of whites in order to gain political advantage, one of his administration's legacies is that of providing aid to poor Louisianans of all backgrounds and of investing in the infrastructural development of New Orleans. His autocratic and demagogic style of leadership and reputation for corruption helped fuel the image of Louisiana as a place culturally and morally apart from the larger United States.

Many aspects of the situation of African Americans in post-World War II New Orleans were common across the South and the nation. Returning black servicemen faced multiple and nested structures of racism and discrimination. Terrorism, humiliation, and exclusion on the local level were compounded by the discriminatory policies of government, the military, and organized labor. As Lizabeth Cohen shows, blacks' access to the benefits accrued by white veterans through the GI Bill and other postwar initiatives—which "discriminated against blacks even more insidiously than against women or the white working class"—was curtailed in multiple and compounding ways (2003, pp. 166-172),.

"Still, African-American vets did what they could to secure a footing in postwar American, some simply by choosing to leave the South" (Cohen 2003, 172). Those who stayed in New Orleans participated in an expanding consumer economy, albeit a segregated one that often allowed whites to tap into the most

profitable opportunities (323-327). The limits imposed by segregation served to concentrate African Americans in places like South Rampart Street, where "there were cafés where blacks could eat, along with bars, large and small hotels, barbershops, juke joints, black fraternal offices and small businesses, [and] a plethora of tailors" (Young 1996, 39). On the other side of the French Quarter, "in the Tremé, they had bars on every corner," some with evocative names like the Crystal Club, the Gypsy Tea Room or the Struggle Inn (Scherman 1999, 69). Despite the richness of these socioeconomic and cultural enclaves, the strictures of segregation and the lack of opportunity in New Orleans and the wider South provided a powerful incentive to those who could afford to leave. The 1940s saw the beginning of a wave of train-based migration of black Creoles (including several prominent musicians like Harold Batiste and Earl Palmer) from New Orleans to greener pastures in Los Angeles (Campanella 2006, 19).

Even as many middle-class blacks left New Orleans in the 1940s and '50s, the decades saw the continuing influx of black migrants from the city's hinterlands in the Delta region, which contributed a distinct set of cultural values to the mixture in the city (Berry et al. 1986, 8). Anthony 'Tuba Fats' Lacen (1949-2004) recalled his youth in the 3rd Ward/Central City area: "Everybody on that block was from either Mississippi or Alabama. They had come to New Orleans to work the riverfronts, which was a blooming thing then. . . . My mother was from Georgia" (Burns 2006, 30). Larry Wilson (b. 1946), who had grown up in the Lafitte Projects near the French Quarter, recalled the painful "culture shock" that he experienced when his father "bought a double in the Upper Ninth Ward . . . in 1955;" "It was country. . . . the streets wasn't even paved then. People had chickens, ducks, goats" (quoted in NTSPC 2006, 21). This 'country' element also had musical dimensions: "Most of the people back there were from Mississippi.

The kind of music I was hearing was blues. I'd never heard any kind of blues before. Not living in the inner city in New Orleans" (21). Neither was this rural musical sensibility stylistically or racially homogeneous: Jean Esther Nelson recalls her mother and her friends "listening to their blues or country western. Sometimes Dolly Parton or Merle Haggard. My mama's dream was to go to see Charlie Pride at the Grand Ol' Opry" (quoted in NTSPC 2006, 41).

On the other side of town from the majority of these recent arrivals, the Tremé and the Sixth Ward remained strongholds of the city's deeply rooted Creole culture, and anchored a wide range of cultural and musical activities. More than geographic distance separated these two African American populations; social and cultural distance was also understood by some as standing between these groups of African Americans. Ninth Ward resident Larry Wilson bitterly laments,

"the Seventh Warders, most of these folks always separated themselves. They came from free people of color. They had all the trades. They did carpentry. Brick mason. Ironwork. And that's been happening since slavery. We couldn't date their children. That's like trying to date white children in the 1950s in New Orleans. You hear me?" (quoted in NTSPC 2006, 21-22).

While hyperbolic, this characterization nonetheless speaks to a genuine and continuing perception of snobbery and social distance separating the Franco-Africans and Anglo-Africans of New Orleans.

Rhythm and Blues (R&B)

Jazz had become an established national genre by the late 1920s, and its New Orleans roots—as well as its strong association with the lower-class African American milieu—had faded as this process moved forward. The presence of New Orleans-based music in the national consciousness declined steeply after jazz

became widely disseminated and commercialized, and many of the top musicians from the city left to pursue careers in places like New York or Chicago. While New Orleans's local music scene never went away, its prominence within the national music industry ebbed to a low point as jazz was increasingly commercialized and mass-marketed, with white-owned companies and white star performers reaping a disproportionate share of the profits and prestige (Lomax 1973, 181).

On the local level, jazz remained a central feature of the musical landscape through the 1940s, as younger generations of New Orleans musicians began their own explorations of the possibilities held out by new styles such as Bebop (Broven 1988, 4). Older forms also persisted; the vast world of corner taverns and hole-in-the-wall clubs provided a space for piano players such as Professor Longhair and Archibald to ply their trade for dancing patrons, and in their blues-inflected, barrelhouse style they carried forward a large measure of the prewar musical sensibilities of New Orleans (Hannusch 1985, 3). In the city's streets, the continuing presence of a vital culture of black carnival institutions and parades featuring brass bands helped to energize a collective musical sensibility that, while highly contested, by its public nature cut across boundaries of neighborhood, generation, gender, social class, ethnicity and/or skin color.

In New Orleans, as elsewhere, the introduction of new sound reproduction technology in the form of phonographs and jukeboxes changed both the dynamics of the music industry as well as the day-to-day experiences of performers and consumers of music. In 1939, a pessimistic fan of New Orleans jazz complained, "except during Mardi Gras, most of the better Negro musicians will be working intermittently, if at all," while a description of the night life in the black hot spot of Perdido Street, published in 1945, reports that "music boxes [i.e. jukeboxes] blasted from every lighted doorway," as opposed to the live musicians

who had previously entertained patrons (C. Smith 1939, 269; Saxon, Dreyer and Tallant 1945, [1]). But if live musicians were working less, the spirit that had animated New Orleans jazz—rooted in the city's lowdown and street culture of brothels, barrooms, and dancehalls, and drawing on the sensibilities and techniques tied to the black church and the city's parade and carnival music—retained its vitality. New developments in recording and sound reproduction technologies facilitated the growth of a large and vibrant scene over the next several decades. A period of dormancy with regard to the national profile of New Orleans music in the prewar period gave way to the rise of another storied scene in the city based around the style known as rhythm and blues, or R&B.

R&B bore many similarities to jazz (especially the rowdy, dance-oriented 'hot' variety that had prevailed in New Orleans in the 'teens and 'twenties). Its vocal style drew heavily from black gospel, and its rhythmic dimension bore a strong imprint from the boogie-woogie genre of piano music popular in the prewar period (Stewart 2000, 294). The new genre was also strongly connected to the wider, historically-rooted black vernacular and oral culture. However, it introduced new themes, such as a focus on teenage subjectivity and consumerism, and exploited new technologies of amplification, recording, reproduction, and broadcasting.

The revival of the national commercial music industry in the postwar years coincided with the rise of this new genre of African American popular music. The spread of R&B existed in a symbiotic relationship with "the rise of black radio and an explosion of independent record labels," and by 1950 the genre was widely popular among African Americans and a growing white audience (Scherman 1999, 63). Like jazz, R&B's lyrics usually lacked explicit political or social messages, and the genre's association with the culture, tastes,

and spaces of the black lower classes often provoked reactions of distaste or dismissal from whites and middle-class blacks (especially those of older generations). However, R&B artists, producers, and independent record label owners harbored considerable commercial ambitions, which could channel their efforts in the opposite direction towards blandness and respectability.

The emerging R&B genre ushered in a fertile period for New Orleans's music industry. Locally, it contributed to a growing local economy of clubs, record labels and distributors, radio stations, and (to a lesser extent) production facilities. African American and white radio deejays like Doctor Daddy-O, Poppa Stoppa and Jack the Cat helped spread the music across social and spatial barriers, even as their careers were alternately limited or enabled by racial discrimination (Hannusch 1985, 119-123). Between the late 1940s and 1960 New Orleans experienced a musical efflorescence comparable to the early years of jazz—a period sometimes referred to as the "Golden Age of New Orleans R&B" (Sandmel 2003).

Business was sufficiently brisk during this period to support the establishment of several important New Orleans-based companies, but, as in the jazz era, blacks faced multiple hurdles in their quest to share the profits generated by R&B. Several of the most prominent institutions of the New Orleans R&B scene, Ace Records and Cosimo Matassa's studio were capitalized by Italian Americans (Hannusch 1985, 109, 111-112). Matassa opened a small recording studio in 1946 after becoming interested in the local music scene through his work in the jukebox business. Although his facilities lacked the technological sophistication of their analogues in bigger cities, Matassa's simple studio remained the axis of the New Orleans R&B and soul music scenes for more than two decades; "Virtually every R&B record made in New Orleans between the late

Forties and the early Seventies was engineered by Cosimo Matassa, and recorded in one of his four studios" (Hannusch 1985, 107).

Led by De Luxe, national independent record companies began to flock to New Orleans to record in the late 'forties. They brought artists from other places to record with New Orleans session players and arrangers, and they also explored the local talent pool and recorded the most promising artists (Broven 1988, 14,17, 86). Matassa's studio "became busier and busier as labels like Chess, Aladdin, Atlantic, Savoy and Specialty all came from different parts of the country" (Hannusch 1985, 111). Much of this success can be attributed to the growing reputation of "a young trumpeter named Dave Bartholomew" who led "the best R&B band in town" in the late 1940s (Scherman 1999, 43). Bartholomew's success as a bandleader led to a busy career as a talent scout, arranger and producer for national record labels, including most prominently Imperial. Robert Palmer describes "the sound developed by Bartholomew's musicians and by the engineer Cosimo Matassa: heavy drums and bass, rolling piano, a rich mesh of saxophones and trumpet providing both organ-type chords and background riffs, and strong vocal leads" (1979, 11).

Bartholomew produced countless records by a variety of talented New Orleans performers, but it was the work of pianist and singer Antoine 'Fats' Domino, which combined energetic, rhythmically driving music with inoffensive lyrics about fun and romance, that captured the nation's attention (Broven 1988: 2). His "rollicking piano style and slightly countrified vocal cadence" helped him achieve popularity across racial lines, making him one of the first stars in the nascent rock and roll genre and one of the most successful artists to emerge from New Orleans, in any genre (Ward 1998, 52). As Ward puts it, "Domino's essentially romantic songs, genial person and rotund appearance simply defused

much of the sexual threat which whites routinely associated with other black rock and rollers" (52).

Scherman notes, "early-fifties label owners streamed to New Orleans not only for the local singing talent, they came for the Studio Band" (1999, 84). This "studio band" or "clique" was composed of seasoned jazz musicians like Alvin 'Red' Tyler and Earl Palmer, whose recorded work helped to define a "singular style of rhythm & blues (R&B) that emerged from New Orleans in the years after World War II" (Stewart 2000, 293). At the core of this distinctiveness lay a particular rhythmic sensibility; studio players like Earl Palmer and Charles 'Hungry' Williams infused the energy of the city's street parade music into drumset playing, producing a style that came to predominate in later decades: "New Orleans drummers excelled in the creation of catchy beats (usually one- or two-bar repetitive patterns) that were innovative while being rooted in their city's percussive traditions" (Stewart 2000, 300, 293).

Earl Palmer confirms this connection to the city's wider musical environment: "The funk thing came about because it was just a street thing that we all just inherently got" (quoted in Payne 1996, 5). As Palmer's comments suggest, the New Orleans rhythmic sensibility presaged the rise of 'funk' as a musical concept in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Within the context of "the underlying rhythms of American popular music," it led to "a basic, yet generally unacknowledged transition from triplet or shuffle feel (12/8) to even or straight eighth notes (8/8)" (Stewart 2000, 293). As Stewart argues, this "move from triplets to even eights . . . supported further subdivision to sixteenth-note rhythms that were exploited in New Orleans R&B and funk" (293). The centrality of New Orleans musicians in the early years of R&B, as well as the foundational role played by drummers connected to New Orleans in the bands of James Brown

in the late '50 and early '60s, would seem to confirm this conclusion (302; Payne 1996, 5).

While hit records by Domino and other New Orleans artists kept nation's ears attuned to the city's music, the day-to-day activity that sustained the city's R&B scene took place chiefly in nightclubs like the Dew Drop Inn, the Caldonia, and the TiaJuana (Scherman 1999, 63, 69-70, 94; Broven 1988, 96-97; Berry et al. 1986, 59-60). While not completely off-limit to whites, the prevailing norms of segregation made these clubs a relatively insulated environment defined by African American music and culture. Cross-dressing MCs or performers mingled with Bebop-loving jazz musicians who came to the clubs to jam after their paying gigs were over for the night (Scherman 1999, 80; Berry et al. 1986, 58-59). A number of important New Orleans R&B artists, including Earl King, Guitar Slim, Huey Smith, and Professor Longhair, built their careers in these clubs. Several performers from other cities also found an artistic and cultural home at the Dew Drop Inn, including Bobby Marchan and Richard Penniman, the flamboyant young piano player from Macon, Georgia, who performed under the name "Little Richard" and who made his earliest recordings, including "Tutti Frutti" and "Lucille," with the backing of New Orleans musicians (Scherman 1999, 90-91).

The R&B era provided some level of opportunity for entrepreneurs who wished to tap into the city's thriving music scene, but the systematic and multi-generational exclusion of blacks from economic opportunities meant that almost all of the individuals who capitalized nightclubs, record labels, recording studios, and distributorships were, up until the mid-1960s, white. However, it is not insignificant that most of these white men can to some degree be considered outsiders to the New Orleans racial/social order; some had Italian surnames like Matassa, Imbraguglio, or Scramuzza, while others came from distant cities

including Baltimore (Joe Banashak) or Concord, N.C. (Marshall Sehorn) (Hannusch 1985, 135, 161). These entrepreneurs profited from the creative efforts of black musicians, performers, and arrangers, and often acted as middlemen between the New Orleans scene and national companies seeking to extract talent. However, they were rarely motivated by profit alone; many if not all of the white label owners, studio owners, and distributors considered themselves music lovers and exercised considerable influence over musical content, mainly through the process of selecting and cultivating artists and hiring key musicians to play and arrange their sessions.

New Orleans R&B and the National Music Industry

In the 1950s, labels like Imperial and Chess benefited from the skills of producers and arrangers like Dave Bartholomew, but the participation of black creators and entrepreneurs in the local popular music economy evolved slowly. During the following decade, white label owners forged relationships with black partners with social or creative capital to contribute. Still, even when Dave Bartholomew, or, in the sixties, Allen Toussaint, made a comfortable living off of music, few of the artists they recorded ever made enough to support themselves. African Americans gained some level of control when black-owned labels like A.F.O., Soulin', and others came on the scene in the mid- to late-sixties, but they were still highly dependent upon white-owned distributors or major labels to extend their reach outside of New Orleans.

As R&B consumption and production spread throughout the nation, New Orleans lost its position of prominence. The city's marginalization increased when R&B began to be eclipsed by the growing popularity of rock and roll, a genre that mixed ideas taken from R&B with "white" music forms like country or

rockabilly and which eventually became strongly associated with white racial identity. Further developments in popular music in the early 1960s, including the rise of the Motown sound and the Beatles, hastened R&B's demise and negatively affected the ability of New Orleans artists to penetrate wider markets (Broven 1988, [114]; Hannusch 1985, 115). "By 1963, many of the independents had begun to desert the city. Fire, Ace [the only major independent record company based in New Orleans] and Fury labels, all of which relied heavily on New Orleans talent, went belly up" (Hannusch 1985, 115).

New Orleans had been at the center of the creation and popularization of R&B, as artists and companies were drawn to the city by the acumen and sensibilities of its producers, arrangers, and musicians, and its native talent captured a share of national attention. However, this did not result in any dramatic shift in the geographic arrangement of music industry power. New Orleans artists, sidemen and producers were more often heard on records released by national companies like Specialty, Atlantic, Chess and Imperial. When a hit resulted, the majority of the profits often accrued to these companies based in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, cities which retained their status as hubs of the music industry. The few local independents that did exist in New Orleans often relied on these larger companies for national distribution, and attempts to remedy this situation by creating sustainable distribution entities have largely failed (Bessman 1995, 69; Strauss 2000; Hannusch 1985, 105, 115). When the flush years of the R&B scene ended, New Orleans had not experienced any substantial or lasting investment from the national music industry.

In spite of its wealth of creativity and talent, New Orleans's music industry infrastructure (which includes record labels, recording studios, pressing plants, and distributorships) remained small and undercapitalized in comparison

with the national centers. This stunted local music industry did not help New Orleans-based artists as they struggled to connect with national audiences. The momentum of any particular artist or label could easily be interrupted by changes in the supply side, which relied upon a fragile cooperation of a variety of actors including national companies, owners of 'one-stop' distributorships, radio deejays, and retailers (Hannusch 1985, 151). This arrangement's instability could also sink the fortunes of artists or companies, as when Joe Banashak's Instant label was knocked out of the picture temporarily "after the record distribution business in New Orleans collapsed." (Hannusch 1985, 115).

The lack of infrastructural investment in New Orleans on the part of national companies was not simply a result of geographic distance or corporate strategy, although these factors certainly played their role in the city's continuing marginalization in the wider music industry. Any who wished to invest in artists or companies based in the city were also forced to deal with cultural challenges—specifically, "the vernacular, uncontrolled context of New Orleans music" (M. Smith 1994, 66). New Orleans's riches had to be extracted from the tangled strands of a highly competitive and dynamic music scene, in which artists and producers relied heavily upon imitation and appropriation (from local or extralocal sources).

At the same time, the city's distinctive, Caribbean-inflected street parade sensibility served as an underlying organizing principle even as musical styles, markets, and technologies changed over time. At certain key moments in the evolution of the popular music audience and industry at the national level, this has been a key asset for those in the local New Orleans scene. At other times, it has served to make the city seem all the more like a self-contained musical universe which only locals understand well enough to exploit.

The Wider Socioeconomic Context in the Postwar Years

The R&B years unfolded within a dynamic social and economic context which presented an array of challenges to African Americans in New Orleans. In the realm of employment, the war years brought stability and relative prosperity for both skilled and unskilled workers in the city and contributed to a growing population. As Mahoney notes, "war industries drew thousands of new migrants to the city," many of them African Americans (1990, 1271). While black workers benefited from the prosperity, "job discrimination continued through the war. In general, blacks . . . seldom had access to skilled or highly paid work. As GI's returned looking for work," writes Mahoney, "employers preferred whites. Therefore, black unemployment rose sharply in the late 1940s" (1271).

During the 1950s and much of the following decade, blacks were shut out of "the growing white collar sector of downtown, and almost all municipal employment" (Mahoney 1990, 1279). Further, "the departure of jobs and the exclusion of blacks from existing jobs caused black unemployment to grow" (1279). During the 1950s and early '60s, "the largest increase in black employment was for unskilled laborers" (1279). An important source of decent jobs for black working class men was lost when the port of New Orleans—formerly an "exception to the rule of exclusion, employing blacks in significant numbers"—was transformed by the introduction of containerized shipping in the mid-1950s (1271). This radically reduced labor needs, ending the "centuries-old longshoremen culture" that had evolved and thrived along with the city's river trade, and cut off a source of "generally stable, well-paid" jobs which were "among the best . . . blacks could obtain" (Campanella 2006, 20; Mahoney 1990, 1271).

"The sudden suburban explosion of New Orleans out of its old confines" hastened the already precipitous decline of economic and social conditions in neighborhoods in the urban core (Lewis 2003, 70). Suburbanization in the pre-World War II era had been a process overwhelmingly dominated by whites. Beginning in the mid-1950s, middle-class blacks also joined the exodus from inner-city New Orleans, populating newly developed neighborhoods on the eastern side of the metropolitan area. As the 1970s dawned, blacks also took advantage of "suburban-style residential development [spreading] eastward within Orleans parish" (Campanella 2006, 23).

As the hard-fought victories over *de jure* segregation in the 1950s and 1960s opened the door for black economic and political empowerment (such as the election of Ernest N. 'Dutch' Morial as the city's first black mayor in 1977), whites fled New Orleans, settling in nearby Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes. "The process of suburbanization pulled jobs outside cities," contributing to the downward spiral of race and class-based concentration and economic disparity (Mahoney 1990, 1278). Suburbanization has enabled "an ominous growth of segregation in New Orleans, the alienation of black and white populations, and the decay of inner-city neighborhoods and public services" (Lewis 2003, 70-71).

Over the last four decades of the twentieth century, census figures reveal a city with a shrinking population base, within which the representation of the black and poor has continued to grow. After peaking in 1960 (just before the implementation of school desegregation) at 627,525, the city's total population declined by more than five percent over the next decade, to 593,471, even as the percentage of blacks as a proportion of the city's residents rose by five points in the same period (Campanella 2006, 20, 22). Whereas blacks constituted thirty-

two percent of the city's population in 1950, by 1977, white flight had made the city "majority-black for first time since [the] 1830s" (23).

The representation of blacks as a percentage of the city's total population continued in an upward trend; by 1990 New Orleans's population was sixty-two percent black, a figure that would grow by five percentage points over the course of the decade that followed: "Whereas in 1950, whites had enjoyed a two-to-one majority, in 2000 the ratio had more than reversed itself: blacks outnumbered whites by nearly three to one" (Campanella 2006, 24; Lewis 2003, 127). These changes left New Orleans "a different kind of city than it had ever been before" with regard to its racial composition, even as the city's total population continued to decline—to 557,515 in 1980, and further to 2003, when it ebbed to the "Depression-era level of 469,032" (Lewis 2003, 127; Campanella 2006, 26).

Education

Although New Orleans had briefly experimented with integrated public schools in the Reconstruction period, much of the century that followed was marked by segregation, which relegated blacks to inadequately funded, second-class facilities (Rousseau 1961). The situation in New Orleans was made worse by its religious and cultural background: "Many Catholics sent their children to parochial schools," and "affluent Protestants often emulated the Catholics" (Lewis 2003, 99). These parents often "disliked paying school taxes from which they derived no immediate benefit," and the city's public school system was "already sickly" before the decade of upheaval caused by the 1954 *Brown* decision (99). As in other southern cities, the issue of school desegregation in New Orleans was highly charged and continued to reverberate into the next millennium.

Ultimately, it was a major factor driving 'white flight' from the city to suburban parishes.

Like other struggles of the Civil rights era in New Orleans, the battle against school desegregation did not capture the attention of the national mass media or wider public to the same extent as the more grotesque spectacles of brutality staged by white racists in places like Birmingham or Jackson. Still, whites in Louisiana and New Orleans—including parents and children as well as government officials at every level—energetically resisted the changes called for by *Brown*: "The legislature and state superintendent of education . . . used various methods in the attempt to stall school segregation" (Rousseau 1961). Even after multiple appeals to reverse the federal order to integrate were denied, "the school board still refused to desegregate the schools," and voted overwhelmingly "to 'call upon the Governor of Louisiana to interpose himself between the federal court and the school Board'" (Devore and Logsdon 1991, 240-241).

When these tactics proved futile against the slow but steady dismantling of the Jim Crow school system, white parents of school children in New Orleans intensified their efforts to avoid mixing with blacks. The integration of the city's public schools began in 1960 when "one tiny Negro girl was enrolled in the William T. Frantz School" (Rousseau 1961). By the next year, "The formerly all-white enrollment of some 500 [had] dropped to eight pupils attending along with one Negro first grader." After three African American girls were admitted to McDonogh 19, "white pupils . . . boycotted this school completely." The one white family whose two sons continued to attend with black students was "subjected to harsh treatment and economic pressures," measures which convinced them to leave the city.

As it became increasingly apparent that the trend away from legally sanctioned racism in the public schools was going to continue, "affluent whites in Orleans Parish avoided sending children to integrated schools by enrolling them in private and parochial schools" (Lewis 2003, 99). Another option was "moving to whiter parishes outside," such as Jefferson, which had drawn working- and middle-class whites from New Orleans beginning in the mid-1950s, or St. Bernard (99, 124). The abandonment of New Orleans's public schools by whites began in earnest in the last years of the 1960s, when, "after holding steady at 40,000 annually since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), white student enrollment at New Orleans public schools [began a] steady decline, while black enrollment [doubled] to 70,000" (Campanella 2006, 22).

In the decades after school desegregation, Louisiana's citizens ranked among the lowest in the nation in terms of education: in 1985, the state had "more illiterate adults, per capita" and "a higher high school dropout rate than any other state" (42.8 percent, as compared with the national average of 26.1 percent) (DeParle 1985, A1). New Orleans was critically affected by these problems: "a 1990 survey showed that almost half of all black Orleanians possessed neither a high school diploma nor its equivalent, while the figure among whites was only about one in five" (Lewis 2003, 131). The disparities continued into the new millennium; in 2003, "the gap between black students and white students in public schools statewide grew wider" (Rasheed 2004). By 2006, the process of "de facto re-segregation" had radically changed the makeup of the student body at the city's public schools: the system was "one-to-one black-to-white in 1957, . . . five-to-one by [the] early 1980s and nineteen-to-one" by 2006 (Campanella 2006, 22). The fortunes of younger generations in New Orleans were increasingly tied to a chronically underfunded public school system

tasked with the education of a population within which poor and black pupils formed a steadily increasing majority.

Public Housing

The combined effects of a growing population and a residential market constrained by geography and structured by racism led to a housing crisis in New Orleans, and, as Mahoney writes, "the city took advantage of the opportunities presented by the Housing Act of 1937 and subsequent federal housing legislation by building public housing projects on a broad scale" (1990, 1268). For several decades after its initiation in the late '30s, New Orleans's public housing policy set it apart from other Deep South cities like Memphis or Birmingham. In general, "New Orleans has a good record for housing its black population," writes Lewis, "a fact which may help explain the difference in the three cities' histories of racial violence" (2003, 98). However, the conception and evolution of the city's public housing system interacted dynamically with other social forces—racism, poverty, suburbanization—in ways that, both immediately and over time, infused its mission of providing temporary housing with less noble aims of racial segregation and the containment of urban poor populations.

Construction of the projects began in 1940, and "by the 1960s, when the courts ordered public housing to be desegregated, New Orleans had built almost a dozen major projects, which by the century's end housed more than 30,000 residents" (Lewis 2003, 133). The size of these facilities varied; some, like Iberville near the French Quarter, were relatively small (850 units), whereas the 100-acre Desire complex, when it opened in 1957, encompassed 1,860 apartments in 262 buildings, making it "the largest project in the city and one of the largest in the country built with federal funds" (133; Mahoney 1990, 1277).

The initial planning of the projects was determined by the apartheid logic of segregation; In addition to bearing the brunt of the "dilapidated, deplorable housing conditions in New Orleans," blacks suffered from "severe housing pressures [which] resulted in relatively high rents and scarce vacancies in black neighborhoods," resulting in their overrepresentation in the population seeking affordable housing in the city's projects (Larry Wilson in NTSPC 2006, 22; Mahoney 1990, 1275-1276). Blacks desperate for housing would often "double up" in apartments—as Larry Wilson recalled, "They would double up and triple up. They might have eighteen to a house"—a practice which led "to the drastic underestimation of the public housing population" (1268; NTSPC 2006, 22).

Of the six projects that opened in 1940, four were for blacks only, while the St. Thomas project in the uptown Irish Channel area was racially mixed, and the conveniently located Iberville project (on the edge of the French Quarter) was for whites only. In terms of residence and employment, whites enjoyed more robust structures of opportunity and, over time, their numbers in public housing dwindled. By 2003, a scholar reported, "New Orleans's ten big public housing projects . . . [were] almost 100 percent black and mostly isolated from the mainstream of city life" (Lewis, 97). As Mahoney notes, "the last three projects were completed in the context of a different urban economy than the one in which they had been planned" (1990, 1278). Instead of helping New Orleans's black poor ascend into the middle class, the city's housing projects increasingly contributed to their social and economic isolation, warehousing them in remote facilities of inhuman scale.

Compounded by worsening socioeconomic outlook in the 1960s and 1970s, project life became bleaker, and "by the 1990s, it was generally agreed that the projects had gone off the rails" (Lewis 2003, 133). As the twenty-first century

approached, the conditions at many of the projects warranted some sort of decisive action. With the help of the federal government, the city initiated "Project HOPE" in the early 2000s, a federally funded program which led to "demolition of some Depression-era housing projects" and their replacement with "mixed-income housing, some subsidized, some market-rate" (Campanella 2006, 26). Several projects were completely razed, including Desire and St. Thomas. The most problematic aspect of this process has been the dramatic drop in the number of housing units available to the urban poor.

The resulting displacement has contributed to the rise of "a sense of nostalgia about the projects," and it must be acknowledged that the experiences of residents have been diverse and include positive dimensions as well as pathological ones (Eig 2001, B1). Many found a sense of belonging and community in their projects, formed through social bonds and collective enjoyment. Team sports and the frequent staging of outdoor parties with food, music and dancing were some of the activities that helped to foster these feelings (NTSPC 2006, 65, 70-72). While some families were unable to overcome the self-reinforcing cycles of poverty and neglect that kept them in public housing for generations, they lived alongside others who were able to at least partially rise above these forces through work and discipline. Public housing tenants organized themselves at varying levels of formality to protest the conditions under which they lived and to pressure the city's power brokers to attend to their needs. For these reasons, many former residents and observers view the demolition of the projects (which has continued in the post-Katrina era) as "a poorly planned uprooting of a generations-old, tightly knit community" (MacCash 2002).

In general, though, the ability of the projects "to achieve the expected upward mobility of tenants, to function as 'way stations' over time" was crippled

by "the shift in the urban economy and the racial sorting of the population that felt the greatest impact from the loss of jobs" (Mahoney 1990, 1252). The effect of the projects' construction upon the larger city was to "alter [the] historic urban fabric, diminish spatial integration of ethnic and racial groups, and concentrate and incubate poverty" (Campanella 2006, 19). The responsibility for these failings is not confined to local leaders: "Federal housing policies financed and maintained enclaves of poverty and exacerbated racial disparities in the city of New Orleans" (BIMPP 2005, 21).

'Urban Renewal' and Freeways

The problems related to the city's public housing facilities emerged over decades and interacted dynamically with other developments which altered the city's social, cultural, and economic life. As Lewis writes, "Black neighborhoods have endured increasing pressure from whites bent on 'improving' the city" (2003, 98). In 1937, the city's Housing Authority cleared "selected historic neighborhoods [including former Storyville and the Irish Channel] to construct planned communities of subsidized housing" (Campanella 2006, 19). Urban renewal projects also took their toll; between 1956 and 1973, the city cleared "ten blocks of historic Tremé . . . forcing relocation of over 1,000 residents, for [the] Theater for Performing Arts and Louis Armstrong Park" (19, 22).

Lewis writes, "while there is no direct evidence that highways were deliberately located in black neighborhoods, a comparison of racial maps with highway maps makes that conclusion inevitable" (2003, 98). Perhaps the most destructive of these endeavors was the construction in 1965 of the elevated Interstate 10 over North Claiborne Avenue—"converting the main street of New Orleans's biggest African American neighborhood [Tremé] from a broad,

landscaped boulevard into a dingy, concrete cavern" (98). The freeway project wreaked irreparable "social damage" in what is "sometimes described as the oldest black neighborhood in America" (Campanella 2006, 9). As community activist Jerome Smith recalled, "The expressway . . . ruptured the rhythms of the neighborhood" (Interviewed in Burns 2006, 125).

In the last decades of the twentieth century, urban residents confronted an increasingly grim economic outlook. As musician Anthony 'Tuba Fats' Lacen noted, "all the trade started going down in the early seventies," and a brief period of oil-related prosperity which began later in the decade was followed by a devastating collapse of the industry in the mid-eighties which sunk the city's fortunes and initiated a "dark era of job loss, middle-class exodus, and increasing crime rates [that endured] until [the] mid-1990s" (Burns 2006, 32; Campanella 2006, 24). Working-class and poor blacks suffered from the "lag between [the] decline of [the] oil industry and [the] rise in tourism/service economy" (25). The 1990 census showed that "Nearly half of New Orleans's children lived in poverty, [and] . . . the majority of the poor population—fifty-eight percent—had incomes less than half of the federal poverty level"; census figures from 2000 showed that "the median income for white households remains nearly twice that of black households in the New Orleans area" (Lewis 2003, 124; Warner and Scallan, 2002).

A 2005 report by the Brookings Institution sums up the socioeconomic and demographic changes to New Orleans between the years 1970 and 2000. The report identifies "three especially disturbing trends" in New Orleans over this period: "Segregation and concentrations of poverty had sharpened; sprawl and decentralization had spread; and a low-wage economy had developed" (5). These trends produced difficult conditions for residents of the urban core. In 1970, "the

city of New Orleans "contained the majority of people and jobs in the region" (9). By 2000, this was no longer the case; "new highways opened up new areas to suburbanization. Likewise human alteration of the environment through land reclamation, de-watering, and expanded flood control created new space for development" (9). These developments created intertwined social and environmental challenges: they "exacerbated the region's racial and economic divides while projecting more and more development onto reclaimed wetland areas" (9).

Compared to the surrounding parishes, "the city of New Orleans also lost growth as an employment center" as "the quality of the opportunities available to New Orleans-area workers, both well-educated and less educated," continued to decline (BIMPP 2005, 9, 12). In recent decades, the extent to which entrenched black poverty has dominated New Orleans's urban core has reached unprecedented levels. Compared to 1970 conditions, "New Orleans had grown extremely segregated by both race and income" by 2005 (5). While the "overall poverty rate remained roughly steady for 30 years, the number of census tracts exhibiting extreme poverty had grown by two thirds" in the closing three decades of the twentieth century (6). The correlation of this extreme poverty with African Americans was strong: "Forty-three percent of poor blacks in the city of New Orleans live in census tracts with extreme poverty levels" (6). In the context of the larger metropolitan area, black poverty was increasingly concentrated within the lowest-lying and most undesirable sections of Orleans Parish.

In addition to tensions caused by economic hard times and residential resegregation, "the resurgence of a more subtle, mainstream form of racism in contemporary southern politics" contributed to a deterioration of race relations in New Orleans (Kuzenski, Bullock, and Gaddie 1995, xi). Though hardly confined

to one candidate or political party, this phenomenon was spectacularly personified in the late 1980s by "former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard" David Duke, who was elected as a Republican to the State House of Representatives by the 81st district of Metairie, a mainly white suburban enclave on the city's northwest periphery (63). Duke waged two subsequent campaigns for the state's executive office in 1990 and 1991; the slim margin of his defeat demonstrated that the 81st district was no anomaly in terms of white Louisianans' willingness to accept a radically anti-black candidate. While Duke's political career fizzled, it was a painful reminder to black Louisianans that the struggles of the past against racism and discrimination were far from over. In addition to Duke's candidacy, Campanella identifies other factors—the "Mardi Gras krewe integration controversy, protests at Liberty Place monument on Canal Street, and record-high crime rates"—that contributed to a deterioration of race relations in the early 1990s (2006, 25).

Rediscovering Vernacular Music Traditions

For many years, black carnival groups occupied a marginal position imposed by mainstream white New Orleans through segregation. White elites, in the form of all-white krewes like Rex or Momus, dominated the public face of carnival, leaving blacks to pursue their own creative vision in their segregated neighborhoods. However, this has begun to change in recent years. While Rex or Comus still parade and put on a variety of events during carnival season, and while the French Quarter still teems with crowds of drunken, mostly white college revelers, New Orleans's African American carnival organizations, institutions, and traditions—long celebrated by scholars and aficionados—are becoming a more central part of the city's self-promotion as a tourist destination

(Gerald Platenburg in NTSPC 2006, 215). The performances of Mardi Gras Indians, second line parades and the brass bands that often feature in them also contribute to a general sense of distinctiveness that now spans across race and class lines within the internal New Orleans imaginary, although as recently as 1999 it remained the case that "most white residents of the New Orleans metropolitan area [had] never participated in a second-line parade" and remained unaware that the events "are linked to a year-long neighborhood parade cycle, which is entirely distinct from the Carnival calendar" (Regis 1999, 472-3, 475).

This acceptance of and attempt to exploit some established institutions of New Orleans black carnival culture lies over a deep history of indifference and outright intolerance on the part of white civic leaders and planners for the expressive cultural forms and venues developed by working class African Americans in the city over the years, as exemplified by the construction of Interstate 10 over North Claiborne Avenue discussed above (Campanella 2006, 21). In 1990, a local journalist wrote that, at best, the city was "slowly starving [the second line tradition] simply by paying no attention," and recalled recent, more aggressive measures such as "the 1979 folly when the City Council . . . tried to outlaw the parades as a 'cultural eyesore'" (Aiges 1990d). More recently, in 2006 a prominent organizer of these parades complained that the permits and fees used by city leaders to control the parades are excessive and punitive (Linda Porter in NTSPC 2006, 216).

In terms of national prominence, New Orleans-based performers and producers have struggled to recapture the heights attained during the 1950s, although the 1960s and 1970s saw an assortment of talented artists emerge from the city. Many of them drew upon the New Orleans's distinctive traditions of

expressive culture for material and stylistic inspiration—as Michael Smith noted, "African musical concepts, in fact, have become ever more important to the evolving music scene" (1994, 60). Both within and outside of New Orleans, the 1970s and '80s were characterized by a growing awareness and appreciation of the city's unique vernacular music traditions. In 1970, the first Jazz and Heritage Festival was staged, and the event has since become "second only to Mardi Gras in [the] cultural tourism calendar and economy" (Campanella 2006, 22). Over the decades, the 'JazzFest' has served as an important venue for artists and groups from New Orleans and Louisiana, and has also played a major part in reviving the moribund careers of legendary New Orleans performers from previous eras like Professor Longhair and James Booker. Festival organizers have attempted to balance the demands of geographical and historical authenticity with those of mass appeal; while 'roots' genres including jazz, gospel, zydeco, R&B, brass bands, and the music of Mardi Gras Indian groups have been central 'traditional' elements of the festival's offerings, it has also included a wide range of performers in contemporary genres like pop, rock, and rap.

JazzFest was a central driving factor in a wider trend of increased visibility for the vernacular musical traditions of New Orleans. In the 1970s, individuals or groups involved in the Mardi Gras Indian subculture released albums documenting their distinctive music, and collaborated with local musicians on albums (such as *Wild Magnolias* (1974) and *Wild Tchoupitoulas* (1976)) which received widespread national exposure. In general, the appreciation and documentation of Mardi Gras Indian culture in general were increasing dramatically in the 1970s and '80s; during the same period, an exciting brass band revival blossomed, contributing to what an observer called

"one of the most startling musical and cultural developments New Orleans has seen in modern times" (Fumar 1986, 6).

New generations of musicians infused brass band music with a dynamic funkiness that reconnected it with more contemporary trends in African American popular music. The Dirty Dozen Brass Band was at the forefront of this movement, and the seeds they sowed gave rise to a proliferation of new bands in the 1980s, led by the teenaged Rebirth Brass Band, who mixed old standards like "Liza Jane" and "When the Saints Go Marching In" with material drawn from or inspired by R&B (of various eras), soul, funk, and rap. While the adaptation of nontraditional material is a prominent feature of the work of Rebirth and other younger bands, Burns reminds us that "the synergy between the band and the crowd is a more significant part of the brass band tradition than the style of music being played" (2006, 4).

In recent decades, the brass band form has not only been revived but has grown to an unprecedented level of activity and prominence in the city. The numbers of brass bands and social and pleasure clubs have surged over the last two decades, supporting a reemphasis on African American public culture. By 2006 a scholar noted that "there are probably more brass bands active in New Orleans than ever before" (Burns 2006, 4). While tourist-oriented shows at places like Harrah's Casino form a part of their livelihood, for the most part, these bands earn money playing for events sponsored by the "well over sixty social and pleasure clubs currently active" (5). Burns remarks that "whether the revitalization of the brass bands gave rise to the increase in social and pleasure clubs or the other way round, I don't know, and I don't think it matters" (8). The reality is more complex than cause and effect; the two subjects interact

dynamically and in conversation with other forces and ideas as well as with each other.

The more interesting question is how collective expression and creativity relate to social conditions; what equation describes the interplay of oppression, deprivation, creative expression, and psychological relief? Contrasting the wider sociopolitical context of the newer brass bands with that of their precursors, Jerome Smith remarks that when "segregation was rigid . . . we needed to invent things to maintain sanity, beyond commercialization. Now that's not needed . . . The music is driven by a desire to make money. Originally, it was based on a need to survive" (quoted in Burns 2006, 129). This idea of a stark division in the worldview of older and younger generations of brass band musicians and audiences is linked by Burns to "the rise of rap music and hip-hop:"

their infiltration into the New Orleans brass band scene; their prevailing ethos of materialism, instant gratification, and guns as fashion accessories; and the echo of these values in the social standards of the New Orleans neighborhoods often give rise to a regret for the loss of the past" (8).

Not only do these assertions downplay the influence of financial gain and interpersonal violence in prior musical subcultures in New Orleans, they also obscure important ways in which contemporary brass band culture in New Orleans and the rap music that informs (or "infiltrates") it serve a similar emotional or psychological function to that described by Smith, helping young black New Orleanians to cope with the range of social and economic problems that confront them and to weather the increasingly bleak conditions of the late twentieth century. This revival of interest in vernacular musical traditions in New Orleans (in ways that do not deny or marginalize their potential connections to contemporary forms like rap) has provided a psychological lifeline through the transformative power of music, dance, and other forms of collective creativity.

When the second line moves from being an event connected to specific communities and groups to becoming a generalized touristic spectacle, the complexity of the relationship between these events, neighborhood identity, and wider local cultural identity is lost. Second line parades and other events on the grassroots level are central to the persistence of a distinctive and widely shared musical and aesthetic sensibility, but they also draw some of their creative energy from the expression, provocation and transgression of a "fierce neighborhood territoriality" that has existed in the city for several centuries (Young 1996, 21). In Louis Armstrong's time, for instance, "the second liners were afraid to go into the Irish Channel which was that part of the city located uptown by the river front. It was a dangerous neighborhood. The Irish who lived there were bad men, and the colored boys were tough too" (1954, 225). Andrew Young, who grew up in the 1940s, recalled that "neighborhoods had developed like separate towns" in New Orleans, and "walking through a neighborhood where you were not known was fraught with danger" (1996, 21). More recently, Regis shows how second line parades connect

"neighborhoods separated by social and geographic distance, such as the historically Anglophone 'uptown' and francophone 'downtown' areas. The route also transcends more recent notions of 'turf' based on localized entrepreneurial 'crews' or 'gangs' engaged in the drug trade. Children in New Orleans grow up thinking about neighborhoods in these terms" (1999, 479).

In this way, the vernacular musical traditions like second line parades not only contribute to the collectively held musical values in the city; they also help to structure the ways in which successive generations of black New Orleanians understand and experience place and local identity.

The Wider Socioeconomic Context: Late Twentieth Century

The wider social context in New Orleans in the years leading up to Katrina involved worsening conditions for the city's poor and working-class African Americans along several key indices. 2003's tally of 275 murders made it "the fourth consecutive year of increases and the highest number since 1996," giving "New Orleans the highest per-capita homicide rate in the nation among major cities" for the second year in a row (Ritea and Young, 2004). The violence was concentrated in "a handful of neighborhoods" where "drugs and joblessness are almost always entwined." In 2003, "the gap between black students and white students in public schools statewide grew wider," and the New Orleans school district remained "at the bottom" of statewide rankings (Rasheed 2004). Compounding the problem, "low-performing schools, where students are overwhelmingly black and poor, get the least-qualified teachers."

In the early nineties, New Orleans had the highest murder rate in the U.S., and the Magnolia Housing Project was, according to a 1995 article in the local *Times-Picayune*, "the most likely place to be killed in New Orleans" (Deshazier). With improving economic conditions and a new police chief at the helm, the city's murder rate fell steadily after 1994, and in 1999 "the New Orleans murder rate plummeted by nearly 30 percent . . . from the previous year, marking the fifth consecutive year-end decrease and the second lowest tally in 24 years" (Philbin 2000).

Even as murder rates ebbed in the late 1990s, the rap scene continued to see its members fall victim to violence: in 1997, murdered rappers included Robert L. "Kilo-G" Johnson Jr., 20, Albert "Yella" Thomas, 22, (from the group UNLV), and 39 Posse's Derrick "Shack" Mushatt, 28 ("Alice Irene Adds, 1997; "Rapper one of two killed in shooting," 1997; Dvorak 1997) . In 1998, Tombstone

Records label owner Elton Wicker, 32, died after a drive-by shooting (the label's vice-president had been shot to death five months previously) (DeBerry 1998). In 1999, Warren Mayes, of "Get it girl" fame, was killed; the following year, 2000, Terrence J. "Lil Daddy" McKenzie, who in his early teen years had participated in the groundbreaking efforts of the group The Ninja Crew, was shot to death in Baton Rouge at the age of 27 (Ninja Crew rapper Terence "Sporty T" Vine was shot to death in 2008) (Philbin 1999; "Terrence J. 'Lil Daddy' McKenzie," 2000; Vargas 2008). In 2001, Irvin "DJ Irv" Phillips, who had turned the New Orleans scene on its ear with T. Tucker a decade earlier, died at the age of 32 ("Phillips, Irvin 'DJ Irv'," 2001). And in late 2003 James "Soulja Slim" Tapp, 26, who had been on the New Orleans scene since 1994, was gunned down in his mother's front yard (Krupa 2003).

Area politicians were largely ineffectual in their efforts to reverse these trends, and often preferred to focus on more simplistic solutions that implicitly placed blame on antisocial attitudes and actions of urban black youth themselves. Despite clear indications that they would not pass constitutional muster, legal restrictions on sagging, low-slung pants (a style strongly associated with rap and hip-hop generally) were proposed with regularity by area politicians, including state Rep. Cynthia Willard, D-New Orleans in 1999, Orleans Parish Deputy Assessor Donald Smith in 2000, Westwego councilman Melvin Guidry in 2002, and Rep. Derrick Shepherd, D-Marrero in 2004 (Anderson 1999; Jensen 2000; R. Nelson 2002; Krupa 2004).

In the last decades of the twentieth century, African Americans in New Orleans and the urban core in general suffered from mutually intertwined problems—spatial isolation, racial concentration, a narrowing of economic and educational opportunities, crime and violence—almost all of which were getting

worse. While music, dance, and other forms of expressive culture undoubtedly provided psychic nourishment to the urban black poor in these worsening conditions, their fragile web of survival was violently and dramatically disrupted in early September of 2005, when Hurricane Katrina slammed into Louisiana and Mississippi. When the levees failed to contain a surge of water coming from the Gulf, entire neighborhoods in the city were submerged.

As analysts from the Brookings Institution noted, "Black people and poor people bore the brunt of the devastation because—for the most part—they lived most often in the lower-lying, more flood-prone sections of the city, such as Mid-City or the Lower Ninth Ward" (2005, 13). The effects of historically-rooted neglect, impoverishment, and spatial concentration were made worse by confusion, inaction, lack of preparation and general incompetence at various levels of government after the storm's landfall. The sad spectacle of citizens stranded on rooftop islands for days on end, broadcast around the world, was for some a ringing indictment of the failure of government and civic responsibility; for others, it merely confirmed the otherness of New Orleans's black poor, as the media focus on the immediate challenges of rescue and resettlement often failed to acknowledge the ways in which "what was happening to greater New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina greatly worsened what happened afterward" (13).

Conclusion

The evolution of a local rap scene and style, which will be the subject of the remaining chapters of the dissertation, is a process that interacted dynamically with the wider social and cultural forces detailed above, the roots of which extend all the way back to the city's colonial period. While rap represented, in many ways, a dramatic break with earlier genres of popular music along the

lines of instrumentation, composition, production, narrative voice, and imagery, it also embodied strong continuities with prior commercial and vernacular music styles within the African American tradition. In New Orleans, this set the stage for an early, enthusiastic, and participatory embrace of rap on the part of young blacks (and a few older folks) in New Orleans.

Its distinctiveness notwithstanding, the stylistic and organizational dimensions of rap in New Orleans reveal the influence of the same forces and phenomena that shaped the evolution of jazz, R&B, soul, and funk in the city. It benefited from New Orleans's status as a place where diverse African American, Afro-Caribbean, and European sensibilities coexisted in mutual influence. Poor blacks in New Orleans took the idea of rap and made it their own, using a syncretic process of creolization and experimentation to find a relatively distinctive voice within the stylistic and identificatory world of rap. This local style and voice emerged from a highly contested and competitive local scene; it also emerged in conversation with the wider world of rap music, its musical evolution and its changing ways of imagining the relationship between place, identity, musical style and lyrical content.

While every era of popular music had its own possibilities and limitations, the persistence of a 'New Orleans sound' over time creates a sense of continuity, the sense that a similar pattern plays out in terms of the way local musicians, performers, producers and audiences in New Orleans interface with wider musical trends, often producing compelling new interpretations and innovations. Another element of continuity results from the perpetuation of a distant and intermittent relationship between artists and companies in New Orleans and companies in the centers of music industry power. As in other eras of popular music, New Orleans rap was hobbled by the city's geographic remoteness, which

has continued to discourage national music companies from establishing branch offices in the city.

If these elements added some sense of stability, or at least inevitability, to the processes at work in the local rap music scene, other factors—including technologically enabled suburbanization, the concentration of black poverty in the city, and a declining industrial base—had the opposite effect. While the local economy, civic institutions, and spatial organization of the city's population had undergone radical shifts in the second half of the twentieth century, one thing had not changed; black New Orleanians were at the bottom of the heap, even as the cultural forms that originated in poor and working class black neighborhoods were increasingly celebrated and globally disseminated. This contradiction structured the ways that participants imagined the possibilities and limitations of the rap era.

Chapter 3. "The City that Is Overlooked": Rap Beginnings (1980-1991)

*"New Orleans isn't known as a center of rap music, by far the most important musical genre to emerge from the decade."
—Times-Picayune music critic Scott Aiges (1989).*

Introduction

This chapter provides a chronological discussion of the emergence of rap music in New Orleans during the period 1980-1991. The ways in which rap evolved in New Orleans were strongly influenced by the genre's wider national context, which included an early focus on New York, and the subsequent development (in the late 1980s and early '90s) of a parallel scene in and around Los Angeles. I offer a brief overview of these aspects of rap's history before moving on to New Orleans. My analysis is informed by an understanding of the historical trajectory of expressive cultural forms and styles in New Orleans, and of their particular political-economic contexts, which were the subject of the two previous chapters.

I begin my discussion of rap's emergence in New Orleans with the foundational efforts of DJs and audiences in venues like block parties and nightclubs, where local preferences were nurtured and aspiring rappers and DJs made their first forays into public performance. I then move on to a discussion of some of the rap artists who made important contributions to the genre's early growth in New Orleans, with an emphasis on their role in the contested process of defining a local "sound" and narrative voice within rap. Artists discussed in this chapter include New York, Incorporated, Ninja Crew, Gregory D and Mannie Fresh, and MC J' Ro J'; artists from the later 1980s, when New Orleans began to connect more significantly with the rap music industry at the regional and national level, include MC Thick, Bust Down, and Warren Mayes, among others.

The chapter responds to the following questions: How did rap as a practice and as a commercial enterprise begin in New Orleans? What songs, artists, and phenomena shaped the evolution of rap in the city? What was the relationship between early rap in New Orleans and the music coming out of the centers of industry concentration in New York and Los Angeles? How did artists negotiate their own wider career aspirations with the demands of local audiences to hear themselves and their town 'represented' in rap? How, and under what circumstances, are ideas of New Orleans's distinctiveness communicated through music and lyrics, and in discourse? How do these expressions relate to the wider vernacular music culture and traditions of New Orleans?

The National Rap Music Scene

Rap music in New Orleans evolved within a dialogic process in which local artists and audiences absorbed and responded to stylistic, technological, and conceptual developments coming from the genre's established centers of production, where artists and labels exercised a defining influence upon the tastes and preferences of audiences in more peripheral locations. The practical or functional dimensions of New York's early dominance were intertwined with the city's notable symbolic role in the proliferation of rap music listening and practice in New Orleans and in other cities across the country. However, as the genre expanded and matured in the 1980s, a progressively wider array of musical and textual ideas, themes, and artistic personae were presented for consumption.

The story of rap's emergence in New York City in the late 1970s has been ably told by many participants and scholars (Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Forman 2002; Hager 1984; Keyes 2002; T. Rose 1994; Toop 2000). For this reason, I will only provide a brief outline of some major developments, with an eye towards

illuminating the relationship between identity, place, musical style, and notions of authenticity that the genre entails.

Rap emerged from a particular cultural, spatial, and socioeconomic context in mid-1970s New York City. Young people (the vast majority of them from an African American or Afro-Caribbean background) in the besieged borough of the Bronx introduced a way of making music which relied upon a radical reinvention of ideas of composition, performance, and subjectivity. The movement also encompassed similar innovations in the realms of dance, clothing, and graphic arts. A youth culture based around street parties and live DJs coalesced into a distinct popular music genre called rap or hip-hop.

Rap's status as a distinct genre was built upon vocal performances that emphasized the percussive delivery of rhymed lyrics rather than singing, as well as the transformative appropriation of existing sound generation and reproduction technology (Keyes 2002, 59; Palmer 1982; Perkins 1996b, 7-9; Toop 2000, 26). DJs recombined or otherwise manipulated existing recordings to create new musical expressions tailored to the emerging preferences of rap audiences; they also explored the possibilities of electronic instruments like drum machines and sequencers, which were being continually refined by their manufacturers as part of the 1980s consumer electronics boom.

Drawing from diverse influences including Caribbean forms like reggae and dub, as well as African American genres like R&B, soul, and funk, rap retained a core connection to African-derived musical values (Hebdige 1987, [136]-141; Keyes 2002, 1, 66; Toop 2000, 12, 18-19, 28-53; Fricke and Ahearn 2002, 23-65; Perkins 1996b, 5-6). The influences of Afro-diasporic vernacular and oral culture were evident in the music's strong association with dancing, its rhyming, circumlocutory vocal performance style (reminiscent of folk forms like

signifying, the dozens, and black radio DJ patter), and of its reliance on particular narrative tropes.

Rap gradually expanded out of the New York neighborhoods where it began, spreading through largely informal means—"house and block parties or school gymnasium dances, ... cassette tape exchange between DJs and their burgeoning audiences"—and making early New York-based rap artists like Afrika Bambaataa and Spoonie Gee into underground legends (Forman 2002, 69; Toop 2000, 132-[133]). The first record companies to show any interest in these performers were "relatively small-scale, uptown independents" including Winley Records and Enjoy Records, among others, "whose guiding lights were familiar names from the past three decades of New York black music" (Toop 2000, 16). Prior to the mid-1980s, rap remained a subcultural phenomenon disconnected from the mainstream of American taste and commerce except as a somewhat obnoxious novelty. The music had demonstrated commercial potential with the breakout success of the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" in 1980, but it was not until 1984 (a year which saw the release of two popular rap-oriented movies, *Beat Street* and *Breakin'*) and afterwards that the genre was transformed "from a relatively contained micromarket to a macro market of diverse and dispersed consumers" (158; Forman 2002, 136).

Part of this transformation involved a diversification of rap's audience along lines of race, class, and region (Adler quoted in Palmer 1985). Run-D.M.C., the Hollis, Queens-based trio whose 1984 debut became the first rap album to achieve "gold" record status (500,000 sold), was at the forefront of these developments (Forman 2002, 138; Watrous 1988; Palmer 1985). Rapper Dartanian Stovall (a New Orleans native) recalled, "when Run-DMC came out . . . that just changed it for me. It was like, OK, this is that shit I want to do" (2008).

The genre's growing popularity attracted the interest of major music corporations, with leading New York-based rap independents like Tommy Boy and Def Jam securing deals with major labels to distribute and market their releases (Forman 2002, 148). These companies in turn worked to increase the genre's exposure and expand its audience in the 1986-1987 period (161). Rap became popular and accepted in most parts of the country, especially among African American youth, spreading through word-of-mouth, recordings (purchased, shared, or copied), and, increasingly throughout the 1980s, radio play, concerts, films, and music videos (xvii).

For this far-flung appreciation and identification to develop into full-fledged creative participation would, however, be a more complex, tension-fraught, and multi-staged process. On the practical side, potential participants had to learn and refine the skills of rapping, deejaying, dancing, event planning, and recording, efforts that ultimately contributed to the establishment or conversion of performance venues, recording studios, record labels, and retail outlets to suit the rap form. To varying degrees, explorations along these lines began in places all over the United States in the early 1980s. The cultivation of competence and popularity on a small-scale, local level was a necessary prerequisite for entry into the expanding field of rap music at the national level in the 1980s, but it was far from a guarantee of transitioning to such exposure. The latter was a process highly influenced by differential access on the part of various emerging scenes across the country to the wider distribution networks, more sophisticated marketing strategies, and more robust capitalization offered by major music corporations. This geographically-based inequality in access to resources was replicated in the conceptual realm, where values related to

authenticity, style, and geographic affiliation strongly favored artists associated with the earliest sites of rap's emergence.

New York's commanding position within the organizational and imaginary dimensions of rap music lasted for nearly a decade as the genre slowly took root in other cities across the country, including Philadelphia, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami and Seattle (Forman 2002, 169). By the early 1990s, an idea of the division of rap into two regionally-based spheres had taken hold. Although New Yorkers still dominated rap in the northeast, they began to be grouped with artists and producers from nearby urban areas to form a cultural bloc called "the East Coast." Meanwhile, Los Angeles's status as a center of the entertainment industry helped the city become the epicenter of another regional imaginary, "the West Coast."

These regional imaginaries encompassed specific artists, companies, and audiences in one or the other of the two places, as well as the distinctive musical styles and narrative viewpoints which were thought to characterize each contingent. Rap's transition from a geographically specific to a more generalized, diversified practice relied upon changes in the way that participants imagined the relationship between identity, place, authenticity, and musical style. Beginning around 1987, artists and producers from the greater Los Angeles area (and especially South Central L.A. and the heavily black area of Compton) rose to challenge New York's dominance (Forman 2002, 194). Their contributions were explicitly or implicitly framed within attempts to establish their own geospatial surroundings (on the level of region, city, or neighborhood) as a legitimate subject for rap music texts and an authentic site for the emergence of credible, authentic artists in the genre (198). Their success not only demonstrated that rap could be cultivated outside of New York, but also that the geographic expansion

of its production was tied to a diversification of the genre's thematic and stylistic dimensions (Toop 2000, xi; Forman 2002, 193).

The success that "West Coast" artists achieved in the late 1980s represented an important step away from the conception of rap as inherently dependent upon a New York-based imaginary and stylistic palette to one that would increasingly encourage and depend upon a proliferation of distinct, musically inflected representations of place. In the earliest significant development in this direction, West Coast rappers not only gave voice to the existing Southern California African American youth culture but also participated (along with record companies, journalists, and consumers) in the creation of the idea of "the West Coast" as a way of establishing the distinctiveness and authenticity of their expressions. Conventions linked to the local social and cultural environment quickly became incorporated into a self-conscious and strategic discourse of place-based distinctiveness, authenticity, and stylistic coherence.

The particularities of 'West Coast' rap, "the generally slower and more sung MCing rhythms" were linked in the rap imaginary to "representations of California as 'laid-back'; the area's large Hispanic population and low-rider culture also contributed symbolically distinctive features (Krimms 2000, 78). While New York-oriented ("East Coast") rap increasingly relied upon collages of "samples" (excerpts of previously existing, commercially released recordings) to support lyrical themes and imagery grounded in afrocentrism and black nationalism, the "West Coast" scene around L.A. became known for a style called "G-funk, . . . whose musical tracks tend to deploy live instrumentation, heavy on bass and keyboards, with minimal (sometimes no) sampling and often highly conventional harmonic progressions and harmonies" (74). The tendency towards

lyrics glorifying criminal behavior and expressing an explicitly antiauthoritarian, outlaw viewpoint helped cement the association between the "west coast" and the rise of "gangsta rap" as a subgenre of rap's narrative voice.

For Murray Forman, this stylistic change was tied to shifting spatial tropes used in rap lyrics: "the rise and impact of rappers on the West Coast [corresponded with] a discursive shift from the spatial abstractions framed within 'the ghetto' to the more localized and specific discursive construct of 'the hood' occurring in 1987-88." The considerable influence of West Coast based gangsta rap along the lines of musical style, lyrical content, and imagery was paired with a general movement in rap towards an emphasis on "regional affiliations as well as . . . a keen sense of what [Forman labels] the *extreme local*" (2002, xvii). This "extreme local" was expressed on multiple levels—as Krims writes, "a poetics of locality and authenticity can work through sound, visual images, words, and media images together" (2000, 124). But, most importantly for Forman, the emergence of a place-based concept of authenticity relates to changes in the conception of rap's narrative voice:

"The tendency toward narrative self-awareness and a more clearly definable subjectivity effectively closed the distance between the story and the storyteller, and the concept of place-based reality became more of an issue in evaluating an artist's legitimacy within the hip-hop scene" (2002, 170).

The emergence of West Coast rap represented a disruption of the status quo within the rap music industry and subculture, but it also heralded the genre's growing momentum as a force in commercial music. By 1988, the mainstreaming of rap shifted into high gear with the release of highly popular 'crossover' albums like Run-D.M.C.'s *Tougher than Leather*; by 1989 "heavy-metal [sic] and rap dominated U.S. sales" (Dixon 1990, B8). As a music industry executive observed, "rap now has a much broader audience. The music has crossed over to new radio

formats" (Plotnicki quoted in Watrous 1988, C11). A 1991 *Billboard* article noted that "widely held assumptions about who constitutes rap music's primary audience are being shattered," as "ratings and sales" demonstrated the substantial adult audience for the music (McAdams & Russell 1991, 91). The development and marketing of stylistic niches flourished within the genre: "Rap music has gotten so diverse that some say the word 'rap' isn't broad enough to cover the various styles" (91). A proliferation of vaguely-defined and overlapping subgenres—'reality' rap, conscious rap, gangsta rap, pop rap—based on distinct categories of lyrical content was augmented by an expanding sonic or musical palette from which artists and producers shaped the non-textual qualities of recordings and performances.

So-called 'underground' or 'hardcore' rap included that which was either too vulgar, violent, or politically militant to be played on the radio, and was often imagined as a more 'authentic' interpretation of the genre than pop rappers like MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice. 'Underground' rap of various types often drew upon images of angry, rebellious, and dangerous blackness, which ultimately helped groups like N.W.A. and Public Enemy garner a substantial audience among white, middle-class listeners. Female performers were rare in 'hardcore' rap, which was strongly associated with masculine subjectivity and audiences; while 'gangsta' rap artists often relied upon demeaning or misogynist representations of women, most 'conscious' or 'political' rap implicitly figured politics, culture, and the public sphere in general as a patriarchal, male domain, with black men speaking for passive and marginalized women.

In addition to Los Angeles, other major cities in the United States were beginning to develop self-sustaining rap music styles and scenes. In the late 1980s, two of the earliest independent labels in the South—Houston's Rap-A-Lot

and Miami's Luke Skywalker Records—"slowly tapped into the southern audiences' musical tastes, displaying aesthetic and thematic content that resonated with local and regional consumers" (Forman 2002, 330). While substantial differences existed between the two labels and the rap music scenes to which they were tied, their rise nevertheless indicates the trajectory towards continuing geographic expansion that would characterize rap music in the 1990s.

The process of geographic diversification was accelerated by the introduction of SoundScan retail accounting technology in 1991, which allowed unprecedented access to the specific contours and trends of thriving local and regional markets tended by independent labels and distributors (Anand and Peterson 2000, 276). Major labels began to explore the possibilities for exploiting these previously obscure markets, and sought out relationships with artists or companies in places outside of the established centers of production. These included previously undesirable southern cities like Atlanta, Houston, and Miami.

New Orleans Rap Grassroots: DJs and Block Parties

In the early 1980s, there were no record labels in New Orleans devoted exclusively to rap, and little in the way of established rap groups. Grassroots activities around rap music in the neighborhoods, housing projects, streets, schools, and jails of the city laid the foundations for an emergent local scene as rap quickly became the dominant frame of reference within popular music for black children and teenagers (Scott 2005; Forman 2002, xvii). However, expansion of the culture of rap music consumption, performance and production gained momentum throughout the decade of the 1980s, as artists, audiences,

DJs, and club owners all participated in the gradual establishment of a local scene.

In New Orleans, as in other places, club and party DJs both foreshadowed and facilitated the transition to the rap era; their efforts represent a crucial nexus between the local scene and national music companies. DJ Carriere, Leo "Slick Leo" Coakley, and Charles "Captain Charles" Leach were among the many local DJs who moved the crowds in the bars, clubs, and neighborhood-based events like 'house parties,' dances held at schools, churches, or community centers, and 'block parties'—large outdoor neighborhood gatherings with a sound system and dancing—where rap music formed an increasing portion of the musical offerings (Dvorak 1998).

New Orleans audiences enthusiastically supported the creative abilities and stylistic sensibilities of DJs, who sometimes achieved minor local celebrity. The key feature of a successful DJ performance is the ability to "set a party off" by establishing, building, maintaining, or interrupting the musical flow, depending upon the circumstances (Joseph Baker quoted in NTSPC 2006, 71). This sometimes involved DJs making their own vocal contributions to the mix, in response to either the musical content or developments within the club or party space itself. Joseph "Joe Black" Baker, a resident of the Desire Projects, described the process of lining up the weekly entertainment for the neighborhood: "we would look for who was gonna do the block party for that weekend or through the week. My best DJ, and maybe a lot of other people's best DJ, was DJ Carriere ... We had other DJs, but he set a party off like no other DJ I ever saw" (71).

Coming "after DJ Carriere," Leo "Slick Leo" Coakley became another highly sought-after club and party DJ, who also "introduced New York-style scratching and broadcasted club mixes [from the Famous Disco] live" on radio

station WAIL-FM (Eric Barra quoted in NTSPC 2006, 72; Sarig 2007, 251; Braxton 2002). Desire resident and dance group member Eric Barra recalled, "We used to give dances and go to dances where he used to be the DJ, cause if you don't get Slick Leo, you ain't *nothin*" (quoted in NTSPC 2006, 72). His comments about Slick Leo demonstrate the esteem in which these popular DJs were held: "He paved the way for Captain Charles and all the famous DJs ... he was the man" (72).

DJs like Carriere or Slick Leo built their reputations at neighborhood-based block parties, outdoor events with no cover charge or age limit, located in spaces which are accessible and familiar to all members of the surrounding community. With roots in "community dinners and courtyard barbecues", block parties have served as a central space for the collective enjoyment and creation of rap music in New Orleans, contributing to the establishment of a collective local musical sensibility that spans across generations (Dvorak 1998). As Yolanda Marrero, president of the resident council at the B.W. Cooper (formerly Melpomene) project, remarked in 1998, "It's something that's unique to our culture . . . We use our positiveness, our looseness to celebrate" (quoted in Dvorak 1998).

Organizing and participating in these events has the potential to contribute to a wide variety of skills, including dancing, music making, sound engineering, event planning, and food preparation. In addition to their role as a source of community enjoyment, block parties also contribute to a diverse array of small-scale entrepreneurial activities; they provide income for the DJ, and stimulate neighborhood businesses, which often sponsor the events. Their small-scale commercial aspirations intersect with grassroots notions of social control: As Raymond Williams recalled,

"On the weekends, Ms. Erzie used to get the DJ for us. She knew a DJ out there would keep the children out of trouble. Nobody would go out there acting crazy. She would have her truck [selling food or drink] to make her money back from paying the DJ" (quoted in NTSPC 2006, 75).

Block parties also provide a space for aspiring rappers like MC T Tucker, Magnolia Slim, or Katey Red to polish their material and techniques and build their local reputation. The phenomenon itself has formed the subject of songs including Partners-N-Crime's "N.O. Block Party" (1998) and Katey Red's "Melpomene Block Party" (1999), among others.

Block parties formed a central axis of many young people's social lives, and attracted attendees from the general area: "If you stayed in the back, or you stayed up front, or you stayed in Gentilly, you knew that we was having a DJ in the court on Friday or Saturday night and everybody would come" (Perry McDonald quoted in NTSPC 2006, 65). For many project youth, the block party was not just a way to pass the time, but was "our time to get our shine on" a regular and celebratory high point in the weekly rhythms of life in the city's poor neighborhoods (Troy Materre quoted in NTSPC 2006, 74). Gerald Platenburg, a dancer who later performed as part of a group called "The Original Desire," remembered that "our dancing was practice for the DJs in [the] Desire [housing project]. At least once a week, we would get together to dance" (quoted in NTSPC 2006, 76).

The frequent use of the term "DJ" to metonymically refer to a block party indicates the centrality of their efforts, but within the vernacular spaces of rap's local evolution, the DJs were not the only people actively participating in the creative process. Dancing was always central to these events, and forms a near-universal commonality of experience even as it exists at various levels of athleticism, eroticism, complexity, and organization. On the high end of these

values came dance groups like The Parkway Boys, the Nature Boys, or Motown Sound, which was founded by Eric "Dirty Red" Barra and Joseph "Joe Black" Baker, who later founded the second line club Joe Black and the Revolution. Barra and Baker's recollections illustrate the multiple benefits held out by performing at block parties—camaraderie, courtship, and just plain fun: "We did a whole lot of different dances as a team . . . We used to have ladies from all over and people just crowd around us when we started playing and then we used to coordinate stuff together" (Joseph Baker quoted in NTSPC 2006, 72). Individuals who introduced innovative dance steps might have a dance named after them, such as "the Funky Joe Black" (72).

While the world of competitive, organized dance groups may have been dominated by young men, their female counterparts also participated in the public dances, and the spectacle of these "utterly liberated young women" performing highly erotic dances in a public space made some community residents uncomfortable (Dvorak 1998). Interviewed for a 1998 article on block parties, Barbara Jackson, president of the resident council at the St. Thomas public housing complex, insisted, "I don't have anything to do with them, but a lot of people say they're too vulgar." Rapper Mia X countered, "It's not sexual; dancing to bounce is about freedom." For some, the public context was more problematic than the dancing itself—as Yolanda Marrero noted, "I don't let my kids do that dance outside . . . Only inside." The divergent views on dancing, eroticism, and appropriate public behavior often break down along generational lines; however, social class, education, and religious orientation also exercise significant influence.

Block parties made substantial positive contributions to the communal experience of black New Orleanians, but these events could not be insulated from

the various problems of daily life in the projects or similarly poor neighborhoods. With alcohol, drugs, and gambling sometimes contributing to the mix, block parties were as susceptible as any other gathering of people to the outbreak of interpersonal violence; the chances were increased when they attracted partiers from other parts of town. Their ability to draw neighborhood residents outside made them vulnerable to drive-by vendetta shootings (Dvorak 1998). Sometimes the violence claimed innocent victims, as in the case of Raymond Williams, who "got shot out there listening to DJ Carriere" in 1983 (quoted in NTSC 2006, 75).

In the block party or nightclub, black youth found community and a release (or at least a distraction) from the challenges of everyday life under material circumstances that ranged from tolerable to bleak. As the above comments indicate, block parties and other similar grassroots events featuring DJs and dancing provided not only entertainment and opportunities for socializing, but also contributed in important ways to the psychic survival of poor and working-class black youth. Perry McDonald grew up in the Desire housing project, became a college basketball star, and then returned to run the recreation program for the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO). His recollections of the importance of these musical events transcend simple nostalgia:

"Those days, man, when the DJ was out in the court, it was something—today I still really don't believe it happened that way. With the camaraderie between the people in the Desire, we always figured out a way to come together to have fun. The DJ in the court was one of the ways" (quoted in NTSPC 2006, 65, 67).

McDonald's near disbelief speaks to the highly transformative effect of these music-centered events (and the collective efforts that made them possible) upon the "prestructured social space" of the housing project courtyard (Stokes 1994, 4).

Nightclubs and 'Gong Shows'

Nightclubs provided another important venue for the evolution of a local rap music scene in New Orleans. In addition to presenting concerts of established national artists like Miami's 2 Live Crew or Houston's Scarface, they more often provided a space for locally-based DJs and rappers to perform. Important clubs with regard to rap music during this period included the Famous Disco, Club Sensations, Club Amnesia, Club Adidas, and the sprawling Mirage, at the corner of 17th and Severn streets in the suburb of Metairie. Teen clubs, such as Club Polo on North Claiborne in the Tremé or 18-Below across the river in Gretna, were an important venue for younger listeners wanting to listen and dance to rap music. These clubs were essential to the careers of DJs like Slick Leo, who worked at the Famous Disco, or Captain Charles, who began his career as a DJ in the mid-eighties in establishments including "the Two Brothers Club, . . . 2004, . . . the Excalibur Club and then . . . Club Discovery" (Cortello 1997c, 17).

Club Discovery, located at 2831 St. Claude Avenue, was one of the most important establishments for the emerging rap music culture in New Orleans in the late 1980s and early '90s. For patrons like Gerald Platenburg, the Ninth Ward club (which also featured a restaurant to provision hungry dancers) served as a weekly place to have fun and socialize ("9th Ward Gunman Dies in Shootout with Cop" 1989). He recalled, "Discovery was known for its dance contests. . . . The [Houston-based rap group The Geto Boys] hosted a contest and the grand prize was five hundred dollars for the winner. I won that one" (NTSPC 2006, 103). The size of the purse in this instance is suggestive of both the value placed on the embodied contributions of dancers to the nightclub experience, as well as the scale of the profits that such venues could generate.

Talent shows or 'gong shows'—open contests in which stand-up comedians, dancers, singers, or rappers (backed by a house band or a recording) and other performers competed for a modest cash prize determined by audience response—formed an important venue for aspiring rap artists in New Orleans in the late 1980s and early '90s. Generally, these consisted of weekly events at bars and clubs, such as the gong shows at Club Discovery hosted by "Brother Randy," or those at establishments like "The Social, The Phoenix, [and] The Other Side" mentioned by *Bust Down* (Burke 1989; *Bust Down* 1991). Less frequently, higher-stakes talent contests were staged at larger venues, such as the WYLD Talent Show, held annually since 1981. Organizers expected over 8,000 attendees at the 1990 event, among them "representatives from most of the major record labels [who] judge the show and scout for acts" (Anding 1990; J. Williams 1990).

Bobby Marchan (1930-1999) was one of the most active organizers of weekly, nightclub-based gong shows throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and represents one of the few direct links between New Orleans's rap scene and earlier genres of R&B and soul that preceded it; as Jeff Hannusch observed, Marchan "virtually [rode] every trend in black music since the late Forties" (1985, 301). Born Oscar James Gibson in Youngstown, Ohio, he traveled to New Orleans in 1953 with "a troupe of female impersonators called 'The Powder Box Revue' that was booked at . . . [the] Dew Drop Inn for several weeks" (301). As one of the "Clowns," he backed pianist Huey Smith in his classic recordings for Ace Records, and developed a solo career around 1960 after his version of Big Jay McNeely's "There Is Something on Your Mind" went to number one on the *Billboard* R&B charts (Hannusch 1999; Grady 1995).

His recording career cooled in the 1970s, and he earned a living by touring with a drag act from a base in Pensacola, Florida. He returned to New

Orleans in 1977, and found work as the emcee at Prout's Club Alhambra. In the early '80s, he began organizing weekly talent competitions at various clubs around town, including Club 2004 and The VIP New Orleans club (Hannusch 1985, 306; Cortello 1993c, 22). If an artist failed to impress the audience, "Bobby would come out there and make his little comments, and talk bad about them, and . . . say all kind of bad things to them" (Leach 2005). These events formed only one of his multi-pronged efforts to make a living in the entertainment business. Under the name Manicure Productions or Manicure Records, Marchan booked and promoted various New Orleans rap artists, including Warren Mayes, Lil' Elt & DJ T, Mystikal, and others, and according to Hannusch was centrally involved in the formation of local powerhouse Cash Money Records (1999). If Marchan's laconic assertions are to be believed, his interest in rap music was strictly profit-driven: "I'm not interested in no rap. I'm interested in what they [rappers] do, bring the money in. . . . Off the job I stay home and watch TV. There's too much violence in the street for me to be running around out there" (Grady 1995).

Active in the local music business until his death in late 1999 at the age of sixty-nine, Marchan nevertheless played a foundational role in the establishment of individual artistic careers in the rap field, and by extension contributed to the rise of a self-sustaining local rap scene in New Orleans. As rapper DJ Jubilee recalled,

"Bobby did a lot for New Orleans. Every bounce artist that went through Bobby made money and became something. Bobby booked shows . . ., got you on the radio—Bobby did it all. Bobby was the greatest empowerer of black artists New Orleans ever had. I don't think anyone will ever replace him because he was a hustler and known all over." (quoted in Hannusch 2000, 93).

Marchan was also involved in lining up rap acts for the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival ('JazzFest'), which since its inception in 1970 has been an important venue for a wide spectrum of New Orleans- and Louisiana-based artists seeking access to wider audiences and markets. As one writer observed, the annual event "gained a national reputation during the '80s," a development that "brought the eyes and ears of the music business to our door" (Aiges 1989). However, the rewards associated with this heightened interest favored established genres of 'roots' music rather than emergent and explicitly commercial ones like rap. The latter genre has never represented more than a tiny fraction of the vast array of entertainment on offer at JazzFest, where audiences can enjoy nationally popular stars as well as local cultural groups such as Social & Pleasure clubs or Mardi Gras Indian gangs.

Nevertheless, JazzFest organizers have maintained a "diverse, egalitarian booking policy" which has resulted in a relatively welcoming attitude towards rap in general and local rap in particular (Sandmel 1989). Appearing in 1985, Run-D.M.C. was the first rap group to perform at the festival, but in the years that followed organizers eschewed big-name acts in favor of more obscure local artists ("Louisiana Heritage Fair" 1985, 18; Spera 1999c). In 1986, Tanya P. appears to have been the first New Orleans-based rapper to perform at the festival; in the subsequent years covered by this chapter (1987-1991), local rap artists appearing at the JazzFest included (in chronological order): Tanya P. & the Mic Conductors; the Rappin Patrol with The Super MC's & The Twins of Spin; MC J' Ro' J & The Gold Rush Crew; Tanya P. & GMS with The Hollygrove Posse; Gregory D. & DJ Mannie Fresh; Li'l Mac & Warren Mayes; and E.R.C, Baby T. & Devious D. (Gilbert 1986; 1987; 1988; Sandmel 1989; Aiges 1990c; 1991a; 1991b).

As rap gained popularity in the mid-1980s, New Orleans saw a variety of nationally popular acts come through town. They performed at large venues like the Municipal Auditorium (located behind the French Quarter near the site of Congo Square), the University of New Orleans Kiefer Lakefront Arena, or the Superdome. The "Jam-A-Tron" concert (featuring UTFO, Kurtis Blow, and Doug E. Fresh, among others) in late August of 1985 and the "Rap Attack" show in March of the following year were two of the rap-oriented tours that came through New Orleans. Teenaged carousing and street crime were reported after several large rap events in the later 1980s which illustrated rap's potential to act as a flashpoint for tensions related to race, youth, poverty, and the public spaces of urban New Orleans ("N.O. Tourists Robbed After Rap Concert," 1986; "Teens Go on Rampage in N.O. on July 4th," 1987). As in other cities, these events and the tone of their coverage in the local press contributed to a growing perception of rap fans and concerts as violent and dangerous and a related reluctance to book rap shows at large, mainstream venues (Pareles 1988).

While these touring arena shows usually featured well-known national performers, they sometimes provided valuable opportunities to local artists seeking wider exposure. In addition to stars like LL Cool J and Dana Dane, the "Rap Attack" show included two local performers, New York Incorporated and DJ Slick Leo while a show in December of 1990 headlined by gangsta rapper Ice Cube included "New Orleanian Warren Mayes," who was riding the popularity of his single, "Get it girl" ("Concerts" 1986; Aiges 1990e).

In addition to block parties, nightclubs, and arena shows, less formal spaces were also important to the incubation of a local rap music scene. Rap's early years corresponded with the popularity of portable radios, or 'jam boxes' which allowed listeners to play their music on city streets and in other public

places, an example of how rap music listeners have used advances in commercially-produced audio technology to effect "transformation of the urban soundscape" (Forman 2002, xvii). In a 1985 "Around Town" local color column, Bill Grady described several such listeners blasting rap music in central, public places in New Orleans. The article generated several letters to the editor harshly critical of the type of behavior it portrayed (Grady 1985, A-13-A-14; "Letters" 1985a; "Letters" 1985b).

Whether at block parties, on the street, or in other venues, the rap music played in New Orleans in the early and mid-1980s reflected New York's monopoly on talent and organization. At a Marrero middle school where students were allowed to bring records to play at lunchtime, "DJ Shane Gros, sporting a black felt hat, gold earrings and chains, said he knows what turns the crowd on" (Hebert 1985). Interestingly, Gros identified the crowd's preference as "funk and soul music" but then named "the Fat Boys, Doug E. Fresh and M.C. Ricky D."—all artists clearly within the rap genre—as examples. In this article (as well Grady's 1985 piece discussed above) the words "rap" or "hip-hop" were never used despite the (retrospectively) obvious appropriateness of such labels. Even to some participants in the scene like Gros, rap music at this time was still in a transitional phase in terms of its status as a recognized genre of music in its own right, and formed a conceptual extension of prior genres such as soul and funk.

Participants in the block parties of the mid- to late 1980s recalled the kinds of music played at these events: "all the early hip-hop—Grandmaster Flash, Curtis [sic] Blow, and Run DMC"; "it was the era of tight pants and everybody was into breakdancing, the electric boogie, rap" (Gerald Platenburg quoted in NTSPC 2006, 76; Raymond Williams quoted in NTSPC, 75). For many, such as dancer Gerald Platenburg, New York retained an iconic and mythical status as

the fount from which rap music culture flowed: "I'd been thinking about New York and breakdancing for years and years" (76). His recollections of music popular in late 1980s New Orleans reflects the growing influence of rap produced in California and, to a lesser extent, Florida: "You had some pretty good rap music back then—L.L. Cool J. [New York], Too Short [Oakland], 2 Live Crew [Miami]. I used to like to dance to N.W.A. [Compton] or Public Enemy [New York]" (103). Artists and groups such as these, from the established centers of rap production, set the standards to which local performers aspired in New Orleans

Early Rap Groups in New Orleans, 1983-1987

Many of the earliest rap records from New Orleans resulted from the efforts of producers or record label owners from prior genres of African American music in the city, such as Senator Jones. In 1983, his Superdome label released what was probably the first New Orleans rap record, a twelve-inch single by Parlez, "Make it, shake it, do it good!" The lyrical content of the record (which bears the subtitle "Mardi Gras man" on its cover) consists of an extended and artful description of New Orleans at carnival time, mentioning the mainstream krewes along with black traditions like the Zulus and the Mardi Gras Indian groups. While the lyrics focus exclusively upon New Orleans's distinctiveness and party atmosphere, the stylistic qualities of the vocal performance and the backing music (in which a group of studio musicians performs a funk/disco backing track to support the rapped lyrics) are indistinguishable from their national counterparts. Rather than representing any sort of connections to or inspiration from a local grassroots rap music scene, the song remains more of a novelty rap, written and performed by artists rooted in earlier genres of black popular music.

The earliest notable rap group in New Orleans was not only patterned after New York-based acts like Run-D.M.C. or the Beastie Boys in terms of music and vocal performance style, but also inscribed this relationship in its name. "New York, Incorporated," a five-person ensemble that billed itself as a "mobile entertainment service," was founded around 1984 or 1985 by a relocated native of Queens, New York, which, along with the group's name, demonstrates the extent to which early rap music in New Orleans depended upon material and imagined connections with New York (Spera 1997b).

The membership of New York, Incorporated was somewhat fluid, but its organizing force was Denny Dee, a rapper and DJ from New York who "transplanted himself" to New Orleans around 1980, bringing with him "all the equipment and skills (such as transforming and battle mixing) that were essential to a budding turntablist" (Aiges 1992b). The group included DJs Mannie Fresh (Byron Thomas) and DJ Wop, two female rappers named Polo B (Mia Young) and Spor-T, and a male rapper, as well as dancers "Country" and "Mike" (Sarig 2007, 251; Sporty T. interview). Although they never released any recordings, New York, Incorporated soon became established on the local scene, frequently opening touring concerts by national rap acts when they came to New Orleans before disbanding around 1986 (Mannie Fresh in Murphy 2005; "Concerts" 1986)

With such a large group of performers, it is perhaps not surprising that several of the members would not maintain their early level of prominence in the rap scene following the group's disintegration in 1986. Its founder performed as late as May, 1992 (as "Lord Denny Dee") and released a cassette called *Taking No Shorts* in August of that same year, after which he descended into obscurity (Aiges 1992b; Aiges 1992f). Other members, however, used their experience in

the group as a springboard for successful careers in the local, regional, and (eventually) national/global markets. As Mia X, Mia Young went on to become the most successful female rapper in the history of the Gulf Coast after several nationally distributed albums on Master P's No Limit label in the late 1990s (Concepcion 2007, 25). The group's DJ, Mannie Fresh, became a pivotal figure in the emergence and crystallization of the local style called bounce in the early 1990s, as well as the successful marketing of bounce-inflected rap to national audiences later in the same decade. With a career that now spans over twenty years, he has been one of the most prolific and consistent contributors to the New Orleans rap scene in terms of both the development of its stylistic identity and its exposure to wider audiences.

Other groups followed in New York Incorporated's footsteps in the mid-1980s, with most of them (including Masters of the Turntables and Rockers Revenge, among others) oriented towards DJing rather than performing their own material. The performances of New York Incorporated were supported by the Rescue Crew, who (after the departure of several members) later split off to form their own group. The Ninja Crew performed in 'ninja' costumes and included rappers Gregory "Gregory D" Duvernay and Terence "Sporty T" Vine, along with their DJ, Terrence "DJ Baby T" McKenzie. While New York Incorporated enjoys the distinction of being the first well-known rap act in New Orleans, the Ninja Crew were "the first New Orleans rappers to expand beyond the city limits" (Sarig 2007, 252).

This exposure resulted from a fortuitous relationship with the Miami-based 4 Sight Records, which began when the teenaged group members called the number listed on one of the label's releases. When owner Billy Hines answered, they performed an extemporaneous audition, after which Hines agreed to put out

a single by the group. They traveled to Ft. Lauderdale to record, and released a twelve-inch single with "We destroy" on the A-side. As Sarig notes, "the record did well among 4 Sight's core audience in Florida and Georgia, and also wound up on AM 940 WYLD in New Orleans" (2007, 252-3).

The style of music on the recording is firmly anchored within the national conventions of the period. The musical content of the songs on the single show little to no influence from the New Orleans local vernacular music environment, consisting of beats derived from records manipulated on a turntable by DJ Baby T, who adds "scratching" techniques in the DJ spotlight track on the B-side, "Baby T rock." Except for a brief mention of New Orleans by Gregory D in "We destroy," the songs' lyrics avoid any references to the local context. Rendered in impressive back-and-forth patter (a presentation comparable with contemporaneous work by nationally popular groups like Run-D.M.C. or the Beastie Boys), they focus boastfully on the superior abilities of the rappers.

Ninja Crew's recording career began and ended with their 4 Sight single, and, like New York Incorporated, the group (together for less than two years) disbanded without achieving any substantial success except on the local level. Still, the individual members of the Ninja Crew—rappers Gregory D and Sporty T, and DJ Baby T (who later changed his stage name to DJ Lil' Daddy)—went on to have prolific careers in rap music at the local and regional levels. After the Ninja Crew's demise, Gregory D teamed up with former New York Incorporated DJ Mannie Fresh to form a duo that soon became the most prolific New Orleans-based rap act of the late 1980s. While they generally aspired to produce rap that was stylistically and thematically similar to that being made in the major centers of production, they were also responsible for several early and influential expressions of locally-oriented rap in New Orleans. A brief review of their

recorded output during this period is instructive for the insight that it provides into the strategic decisions that artists and companies engage in at particular times to privilege or deemphasize local content.

Like the Ninja Crew, Gregory D. and Mannie Fresh sought out a record company outside of New Orleans, signing with the Los Angeles-based independent D&D Records. After enjoying moderate success with the 1987 single "Freddie's back" (inspired by the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films), the label released a full-length album, *Throw down*, in the same year (Sarig 2007, 253). The album's lyrics, musical content and imagery are geared towards the imagined tastes of national audiences, with the notable exception of the song, "Never 4-get were [sic] I come from," a tribute to the support that the rapper (now imagined as "world-renowned and [having] millions of fans") received from his hometown crowds. Gregory D's narrative focuses upon his own loyalty to New Orleans rather than the city's distinctiveness in itself. His expressions (e.g., "I really got my buck jump from Kennedy High") are framed positively and focus on peer and community support, and express a connectedness to black neighborhoods and communities that supports more abstract notions of rap authenticity.

Near the end of the song, Gregory D leads a male group in a 'roll call' of New Orleans's black neighborhoods, within which the names of places represent the identities of the people who live there; as he calls out the name of a neighborhood (e.g., "That third ward!"), the chorus responds, "Can't never forget!" Alternating in this fashion, the list covers most of the predominantly black areas of the city (the third, seventh, ninth, twelfth, thirteenth, seventeenth, and fifteenth wards, as well as the middle-class Seabrook subdivision), then moves to higher level categories such as New Orleans East, uptown, and downtown. The rapper breaks off from this list of neighborhoods to include a

cluster of references to the early rap groups in New Orleans, or at least those with which Gregory D and Mannie Fresh were closely tied ("That Ninja Crew! . . . New York Incorporated! . . . That Rescue Crew!"), and the list ends with a jubilant shouting out of the name of Gregory D's high school, "Kennedy!"

This is the first known recorded instance of this specific lyrical device—a semi-comprehensive listing of black neighborhoods and communities in New Orleans which alternates between solo performer and audience/group response—which in the years that follow will become a common feature of songs which attempt to exploit the values, preferences, and subjectivities of local audiences. In addition to the explicit level of textual meaning, the musical structure within which it is presented—collectively chanted and repeated phrases ("can't never forget") and a prominent featuring of call-and-response between solo and group voices that energizes a sense of collective participation—relate centrally to the device's meaning with the local New Orleans context. Finally, the tempo of the song, at 105 beats-per-minute, also speaks to emerging and distinct local preferences; the 'bounce' style that emerged in the early 1990s would be defined by tempi between 95 and 105 b.p.m.

D&D Records did not release Gregory D and Mannie Fresh's salute to their hometown as a single, and while it does deserve credit as the first song to include a particularly effective device (the 'roll call') for connecting with local audiences' attachment to the various wards, projects, and neighborhoods of New Orleans, it could justifiably be viewed as a 'filler' track among the more commercially viable offerings on the nine-song *Throw Down* album. However, another local New Orleans rap release from around 1988 spoke much more directly and exclusively to local music sensibilities. In the seven-inch single "Let's jump," MC J' Ro J' (Roy P. Joseph, Jr.) made explicit connections to the city's

African American vernacular parade culture through lyrical references, samples, composition, and performance techniques. While the single's cover photograph of the rapper wearing a New York Yankees baseball cap and a thick gold chain situate him within rap's stylistic mainstream, the narrator of "Let's jump" positions himself at the center of the local rap sensibility and scene through the use of musical and lyrical content keyed to the social geography and the vernacular, "street parade" sensibility of working-class black New Orleanians.

Even when they serve the classic rap function of self-aggrandizement, the lyrics of "Let's jump" maintain a particularity with regards to New Orleans's black culture: "I'm the uptown ruler, I'm cool and I'm hard / I'm well known in every ward." In subsequent lyrics the particularity of New Orleans is also framed within the dominant images of the expanding tourism industry: "New Orleans is full of happenings / Smiling faces, jamming places, all sorts of things / If you ever decide to come to New Orleans / Sit and try a taste of our native cuisine." These lyrics and others like them mentioning local landmarks are reminiscent of Parlez's 1983 "Make it, shake it, do it good" single, and demonstrate the ways in which New Orleans rap music incorporated and strategically deployed more widely-held and commercially inflected notions of the city's cultural and historical distinctiveness.

While Gregory D's lyrics in "Never 4-get. . ." held few specifics about New Orleans, the lyrics of "Let's jump" take the city and the particular musical and celebratory traditions of the city's black neighborhoods as its primary subject, with the narrator's authenticity deriving from his adept participation in these types of events: "This is the truth, it's an actual fact / That we will buck jump to a drop of a hat / As we clap our hands and stomp our feet / I said, this is how we roll to the buck jump beat."

The reference to "buck jumping" in this last stanza makes "Lets jump" (along with Gregory D's song described above) the first of several late-1980s rap records from New Orleans to employ this term. Like the "bounce" label that would describe much New Orleans rap between 1992 and 1995, "buck jump" connotes a sense of embodied, explosive, kinetic energy along a vertical axis. Related to dance, collective celebration, and aesthetic competition, it maintains a central connection to the city's vernacular musical traditions, especially the 'second line' (Sarig 2007, 253). In reference to the rap-influenced Rebirth Brass Band, Ben Sandmel observed, their "young peers [have] developed a unique solo dance called 'buck-jumping'" (1989). It remains unclear how directly this dance draws upon earlier, similarly named African American traditions from the area: WPA-era interviews with former slaves from the South Louisiana sugar country include reference to "the buck dance that . . . evolved as a flexible fluid dance in which the slaves, bending low to the ground, pounded the earth with rhythmic intensity" (Follett 2005, 222). Shane and Graham White, in their study of slavery-era musical practices, describe a "widely popular slave dance-form known as buck dancing" which if nothing else bears an archetypal resemblance to the highly competitive, public dance culture associated with rap:

"attention was initially fixed on the fast-stepping dancer, a solo performer, who beat out exciting rhythms with his feet. But, typically, buck dancing took place within a communal context . . . As the dance progressed, the spirited participation of onlookers invited others to jump into the central space, challenging the current performer's dancing skills" (2005, 50).

The associations with aesthetic competition are highlighted in the meaning assigned to the verb 'to buck' in the jazz era, when competing brass bands would "'buck' (compete against) one another" in public spaces (Hersch 2007, 81)

In terms of the musical elements of the song, "Let's jump" contains a rich array of local signifiers. Among its noteworthy elements, the song was the first to use samples of the music of New Orleans brass bands as a way to connote the vernacular traditions of the city's black communities, an idea which was continually employed in recordings by a variety of other artists (39 Posse, Big Heavy, Da' Sha Ra', Ricky B, 2 Blakk, among others) over the decade that followed. Samples of three different songs taken from the Rebirth Brass Band's 1984 debut *Here to Stay!*—"Shake your booty," "Lil' Liza Jane," and "It ain't my fault"—surface in different parts of "Let's jump." The (tuba) bass line sampled from Rebirth's "Shake your booty" exemplifies the fondness on the part of Crescent City musicians and audiences for "vocally suggestive horns" (Berry et al. 1986, 5), and provides a riff which drives the musical dimension of MC J' Ro J's song. The chorus of "Shake your booty"—which includes collective vocal performance alternating with horn lines—is also appropriated in "Let's jump," adapted to a new antiphonal structure in which MC J' Ro' J answers the band's exhortation with one of his own, the title phrase, "Let's jump!" Like "Never 4-get. . .," the tempo of "Let's jump" (98 b.p.m.) is also within the range that would become established as a defining local preference in the early 1990s.

Another highly distinctive feature of the song which connects it to earlier forms of local musical identity is its propulsive rhythmic pattern, which resembles the New Orleans "walking rhythm" described by R&B-era drummer Jabo Starks as "a beat that's not on, but it's not off—it's in between (in Payne 1996, 53). In "Let's jump," this effect is produced by heavily syncopated, parade-inflected electronic snare and bass drum patterns, which form the foundation for a mixture that includes hi-hat, clave, and electronic hand claps. A connection to New Orleans's nascent rap scene is also established through the use of a small

vocal sample from Gregory D. and Mannie Fresh's "Never 4-get. . ." (discussed above). Additionally, the song concludes with a similar "roll call" to that featured in "Never 4-get. . .," in which the rapper uses call-and-response structures to encourage audience members to represent their wards.

Due to its unmistakably local orientation (both in terms of content as well as marketing and distribution), it is doubtful that "Let's jump" received much exposure beyond the city itself, but it represents an important link in the chain of early expressions that attempted to define and exploit a local New Orleans musical sensibility. However, the song marked the high point of MC J' Ro' J's engagement with the musical, thematic, and social elements of New Orleans vernacular carnival and parade traditions. In the early '90s, he abandoned his career as a solo rapper and founded several record labels, including Emoja and Slaughter House, which released seminal recordings by artists including Mia X, the Bally Boys, Lil' E, and Fila Phil in the early to mid-1990s.

"Buck Jump Time (Project Rapp)" (1989)

A release the following year (1989) by Gregory D and Mannie Fresh further elaborated and celebrated a distinct local sensibility through a combination of explicit lyrical references and implicit qualities on the level of style or concept. The duo had departed from Los Angeles-based D&D and signed with local Uzi Records label, headed by Brian Smith, "a suspected drug dealer." Their debut twelve-inch single on the label contained the songs "Buck Jump time (project rapp)" and "Where you from? (party people)," both of which are strongly rooted in the distinctive sensibilities of the emerging New Orleans rap scene. The two songs on the twelve-inch are similar and easily confused. They share a tempo of around 112 b.p.m., and both rely upon chanted refrains in a call-and-response

pattern which alternates between an individual and a group. Both songs also feature the calling-out of various New Orleans wards, neighborhoods, or housing projects. While relatively complex and non-repetitive lyrical content linked the songs to rap's mainstream, their articulation of a local New Orleans sensibility unfolded forcefully along multiple dimensions: participatory, group-based vocal performance; rhythmic devices such as clapping and propulsive bass and snare drum beats to connote the New Orleans street parade; and the referencing in lyrics to the city's black neighborhoods.

In the lyrics of both songs on the twelve-inch, Gregory D contextualizes his discussion and celebration of New Orleans's "hardness" and neighborhood culture within a national rap industry dominated by the established centers of production—"New York this, California that / Forget that talk, this is where it's at." In "Where you from?," discussion of New Orleans— "the city of doom"—is prefaced by references to several established places on the rap map; "The city that is overlooked / but from this point the stand has been took / I know you heard of Strong Island [Long Island, home of Public Enemy] and Hollis, Queens [home to Run-D.M.C.] / But let's talk about New Orleans!"

The lyrics of "Where you from?" begin by asserting the uniqueness of New Orleans, and the desire on the part of its young people to participate in the "scene," understood here as the national rap music culture and industry. In his verses, Gregory D describes parties in different parts of town (including the Seventh Ward, Hollygrove, and New Orleans East) where conflicts occur between rival groups representing different housing projects or wards. While the narrator and his group of friends try to leave before violence breaks out, they are obviously fascinated with the charged atmosphere that surrounds these clashes. The exploration and celebration of local neighborhood- or ward-based rivalries

contained in the songs serve both to "represent" New Orleans textually as well as to establish the city's position in rap's symbolic economy of outlaw authenticity in which the dangerousness of a place elevates its prestige.

The verses are punctuated by simulations of listener call-ins to a local radio station, which, within the somewhat elastic logic of the song, is implied to be playing "Where you from?" over the air. Rather than showing appreciation the New Orleans-themed song, the two callers—over-the-top parodies of local character types—instead complain bitterly about the rapper's failure to mention their particular neighborhoods. The radio DJ character assures the agitated callers that their areas will be featured in upcoming verses. This potential for a musical performer (DJ or rapper) to alternate between stoking the volatile energy of the crowd and mediating or attempting to control it through verbal, lyrical and musical devices is also referenced at the end of the song. As the verses descend into unstructured chaos, Gregory D is portrayed picking up the microphone at a house party and trying in vain to rein in a rowdy crowd bent on pillage and destruction—"Don't steal the sofa, li'l daddy"—in lyrics that humorously portray the dangers involved when such a gathering gets out of control.

The expression of a particularized local identity in "Where you from?" is also achieved through musical devices. The song's prominent featuring of background chanting by a group of males places the emphasis on call-and-response, collective participation, and dynamic communication between an individual performer and competing groups of audience members. While the lyrics feature complex and non-repetitive narrative portions, they also include important sections in which phrases (usually names of places) are repeated rhythmically in a chanted fashion. These "war chants," ward or neighborhood names chanted by a group of male backup singers, are voiced over a stripped-

down backing track consisting of syncopated bass drum notes and handclapping in an eighth-note pattern. The combination of handclapping and collectively-voiced chants serves to connote the sense of collective energy and pride expressed in the city's black parade and carnival culture. Further connection to this sense of local identity is established through the use of synthesizer-generated sounds that suggest a trumpet.

"Buck Jump time" shares with "Where you from?" a focus on the local social geography of New Orleans. The song begins with an antiphonal 'roll-call' in which Gregory D calls out the names of the city's housing projects ("That Calio!" . . . "That Melpomene!"), and is answered by the male chorus chanting the song's title in response. The lyrics consist of listing and (briefly) describing some of New Orleans's black neighborhoods and housing projects, as well as some of the criminal activities (such as robbery or drug trafficking) of their inhabitants. As the song progresses through several distinct parts, Gregory D portrays himself addressing a crowd and stoking its collective energies to ever-higher levels.

Both songs explore the paradoxical nature of New Orleans's local cultural and social identity. They foster awareness of collective struggle and distinctive traditions that are part of the way young black New Orleanians set themselves apart from their counterparts in other places. However, the creative tension in the songs derives from their documentation, celebration, sonic recreation and (potential) incitement of the rivalries between opposing neighborhood groups. Veteran DJ Captain Charles lamented that he could not play "Buck Jump time" without a fight breaking out in the club; in several cases reported in the *Times-Picayune*, this and other, similar songs which feature the chanted names of wards or projects seem to have been particularly effective at setting off the volatile mixture of neighborhood pride, gun violence, and vendetta killing that plagued

the city throughout the early 1990s, spurring participants and journalists alike to frame the relationship between musical representations of ward-based conflict and real-world violence as directly causal (Leach 2005; D. Bennett 1990; Cooper 1993; Walsh 1993).

Needless to say, these tensions—and the easy access to powerful firearms that transformed their release from fistfights to much deadlier forms—existed prior to being represented in song. However, it is also quite clear from these anecdotal examples that songs, the ideas expressed through them, the devices used to express these ideas, do more than passively reflect an existing social reality and have a significant potential to catalyze 'real world' action, including violence.

Gregory D and Mannie Fresh left Uzi Records after the untimely demise of label owner Brian Smith, who fell to his death in June of 1989 from a hotel balcony as he tried to escape from Drug Enforcement Administration agents (Aiges 1990a). Dallas-based entrepreneur Kim Bihari quickly signed the duo to his newly-formed independent label, Yo! Records, and they released the full-length *"D" rules the nation* later that year. "Legendary Chicago house producer Steve 'Silk' Hurley," with whom Mannie Fresh worked in Los Angeles, engineered and mixed the album, which featured few lyrical or musical references to New Orleans (Reynolds 1999). The album's visual presentation also does little to establish a clear relationship between the artists and their home town, although Mannie Fresh does appear on the cover wearing a New Orleans Saints (football team) cap. With several images of the African continental outline, the cover imagery of *"D" rules the nation* touches on another, more abstract geographical imaginary, the afrocentrism of nationally-popular late '80s groups like Public Enemy or A Tribe Called Quest, among others. Gregory D's local affiliation was

enough to make the record popular in New Orleans, and it received "heavy airplay on WYLD and WQUE," the two stations competing for the city's rap-urban market in the late 1980s (Aiges 1990b; Davis 1987).

The duo recorded a new version of "Buck Jump time" for their album on Yo!, which, when compared with the earlier twelve-inch single on Uzi Records, yields a unique perspective on the ways in which local and mainstream sensibilities were mediated by New Orleans artists during this period. While the lyrics on the twelve-inch began by listing New Orleans's housing projects, the album version starts by naming some of the major cities of the United States, placing emphasis upon the potential contributions of the U.S. South in general to the rap music form. Whereas the twelve-inch version represented a charged musical exploration of the creative and destructive energies that animate New Orleans's deeply-felt neighborhood-based affiliations, the album version introduces outsider audiences to a more generically southern form of rap expression. The musical content of the song, however—in which a New Orleans critic found "clear second-line influences"—remained largely the same in the single and album versions ("The year on record" 1990).

While the subject and style of "Buck Jump time" and "Where you from?" hinted at the future development of a highly localized interpretation of the rap form in New Orleans, these songs remained in the background of Gregory D and Mannie Fresh's attempts to forge careers within rap's mainstream. The approach to lyrics and musical style that marked "*D*" *rules the nation* continued when Gregory D signed as a solo artist with major label RCA in 1992. He toured nationally with West Coast rappers Too Short and Spice-1, and filmed a music video for his single "Crack slangas" in the gangsta rap capital of South Central Los Angeles. The release of Gregory D's full-length effort, *The real deal*, in 1992 was

celebrated in New Orleans with "an autograph signing party at Odyssey Records [and] a party at the downtown Sheraton" arranged by RCA (Cortello 1992a). Nevertheless, a national following failed to materialize for Gregory D, and by 1994 he was back with Kim Bihari's Dallas-based label (now renamed Midwest), struggling to carve off a slice of the local market that he had largely been able to take for granted in the 1980s. His Midwest album *Niggaz in da boot* was marked by explicitly local expressions, in its title (which referenced a popular slang term for the boot-shaped state of Louisiana) and in its inclusion of the 1989 twelve-inch (local) version of "Buck Jump time."

"It Was a Westbank Thing" (1989-1991)

As the 1980s came to a close, more and more skilled rappers and producers emerged from the New Orleans area. Groups like Full Pack, ERC, and 39 Posse built local reputations, while other rappers, including MC Thick, Bust Down, and Warren Mayes made records subsequently picked up by major labels or large independents from outside New Orleans in the years 1989-1991. In terms of both lyrical and musical content, performance style and visual presentation, their work was stylistically and conceptually distinct from the bounce style that would dominate the local scene between 1992 and 1995. To a lesser extent than "Let's jump" or "Buck Jump time," the work of these pre-bounce groups contained musical and lyrical elements that foreshadowed the emergence of a more particularized local music sensibility.

Many of the most prominent members of the next generation of rap performers in the city came from one part of town. Despite its name, most of the West Bank is located to the east and south of central New Orleans, from which it is separated by the Mississippi River as it winds and turns through the metro

area. The area includes a small part of Orleans Parish, where Algiers and the Fischer Project are located. To the west, in neighboring Jefferson Parish, lie the suburbs of Gretna, Harvey, Marrero, and Westwego. A cohort of rappers from this part of New Orleans, including MC Thick, Bust Down, and Tim Smooth, built upon local fame to attract the attention of major labels or large, out-of-town independents in 1990 and 1991 (L. Williams 1991). Their success inspired others' efforts, and their geographic concentration on the West Bank made easy fodder for rivalries between rappers from opposing sides of the river.

MC Thick (Stewart Glynn Harris, 1972-2001) grew up in Marrero, an "unincorporated area in Jefferson Parish" with around 45,000 residents. The portly Harris "began his career in the ninth grade by forming the rap group Thick and Thin," but soon developed a career as a solo artist, honing his skills at talent shows and nightclubs. MC Thick's career took off in early 1991, when the nineteen year-old released his debut single, "Marrero (what the f____ they be yellin)." Produced by J. "Diamond" Washington for his Alliv Records label, the song features a loping beat with a relatively slow tempo (88 b.p.m.) Its chorus consists of a complex montage of samples, which ultimately concludes with a group chanting, "Marrero!" in response to the leader's question, "What the fuck they be yellin'?" References to specific places within Marrero and individual law enforcement officers contributed documentary realism to the lyrics of the gangsta (or "reality") rap song, which revolved around the local drug trade and its byproducts of crime, violence and aggressive police tactics. They express an ambiguous social commentary which simultaneously criticizes and glorifies the excesses of the crack-fueled drug trade in Marrero.

By August of 1989, the *Times-Picayune* reported, MC Thick's single on Alliv had sold three thousand copies, and the song was "among the top five most-

requested songs on radio station WQUE," leading to "heightened interest in his nightclub performances." Several months later, the newspaper reported that the rapper had signed a deal with "giant record company" Atlantic, which released "Marrero" nationally in late November of 1991 (Aiges 1991c, L7). Another single, "From the brick jungle" (a "Marrero" knock-off) soon followed. MC Thick's debut album, *The show ain't over till the fat man swings*, came out on Atlantic's Big Beat subsidiary in 1993.

MC Thick's ascent boded well for the New Orleans rap scene, but his depiction of Marrero as a war zone where cops and drug dealers vied for dominance was greeted unenthusiastically by local civic leaders. "Marrero" drew the ire of Jefferson Parish Councilman James Lawson Jr., a white democrat who asserted that "'Marrero is a good place to live[,] with numerous beautiful subdivisions'" and vowed to "ask WQUE to stop playing" the song (L. Williams 1991). However, these sentiments had little effect on MC Thick's popularity; he placed first in the "best rap" category in the Big Easy Entertainment Awards in 1992, and performed at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival soon afterwards (Aiges 1992a). "Marrero" represented the peak of his popularity, however, and despite the release of full-length albums in 1993 and 1996, he remained a marginal figure until his death in 2001 at the age of twenty-nine. While "Marrero" would seem to share little with the "bounce" genre that emerged in the early 1990s, several elements—a lyrical focus on the local environment, and a chanted, call-and-response oriented vocal performance during the song's chorus—foreshadow the rise of the intensely local subgenre.

John "Bust Down" Bickham, Jr. was another West Bank-based rapper who rose to local popularity in the years preceding bounce's emergence. He debuted on the local Disotell label around 1990, and in 1991 signed with Effect, a

subsidiary of Miami-based independent Luke Skywalker Records (home to the raunchy 2 Live Crew). Working with producer Herbert Michael "Ice Mike" Scott, Bust Down's best-known effort is the grotesquely humorous and misogynistic "Nasty bitch." In addition to its over-the-top lyrics, the song's appeal was augmented by the huge booming bass tones punctuating its slow (circa 80 b.p.m.), ponderous beat. In a move that again points to the underdevelopment of New Orleans's rap music infrastructure, producer Ice Mike flew to Dallas to use a mastering studio where he could ensure that the bass tones would be as powerful as technology allowed (Scott 2005). The combination proved successful: "Nasty bitch" became a regional club hit, inspiring at least one female "answer song" in the form of Memphis-based rapper Gangsta Boo's 1999 single "Nasty trick."

While "Nasty bitch" kept nightclub audiences laughing, cringing, and dancing simultaneously, the song "Putcha Ballys on" represents the closest thing to a locally-oriented song in Bust Down's catalogue. Dedicated to "the whole New Orleans," it contains "shout outs" to locations on the West Bank ("Marrero, Harvey, the Heights [Kennedy Heights], Algiers") and "cross that water" ("Ninth Ward, Hollygrove, Uptown"). The rapper voices these place names in call-and-response phrases in which a male chorus responds with the song's title. The inclusion at the beginning of the song of a trumpet sample from the 1970s Mardi Gras song "Second line" by Senator Jones's group Stop, Inc. connoted the city's carnival culture for local listeners.

Warren Mayes (1966-1999) became locally famous in 1990 with a song, "Get it girl (don't stop)," which, while lacking explicit references to New Orleans, formed an important and influential expression of a local rap music sensibility (Lyons 2005). Mayes relied heavily on simple, repeated refrains intended to inspire dancers; these "chanted" vocals form a defining element in the song that

connects it to the city's vernacular music traditions such as brass bands (who often rely on chanted, repeated refrains for lyrics) or Mardi Gras Indians. For this reason, "many consider ["Get it girl"] to be the forerunner of bounce," the local style that emerged around 1992 (Wade 2001, 136). The song was originally released on Bobby Marchan's Manicure Records label, before being licensed to Atlantic Records for national distribution.

Largely adapted from the 1988 Too Short song "I ain't trippin'," the song's bass-heavy, swing-shuffle beat creates a relaxed mood conducive to dancing. At around 96 beats-per-minute, the tempo of "Get it girl" is in sync with the clear preferences in this area that would emerge after 1992. His exhortative narrative voice, his dance-oriented lyrics, and his fondness for various musical devices that encourage collective participation, made him a local favorite. When compared to the other New Orleans-based rappers who achieved prominence during this period, Mayes's deemphasized lyrical complexity, instead foregrounding chants, grooves, and a participatory attitude toward music, aspects which support his status as an influential forerunner to the bounce style.

While "Get it girl" failed to carry Mayes to the top of the national charts, "the record burned up local charts and airwaves" in 1991 (Wade and Braxton 2001, 137). Male and female dancers supported his live performances, which drew upon Mayes's ability to "get the crowd hype . . . [and] the whole club rowdy," and helped fuel his celebrity status (George Thomas in Wade and Braxton 2001, 137). Mayes performed at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival in 1991, headlined a talent revue at the State Palace Theater, and produced an 'answer record' to "Get it girl," "Get it boy" by The Get it girls & MC Donna.

The success of "Get it girl" in the local market suggests that Mayes's approach to making rap resonated with local audiences, and along with "Marrero," "Get it girl" was one of the two records produced in New Orleans between 1989 and 1991 that caught the ear of national music companies. While MC Thick's appeal rested upon a thinly politicized interpretation of the standard gangsta rap concept, however, Mayes's music featured neither angry rhetoric nor sensationalized imagery of crime and violence. For this reason, "Get it girl" was out of sync with the rap music conventions of the New York/Los Angeles axis, while displaying much more of an affinity with Miami bass. Mayes could not match the dazzling verbal dexterity of other New Orleans rappers like Gregory D or MC Thick, a fact which led some to view the song as an anomaly in its catchiness and its apparent simplicity.

Mayes came of age in the Tremé in the late 1970s, when the vernacular culture of black New Orleans was experiencing an exciting revival, transformed by the efforts of funky brass bands like The Dirty Dozen and "second line" groups like the Tambourine and Fan club. Mayes enjoyed strong ties to these neighborhood institutions and traditions—he collaborated with the Rebirth Brass Band, and in the early 1990s often organized concerts with both brass bands and rappers on the bill.

In addition to his extensive connections to the city's vernacular, parade-based expressive cultural traditions, Mayes's ability to please local crowds drew upon his long involvement with the city's rap music and club scene. He promoted concerts, founded several small record labels, and worked in several nightclubs, eventually opening his own Club 88, among other ventures. A mover and shaker in the New Orleans club scene, the tall and handsome Mayes (a former football player) was also a ladies' man; according to his 1999 obituary, he was survived by

thirteen children when he died at the age of thirty-three, shot to death in his car while stopped at a red light at two in the morning ("Warren Henry 'Stone' Mayes" 1999; Philbin 1999).

The releases discussed above do not cover the totality of rap music production in 1980s and early 1990s New Orleans. In addition to countless amateurs who aspired to careers in rap during this period, other artists were able to obtain record deals with out-of-town companies, such as Tim "Tim Smooth" Smoot and producer/rapper Ice Mike, both of whom released material on Kim Bihari's Dallas-based Yo! Records. Other local groups, such as 39 Posse and Full Pack, capitalized independent record labels (Parkway Pumpin' Records and Pack Records, respectively). These labels initially allowed them to release their own records, but the involvement of talented producers like Craig "KLC" Lawson and "Don Juan" Henry soon led them to record and market music by other artists. All of these efforts contributed to the vibrant local scene that existed in the several years prior to bounce's emergence, in which rappers and producers often strove to establish their stylistic and thematic competence within the conventions of rap music from the established centers of production.

Conclusion

During the years 1980-1991, rap music evolved from a marginal, subcultural phenomenon into a central feature of the national-global popular music landscape. In its most basic form, this process as it unfolded in New Orleans was similar to that taking place elsewhere—the music was shaped by the collective support of audiences, as well as the efforts of legions of aspiring producers, rappers, and DJs who, as in the English town of Milton Keynes studied by Finnegan, "engaged in and fought over and created and maintained"

the local rap music scene, and "whose work both reveals them as creative and active human beings and serves to uphold the cultural traditions" of New Orleans in the rap era (1989, 341).

During the 1980s, the enthusiastic appreciation for rap music on the part of black youngsters in New Orleans developed prior to the desire to refashion the form to suit local musical and thematic values; the specific questions of whether and how the genre would be adapted to the local cultural and social context were largely open and vaguely conceptualized. In the mid-1980s, there was no such thing as a local New Orleans rap music sound, and little understanding existed at this time of rap's potential to accommodate and intersect with local preferences and identities. Club DJs like Slick Leo, Captain Charles, or the group the Rap Patrol entertained local audiences with music from rap's center of creativity and production, the greater New York City area (Forman 2002, 137).

The development of a local and particular rap sensibility began with these nightclub and block party DJs, who gauged audience response in order to identify particularly resonant or energizing songs or parts of songs. Local audiences' tastes and preferences often overlapped with those in other places, but not always; it was the DJ's challenge to identify and then exploit the exceptions. Similarly, recordings and performances which were strongly derivative of rap from other places formed the context within which a local rap sensibility began to take shape. Artists, producers, and record labels making rap at the local level were largely concerned with replicating the styles and themes of nationally popular artists, but they also helped to build a common vocabulary of locally resonant stylistic and thematic preferences.

In songs like "Never 4-get were I come from," "Let's jump," "Buck Jump time," "Marrero," "Putcha Ballys on," and "Get it girl," early New Orleans-based

rappers and producers discussed in this chapter helped define a collective local sensibility rooted in a constellation of devices and stylistic approaches. These include lyrics based on New Orleans' strongly defined neighborhood culture, with shout-outs to projects, neighborhoods, and wards, and references to the city's cultural heritage and expressive forms. Musically, they include tempi between 95 and 105 b.p.m., polyrhythms created by the layering of handclaps or other constant, simple percussive elements, particular types of bass drum patterns (often with the emphasis on the last beat of the measure), a strong reliance upon call-and-response, and collectively-oriented approach to music-making in which dance figured centrally.

These songs drew upon and perpetuated a collective musical and cultural sensibility nurtured by the city's parade and carnival traditions, which had contributed in formative ways to earlier black popular music genres in New Orleans. Some of these elements (such as "a strong reliance upon call-and-response") are organizing principles with overlapping influence within rap, African American music generally, and New Orleans' black music in particular. Often, the distinctiveness of rap in New Orleans does not rely upon the introduction of completely novel elements, but rather upon changes in emphasis among features which are already present in the wider context of rap generally.

As the next chapter will show, the introduction of the 'bounce' style by MC T. Tucker and DJ Irv in late 1991 was a transformative event within rap music's evolution in New Orleans. However, their ability to effect this transformation built upon the efforts of the early generations of artists discussed in this chapter, which were in turn informed by New Orleans's distinctive musical traditions and the particularities of its social life and culture.

Chapter 4: Bounce (1991-1994)

Introduction

This chapter covers the years between 1992 and 1995, a period in which New Orleans's rap scene was transformed by the sudden emergence and rise to widespread local popularity of a stylistically and thematically distinctive style of rap music, eventually labeled 'bounce.' Oriented towards the musical preferences and narrative perspectives of residents of New Orleans's housing projects and other poor neighborhoods, bounce quickly proved to be an enduring and profitable feature of the local music landscape. Its popularity spread through concerts and airplay on local radio, which in turn helped the development of the local music infrastructure in the form of clubs, record labels, and retail outlets.

As in the previous and following chapters, I offer a synthesized history and description of rap music produced in New Orleans during this period, touching on its major figures and central stylistic and organizational dimensions. The chapter begins with an examination of the emergence of bounce, which depended on key samples (especially the Showboys song "Drag rap") and a particular approach to vocal performance style and lyrical content pioneered by MC T Tucker and adapted, refined and shaped by artists including DJ Jimi, Silky Slim, Juvenile, and others. The "explosion" of the rap scene and local industry in New Orleans that began in 1992 was matched by a corresponding surge in press coverage. Writing in the daily *Times-Picayune* and the monthly music magazine *OffBeat*, local music critics documented the extent of the genre's popularity and the contested politics of musical style that it entailed.

During this period, New Orleans-based audiences, artists, critics, and entrepreneurs came to see the city as having its own style of rap music. This

development was not universally celebrated; criticisms of bounce abounded, rooted in a hierarchical understanding of musical complexity. That the period in question saw the national exposure of New Orleans-based artists drop, rather than increase, from its late-1980s levels fueled dissatisfaction with the possibility of bounce "representing" the city. Rappers, producers, and record label owners whose aspirations went beyond local or regional markets were especially sensitive to these concerns; their views were sympathetically received by music critics who disliked bounce and who were eager to see New Orleans established as a home of more "serious" rap in an era when African American popular music and vernacular traditions were becoming increasingly central to the city's self-image, as well as its marketing as a tourist destination. Of these several local critics whose views are examined in this chapter, only one—Karen Cortello—approached bounce with anything resembling an open mind. For *Times-Picayune* critics Scott Aiges and Keith Spera, the local genre was an atavistic embarrassment, "cookie-cutter" "rap lite" with a dance orientation and meaningless lyrics (Aiges 1994b; Spera 1993, 32; 1995, 32; 1996; 1997a).

The analysis in this chapter of historical events, individual biographies, critical discourse, and sound recordings is guided by the following questions: What were the circumstances around bounce's emergence, the factors and forces centrally involved in its popularization and dissemination? What stylistic or thematic qualities characterize the rap music produced during this time? What did bounce offer to local audiences? How and to what extent did the rise of bounce prompt changes in the strategies of aspiring rappers, producers, and record label owners? How did the various participants in the New Orleans scene understand and discursively represent these changes? What roles did record

companies, radio stations, and critics play in shaping bounce's success and the public discourse around it?

Bounce Beginnings

Though bounce did not "explode" until 1992, it built upon many years of collective efforts to explore and refine local preferences. To a large extent, these were expressed and reinscribed through locally-produced recordings like "Buck Jump Time" or "Get it girl" (see previous chapter) in which performers used particular themes or stylistic approaches that local audiences found compelling. The local rap sensibility was also expressed more subtly, through the differential ways in which New Orleans audiences responded to the work of artists from other cities (Aiges 1992g). Songs which resonated strongly might inspire similar compositions and performances on the part of local producers and artists, or they might be more directly appropriated through electronic sampling. In the case of the song "Drag rap" by the Showboys, New Orleans more or less adopted a song from New York and made it an anthem of local identity which persists to this day (Aiges 1994a, 1994c, 26; Cortello 1993b, 21; Leach 2005; Tim Smooth quoted in Spera 1993).

"Drag rap" was part of a small body of work produced in the mid- to late 1980s by the Showboys, a duo consisting of Orville "Buggs Can Can" Hall and Phillip "Triggerman" Price based in Queens, New York. The song made little impact on the national scene when it was released by Profile Records in 1986, and the group became inactive not long afterwards. However, unbeknownst to the song's creators, its popularity was increasing during the late 1980s in the South, especially in Memphis and New Orleans. As John "J-Dogg" Shaw observed in late 1997, "Drag rap" "became a smash club hit, influencing the local rap scenes [in

Memphis and New Orleans] which were to follow." Among rap listeners in these cities, the song was often referred to as "Triggerman," based upon the name of one of the rappers used prominently in the narrative.

In terms of its lyrical themes and imagery, Sarig writes that "'Drag rap' was perhaps the first gangsta rap song," although it lacks the defining characteristic of implicit or explicit linkage between the performer's 'real life' biography with the narrative characterization (2007, 257). Loosely set in the prohibition era, the song consists of an elaborate exchange of threats between two "gangstas fightin over territory," which are made ironic through levels of rhetorical violence that border on the absurd (Pig Balls 2000, 90). A "commercial break" in the song references television commercials for deodorant soap and a hamburger chain, humorously calling attention to the most basic function of the sensationalized portrayals of crime on shows like *Dragnet*, which is to promote and sell products which are often quite unglamorous and mundane.

Part of the song's appeal no doubt rests in its prominent bass drum part, played on a Roland 808. As one of the Showboys explained, "also at the time there was a new drum [machine], the [Roland] 808 with that boom sound. We was the first ones to use it where it didn't just come in and go out, it was constant" (Pig Balls 2000, 90). The tonal qualities of the bass drum and its swinging cadence were central features of the song that drove its popularity in New Orleans, along with its mid-tempo (around 96 beats-per-minute) orientation.

Another influential element of "Drag rap" was a running, ascending and descending ostinato pattern of high notes, "a line that went 'digidigidigidi', . . . a constant [that the Showboys called] the bones on the keyboard" (Pig Balls 2000, 90). This feature would become better known in and around New Orleans as the

"bells," and was described by *Times-Picayune* music writer Scott Aiges as a "xylophone arpeggio" (Aiges 1994b). The "bones" motif is one of the most persistent and frequently quoted elements of "Drag rap," contributing a continuous, melodically-inflected strain within the polyrhythmic layering that is a central and longstanding feature of the New Orleans sensibility generally. Through repetition, the sample has become an icon of the bounce style, to the extent that even in isolation it connotes New Orleans for rap aficionados.

In addition to the bass drum and the "bones," "Drag rap" contains a large number of distinct musical elements and breakdowns, almost all of which have been subsequently stripped out, sampled, and recombined for use in bounce songs by New Orleans DJs and producers. Other frequently sampled elements include vocal snippets, a powerful break which is played simultaneously on the snare and bass drums, and a version of the thematic motif from the television show *Dragnet* ('dum, dah dum dum'). The "Drag rap" bass drum pattern was made even more propulsive when combined with "the drum break from [Derek] B's 'Rock the beat'," known colloquially in New Orleans as "Brown's beat" (Green 1999a, 129).

While its influence upon the lyrical content and vocal performance style of New Orleans-based rappers remains debatable, "Drag rap" had a profound effect upon the instrumental content of rap music coming from New Orleans in the early 1990s. As veteran club and party DJ Charles "Captain Charles" Leach recalled in 2005, "'Triggerman' was such a huge, huge, *huge* song . . . If you was a young kid who came up and wanted to be a rapper or a beatmaker . . . that would be one of the songs you would want to use. . . . That was the song everybody related to." Writing about the bounce scene at its creative peak in 1994, Scott Aiges claimed that "Drag rap" samples were no longer fashionable in music

produced for local audiences, but this has turned out to be a premature conclusion (Aiges 1994c, 30). While the use of the song may have waned in the mid-'90s, it continues to resurface regularly. Especially among artists and record labels oriented towards local audiences, samples from "Drag rap" continued to be used abundantly as recently as 2005 (Sarig 2007, 261). The song has also been increasingly used by artists from outside New Orleans; in 2003, Mississippi-based David Banner scored a hit with "Like a pimp," featuring Lil' Flip, which used the "Drag rap" sample.

Given the evident popularity of "Drag rap" in New Orleans, it is not surprising that local rappers supported their own performances with the instrumental version of the Showboys' song. Used in this manner, the record was central to a key transition in New Orleans rap that began in late 1991 with the release of a song called "Where dey at?" by Kevin "MC T. Tucker" Ventry (sometimes called "T.T. Tucker" or, as in the following pages, simply "Tucker") and Irvin "DJ Irv" Phillips (1969?-2001) which catalyzed dramatic stylistic and organizational changes in New Orleans rap. The raw, hastily-produced recording (a document of one of their live performances) relied exclusively upon portions of "Drag rap" for its musical backing, as Phillips kept the groove going continuously for long periods of time using the technique known as 'backspinning' (Scott 2005). The combination of the Showboys's song with Tucker's exhortative, chanted raps made "Where dey at?" a local favorite that, like "Drag rap," endures to this day (Leach 2005).

Tucker traced his career back to 1989, when he began performing at block parties in the St. Thomas housing project where he lived, and further honed his skills and developed his repertoire in local bars (Aiges, 1994b; Dvorak 1998). It was in one of these, the Ghost Town Lounge (located at the intersection of

Edinburgh and Eagle Streets in the uptown Carrollton neighborhood) that he and DJ Irv became known for performing "Where dey at?" They produced a low-fidelity recording of their club performance in the fall of 1991, "recorded . . . within 15 minutes," according to the pair's former manager (Lorén K. Phillips Fourous quoted in Wade and Braxton 2001, 137). Initially released as "a cheap demo tape" then "a hastily recorded single on local label Charlot Records," the song quickly became a local sensation (Aiges, 1994a). This was due in part to the exposure that the song received on the two stations in New Orleans programming rap music in the early '90s, WQUE and WYLD (where it was "the most requested song") (Aiges 1994c, 26). The radio airplay was matched by brisk sales of the cassette: the owner of Odyssey Records estimated, "just out of my stores, I would say it sold 500 copies a week. . . . This was something that sounded like nothing else, and they had to have it" (Gary Holzenthall quoted in Aiges 1994c, 26). The song remained a top seller for about three months, over which time Tucker became a local rap celebrity (26).

Unlike earlier New Orleans rappers like Gregory D., Tim Smooth or Bust Down, whose appeal rested upon the complexity or richness of their narrative constructions and who aimed to please "hip-hop fans who put a high value on rhyming skills that show off a well-developed intellect," T. Tucker conceded in 1994 that his famous performance "'wasn't no rap at all,'" but instead "'just talking a gang of bull stuff'" (Aiges 1994b; quoted in Aiges 1994a). With regard to lyrics, his approach consisted of "chanting common phrases heard on the street rather than written raps" (Aiges 1994c, 26). The most prominent of these was the title, "Where they at." To describe Tucker's performance as "chanting," however, leaves the impression that he was simply repeating himself over and over again without variation, when in fact he was using these simple phrases as the basis for

extended percussive improvisation within the vocal performance, intercutting them in ways that simulate the manipulation of a recording on a turntable.

Tucker's lyrics in "Where dey at" consisted of an open-ended string of seemingly unconnected phrases (some of them explicitly borrowed from other texts), repeated rhythmically and in an improvisatory manner based on crowd response and the DJ's manipulation of the backing music. Within the context of an evolving New Orleans rap sensibility, "Where dey at" shares some of the central elements of precursors like "Get it girl" or "Buck Jump time" (e.g., chanted phrases designed for call-and-response participation, local themes and references), but was distinguished by its raw simplicity, both in terms of the conception of the musical and textual dimensions of the song as well as the production and reproduction of the recording, and by its unmitigated indulgence of local musical and thematic preferences.

Within Tucker's vocal performance, the phrases and their improvisation, elaboration, or repetition take on a more unified quality when viewed as music rather than as text. Tucker's lyrics are constructed with an expectation of audience participation within a call-and-response structure. While not immediately discernable in the four-minute version of "Where dey at" released as a single, this feature is clearly evident in an undated, twenty-six-minute long live recording of Tucker and Irv performing at a club—the crowd can be heard chanting back to the rapper in response to key phrases. It is also likely that, as in afro-Caribbean forms like dancehall reggae, "vocal and musical quality [were] as important to listeners as [was] the strictly lexical register" in Tucker's performance, and textual meaning was often secondary to the sonic value of a lyric or phrase (Stolzoff 2000, 19). The success of Warren Mayes's "Get it girl"—which mixed more conventional rapped narratives with chanted, repeated

phrases—hinted at the readiness of New Orleans audiences to deemphasize explicit lyrical meaning and prioritize "vocal and musical" qualities like rhythmic inflection, timbre, and repetition.

Tucker's vocal performance can also be connected to afro-Caribbean musical practices based on its cellular, rather than linear, structure, "the technique of building a piece on repetition, especially of a short musical cell, or ostinato. Variety can be provided by altering the pattern or by combining it with another feature" (Manuel, Bilby and Largey 2006, 9). Rather than contributing to tedium, repetition enhances the enjoyment of these short musical elements. In one of many instances of this concept in "Where dey at," Tucker riffs off of the phrase, "I'm the nigga you love to hate" in various rhythmic permutations for twelve measures. His improvisations show the influence of a groove-centered New Orleans musical sensibility, a collective fascination with the "endless repetition of short motifs" that can be traced back through the twentieth century and beyond (Russell and Smith 1939, 10).

Tucker's voice was as much or more of a percussion instrument as it was a source of textual meaning, and by improvising rhythmic patterns consisting of repeated phrases, he put his vocal performance into dynamic interaction with the backing track and with the audience's verbal and embodied responses. Not only did Tucker include lyrical content that provided a degree of local representation unavailable elsewhere, he also performed in a manner that resonated with the tastes of black New Orleans audiences for participatory, group-based musical expression. The connections between Tucker's style and the vernacular musical traditions of New Orleans were not lost on local music critic Scott Aiges, who observed that Tucker's "sing-song chant ... wasn't too distant from the repetitive call-and-response songs of the Mardi Gras Indians he grew up watching" (1994a).

In terms of textual meaning, Aiges speculated that the question "'where they at?' ... might refer to 'fly' (pretty) girls, homeboys or the police" (1994a). This explanation downplays one of the central meanings of the phrase (especially in light of a longer recording of a live performance in the author's collection) as referring to 'posses' or groups of audience members who 'represent' different wards, neighborhoods or housing projects. Other lyrics alternately serve the ends of self-aggrandizement and fantasy, the encouragement of the audience to dance, and sexualized commands to an imagined female addressee.

Early in the song, Tucker includes another lyric—"Fuck David Duke"—that takes the embryonic bounce genre in an explicitly political direction. Duke's status as the only individual named in "Where dey at" speaks to the depth of feeling generated by the unrepentant former Klansman's campaigns for governor and president in the early 1990s. The infusion of this crude politicized rhetoric into a song dominated by boasting and sexual themes helped make the lyrics a collection of 'non sequiturs' for Atlanta-based journalist Roni Sarig (2007 258). However, the pairing of phrases "Fuck David Duke" and "Fuck 5-0" [i.e. the police] later in the song posits a connection between overt anti-black racism represented by Duke and the everyday interactions of police and citizens in New Orleans's poor and working class black communities, which were marked by longstanding distrust, corruption and violence. In general, the song's lyrics existed at a level of casual abstraction that accommodated a wide range of literal meanings as well as connoted moods or feelings, including electoral politics, social control, male sexual desire, the hustling lifestyle, the supremacy of the performer, and the city's neighborhood culture.

At the peak of his fame, Tucker was jailed for a year and a half for "a parole violation involving firearms," spending his time "working in the kitchen of

the state penitentiary at Winfield, La." (Aiges, 1994c, 26; 1994a). He was released around late 1993 or early 1994; in a March 1994 article for *Billboard* magazine, Aiges notes, "Tucker returned from prison calling himself 'the father of bounce,' and began work on his first full-length album, which was expected to be released in late March [1994]" (1994c, 26). A single featuring "Let the booty shake" and "Where dey at? Part 2" was all that materialized, however, and Tucker's career stalled. The rapidly changing local rap market, combined with the rapper's repeated episodes of incarceration, contributed to his inability to regain the prominence that he had attained in late 1991 and early 1992. As of the time of writing (seventeen years after the song's initial release) "Where dey at?" remains popular in New Orleans, but, ironically, has only been self-released or produced by fly-by-night companies (Leach 2005). The raw qualities of the performance and recording, the adherence to local stylistic and thematic priorities, and a heavy reliance on "Drag rap" have all hindered the widespread exposure or reproduction of Tucker's seminal song outside of New Orleans.

The Scene Expands

The subsequent production of a number of songs in 1992 and 1993 that responded to or referenced Tucker and Irv's song either directly or indirectly was a telling indicator of the extent of its influence on the local scene in the early 1990s—as rapper Floyd "Everlasting Hitman" Blount put it, "Everybody runnin' 'round town bitin' [i.e. appropriating] Tucker rap." Female rapper Ramona "Silky Slim" Mark's song "Sister sister," released in February of 1992 on Mugz Records, was probably the first knock-off, coming out just months after Tucker and Irv's "Where dey at." The song's title and chorus adapted the concept and borrowed the rhythmic cadence from Tucker's lyric, "I'm the nigga / the nigga nigga," a

connection that was strengthened by the inclusion of a cameo appearance by Tucker himself on the recording. While "Sister sister" did not include any samples from "Drag rap," its connection to the emerging local preferences represented by the Showboys's song was reinforced by a short ostinato motif repeated throughout the song which was very similar in effect to the Showboys's 'bones.'

"Sister sister" presented some of the core themes of "Where dey at" in a less concentrated and more professionally produced form, adding sonic variety and verses that operated as narrative in the traditional sense, features that made the song more marketable on a national level. While not the first female rapper on the scene in New Orleans, Silky Slim was the first to record in the bounce genre, a fact made all the more significant by the increased participation by women performers that the local genre entailed. While Tucker and Irv's "Where dey at" had resisted facile commercial exploitation, "Sister sister," to some extent, demonstrated the possibility for wider success held by recordings which used the distinctive New Orleans style in more polished arrangements. She was also one of the few performers in this period able to attract attention outside of New Orleans with locally-oriented style or content, signing a deal with New York-based independent Profile Records, which released "Sister sister" as a single, "with an LP option based on 12" sales" (Cortello 1992b, 10). The song garnered a positive (if brief) review in *Billboard*, and received "airplay on stations in Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and Florida," but its sales fell short of Profile's expectations, and the LP never materialized ("Single Reviews: Rap" 1992; Cortello 1992b, 10). Instead, Marks released an album (*Bouncin' in a Six Tray*) on Big Boy Records in 1994, under the name "Silky"

Building upon these efforts, the next important step in bounce's emergence and establishment began with a local music entrepreneur, Isaac Bolden, who sensed the commercial possibility in Tucker's song, and released a similar recording by an artist named Jimi "DJ Jimi" Payton. Bolden was an experienced songwriter and arranger who since the 1960s had produced R&B, soul, funk and disco records on his Soulin' label by artists including Tony Owens and Jean Knight. Ever attuned to the shifting terrain of the music business, he had ventured into rap in 1989, releasing a single and album by the duo Devious D & Baby T (Dion Norman and former Ninja Crew DJ Terrence McKenzie). Despite their impressive skills at rendering complex, extended raps and smoothly blended sample collages and beats, they achieved only a moderate level of success at the local level. Undaunted, Bolden continued to keep his ear to the ground for an artist or song that would produce a hit for him in this era when "the industry was changing" due to shifting music styles and generational taste patterns (Bolden 2006).

Bolden became aware of the potential held by Tucker's song in the summer of 1992 while eating at a local seafood restaurant. When "Where dey at" was played on the radio, he noticed that "all the customers—you had a lot of young people in there, customers—would be dancing" (2006). He inquired about the song at Peaches Records, a hub of the local rap music scene, and was told that the artist was in jail. "Rather than have that record die," he instructed Dion Norman to "cover it," with the caveat, "'Don't do the same thing because then it's their song.'" Citing his distaste for the song, Norman balked at rapping on the record, so Bolden instructed him to "get somebody else." Norman recommended Jimi "DJ Jimi" Payton, "a guy who works at a place called Big Man's . . . a place where a lot of teenagers would go," and who had also worked with DJ Irv. Not

only could Jimi perform the song, but, Bolden was told, "he's the one that started the 'Where they at' thing.' . . . They said that the guy that's in jail [i.e. Tucker] got it from Jimi, from the club. I said, 'Okay, well, we got the original one.'" Bolden booked studio time and Norman (with the help of Derrick "Mellow Fellow" Ordogne) produced Jimi's "Where they at."

In their lyrical performance, Tucker's and Jimi's songs shared important thematic and stylistic similarities, including the prominent use of samples from "Drag rap" and the "where they at?" chorus or hook. Their lyrics consisted largely of phrases intended to encourage dancing and evoke participation on the part of audience members, as well as examples of the "ribald sexual scenarios [and] crude humor . . . in the dirty blues tradition" that would become stock elements of the bounce genre (Green 1999a, 129). Still, substantial differences in style and content marked the two versions of "Where they at." Recorded in a studio rather than a nightclub, DJ Jimi's song was more polished, featured less rhythmic improvisation, and displayed a vocal style more relaxed than Tucker's raspy monotone. Musically, the song was slightly slower in tempo and had a more complex backing track than Tucker's, with the "Drag rap" bass drum, "bones," and cowbells augmented by many other samples, including the theme from the horror movie *Halloween*. An introductory section, as well as the use of effects and the interjection of a variety of sampled sounds (including snippets from Bronx-based B.D.P. as well as local New Orleans rapper Bust Down) helped to further build richness and variety in the song.

With local radio exposure, the recording quickly became an overnight sensation. According to Bolden, "that's all you would hear. . . . They played the clean version on the radio . . . [and] the next morning they had orders at the distributor for the record. It was . . . like magic" (2006). The fact that DJ Jimi's

recording took off in New Orleans even after the apparent saturation of Tucker's song further demonstrates the extent of the local market for this type of material. It saw the overnight transformation of Jimi's career from that of a struggling nightclub DJ to a regional celebrity, a status that was enhanced by his raunchy live shows, in which his mother and grandmother often performed as his back-up dancers.

However, Bolden's attempts to license the single to a major label for distribution—something he had achieved with Jean Knight's "My Toot Toot" in 1985 (like Jimi's, a slicker cover version of a song already popular locally) and that he had facilitated with Warren Mayes' "Get it girl" in 1991—met with resistance; "I talked with the people with Universal, because I did business with them before, Atlantic, and all—'No, too vulgar'" (2006). Even with the inclusion of a clean version suitable for radio play, the response from the majors was, "'Too vulgar!'" Eventually Bolden struck a deal for national distribution with the Memphis-based Avenue Records, which helped the record reach the middle regions of *Billboard's* "Hot R&B singles" chart, where it hovered for around six months. In places that were within New Orleans's regional sphere of influence, such as Houston, the single did significantly better (Westbrook 1992).

While it did not garner the major label interest that Bolden hoped for, DJ Jimi's "Where they at" helped to further establish the conventions of the emerging bounce style that Tucker's song had initiated. The success of the single led Bolden to release an album of material by Jimi and others, which became another important vehicle for the development of bounce as a distinct and lasting local subgenre.

Due in part to DJ Jimi's limited experience as a songwriter—he described his efforts as "acting a fool" on the mike"—and also to the prevailing ethos of

experimentation, the 1992 album *It's Jimi* included several guest appearances by other performers who had never recorded previously (Payton in Aiges 1994a). On the single release of "Where they at" and on the *It's Jimi* album, an uncredited female performer raps in a song called "Bitch's reply," a parodic female response to T. Tucker's "Where dey at." Like Silky Slim's "Sister sister," "Bitch's reply" interpolates Tucker's "nigga nigga" motif (a feature which did not appear in DJ Jimi's version). A more serious attempt at a female retort to "Where they at" was included on the *It's Jimi* album, in the form of "Lick the cat," a song by a performer named MC E. Released as a single in early 1993, the song's lyrics include a chorus that rhymes with and uses the same rhythmic phrasing as Jimi's and Tucker's. In a description that fits much early bounce material, a *Billboard* reviewer wrote that "Lick the cat" "derives catchiness from repetition with a nursery-rhyme quality to it" ("Single Reviews: Rap" 1993).

The lyrics of "Lick the cat" reverse the themes of male gratification and the exploitation of women that mark early bounce recordings by male artists, as the percussive chorus commands the imagined male listener to perform cunnilingus (often figured as the ultimate in male sexual submission), a demand featured in "Sister sister" and other, later songs by New Orleans-based women rappers. The proliferation of female "answer songs" speaks both to the popularity of the "Where they at" concept as well as the degree to which the portrayal of women and male-female relationships in Tucker's and Jimi's songs was promptly and effectively contested by women performers. "Lick the cat" quickly faded into obscurity, however, and of the two songs by women on *It's Jimi*, it is the novelty "Bitch's reply" that has been remembered (faintly, at least) in rap circles.

Another guest appearance on Jimi's 1992 album was destined to be of more lasting significance than the aforementioned songs. Terius "Juvenile" Gray

(b. 1975), who was seventeen at the time, "was approached by DJ Jimi to record the song [he] had been performing at clubs" (Cortello 1993a, 22). The result, "Bounce (for the Juvenile [sic])," became "one of the most requested local songs at radio, record stores, and clubs" (22). The teenaged rapper told a local journalist that "he gets most of his musical ideas from the projects, and that he tries to keep an original New Orleans sound" (Gray in Cortello 1993a, 22). A wider, Afro-Caribbean realm of influence is suggested by ideas derived from or inspired by Jamaican dancehall reggae, such as a quoted riff from the chorus of Shabba Ranks's song "Housecall" (1991) in the vocal performance in "Bounce (for the Juvenile)".

According to Karen Cortello, "radio stations and clubs started playing the LP cut, and it caught on," making "Bounce (for the Juvenile)" another local sensation in its own right (Cortello 1993a, 22). Scott Aiges confirms this account: "Commercial radio has been wearing out the wax on "Bounce," but it hasn't been released yet as a single. So all those Juvenile fans have had to buy Jimi's album to hear their song, and Jimi is laughing all the way to the bank"—and indeed, the older rapper was reported to have earned over \$200,000 in 1993, when his career was at its height (although much of this income likely derived from performances) (1993a; 1994a). The album's popularity was likely driven by the appeal of both Jimi's and Juvenile's songs, and it enjoyed strong sales which were not limited to the local market; in the distant locale of Cincinnati (black population around forty percent) *It's Jimi* was for a time the top-selling album by a new artist (as opposed to number thirty-nine in the national charts) ("Soundscan: Best-Sellers" 1993).

Interviewed in 2000, Juvenile complained, "the song that I put on [DJ Jimi's] album made him a star . . . [but] I didn't make any money back then"

(Fuchs 2000). Still, he is happy to take credit for originating the local style: "I started chanting, and after a while, everybody started doing it. And it feels good to know that I was doing something right." While his statements amount to a gross oversimplification of the decade-long collective processes through which bounce emerged, Juvenile certainly qualifies as one of the central figures in the genre's formative period. DJ Jimi's career peaked around 1992-1993, but his young protégé went on to become one of the most successful rappers in the history of New Orleans and helped bounce blow up around the country" in the process (Spera 1999e).

Beginning in late 1991, then, a series of recordings jump-started the bounce genre in New Orleans. T. Tucker and DJ Irv's club hit "Where dey at" combined the music of "Drag rap" with chanted lyrics in call-and-response structures that were especially familiar to local audiences. In 1992 the "Where dey at"-inspired "Sister sister" was one of several early bounce records that garnered attention outside of the city in the form of distribution deals or chart position and coverage in *Billboard*, a fact that would seem to bode well for the future prospects of artists emerging from the local scene. DJ Jimi's subsequent song "Where they at," though similar in many ways, attempted to overcome the limitations of Tucker's efforts. With Bolden's substantial experience in the music business, DJ Jimi's release was recorded professionally according to prevailing technical standards and was promoted on local radio. Further, because Bolden had paid for clearance of the samples used in the song's composition, its success was unimpeded by legal stumbling blocks. However, the relatively modest success of Silky Slim and DJ Jimi represented the limits of exposure for rappers trafficking in a locally-oriented New Orleans style; no artist would enjoy anything

close to a similar level of success with bounce-influenced rap music until Juvenile hit nationally with "Ha" in 1998.

The aforementioned songs enjoyed immense local popularity, and in several cases drew notice and sales outside of the regional hinterland. Other emerging artists were quick to follow on the heels of this foundational group of artists with similar releases, backed by record label owners eager to cash in on the bounce craze. In August of 1992, *Times-Picayune* music critic Scott Aiges reported, "New Orleans rap is booming. The number of local artists increases daily. Records are being released on homespun labels almost as fast as stores can stock them, and fans are snapping them up" (1992f). Some of these records, like Everlasting Hitman's "Bounce! Baby, bounce!" (likely released in 1992) or Lil Slim's "Bounce, slide, ride" (1993) helped to further establish the genre's name and central concepts. Other contemporaries of Tucker, DJ Jimi, Silky Slim and Juvenile who worked in and helped to define the bounce style in its early years included Pimp Daddy, Daddy Yo, Papadoc, and Sporty T. Female rappers proliferated in 1993 and 1994, including Mia X (whose song "Da payback" was "the No. 1-selling local record of 1993 at Odyssey Records"), Ms. Tee, Cheeky Blakk, and the duo Da' Sha Ra', among others (Aiges 1994c, 30).

Opinions varied on bounce's artistic worth, but one metric of the genre's success in New Orleans—sales—was beyond dispute. The enthusiasm with which local audiences greeted the efforts of T. Tucker, DJ Irv, and DJ Jimi supported the emergence of other artists peddling similar material. Owners of local rap record stores—which included Odyssey, Peaches, Groove City, Brown Sugar, and other, smaller enterprises—were understandably pleased. Odyssey's Gary Holzenthal reported in 1992 that "of his 12 top-selling cassettes . . . , nearly all are rap and eight of those are by local artists." An incredulous tone pervades the

animated descriptions of "local rap releases [which] fly off the shelves" in numbers that few anticipated, "kicking (every major record label in the country) . . . in the butt," especially given the sparse promotional efforts and low production values that characterized these recordings in comparison with their national counterparts (Aiges, 1992f). Bounce built up considerable momentum with surprisingly little promotion or marketing in the traditional sense. Holzenthal marveled,

"They'll put a tape out, and within a day or two days — sometimes a tape isn't even out yet — these guys are busting down the doors for the new Magnolia Slim or the new Pimp Daddy or UNLV that they may have heard about. Sometimes [the labels] have to do no promotion. The word-of-mouth is so phenomenal, I've never seen anything like it" (quoted in Aiges 1994c, 26).

Defining Bounce: Style and Themes

By the summer of 1992, collective and dialogic effort had established the basic contours of the new local style of rap; as bounce-hating music critic Scott Aiges lamented, New Orleans had become "a city where rappers by the dozen get by with insipid, simple rhythm tracks, lamely complain about gold-digging women or act as neighborhood cheerleaders" (1992d). Musically, bounce relied upon tempi between 95 and 105 beats-per-minute and multiple simple percussive patterns (often using handclaps and elements from "Drag rap" including the "bones" and bass drum) repeated within a cellular structure and combined to form a layered, polyrhythmic construction. The bass drum patterns inflected to accent the end of the measure (similar to "the second line beat—the accent on the two and the four instead of the one and three") creating a propulsive and swinging beat with ties to the city's parade culture (Patterson quoted in Rowell 2007, 1291). While bounce producers often used samples of other recordings,

they also relied heavily upon sounds generated by sequencers and drum machines.

The stylistic conventions that generally applied to vocal performance in bounce were also distinctive. Extended narratives were often replaced by a string of shorter, chant-friendly phrases, hooks, or choruses that lend themselves to call-and-response participation. These are rendered in a manner that is more heavily characterized by melody (resulting in frequent use of the adjective "singsong" in describing bounce vocals) and in the early years lyrics were often rendered within specific sixteen-bar rhythmic and melodic patterns which ultimately form another self-reinforcing element of bounce's particularity (Aiges 1993b; 1993c; 1994a; Spera 1996; 1997a; 1999d; 2000b).

While there was considerable variation in lyrical themes and narrative voice in early 1990s New Orleans rap, the lyrics of bounce songs have several core themes, with dance being one of the most prominent (DJ Jubilee's 1993 "Do the Jubilee all" was described as "a typical bounce track that simply chants the names of dance styles") (Aiges 1994b). Rappers often exhorted listeners at the collective or individual levels to dance, encouragement that was sometimes localized to particular parts of the body. The representation of various places within the city's African American social geography, which includes housing projects ("Melpomene," "Calliope"), neighborhoods and parts of town ("uptown," "West Bank"), and even particular intersections ("Sixth and Baronne"), formed another central theme in the bounce style, one which could be employed in multiple ways. The names of these places often form the text of basic call-and-response structures designed to encourage collective participation; at other times, the city's map of wards and projects serves as the contextual setting for linear, 'gangsta' narratives.

Another central theme present in the lyrics of most of the early bounce recordings rested upon on a particular representation of male-female relationships, which resembles the "culture of sexual exchange" described by Tricia Rose (1994, 169). These songs portray a ruthless and mercenary battle between the sexes in which men and women attempt to exploit one another for the commodities they offer. Men who dole out money or other gifts in return for sex ("tricks") and women who engage in sex and demand nothing in return—or, even worse, who reverse the dominant scenario by providing cash or material possessions to their male partners—are all figured as foolish within a logic of exploitation that, like the jargon of "tricking" and "treating," harks back to the days in which New Orleans became famous as a center for prostitution, a reputation established during the era of slavery (A. Long 2004, 1-9).

Men's sexual and material demands voiced in songs including "Where dey at?," "Where they at," "Bounce (for the Juvenile)," "Bounce, slide, ride," and even "Stop, pause (do the Jubilee All)" by the famously clean-cut DJ Jubilee existed in conversation with similar expressions by women rappers, including Silky Slim, MC E, Mia X ("Da payback") and Females in Charge ("Where's my bitch?") However, these statements are almost always intended to be humorous as well as demeaning, and exist in continuity with various African American oral traditions involving hyperbolic, combative verbal exchange. The theme also resonates with the historically-rooted understanding of the pimp as a "culture hero" within urban African American culture, whose motto is, according to Abrahams, "the one who does best is the one who manipulates most and is manipulated least" (1970, 19).

The career aspirations of Tucker, Irv, and Jimi evolved over the course of the 1990s and beyond. Scott Aiges emphasized the unexpected nature of their

initial success, which he described as "a surprise" or "a fluke" rather than the product of strategy, calculation or ambition (Aiges 1994a). To the extent that we can accept this explanation, it suggests that specific local audience preferences exercised a pronounced influence upon the direction of the local music scene, much more than that wielded by music critics and record label owners. While many of the latter were unable to resist expressing their contempt for bounce (and by extension its audience), the genre's resonance with the values and preferences of inner-city youth was strong enough to propel it and the artists associated with it forward on a local and regional level. By attending concerts, purchasing records, and requesting songs on the radio, New Orleans audiences played a pivotal role in bounce's emergence as the dominant force in the local rap music market.

The press coverage of bounce's emergence touched on some of the central dimensions of the music's appeal for local audiences. The most obvious and taken-for-granted of these was the fact that the music was "easy to dance to": "when asked why they listen to bounce music," two eighteen-year old girls responded, "Because you can bounce to it!" (Aiges 1994b). The music's dance orientation is evident in its emphasis on continual grooves within particular range of tempi (around 95-105 beats-per-minute), which allow for easy transitions between stylistically similar recordings within a club, party, or radio broadcast setting. The use of highly inflected bass drum patterns and the combination of these in layered ways with other rhythmic and melodic elements all helped to cement the appeal of the music, which combined ideas and preferences drawn from the national/global rap music context with those tied to the historical vernacular music traditions of New Orleans. As Scott Aiges wrote,

"bounce . . . is dance music in a dance city. The shuffle of a second-line beat will turn a New Orleans street into a block party in minutes" (Aiges 1994c, 26).

Another, more frequently referenced aspect of bounce that was thought to explain its appeal among the city's young rap audiences was its reliance upon lyrics referring to various housing projects, neighborhoods and wards within New Orleans. As one local producer explained, "People just chant what we like to hear down here — the wards and the neighborhoods and all that" (Aiges 1994c, 26). Though he clearly does not identify with the "emphasis on local references" that marked bounce, Aiges perceptively identifies "inclusiveness" as key to the music's appeal, a value that structures lyrical as well as musical composition and performance. However, for Aiges, these participatory elements produce a democratizing or leveling effect that, by implication, drains rap of its artistry and complexity, reducing it to an "anyone can do it" art form (1994b). Aiges also ignores the ways in which the "inclusiveness" engendered by neighborhood shout-outs exists in parallel with a sense of divisiveness and rivalry between groups of audience members associated with different neighborhoods or parts of town.

Journalistic articles on local rap in New Orleans during 1993 and 1994 were generally marked by a focus on the issue of bounce, its distinctiveness, artistic worth, and potential effect on markets and careers, suggesting that the emergent local style was a phenomenon too imposing to ignore. Many observers and participants understood local audiences' preferences as holding out both enabling and constraining dimensions. Commenting on his 1993 Big Boy Records release, Sporty T explained, "I had to give them (the audience) what they wanted. . . . They want bounce, nothin' but bounce'" (Cortello 1993d, 22). Critics also perpetuated the idea of a concession to local preferences (with a resulting

diminution of creativity) as applying to live shows: a description of a performance by rapper Dion "Devious" Norman asserts that he "left the stage unfulfilled" despite having driven "thousands of bounce fans . . . into a frenzy" (Aiges 1994b). The rapper complained that "it's easier for me to bounce and make the crowd get hyped and talk about their territories than it is for me to get on the mike and talk about something knowledgeable."

One journalist explained the bounce style as a career necessity for artists: "bounce has become so dominant that local rappers hoping to establish themselves have adopted it - chanting simple lines over the "Drag rap" beat or something similar - with the hope of crossing over to more conventional rap later" (Aiges 1994a). In the same vein, Karen Cortello pondered, "for some reason, many New Orleans rap fans have adopted the 'Drag rap' beat as a local theme song. So rappers like [Joe] Blakk use the beat to get strong local support, which translates into radio airplay and record sales. It also sets the stage for original, more creative releases later on" (1993b, 21).

While these descriptions laid the blame for bounce's supposed shortcomings—repetitiveness, musical and lyrical simplicity, lack of creativity—at the feet of immature and unenlightened audiences, others focused on unscrupulous agents of corporate mediocrity: paraphrasing the opinions of unspecified "underground rappers," Aiges wrote, "listeners' tastes are shaped by what they hear on the radio, and . . . if radio stations play only pabulum, then that's what listeners get used to and request. If exposed to more adventurous rap, these artists argue, the audience would embrace it," instead of the "simpler stuff" they seemed to prefer (1992f). But WQUE music director Karen Cortello made clear that the agency lay in the hands of local listeners: "We have to play the hits and the records the audience wants to hear ... The [local rap group] 39 Posse may

not be considered progressive or whatever, but if that's what the audience wants to hear, that's what we play" (quoted in Aiges 1992f).

These comments and others indicate that the emergence and rise of bounce caused a significant amount of upheaval and conflict within the New Orleans rap scene even as it fueled expansion and growth in the local music industry. To some extent, participants' opinions of the genre were shaped by whether they personally stood to gain or lose ground in the new, bounce-centered environment. Rappers who had cultivated the ability to write and perform extended, non-repetitive narrative material often derided the new local style as not 'real rap;' Tim Smooth remarked, "[Bounce] should be labeled dance music," as if this alone were enough to disqualify it from serious consideration as rap. He further complained that the new crop of bounce artists "really [doesn't] rap—it's more like cheerleading, like chants" (quoted in Spera 1993, 34). Given the feminized association of 'cheerleading', such comments (and similar ones by music journalists) illuminate the gendered dimensions of sense-making and evaluative processes as they relate to the music scene. The conclusions of Stallybrass and White regarding the importance of "interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low" in the symbolic representation of culture and society apply to the discourse around bounce, which was often represented in an inferior position within a series of pairings (including but not limited to male/female, mind/body, listen/dance, rap/chant, national/local, creative/derivative, authentic/commercial, serious/silly, ethical/debased, heavy/light, substantive/superficial, linear/nonlinear) which expressed and structured understandings of musical value (1986, 2).

Rappers also complained about the effects of bounce upon New Orleans's reputation and identity within the wider rap geography and industry, which was

in these years still firmly rooted in the coastal centers of power. The popularity of bounce, it was feared, "[diluted] the definition of the local rap sound" and may have "sullied the New Orleans scene in the eyes of some national labels" and other outsiders—as rapper Tim Smooth complained, "the people from other states [who] come here to check our scene out . . . don't think nothin' comes out of here" (Spera 1993, 34). Gregory D also had a negative perspective on the emerging local style, insisting that New Orleans-based artists must be able to "create national material that's gonna sell national" to achieve true success. However, he also acknowledged the determinative role that music corporations play in terms of their willingness to invest in artists emerging from marginal local scenes—"They don't give a fuck about New Orleans, that's the bottom line" (quoted in Spera 1993, 34).

At times, artists who stood to lose the most from bounce's ascendance nevertheless tempered their criticism of it with grudging acceptance or even admiration. Regarding the use of "Drag rap" in local rap, Tim Smooth described the "'Triggerman' beat as the cornerstone of the local sound. 'Once they put that in, that's New Orleans music—it's like Mardi Gras music. Anybody who uses it will sell'" (quoted in Spera 1993, 34-35). While predicting that the "chant artists, the 'Where They At' people . . . ain't gonna get far from here," producer and rapper Ice Mike conceded, "at the same time, for New Orleans, that's working" (35). For some, like rapper Larry Birden, the fact that they were "not really into" the local style of music did not stop them from seeing it as contributing positively to stylistic diversity and local cultural expression, with potentially marketable results:

"there is a totally different sound coming out of New Orleans compared to the industry. . . . People looking into New Orleans are like, 'What are they doing down there? That's live, I like that.'

That's what's going to be what draws a lot of attention to New Orleans. It's a totally different flavor, a totally different concept" (35).

The response of producers and label owners to the rise of bounce was also multidimensional, often combining a desire to profit from the expanding local scene with attempts to distance themselves or their companies from the music's negative connotations. Ronald 'Baby' Williams, president of Cash Money Records chose to hedge his bets in terms of explicitly linking bounce and the music on his label (some of the most popular in the local market in the early 1990s): "We took it from chanting - what they call 'Where They At'-style - and added lyrics. . . But by us swinging our lyrics, they call it bounce. Other than that, it ain't no different from rap" (quoted in Aiges 1994b). While this description might apply to some songs released under the Cash Money imprint, others (including those by Pimp Daddy, Ms. Tee, UNLV, Lil Slim, and even Williams himself, under the stage name B-32) are, in retrospect, not only solidly within the bounce genre but were instrumental in helping to define the local style in the 1992-1994 period.

James Joseph, a self-described gangsta rapper and president of Pack Records, which released several seminal bounce recordings by Pimp Daddy and Kimy P. & Shorty T in 1993, declared that "bounce music . . . is just stupid," made by artists who are "not showing any real talent" (quoted in Aiges 1994c, 26 ; 1994b). The hyperbolic label owner assured a journalist that his group Full Pack would "never stoop to doing a bounce song," although they included one ("Slide, Giddy Up") on a 1993 single. Setting aside his personal feelings, Joseph conceded that "bounce is what's making money now," because "the people who buy rap music down here, they prefer to buy bounce music" (quoted in Aiges 1994a). Rather than stand on principle, Joseph acceded to the clear preferences of local audiences and advised other interested parties to do the same: "The hip-hoppers,

the gangsta rappers - whatever type of music you doing, if it ain't bounce, you going to have a problem. It took over." After selling 30,000 copies of DJ Jubilee's debut single, Take Fo' Records president Earl Mackie expressed a similar sense of resignation and bafflement towards bounce's popularity: "The people just like it" (1994b)

Mannie Fresh, the in-house producer for Cash Money Records throughout the decade of the 1990s, was lukewarm on the topic of bounce, despite being centrally involved in defining the stylistic conventions of the genre through his production work: "To me, it was the silliest thing in the world . . . It was basic, basic, basic. In the beginning, it was just chants" (Aiges 1994c, 26). Further comments speak to the dynamic nature of the bounce scene, and the push-and-pull between imitation and innovation involved in its development:

Bounce has "got to change, or the public is not going to go for it. . . . If you do something simple, they'll say, 'That was two years ago' or 'He ain't saying nothing.' It used to be that you could say the same lyrics that somebody else did and get over, the same little chants. Now you can't say the same old things" (quoted in Aiges 1994b).

Both Mannie Fresh and Leroy "DJ Precise" Edwards—the "busiest bounce producers" in early 1990s New Orleans—attempted to distance themselves from some of the production values of the local style, particularly the use of the "Drag rap" record and other sampled sources. Both asserted that "they use only live instruments on their tracks, no samples from other records" (a claim that is contradicted by several subsequent recordings) (Aiges, 1994b). While DJ Precise observed that "if you do a bounce song locally, independent, you'll make more money than if you do a rap song on a national record label," he also made clear his preference for producing "national sounding" material: "Every time you put out a project, you're really educating the consumer and gettin' them prepared for

upper level stuff" (quoted in Aiges 1994c, 26; Cortello 1996b, 85). Nevertheless, Edwards remained optimistic about the possibility for bounce to catch on in other places, even if the style had peaked in New Orleans: "if you take it into Buffalo, it's something new" (Aiges 1994a).

The Business of Bounce: Record Labels, Radio, Concerts

As with prior genres of black popular music like R&B, soul, and funk, small, locally-owned independent record labels formed a crucial link in the productive nexus between artists, radio programmers, music retailers, and local audiences in New Orleans's rap scene. Some of the earliest rap record labels in the city were owned by individuals who had a toehold in the music business in the 1960s and '70s. Isaac Bolden's Soulin' Records is one case that has already been discussed. J. "Diamond" Washington, owner of the Alliv, Lamina, and Rap Dis! labels, was an accomplished producer by the late 1980s, and produced popular records including MC Thick's "Marrero" (1991) and Mia X's "Da payback" (1993), among others.

In the early 1990s, a number of other labels were capitalized by members of a younger generation of aspiring entrepreneurs. Many of these, including Pack, ERC, and Parkway Pumpin', were owned by artists who used them to release their own work as well as, in some cases, that of other artists. However, the stakes were raised considerably over the course of 1992 and 1993, when the local market for rap recordings demonstrated new levels of potential for profit, and several labels were formed as more serious business ventures. Cash Money, Big Boy, and Take Fo' were some of the most prominent local labels during the 1993-1995 period, but they were far from monopolizing the New Orleans scene. A long list of smaller labels came and went, including Mobo, Slaughterhouse, Hit 'Em Up,

Mugz, Charlot, Ready-Or-Not, C&M, Disotell, Terrible T, and Mr. Tee Records. Some of these labels predated the emergence of bounce, but made important contributions to the new style nonetheless.

Cash Money Records, started around 1992 by brothers Ronald ("Slim") and Bryan ("Baby") Williams with unspecified assistance from Bobby Marchan, became the most successful label to emerge in the early 1990s, producing a variety of bounce, gangsta rap, and every imaginable fusion of the two by artists including Kilo G, Lil Slim, Ms. Tee, UNLV, and others. In a 1994 article, Scott Aiges reported that Cash Money "has dominated the local charts by consistently claiming four of the top five spots" (Aiges 1994c, 30). For the musical content of their recordings, the label relied exclusively upon veteran DJ and producer Mannie Fresh, who had his start with New York Incorporated and spent several years backing Gregory D.

Big Boy Records, which would grow to become Cash Money's closest competitor, was capitalized by former nightclub owner Charles Temple and his partner Robert Shaw after Temple won \$20,000 at a casino (Cortello 1993d, 22). The label's debut release, Sporty T's "Sporty talk -n- sporty 93," hewed closely to the conventions established by earlier bounce artists, while subsequent releases on the label by artists including Silky (formerly Silky Slim) and Partners N' Crime mixed bounce-inspired hooks and concepts with extended narrative raps and diverse thematic orientation. Other Big Boy releases, such as those by G-Slimm and Black Menace, showed little bounce influence but were nevertheless locally popular. Like Cash Money, Big Boy benefited from the efforts of an experienced in-house producer, Leroy "Precise" Edwards, who grew up in the Hollygrove area and who had deep roots in the local rap scene—as Karen Cortello observed, "by

the late '80's, Precise was producing the majority of local rap acts—everybody from DJ Jimi to Fullpack" (1996b, 85).

Bounce was propelled forward in the early 1990s by a critical mass of energy concentrated in New Orleans's housing projects and poor neighborhoods. However, despite the music's grassroots appeal and the related lack of traditional marketing and promotional efforts, it did draw upon and benefit from more established and conventional forums—a critic reported in 1993 that "radio has played a key role in solidifying bounce's hold on New Orleans" (Aiges 1994c, 26). The medium's role was more significant in New Orleans than in other places: a 2001 *Mediaweek* profile noted that "the region's scorching heat and humidity in the summer" produced levels of television viewing which were "much lower . . . than in other markets. As a result, New Orleans media is largely dominated by radio during the summer months" (Hudson 2001).

In articles about the local rap radio market, bounce is often framed as competing for audience and airtime with "local hip-hop," material with extended narrative raps and an emphasis on textual meaning (Aiges 1993e; 1994a; 1994c, 26; Spera 1993, 32). Commercial stations like WYLD or WQUE played bounce because of its overwhelming local popularity, and did not play the "underground" rap championed by local music journalists like Aiges and Spera for the simple reason that it did not make good business sense to do so. In the nonprofit sector, however, these views found a receptive ear in Jeff Bromberger, host of a rap show on the Tulane University station WTUL, who "plays local hip-hop but bans bounce because he thinks it's "stupid"" (Aiges 1994c, 26). For such hip-hop purists, bounce was suspect for reasons including its relationship to dancing, its deviation from a preferred set of conventions with regard to musical structure and lyrical themes, and the extent of its grassroots popularity. The latter

threatened the relevance of would-be gatekeepers like Aiges, Spera, and Bromberger, who were largely ineffective in their efforts to promote what they saw as more authentic rap music. Through their Local rap audiences had a clear idea of what they wanted to hear and dance to, and local artists, producers and record labels often chose to cater to these preferences.

The exposure of local rap on commercial radio reached a peak in 1991 and 1992, as WYLD and the Clear Channel-owned WQUE battled for New Orleans's rap audience, which doubtlessly facilitated the "explosion" of the local rap scene around the same time. In 1993, however, WYLD underwent a change of ownership and eliminated rap from its format. With the consolidation of WQUE's hold on the rap radio market, the amount of local music being played on commercial radio decreased (Aiges 1994c, 26). However, the station played an important role in the early years of bounce thanks to the efforts of individuals like Karen Cortello and the DJ Davey D (both white), and in later years continued to play a central role in the exposure and popularization of local rap, largely through its legendary mix DJ, Roland "DJ Ro" Watson.

Radio support was not essential to the success of bounce recordings, but, especially in the early 1990s, it represented one of the most accessible venues (along with block parties and other all-ages community events) in which listeners could become familiar with the local style. The desire on the part of inner-city New Orleanians to hear their local sound and place names on the radio further diffused the bounce genre within the New Orleans area and helped to solidify its status as a representative and ongoing local subgenre.

As in the years covered by the previous chapter, live appearances at house or block parties, clubs, talent shows and other local venues played a central role in artists' efforts to establish careers. Descriptions of early bounce performances

indicate the dynamic nature of the performer-audience relationship, and the crowd's ability to influence the evolution of the local rap scene rather than merely passively observing change. In the narrative of Tucker's ascendancy, crucial turning points are marked by audience response: he persevered as a rapper because "the crowd reaction was enthusiastic" at his early block party performances; he and DJ Irv decided to record their version of "Where dey at" because "the applause every Saturday night was so heartening" at the Ghost Town Lounge (Aiges 1994a). Within New Orleans, the nightclub and talent show circuit provided a basic and constant forum for aspiring rappers seeking places to perform, while more established artists performed at "1,000-person-capacity dance clubs." Still, Aiges reported, "scheduled concerts are rare," a fact which is surprising in light of the music's thriving popularity, and which likely relates as much to the "vernacular, uncontrolled" nature of the local music scene as to media reports linking rap concerts to the outbreak of violence (Aiges 1994c, 1; M. Smith 1994, 66; Pareles 1988).

When they did occur, larger concerts were staged at venues including the Municipal Auditorium or the Pontchartrain Center and featured multiple artists. Warren Mayes, who had prior experience in promotion and the operation of nightclubs, organized some of these shows, such as the "Summer Jam '92" in mid-August. With a ticket price of only five dollars, the bill touted performances by ten rap acts, including Mayes, as well as the Rebirth Brass Band, a young group that enjoyed close ties to the New Orleans rap scene (Aiges 1992e). Similarly, in late 1993 Mayes put together a "special Christmas concert" at the Tremé Community Center, featuring "eight of the hottest-selling local bounce rappers" in addition to "a couple of local non-bounce rappers as well as live funk from three brass bands." (Aiges 1993e).

However, the days of these types of extravaganzas were numbered as the local scene matured and began to fuel wider commercial aspirations. In 1992, a writer for the *Times-Picayune* cited several local rappers in an article that claimed that the fabled "house party" that "once served as a proving ground for local rappers" had declined, as "the lure of bigger dollars elsewhere and increasing violence have sent many rappers looking for new ways to promote themselves" (Jourdan 1992). However, enough nightclubs (including Flirts, Club Rumors, Newton's, and countless other short-lived endeavors) and similar venues existed in the city that such decisions did little to slow the expansion of the local scene. Other mainstream venues, such as the city's Jazz and Heritage Festival, continued to provide an important platform for local rappers, especially those promoted by the well-connected Bobby Marchan. Rappers from an older generation like Gregory D and MC Thick gave way after 1992 to younger artists from the bounce genre like Silky Slim, Lil' Elt, DJ Jimi, DJ Jubilee, and Ricky B in the 1993-1995 period (Aiges 1990c; 1992a; "1993 Jazz & Heritage Festival"; Tisserand 1994; "Saturday" 1995).

The hinterlands connected to the emerging New Orleans scene were determined by geographical proximity, cultural affinity, and specific connections at the level of commercial networks. As early as 1992, a local commentator observed, "bounce artists regularly travel throughout Louisiana and neighboring states drawing thousands of fans," and the genre saw New Orleans become further defined as the center of a hinterland that included "Louisiana and parts of Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee" (Aiges 1994a; 1994c, 26). While bounce concerts in New Orleans were relatively infrequent, "out-of-town concerts throughout Louisiana and neighboring states [were] nearly weekly affairs" (26). New Orleans-based artists performed together in "little

country towns in St Charles Parish, St. James Parish," and other nearby locations, with some shows featuring "an entire roster of artists" from a given record label, events which "often [earned] \$15,000 to \$20,000 per show" (Leach 2005; Aiges 1994c, 26).

The appeal of bounce (or its constitutive elements) outside of New Orleans was also indicated by the production of music influenced by the New Orleans sound in other cities. In a 1991 review of 2 Live Crew's *Sports Weekend* album, *Miami New Times* critic Greg Baker raved about the single "Pop that pussy," a "groin-oriented dance song, inspired during a trip to New Orleans, where a dance by that name is already making the club rounds." In 1992, Memphis-based artist FM released the single "Gimme what you got! (For a pork chop)", billed as "the answer to 'Where They At'" but almost entirely derivative of DJ Jimi's song. A more original attempt to adapt the bounce concept to a different location came in the 1994 single "Georgia bounce" by the group N.P.C. A 1999 song by Miami-based rappers the 69 Boyz (featuring Luke), "Don't start no shh," was based on a common brass band or second line chant, and began with a rendition of Tucker's "alright, alright" introductory riff.

While these bounce-influenced songs demonstrate a general familiarity with the local New Orleans style on the part of rappers and producers from other cities, bounce's appeal was highly constrained within the Gulf Coast region. As the bounce scene matured in the early 1990s, its already tenuous contact with the wider national music industry and audiences dwindled to almost nothing; as Ice Mike recalled, "we couldn't understand why they couldn't understand us" (Scott 2005). The New Orleans music scene remained effectively isolated from mainstream exposure in the early and mid-1990s, sustained by strong local sales based on word-of-mouth and radio promotion. The isolation was compounded by

the limitations of local and regional music industry networks: "New Orleans's labels dependence on Gonzales Wholesale, whose distribution area was primarily limited to Louisiana and southern Mississippi," was one of the factors that "widened the gulf" between the city and nearby potential markets like Memphis (J-Dogg, 1997).

Bounce: Evaluation and Criticism

New Orleans's rich traditions of vernacular music culture, in combination with a growing understanding on the part of civic leaders of the central role of music and cultural tourism in the city's economic future, has resulted in increasingly thorough and mostly positive coverage of local performers and musical events in a variety of print media. This category includes the daily *Times-Picayune*, the "alternative" *Gambit Weekly*, the free monthly music magazine *OffBeat*, the African-American-owned *Louisiana Weekly*, as well as other, shorter-lived publications devoted specifically to the city's rap scene, like *Da R.U.D.E. Magazine*. The following examination of the critical writings of three prominent New Orleans music journalists—Scott Aiges, Karen Cortello, and Keith Spera—will focus on the ways in which they made sense of and evaluated the emerging local scene and style, and shaped the discourse around it.

Bounce's relationship to the New Orleans music journalism establishment was not a smooth one. Artists, producers and audience members working in the local scene relied more upon word-of-mouth and radio play than print media for publicity. On the other side of the equation, journalists like Aiges, Cortello and Spera were separated from bounce's core audience along multiple dimensions—most centrally race, class, and age—in ways that ultimately influenced their

evaluation of the music, although important differences obtained between their views.

As the main music critic for the *Times-Picayune*, Scott Aiges was "the gatekeeper to the most visible print media outlet in the area" in the early 1990s (Spera 1993, 33). In hundreds of articles on local and national music that he wrote before leaving the paper in late 1995, he displayed a keen grasp of musical style and history in general and New Orleans's traditions in particular. In addition, Aiges, who had roots in New Jersey, was "a dyed-in-the-wool, Adidas-wearing rap fan" with a well-developed understanding of the genre (33).

However, while Aiges understood the connections between bounce and the historical-cultural context of New Orleans's black communities, he never seemed to warm up to actually liking the music, which he dismissed as "inane," "insipid," and formulaic "cookie-cutter" music "with seemingly interchangeable music and words" (1993d; 1992d ;1994b). In his conviction that "the so-called 'bounce' style of local rap - the sing-song chanting that is popular on the radio . . . is uncharacteristic of true hip-hop, which emphasizes wit, creativity and social consciousness," he promoted an essentialist understanding of the rap form informed by geographical-cultural bias and a particular interpretation of "musical sophistication" (1993b ; 1992d). These views significantly affected his coverage of bounce, in which he often emphasized the music's idiosyncrasies and surprisingly strong local sales rather than any musically innovative or interesting qualities it might embody.

Aiges had several related complaints about bounce. First, that it was simple and simple-minded: he criticized practitioners of the "sparse and dirty" local style for "[ignoring] the sonic complexity of the national scene," and eschewing the "funky grooves with brave musical choices" and "increasingly

diverse selection of musical backdrops" found in "state-of-the-art rap." (1992c; 1992f). He dismissed bounce rappers' lyrical content along similar lines: in contrast with "the best rap artists [who] show off their poetic skills with intricate, witty word play" and use rap to issue "calls for justice, equality and peace," local rappers craft

"lyrics that are no more complex than a few phrases repeated as refrains. The local rap hits that have actual story lines rarely go deeper than the usual complaints about gold-digging women, challenges to other rappers or neighborhood cheerleading" (1992f).

However, a review of material produced between 1992 and 1994 in New Orleans demonstrates that Aiges vastly overstated both the musical and thematic simplicity of the local style.

Aiges reacted negatively to the frequent use of the "grating" "bones" sample from "Drag rap," which was "trotted out again and again by local rappers." In early 1994, he wrote, "for the first 18 months or so of [the genre's] existence . . . all bounce records relied on two elements: a snippet of a xylophone arpeggio electronically 'sampled' from . . . 'Drag rap,' and one- or two-line chants that were sung rather than spoken" (1993d; 1994b). In another article on the rise of bounce, he lists seven songs that "use the same electronic drum beat and synthesized xylophone sound" taken from "Drag rap" (1992f). However, close listening to the recordings in question reveals that only four of them sample the Showboys's recording, with only one of these (T. Tucker's "Where dey at") depending entirely on "Drag rap" for its musical content. The remaining three combine the "bones" and other samples from "Drag rap" with a variety of other layered musical elements.

Three of the songs cited by Aiges as relying upon "Drag rap" samples ("Sister sister," "It was a West Bank thing," and "Get the gat") do not actually

contain any samples from the song at all. The critic's oversight can be partially attributed to the fact that all of the songs listed share a similar tempo and swinging bass drum beat. Further, some of those that do not employ "Drag rap" samples contain short motifs repeated within a cellular structure similar to the iconic "bones." Still, in his confident assertions about the ubiquity of "Drag rap" samples, Aiges minimizes or ignores the complexity, variety, and sophistication (both technical and conceptual) represented by the recordings in question. His conviction that all of the early bounce material sounded the same, said the same thing, and drew from the same sources clouded his ability to hear evidence to the contrary, making his pre-formed conclusions effectively self-fulfilling. Through his position, he enjoyed a public venue through which these opinions and mischaracterizations were widely disseminated.

Aiges's lack of attention to nuance and subtlety within the style led him to compare it unfavorably to national or mainstream recordings and artists. On the other hand, he did provide basic coverage of the bounce scene and in that way helped to further establish the genre in New Orleans. For Aiges, the most appealing aspect of bounce was its compatibility with a historically-rooted narrative of New Orleans as a site of distinctive expressive cultural forms and musical innovation based on cross-cultural contact: "Rap in New Orleans is different from rap just about anywhere else. Here, the preferred style has a jaunty, rolling beat with musical influences from the blues, Jamaican dancehall reggae and Mardi Gras Indian chants as well as gangsta rap" (1993e).

In a conversation with his colleague Keith Spera, Aiges commented on what the appropriate "hybrid" coming out of New Orleans should sound like: "the city would seem to be fertile ground for the further development of the rap/jazz merger propagated by national acts like Digable Planets" (Spera 1993, 33).

Referring to a local group that mixed rap vocal performances with "live" instrument playing (a concept popularized by the Philadelphia-based group The Roots), Aiges conceded that Kipori Funk "may not be a great band, but at least they are . . . delving into that scene, and that is brilliant news to me. I would love to see 10 bands like that playing around town," a statement which renders ironic Aiges's frequent assertions that bounce—the style of rap music that was actually popular with local new Orleans audiences—was mediocre, derivative, "cookie-cutter" music that all sounded the same (33).

Aiges left the *Times-Picayune* in late 1995, but has remained a fixture of the local music landscape in a variety of positions with city government and other music-related nonprofits. He was succeeded at the paper by New Orleans native Keith Spera, who had previously written for the free monthly music magazine *OffBeat*. Spera's views on local rap were similar to Aiges's and informed in important ways by the perspective of his predecessor. The overlap is evident in Spera's 1993 *OffBeat* cover story, an interview-based article on "New Orleans hip-hop," which begins with Aiges before moving on to other participants in the scene, including rappers, producers, and engineers. In the article, Spera described a New Orleans "rap and hip-hop community . . . roughly divided between the lightweight 'bounce' artists whose repetitive, crowd-pleasing cheers are the most successful at winning local airplay and generating local sales . . . and the more serious, harder-edged rappers" (1993, 32).

The equation of narrative complexity in the lyrical dimension with artistic worth and seriousness continued to pervade Spera's treatment of bounce in the years that followed as he became one of the city's most prominent music critics. Based on bounce's "repetitive, sing-along choruses," and "relatively simple musical arrangements," he consistently labeled the music "rap-lite" and "hybrid"

(1993, 32; 1995, 32; 1996; 1997a). Like Aiges, Spera gave positive coverage to acts that most closely resembled (in musical style and lyrical content) their national counterparts. Both critics shared the opinion that bounce artists were not noteworthy for their creative contributions, which were largely minimized or ignored, but instead for their inexplicable local popularity and concomitant sales.

While the passage of the torch to Spera did not signal any major change in the critical perspective on bounce in the pages of the city's daily paper, not all local journalists shared their pessimistic view of bounce. When she began writing her "Street" column in the monthly music paper *OffBeat* in late 1992, Karen Cortello (1963-2005) was the "music director/assistant program director" at WQUE, and had been instrumental in getting local bounce artists on the air (Cortello 1992a, 16). Her columns were characterized by informational rather than evaluative content, and while she actively promoted the work of women artists in the local rap scene, she hesitated to scrutinize or condemn others for misogynistic or violent lyrics. Cortello's general willingness to take bounce at face value, and to accept (for the most part) the local style without forcing comparisons with the dominant style of rap music, helped her achieve a relatively unbiased perspective on the bounce scene as it emerged in the early 1990s. Until her departure in 1998, her "Street" column remained the most comprehensive and in-depth treatment of locally produced rap in the New Orleans journalistic sphere.

Over the course of 1993 and 1994, bounce became an established local style of rap and a potentially profitable business enterprise, factors which contributed to a growing critical interest in the origins and history of the style. Various interested parties tried to influence the critical discourse, which gravitated towards narratives attributing the style to an individual or a small

handful of people. Responding to an article in 1994 that credited Tucker for "Where dey at," DJ Jimi's aunt and manager Gayl Payton contacted the newspaper to insist that "Jimi influenced Tucker before either ["Where they at"] single was released" (reeling). Juvenile, whose influential song "Bounce (for the Juvenile)" gave the genre its name, insisted, "I started it . . . I am bounce" (Soeder 2000). Soulja Slim made similar claims in the lyrics of his song "Make It Bounce," included on his 2001 release *The Streets Made Me*.

Local record labels were essential to the diffusion of these songs, and credit is justifiably claimed by label owners like Isaac Bolden, who remarked about Jimi's song, "that's the first rap record to come out of New Orleans to make the national trades. And Master P [the New Orleans rap mogul who rose to prominence in the mid- to late 1990s] and all them other people now, [have] followed that" (2006). For those involved in the production side of the rap scene, the credits are given to seminal DJs: Ice Mike asserted,

"a guy named DJ Lowdown [Dwayne Jackson]. . . was actually the originator of bounce. He used to backspin "Triggerman" [i.e. "Drag rap"] and other guys, DJ Irv, would do the same thing out on the other side of town at Ghost Town. And T. Tucker started rapping over it. So, that's the three people who you could actually say are the originators of bounce" (Scott 2005).

With the use of "Drag rap" samples established as one of bounce's central features, members of the group 39 Posse asserted their status as the first to appropriate the "bones" on record, in their 1991 song "Ask them hoes." When all of these claims are assembled and compared, however, the collective and multidimensional nature of New Orleans's rap music scene in the early 1990s seems beyond dispute.

Conclusion

This chapter showed how a local style of rap ("bounce") emerged and "took over" in New Orleans during the period 1990-1994, driven by the collective efforts of "independent production networks and links between artists, studio producers, nightclubs, radio programmers, and an eager audience constituency" (Forman 2002, 334). With a few minor exceptions, the city's rap scene during the first half of the 1990s was largely self-contained. At the same time, the rise of a more strongly defined local scene and style was influenced by developments in diverse contexts which included the wider political economy of New Orleans and the national rap music industry and audience. Two important factors influenced this process and the particularities of the music that resulted from it; New Orleans's grounding in self-renewing vernacular expressive traditions, and its geographic and cultural isolation from the centers of music industry power.

While bounce entailed continuities as well as disjunctures in musical style and lyrical content, it produced a radical shift in the career trajectories of both established and emergent rap artists and labels in New Orleans. In late 1989 critic Scott Aiges lamented, "New Orleans isn't known as a center of rap music, by far the most important musical genre to emerge from the decade," but by 1994 he looked back nostalgically on the period "before bounce hit, [when] New Orleans rap artists Gregory D., Bust Down, MC Thick and Tim Smooth were signing deals with major record labels such as Atlantic and RCA" (1994a). The emergence of bounce interrupted the process of exposing these and similar artists to national audiences, as new generations of performers trading in more explicitly local priorities and values rose to unexpected prominence within New Orleans's rap scene.

Building on the efforts of earlier New Orleans-based artists to express a local sensibility in songs like "Buck Jump time" or "Get it girl", Tucker and Irv's song encouraged a reorganization of the priorities (musical and thematic) that guided rap music conceptualization and production in the city. "Where dey at," "Sister sister," "Bounce (for the Juvenile)," and similar efforts heavily indulged the particular appetites of New Orleans club and party audiences to an extent that set them apart from other contemporary or earlier recordings in which performers had balanced local themes and preferences with aspirations to national success. The priorities of New Orleans audiences—in the form of lyrical themes or an affinity for vocal performances in cellular structures that deemphasize narrative and reemphasize collective experience—were substantially different from those which were thought to characterize national, mainstream audiences. Artists or companies who ignored these preferences did so at their peril, as bounce became increasingly central to the expectations of local audiences. Engagement with audiences at the grassroots level of nightclubs and block parties was a crucial first step for aspiring artists, producers, and label owners, regardless of their personal artistic aspirations.

New Orleans-based artists and owners of independent record labels were often dissatisfied with their continued inability to move beyond the regional level in the early 1990s, but the prevailing circumstances also offered certain advantages. The failure of national companies to extract talent or ideas from New Orleans's rap scene allowed independent record companies in the city to rise to the top of the local music industry food chain. Their near-monopoly in access to New Orleans's market and talent pool helped them establish creative and commercial networks which would contribute to long-term viability and profit. In the three or four years after the bounce concept had energized the New Orleans

rap music scene and industry in late 1991, labels including Cash Money and Big Boy expanded rapidly, building their rosters of artists and producing a steady supply of popular releases. While some companies active in the late '80s and early '90s (including Pack, Parkway Pumpin', and Soulin') dropped out of the scene, many new record labels—including Take Fo', Mobo, Slaughter House, and others—were formed during this period in order to capitalize upon the thriving demand for locally-oriented rap and to exploit the seemingly bottomless supply of talent held by New Orleans's projects and black neighborhoods. The next chapter will show how the intense but isolated local rap scene of the early 1990s set the stage for a stunning reversal of fortune for New Orleans artists and labels, some of whom became global rap superstars later in the decade.

Chapter 5: "Bout It": New Orleans Breaking Through (1995-2000)

"Louisiana is fast becoming the nation's capital of filthy-rich rappers"—New York Times music critic Neil Strauss (2000b).

As the preceding chapter showed, the emergence and rise to popularity of bounce in the early 1990s introduced important changes in the organizational and stylistic dimensions of New Orleans's rap scene, and sparked a lively debate about the possibilities and limitations of the distinctive local style. Beginning in 1995, the city's rap scene was transformed in a different way; the long isolation of New Orleans-based artists and independent labels from national markets and audiences was broken, and within a few years the city was home to two of the most successful independent record labels in the business—No Limit Records and Cash Money Records—which had launched several artists into the top of the sales charts.

Out of the rich and dynamic scene that emerged in the early 1990s, only a few artists and companies went on to transcend local or regional markets later in the decade. Those that did, however, represent significantly divergent ways of achieving this goal. Differences in timing, background and experience, business strategies, and access to capital and commercial networks meant that in each of these cases, the intersection of the local with the national/global would unfold according to its own particular logic. In this chapter, I examine three central dimensions of the process that ultimately transformed New Orleans from a rap backwater to a celebrated center of the 'Dirty South' in the second half of the 1990s.

I have chosen these three case studies because they represent distinct approaches to mastering the "local-global nexus" through which the New Orleans rap scene connects with national companies and audiences. Artists and record

label owners associated with these cases drew on and referenced the local rap scene and sensibility in divergent ways, reflecting differences in strategy, biography, and timing. Their efforts greatly impacted the exposure of New Orleans rap in the national arena, and contributed to the 'Dirty South' movement in the late 1990s.

The first of these important breakthroughs for New Orleans-based artists and companies was the career of Michael "Mystikal" Tyler. After developing a local following on Big Boy Records, Mystikal signed with Jive in 1995 and reached a national audience. He downplayed the connections between his career and his label, and the local rap scene and industry. Through the style and content of his music (and in discourse around it), Mystikal and others tried to create as much distance as possible between him and the grassroots 'bounce' scene that had flourished in the city in the early 1990s,

The following year, New Orleans native Percy "Master P" Miller forged a groundbreaking deal between his No Limit Records company and national distributor Priority Records, a mutually profitable arrangement that forms my second case study in this chapter. No Limit built upon Master P's New Orleans roots as well as his experience selling and marketing underground gangsta rap in California. The company's rise to national prominence depended in important ways upon Master P's engagement with the existing New Orleans scene, which supplied the majority of his producers and artists. However, he exercised strict control over the use of locally-oriented stylistic or thematic elements in No Limit's music. The label succeeded in marketing a highly mediated version of local New Orleans style and cultural identity in the rap genre, setting new standards for commercial success and making Miller one of the richest entertainers in the world.

Not long after Priority helped Master P achieve his label's stated goal of "supplying the world with that gangsta music," another independent record label based in New Orleans negotiated a similarly lucrative "pressing and distribution" deal with a major label, in this case Universal. Cash Money Records, owned by brothers Bryan and Ronald Williams, forms the third case examined in this chapter. While Cash Money moved away from locally-themed expressions in the middle of the decade, the label's signing of Terius "Juvenile" Gray in 1996 and the central role of producer Byron "Mannie Fresh" Thomas kept the label's output anchored in a distinctive New Orleans sensibility. This turned out to be a boon to Cash Money and its artists when audience preferences at the wider, national level shifted in the direction of more locally-inflected southern rap styles late in the 1990s. Master P, on the other hand, increasingly staked his company's fortunes on expressions that were largely devoid of local or regional content, a fact which may have contributed to No Limit's shrinking market share at the decade's end.

What enabled New Orleans's transformation from an isolated rap scene with a style understood as limited and provincial to one of the leading lights of a surging rap movement based in the major cities of the U.S. southeast? What individuals, companies, events, processes, phenomena (at the local and national levels) were involved in this change? What was their relationship to the existing New Orleans rap scene, in its stylistic and organizational dimensions? How did the developments of this period depend upon and/or catalyze changes in the ways that audiences, critics, and record companies (at various levels of scale) understood the relationship of musical style to the local cultural identity of New Orleans and its inhabitants? What strategies did New Orleans-based participants employ to try to control this process? Of the artists and companies that were

successful, how did their relationship (stylistic and discursive) to the local rap scene and sensibility change over time?

Mystikal: "The next big thing in New Orleans rap isn't bounce."

By 1994, bounce had proved to be more than just a passing fad, and continued to dominate the local New Orleans rap market (Aiges 1994c, 1, 26). The idiosyncratic local genre had displayed a surprising amount of longevity and stylistic diversification, enabling the establishment of several profitable independent record companies in the city and driving an expansion of the production base generally (Cortello 1997a, 20). With regard to its connections to national companies and audiences, however, participants in the city's rap scene seemed unable to recapture even the relatively meager possibilities that existed for artists like DJ Jimi and Silky Slim in the early 1990s; no New Orleans-based artist gained national exposure in the years 1992-1998 with anything resembling a locally-oriented, bounce-flavored style.

The growing understanding of bounce and marketability on the wider national level as mutually exclusive seemed to find confirmation in the next major development in the relationship between New Orleans's rap scene and the established music business: "In 1995," wrote Karen Cortello, "New Orleans's local rap scene finally got some of the national attention it deserves" but for an artist—Mystikal—who consciously framed himself outside of the bounce genre and who shunned the signature formal and thematic elements of the style (1996a).

Michael "Mystikal" Tyler (b. 1975) first entered the local rap scene as a breakdancer, and later moved on to try his hand at rapping under the name "Mystical Mike," gaining exposure through an association with the group 39 Posse. He was already looking beyond the New Orleans horizon for inspiration—

he cites New Yorkers Das EFX and LL Cool J as early stylistic influences—and his musical perspective was further broadened by a four-year stint in the army which took him to Iraq as part of Operation Desert Storm in 1991; he had previously only left New Orleans once in his life for a trip to Disneyland (Spera 1995, 34). The time in the army also gave him the opportunity to build his repertoire and hone his performance skills during open-mic contests while stationed in Georgia (35).

By 1993, he was finished with his army commitment and had returned to New Orleans, where he found work as a security guard. His rap career took off after he was invited to open a concert by the legendary '80s group Run-DMC at the Tremé Community Center in early 1994, where his performance caught the ear of Leroy "Precise" Edwards, the in-house producer for Big Boy Records. Within several weeks time, Edwards had signed Mystikal to a contract, and soon afterwards released the rapper's debut single. Mystikal was "an immediate sensation in the New Orleans rap community," and Big Boy released an eponymous, full-length album in late 1994, which by the early part of the next year had risen to no. 56 on the *Billboard* Top R&B Albums chart without national distribution (Spera 1995, 35; Cortello 1995a, 24).

Tyler's style was distinctive within the context of rap music generally, and it stood out even more against the backdrop of New Orleans's bounce scene, which by this time had dominated the local market for several years running. In comparison to the sing-along chants of bounce, which often unfolded according to thematic, rhythmic and melodic patterns already familiar to New Orleans audiences, Mystikal's style was unpredictable to the point of resembling aural pastiche. The rapper crafted complex, largely non-repetitive lyrics which drew upon eclectic and diverse sources for inspiration. The result included dramatic

shifts in register, timbre, pacing, and volume, and an agile movement between different subjects and narrative voices. Robert Shaw, a partner in the Big Boy Records label, commented on Mystikal's "voice control, what he can do with his mouth—you might listen to his CD and think you're hearing sound effects, but it's his voice" (Spera 1995, 32). In the content and delivery of his lyrics, Tyler mixed popular culture references (e.g., the television nerd "Urkel") with an array of ideas and stylistic approaches drawn from the local world of African American vernacular expressive traditions, including the Baptist preaching and singing that he was exposed to in his youth.

With regard to musical style, Mystikal challenged the conventions of New Orleans's rap scene and their underlying assumptions. According to producer Precise, because the rapper's "wording, . . . style and . . . lyrics" were "so different" from what he was accustomed to working with, they required a different approach to composition and the creation of custom-made backing tracks (Spera 1995, 35). Fellow Big Boy Records artist Michael "Misdemeanor" Patterson (of the group Partners-N-Crime) marveled, "It's just the emphasis that he puts on so many words that makes the music so different. Mystikal can do tongue-twisters, break it down, slow it down, speed it up. . . . he's got his own style" (35). Patterson's description of Mystikal's relationship to the conventions of the local rap scene illustrates the intertwined and mutually dependent nature of ideas of place, identity, and musical style:

"I heard him rap, and I was like, 'Man, where did *this* dude come from?' . . . It was a certain type of sound that I had never heard from New Orleans. . . . New Orleans had its own flavor—bounce. Or people try to rap hardcore, but it all sounds the same. When he came along, it was a hardcore style that was different. I thought he was from New York or somewhere like that" (35).

For some, the fact that Mystikal's style was "unusual for New Orleans" (32) was tied to hierarchies of style and artistic merit which were in turn structured by geography. In 2000, a *Times-Picayune* critic speculated that "Tyler is perhaps the most skilled of all the New Orleans rap stars" ("Rap"); in the same year, Keith Spera insisted that Mystikal was "still the most technically impressive local rapper" in spite of diminishing attendance at his concerts in New Orleans (32; "Rap" 2000; 2000c).

During the late spring and summer of 1995, after the release of his full-length debut, Mystikal was "one of the top-selling artists in New Orleans, of any genre" (Cortello 1995b, 31). Big Boy had sold over 300,000 copies of the record by the time the local company sealed a distribution deal with Jive Records, an independent distributed by RCA (itself a property of the German-owned BMG) ("Mystikal profile" 2000). The signing of Mystikal conformed to Jive's "A&R philosophy of spotting developing regional performers, signing them, then building onto their respective bases," which had helped the company build a reputation for "high-caliber rap acts" (H. Nelson 1991, R-18). With the addition of several new tracks, Jive re-released Mystikal's debut with the title *Mind of Mystikal* and a cover image that (unlike the Big Boy release) included several signifiers of New Orleans and (black) Louisiana identity in the form of a Grambling University jersey and the backdrop of the Greater New Orleans Bridge. The record was distributed nationally in September of 1995 and sold over 500,000 copies, enough to qualify for "gold" status. The rapper filmed a video for the song "Here I go" in late 1996 in which he and the director "chose to highlight the city's landmarks — Bourbon Street, the Lakefront, the Piazza D'Italia, and others," presenting a generic, timeless, and picturesque New Orleans rather than any specific references to the city's distinctive rap scene or the black

neighborhoods where it flourished (Oliver 1997, 51).

In mid-1994, when Karen Cortello first reported on Mystikal in her "Street" column, the rapper emphatically described his music as "original hardcore hip-hop . . . NOT bounce," and in the early years of his career he was careful to distance himself from the local genre (1994). Mystikal eschewed bounce's characteristic chants and local perspective, and the production behind his rapping contained few if any of the signature elements of the genre. His ambivalent relationship to bounce and the local rap scene is put into relief in the song "Never gonna bounce (the dream)," one of several added to the original Big Boy release to fill out Jive's *Mind of Mystikal*. The song's title makes obvious reference to New Orleans's native rap style, insinuating a rejection or disconnection from it. However, it also signifies upon another meaning of the verb 'to bounce' in the wider rap subculture, which is 'to depart.' The lyrical subject of the song is the rise of bounce icon T. Tucker and his subsequent incarceration and commercial marginalization, with the majority of the lyrics narrated from Tucker's first-person perspective; only at the end of the song does it become clear that he is calling from jail. In combination with the title, these lyrics portray Tucker's perseverance and eventual triumph; however, through its delivery, composition, and musical backing, "Never gonna bounce" also expresses Mystikal's distance from the style Tucker started.

Mystikal's breakthrough to national audiences built upon the local and regional success of his record label, Big Boy Records. Established in 1993 and based in the New Orleans suburb of Kenner, it was one of several local independents—including Cash Money, Take Fo', Mobo, and Mugz—that had blossomed during the formative years of the bounce genre. Label owner Charles Temple had roots in the local music scene which extended back to 1990, when he

partnered with rapper and producer Ice Mike in the C&M label. Prior to the release of Ice Mike's single "I got game," the entrepreneurial Temple "wasn't really interested in [the] music business at all. He was into tow trucks . . . that was his thing" (Scott 1995). In the early to mid-1990s, Big Boy and Cash Money vied for dominance in the local scene. Songs dedicated to the rivalry between the two labels and their respective artists included "Pussy n a can (fuck U & L.V.)" (1993) and "Talk that shit now (fuck U & LV)" (1995) by Partners-N-Crime, "Come like me" by female rapper Silky (1994), "F**k Big Boy" by B.G. (1995), and "Nigga I'm bout it" (1995) and "Drag 'em 'n' tha river" (1996) by U.N.L.V.

As Mystikal rose to national prominence, Big Boy Records looked like the wave of the future for New Orleans's rap industry, a future that was widely understood as departing from bounce. The duo Partners-N-Crime retained a substantial amount of bounce influences in their Big Boy releases, but in general the label moved away from the local flavor that characterized many of its earlier releases (such as those by Sporty T or Silky from 1993 and 1994, respectively) with more straight-ahead gangsta rap offerings from the likes of Black Menace, G-Slimm, and the female duo Ghetto Twiinz, a trend which was greeted with thinly veiled jubilation on the part of Scott Aiges. "Rap newcomer G-Slimm's debut," the *Times-Picayune* critic wrote in late 1994, "isn't just a great New Orleans rap record - a contradiction in terms to those who hate this city's homegrown 'bounce' sound," but instead "can stand proudly with records on the national charts - and has not a trace of bounce" (1994d).

By 1996, according to label owner Charles Temple, Big Boy was poised for "a total takeover" of the New Orleans rap scene (Cortello 1996a). In addition to having brought Mystikal to national audiences, the label's roster featured several other promising artists, such as the duo Black Menace, who charted in *Billboard*

in early 1995. The label's in-house producer, Leroy "Precise" Edwards, had developed his local career as part of the group ERC ("Everyone Receives Cash"), and produced most of DJ Jimi's debut album, *It's Jimi* (1992). In terms of technical skill and creativity, the quality of his production work was often equivalent to or better than much of that in the national market, and was minimally connected to the distinctive tastes of New Orleans audiences, a fact which did not hinder its local popularity.

Despite the promise of its beginnings, however, Big Boy's planned "takeover" never materialized, and the label folded abruptly sometime in 1997, as its local profile was rapidly eclipsed by the rising stars of Cash Money and No Limit. Several of Big Boy's rappers defected to No Limit, and the company's roster took a hit when up-and-coming gangsta rapper Kenneth "G-Slimm" Jackson, Jr., was murdered in late 1996 at the age of twenty-two. The exact reasons for the label's demise remain unclear, but likely relate to the dissolution of the relationship between Temple, Precise, Robert Shaw (the third partner in the Big Boy operation) and some of the label's top-drawer artists (Braxton 2002). By 1997, Precise and Shaw had left to form Upper Level Recordings, bringing with them former Big Boy acts the Ghetto Twiinz and building upon a relationship with James Smith's Houston-based Rap-A-Lot Records. Around 2002, Big Boy reappeared on the New Orleans scene, but the label failed to recapture the momentum it had enjoyed in the mid-1990s.

No Limit Records: "It ain't about where you're from" (Miller quoted in Baraka 2002, 50).

As Big Boy Records tried to build on Mystikal's momentum, another record label seemed to come out of nowhere and rapidly became a dominant

presence on the New Orleans scene and the sole conduit connecting it to mainstream, national rap audiences. No Limit Records enjoyed spectacular growth between 1996 and 1998, making founder and sole owner Percy "Master P" Miller spectacularly rich and elevating the profile of New Orleans rap in general. However, the label's relationship to New Orleans's vernacular musical traditions and local cultural identity was always tentative, qualified and carefully managed for maximum strategic effect.

Born in 1969, Miller was "about 5 years old" and had three younger brothers when his father, "Big Percy, and his mother, Josie (who never recovered from her best friend's suicide in the family's back yard), split up." He and his brother Kevin moved into his paternal grandmother's apartment, where Maxine "Big Mama" Miller and her husband, Claude, raised him along with several other children: "This meant that young P often slept in the hallway of the three-bedroom home" in the Calliope Project (Shruers 1997). His grandmother worked multiple jobs to be able to send Miller to a nearby private Catholic school (R. Johnson 1999). Under the iron discipline of his grandparents, who "wanted us to get out of the project," he finished high school and went to the University of Houston on a basketball scholarship, but was forced to temporarily abandon the sport due to a knee injury (Shruers 1997). Returning to New Orleans, he studied business at the Southern University of New Orleans, and, with his younger brother Kevin, dabbled in the street life and drug dealing that were nearly ubiquitous in New Orleans's poor neighborhoods. Sometime around 1988, however, Miller concluded that New Orleans was "too hot . . . Everybody was dying there," and moved to Richmond, California (north of Oakland in the San Francisco Bay Area), to be near his mother. His brother Kevin joined him, but

after a week decided "it was too slow for him . . . And when he went back home, he got killed the next day."

In Richmond, Miller and his wife Sonya opened a record store, and soon found that they were selling large quantities of 'underground' gangsta rap tapes, the production and distribution of which were, for the most part, disconnected from major companies and their commercial networks. Miller founded the No Limit Records label, and with his brothers Corey ("C-Murder") and Vyshonn ("Silkk the Shocker", b. 1980) formed a trio called TRU ("The Real Untouchables") which released albums in 1991 and 1992. Thematically and musically, these recordings (as well as another in 1993 by Sonya Miller) were heavily influenced by the gangsta rap of West Coast artists like N.W.A. and, later, Tupac Shakur. As Miller's experience grew, No Limit's recordings moved closer to the technical and creative standards of the West Coast gangsta rap genre, and he began to develop his own career as a solo artist. He sold over 100,000 copies of his first album, *The Ghetto's Tryin' to Kill Me*, which cost a mere one thousand dollars to produce. Sales doubled with his next effort, *99 Ways to Die*, the first No Limit title to penetrate the *Billboard* charts; combined, the two releases had achieved total sales of 350,000 copies (R. Johnson 1999; Muhammed 1999).

Increasing sales fed into an expanding business plan; in addition to developing himself and various members of his family as rap artists, Miller also tapped into the vital 'underground' rap scene that existed in the Bay Area. In 1994, No Limit released a compilation, *West Coast Bad Boyz: Anotha Level of the Game*, featuring prominent Bay Area rappers such as Rappin' 4-Tay, JT the Bigga Figga, C-Bo and E-40. As he traveled to promote this and other releases, Master P began to establish connections with artists and producers in New Orleans. These included Mia X, one of the city's most popular female rappers, as

well as Craig "KLC" Lawson, an accomplished DJ active in the city since the late 1980s who had honed his abilities as part of the group 39 Posse and as a producer for the Parkway Pumpin Records label (Aiges 1994c, 30).

In 1995, Master P organized a compilation of up-and-coming southern artists in the mold of *West Coast Bad Boyz*. The compilation, *Down South Hustlers: Bouncin' and Swingin'*, featured an impressive selection of New Orleans talent, including KLC, Mia X, Magnolia Slim, Joe Blakk, Skull Dugrey, as well as rappers from Baton Rouge, Texas, and even the Bay Area. While much of the material for *Down South Hustlers* was recorded on the West Coast, Master P was strengthening his ties with New Orleans during this period, most significantly through his increasingly close relationship with KLC. The decision to move strongly into southern regional rap at this time was prescient, as national audiences were in the process of shifting their tastes in this direction. According to Roni Sarig, "the success of Third Coast gangstas like the Geto Boys and Eightball & MJG convinced him there might be some opportunity in the South where he'd seen none back in 1989" (2007, 82). *Down South Hustlers* was forward-looking both in terms of its regional orientation, and, as rap's first double CD release, its ambitious scale.

The song "Bout it, bout it," produced by KLC and included on TRU's 1995 album *True*, marked an important moment in Master P's ascent as well as in his shifting relationship to New Orleans, one in which he found his niche between "Louisiana bounce and California g-funk" (slow gangsta rap music characterized by "a heavy bass sound . . . and laid-back tempo) (Braxton 1997, 95; Keyes 2002, 90). Several dimensions of his vocal performance in the song—including reliance upon a simple, repeated motif and the inclusion of a prominent and extensive 'roll-call' of the city's wards in a participatory, antiphonal structure—suggest

connections to the grassroots New Orleans rap subculture. The backing music, like Master P's rap, draws selectively upon locally-derived stylistic elements. A tempo of seventy-six beats-per-minute and the use of soaring, portamento-inflected single-note synthesizer lines situate the song within the West Coast gangsta rap aesthetic, while the propulsive bass drum pattern and the rhythmic, simple organ chords suggest connections to New Orleans's vernacular music traditions. The beat of the song, one writer claimed, "synthesized three styles of hip-hop production: New Orleans 'bounce,' Oakland 'dopefiend beat,' and L.A. 'G-funk'" (Gordon 1997).

In its lyrics and concept, "Bout it, bout it" represents Master P's most explicit and direct attempt to situate himself within the local rap milieu, and served to announce his return (physically and stylistically) to his hometown. He introduces himself as a "native of New Orleans," and vows, in an echo of Gregory D's 1987 tribute, that he "could never forget where [he] came from." In "Bout it, bout it," Master P portrays New Orleans as the "murder capital of the world," emphasizing the toughness and ruthless opportunism of the gangsters and hustlers in the city's housing projects and poor black neighborhoods, places where there "ain't no love." A mention of Mardi Gras only serves to make the point that "some tourists don't make it back." "Bout it, bout it" presents a darker and more narrowly focused portrait of local criminality than earlier efforts like Gregory D and Mannie Fresh's "Where you from (party people)," and more closely resembles the Atlanta-based Goodie Mob's contemporaneous song "Dirty South," in which the criminal subculture of southern, urban blacks (as well as the South's history of racism) is used as a starting point for addressing the invisibility of southerners within the wider rap music geography and imaginary (Miller 2004, 182-189; 2008).

The song's connection to the local cultural landscape is established in a less pathological and bleak way by Mia X, whose creative abilities were substantially more advanced than those of her employer, Master P. Her verses in "Bout it, bout it" anchor the song in the rich local history of rap in New Orleans, drawing upon the talents of an artist who had been on the scene in various capacities since 1986 and whose perspective and stylistic orientation was much more solidly rooted in the local scene than those of Master P. In the verses she contributes in the second half of the song, she defends her abilities (and, by extension, those of women rappers, southerners, and her record label associates) and, like Master P, peppers her rap with references to iconic touchstones of New Orleans's cultural particularity (such as "gumbo, gris gris, [and crawfish] etoufee") which resonate with a touristic portrayal of New Orleans in the wider cultural imagination.

No Limit's growth did not escape the attention of California-based Priority Records, owned by former employees of budget label K-Tel. The company's first taste of success had come in 1987, when it released the first of several compilations by The California Raisins. The animated classic soul "group" (which used the vocal talents of Buddy Miles, among others) scored a hit single with a cover of Marvin Gaye's "I heard it through the grapevine," and eventually sold over a million copies of their debut *The California Raisins Sing the Hit Songs*. Priority then forged "a revolutionary deal with N.W.A. founder Eazy E" which helped the seminal 'West Coast' gangsta rap group's 1988 release *Straight Outta Compton* become "the first rap album ever to enter the charts at No. 1" (Rosen 1995, 18). The resulting profits financed Priority's further pursuit of partnership and distribution deals with smaller companies as well as contracts with individual artists.

As Keith Negus observed, major music companies "tend to allow rap to be produced at independent companies and production units, using these producers as an often optional and usually elastic repertoire source," relying on "street teams . . . for information gathering and feeding that data back to headquarters," a scenario that played out in the No Limit-Priority partnership (1999, 96, 99). According to Priority executive Bryan Turner, "We have street teams of promotion guys out in the field, and one of our employees saw P's records in stores and inquired, 'Who is this guy?'" (Babcock 1997). Shortly afterward, Turner offered Miller "a typical boutique-label deal that heavily favored Priority," which was "promptly declined" (Muhammad 1999). Building upon his impressive history of 'underground' success with minimal marketing and radio support, Master P leveraged a deal with Priority in 1996 in which he retained "100% ownership of the master recordings, which allows [No Limit] to profit from future sales such as catalogs and reissues." Priority pressed and distributed his releases, but Miller earned eighty-five cents on the dollar for the sales of No Limit product. The first album to be released under the new arrangement, 1996's *Ice Cream Man*, "sold 32,000 in the first week [and by late 1999 had] sold nearly one million units" (R. Johnson 1999).

With Priority's backing, No Limit cranked out a string of million-selling albums by artists including Master P, Mia X, Mystikal (whose release from his contract with Jive was procured at substantial expense), Ricky "Fiend" Jones, the twins Kane & Abel, Master P's brothers C-Murder and Silkk the Shocker, and the group TRU. In its first week on the market, Master P's 1997 album *Ghetto D* "sold a staggering 256,000 copies, surprising many music industry observers by vaulting to No. 1 in . . . *Billboard* magazine," making it "the first release by a Louisiana artist to do so in more than 30 years" (Spera 1997c; 1997d). In addition

to topping the R&B charts, "where rap artists generally appear," the album also penetrated "the *Billboard* 200, [and] the mainstream pop and rock charts" (1997c). To some extent, this success was understood as carrying the New Orleans rap scene along with it; in 1997, *Times-Picayune* writer Keith Spera noted that "business is booming for local rap in general," and claimed that "P and his organization are riding atop this bull market—and are largely responsible for calling national attention to New Orleans rap" (1997a).

While Master P and his family members held central positions in No Limit's roster of artists, the label's growth after 1996 involved an aggressive strategy of identifying and acquiring the most talented artists operating in the local New Orleans scene. No Limit signed several promising rappers away from Big Boy Records, including Magic, Fiend, and Kane and Abel. Former New York Incorporated member Mia "Mia X" Young had enjoyed a local hit with the 1993 single "Da payback," and had signed with Emoja/Slaughter House Records, owned by Roy P. Joseph, Jr. (MC J' Ro J'), before moving to No Limit in 1995. That year, she traveled to California to record an EP for the label entitled *Good Girl Gone Bad*, which sold 200,000 copies. In 1997, she released her first full-length recording, *Unlady Like*, which eventually hit gold record status with over 500,000 copies sold, and which peaked at No. 2 on the *Billboard* "Top R&B Albums" chart. A second album, 1998's *Mama Drama*, would be her last No Limit release.

James "Soulja Slim" Tapp, who made his recorded debut under the name Magnolia Slim in 1994 on the Parkway Pumpin' Records label, was another established New Orleans artist who joined the No Limit operation in the mid-1990s. Thanks in part to his connection to producer Craig "KLC" Lawson, Tapp was one of several up-and-coming New Orleans rappers featured on No Limit's

1995 compilation *Down South Hustlers: Bouncin' and Swingin'*, which included the song "You got it" excerpted from his 1995 *Dark Side* EP. His career was interrupted in 1995 when he was sentenced to a three-year prison term for armed robbery. In the title track of his 1994 full-length cassette *Soulja Fa Lyfe*, as well as in the song "Soulja Made for Walkin'," Tapp was one of the earliest New Orleans-based artists to introduce the metaphor of fatalistic militarism into his lyrics and self-presentation, a trope which would be further elaborated by several prominent artists and record labels in the later 1990s, most notably Master P, who used a tank for his record label logo and called his clique the No Limit Soldiers.

In 1998, No Limit released Soulja Slim's album *Give It 2 Em Raw*, although the hard-living rapper was back in jail for violating parole before he had time to promote the recording. Nevertheless, it was a banner year for Master P and No Limit, which "sold 26 million records . . . , more than any other rap label" (R. Johnson 1999). *Forbes* magazine estimated Miller's income at \$56.5 million, with the company itself valued at \$230 million. In the summer of that year, the label secured a deal for international distribution with Virgin Records (Kwaku 1998). The label signed the iconic 'West Coast' artist Snoop Dogg, who remained on No Limit until 2001.

In addition to Master P and his younger brothers, several New Orleans-based artists played important roles in the company's halcyon days of the late 1990s. In 1998, releases by Fiend and Mystikal, as well as "Master P's brothers, Corey 'C-Murder' Miller and Vyshonn 'Silkk the Shocker' Miller, . . . all hit No. 1 on the R&B album chart and landed in the Top 10 of the pop chart" (Spera 1998a). Master P's 1998 solo album, the double CD *MP tha Last Don* (which, he claimed, marked his retirement as a rapper) topped the rap and pop charts, and

went on to sell over 400,000 copies, one of the twenty platinum or multi-platinum albums that No Limit generated in the three years following its deal with Priority (Cooper 1998).

Not content with these remarkable achievements, and vowing to not "get caught up in the music," Master P used No Limit's reputation for gangsta rap as a starting point for a variety of side ventures and spin-offs, branching out into "phones, . . . beepers, . . . clothes, . . . movies, . . . real estate. Ain't no rappers at No Limit. We're entrepreneurs" (Spera 2000b). His direct-to-video projects *I'm Bout It* and *I Got the Hook-Up* earned millions for the label, and his empire grew to include several Foot Locker retail stores, a clothing line, and a sports management company, No Limit Sports, which was (briefly) able to attract the business of several prominent professional athletes. Seemingly possessed of boundless energy, Master P's ambitions also included a revival of his own basketball career; he made a respectable showing in the tryouts for the Charlotte Hornets in the summer of 1998, although the team ultimately decided not to sign him.

No Limit and the Local/Global Nexus

No Limit's engagement with the local style was selective and driven by a desire to avoid any idiosyncratic elements that might go against mainstream conventions: "He was determined to surpass the limitations of 'bounce,' the local rap-lite hybrid with sing-song choruses that has not broken beyond its regional base" (Spera 1997a). Master P remarked, "New Orleans is my heritage, but you've still got to think bigger. . . . You couldn't do the stuff we do if you have your mind focused on New Orleans." However, while the market that No Limit aspired to conquer was larger than New Orleans or the South, the label's appeal within this

wider realm depended to an important degree upon its biographical and stylistic connections with New Orleans and by extension the city's connection to a southern 'gangsta' subculture. No Limit's relationship to the New Orleans rap scene was strategically mediated in ways that attempted to capitalize upon the growing appeal of southern style and distinctiveness within rap generally in the late 1990s, while maintaining distance from the limitations associated with local style and content.

For Master P, the possibilities held out by the New Orleans scene were only one of many possible marketing hooks. As Sarig observes, "early No Limit was definitely a West Coast label," drawing upon rappers from the local Richmond area including "Lil' Ric, King George, and E-A-Ski" (2007, 81). This "West Coast" orientation related to both musical style and the content of lyrics or imagery; "even the Millers [Master P and his brothers] represented for Cali [California] at least as much as they did the [New Orleans housing project known as] Calliope" (81). However, Master P's engagement with the New Orleans scene beginning in 1994 and 1995 informed a key transition in the stylistic and geographic associations of his music.

As Master P and No Limit's national fame grew, their relationship to the local New Orleans rap scene and the 'bounce' style was represented in confusing and contradictory ways. A 1999 article in *Fortune* portrays Master P as an advocate of bounce even when he was living in California: "We had a big bounce style down there [in New Orleans] that they didn't have nowhere else" (R. Johnson 1999). Regardless, the material by New Orleans-based artists included in his 1995 *Down South Hustlers* compilation contained only muted references to the bounce style, and No Limit's attempts to tap the New Orleans scene for talent became more selective as the decade progressed.

While many critics focused on the place-based authenticity and stylistic peculiarities of No Limit's music, Master P framed his appeal as directly related to the absence of a strong regional affiliation: "After a while, with the different tragedies and the battles between the East and West Coasts, I just think I was right in line to say it ain't about where you're from. It's about making good music and representing that" (quoted in Baraka 2002, 50). It was only in the 1999-2000 period—after Cash Money had won over national audiences with more explicitly bounce-influenced material—that No Limit began to reengage with local New Orleans style.

Critics from distant locales often failed to appreciate the distinctions between No Limit's music and that coming out of the wider local rap scene. That the label was home to several artists and producers who had honed their skills in the local New Orleans scene also served to encourage an understanding of its output as stylistically representative of the wider New Orleans scene, when in fact it was not. In a 1998 *Village Voice* article, Barry Michael Cooper offers a series of interrelated generalizations and distortions related to the stylistic particularities of New Orleans rap in general and No Limit's relationship to them. Cooper describes "the unique N.O. Bounce" style as "funerary" and "slowed down to a heroin nod," descriptions which match No Limit's music (heavily influenced by West Coast gangsta rap) much more closely than they do bounce in general, with its defining mid-tempo (95-105 b.p.m.) orientation.

In his exploration of the connections between Master P's work and "New Orleans funk history," Cooper cites as an example the portamento-inflected, minor-key synthesizer lines of "Bout it, bout it:" "if you're familiar with the New Orleans tradition of the mournful, plaintive wail of a jazz band trailing a funeral procession, then you can also hear the synths replacing the brass section" (1998).

Ironically, the critic's focus here is on a musical element which is clearly influenced by West Coast 'g-funk' or gangsta rap. Historically rooted stereotypes inform Cooper's representation of the relationship between No Limit and bounce and between bounce and New Orleans's vernacular musical traditions, as evidenced by his description of rappers "enslaved to the drum" who include "apparent references to voodoo" in their lyrics. These comments gloss over the complexity and contradiction that marked No Limit's relationship to the local musical and cultural context with a contrived, touristic portrayal of young black New Orleanians and their music.

For some observers in the local scene, Master P's ruthless opportunism, in combination with his impressive leverage, was grating. Joseph "Joe Blakk" Francois, one of several local rappers featured on No Limit's *Down South Hustlers* compilation, recalled, "People in New Orleans didn't know who Master P was until he hit BET [cable network Black Entertainment Television]" with the music video for "Bout it, bout it" (Goss 2002). The fact that Master P and No Limit were not mentioned in Karen Cortello's "Street" column (a relatively comprehensive chronicle of the city's rap scene) until mid-1995 lends credence to these assertions, as does Sarig's claim that "few down South knew anything about No Limit" in the early 1990s (2007, 81). And in fact, according to Joe Blakk, it was not Master P who brought fame to New Orleans, but the reverse: paraphrasing Francois, a journalist writes, "[Master] P had that West Coast sound and he had not become nationally recognized until the first dirty South hit 'Bout it, bout it' was released" (Goss 2002). Annoyed by Master P's willingness to strategically emphasize or deemphasize ties to New Orleans and the distortion of wider popular understandings of music history that resulted from the mogul's

high profile across a variety of media, Joe Blakk complained, "He made the world [believe] he was the creator of all this and he wasn't."

The tentative and strategic nature of Master P's relationship to New Orleans and its music scene after 1995 is also evident from changes in the location of the No Limit Records headquarters. After first setting up shop in New Orleans around 1995, by 1997 the label was in the process of relocating to Baton Rouge, where construction had begun on a sprawling studio and office complex and where the label's executives and artists moved into mansions in the exclusive Country Club development (Spera 1998b; "BR-based rapper Master P ranks 10th on *Frobes* money list" 1998). At the same time, the number of artists on Miller's label with local roots declined sharply, as he focused on acts with minimal connections to the New Orleans scene, including his preteen son "Lil Romeo" and Snoop Dogg. Still, Master P and his company retained their symbolic association with New Orleans, and he remains the most widely known figure in city's rap music history.

The establishment and expansion of No Limit was due, in large part, to Master P's understanding of the "powers of street-level marketing, cross-promotion and branding." His mastery of these principles allowed him to transcend racialized market divisions: "That was my main concern—creating a brand. I wanted to hit every marketplace, every community that accepted rap music. I didn't care whether it was white, black, Asian or Latino" (quoted in R. Hall 2002, 38). While his record label cranked out a steady supply of bleak and violent gangsta rap, Miller saw himself in the tradition of American icons of aggressive corporate expansion: "I built my record company like McDonald's and Wendy's: The customer is always right" (quoted in Shruers 1997, 22). He frequently analogized the music business to the street-level drug trade (as in the

cover image for *Ghetto D*, which shows a crack smoker blissfully enveloped in a digitally-generated cloud of No Limit tape covers), but also called himself "the Ghetto Bill Gates," linking himself to one of the blandest public personalities of information-age capitalism (quoted in Muhammad 1999; Baraka 2002, 52).

Miller was attuned to the importance of lifestyle marketing, the idea that "you're unique and you stand behind something. It's your identity, and I think people were just looking for a different identity" (quoted in Baraka 2002, 50). The label's logo, a diamond-encrusted rendition of a tank carrying two rifle-toting soldiers, was the starting point for a host of imagery and ideas related to the street-hardened "No Limit soldier." Master P also relied on sheer volume to establish his dominance; he pioneered the double-CD trend in rap, and packed his releases with as many songs as possible (Shruers 1997, 22, 34). CD and tape booklets were crowded with images promoting other No Limit releases in all stages of production, some of which were ultimately never released.

Uncommitted to any particular musical vision, Master P kept rappers and producers around only as long as they furthered his business interests. In a stark contrast to Cash Money's exclusive and decade-long reliance on Mannie Fresh, No Limit employed a roomful of producers, including a collective known as Beats by the Pound (made up of Craig "KLC" Lawson, Master P's cousin Mo B. Dick, Craig B., and O'Dell), which in a later incarnation was known as The Medicine Men. As with the rappers on his label (at least those not in his immediate family), these producers were ultimately expendable; after most of them had left the label around 1999, Miller rationalized their departure as "business . . . I had producers that couldn't keep up, I got rid of 'em. I had artists that couldn't keep up, I got rid of 'em" (quoted in Spera 2000b).

The reasons for No Limit's stagnation and decline (further detailed in the following chapter) were multiple, and related to Master P's centralized management style ("the big man was a little too hands-on") and the lack of personnel or infrastructure to handle the company's rapid growth: "There were no budgets and no central accounting" (Pulley 2002). Master P's pursuit of a strategy of diversification, in which music played an increasingly marginal role, not only failed to slow the label's spiraling decline, but also contributed to crippling confusion and overextension beginning in 1999. A proliferation of ventures could not make up for the core of credibility that No Limit's music had provided between 1996 and 1998. As the company's fortunes waned, many of the side ventures were abandoned.

Master P's business practices have been criticized by several former artists and associates. James "Soulja Slim" Tapp claimed that No Limit had cheated him on royalties from his two albums with the label (for which he had signed no contracts), and failed to promote him correctly: "Nigga stuck me out there like a sore thumb" (Black Dog Bone 2003). Rather than pursue his royalties in court, Tapp claimed that he preferred to "get it in blood," although his own murder in 2003 prevented him from achieving this goal.

The problematic nature of Master P's relationship to the New Orleans scene related to the ways in which his capital and connections allowed him to manipulate or exploit the efforts of rappers and producers under his control. Among other advantages provided by his access to mainstream channels of distribution and marketing, he was able to turn a catchy song into a mass media phenomenon in ways that ensured that he and his company would reap the biggest benefit. He exploited the various means at his disposal to influence the consumption by the public of his music and other products, and carefully

balanced the imperatives of business and family despite his professed allegiance to profitability above all else. In some cases, he used the rhythms and routines of the music industry to his and his brothers' advantage. In 1998, Mystikal's second No Limit album, *Ghetto Fabulous*, was released "in the midst of the holidays" and reached number 5 on the *Billboard* pop charts, even though the album "would have hit No. 1 . . . had the release been held back until January" (Spera 1999a). Instead, the artist enjoying the benefit of this timing was Master P's youngest brother, Silkk the Shocker, whose album *Made Man* was "at No. 1 on both the mainstream pop and R&B charts" in early February of 1999.

The case of the rapper Awood "Magic" Johnson, the son of a respected local trombonist and one of many New Orleans-based rappers to part ways with No Limit amidst allegations of unfair treatment, provides another example of Master P's business practices. Initially signed to Tru Records, a side project managed by Master P's brother Corey "C-Murder" Miller, Magic was pulled onto the No Limit roster as soon as he started to show some promise. According to Magic, this business decision entailed significant negative consequences on the level of creativity and friendship: "in the process . . . a lotta relationships got destroyed, a lotta bad things happened" (quoted in Braxton 2003). One of these "bad things" was the fate of the bounce-flavored song "Wobble wobble," which Magic had hoped to release as a single. Sensing its potential, Master P instead insisted that his group 504 Boyz (with Silkk the Shocker and Mystikal), should record "Wobble wobble," with Magic appearing as a guest rapper along with Mac and Krazy. Not only was Magic robbed of the song's career-building potential—it reached the number seventeen spot in *Billboard's* Hot 100 singles chart and helped the 504 Boys' 2000 album *Goodfellas* reach the number one slot on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums—but Master P compounded the insult by arrogating

the publishing credits. As Magic bitterly recalled, "When I say he took it I mean he took it. . . . He abused the situation."

No Limit had a profound effect upon both the local scene and the perception of New Orleans rap within the wider, national-level rap imaginary. Master P's selective use of local talent, content, and style produced impressive results in 1997 and 1998, but his inability to respond to changes in the tastes of wider rap audiences—changes which, ironically, he himself had helped catalyze—contributed to a rapid loss of market share after 2000 (see next chapter). In that year, facing declining sales of No Limit product, a lack of artistic continuity in the areas of rapping and production, and the rise to prominence of Cash Money, Master P framed the difference between the two companies in the following manner: "If it's just about rap music, then you need to talk to Cash Money. I wish those guys the best of luck, and I think they're doing a great job. But I'm not in it for rap music. I'm in it to be the best business that I can have. That's what No Limit is about" (quoted in Spera 2000b). However, his ability to maintain the No Limit brand ultimately rested upon the label's reputation for "making good music," which quickly evaporated as the new millennium dawned (Miller quoted in Baraka 2002, 50).

Fortunately, No Limit's decline did not mean that New Orleans would lose its position of prominence in the national rap industry; in the shadow of Master P, another company had been consolidating its hold on the local scene and, by 1998, was ready to take on wider audiences. Cash Money Records was uniquely positioned to bring the next crop of New Orleans rappers to the national market, for reasons related to its long and successful local track record, the sensibilities of its in-house producer Mannie Fresh and core artists like B.G., Juvenile, and Lil' Wayne, and its particular approach to musical style and content. The company's

rise also depended upon an increasing openness on the part of rap listeners at the national level towards music explicitly tied (through lyrics, music, discourse, and imagery) to southern urban scenes such as that which had become established in New Orleans in the early 1990s.

Cash Money: "We wanted to create neighborhood superstars"

As a writer for *Billboard* observed, within the national rap music industry of the late 1990s, "Cash Money/Universal and No Limit/Priority represent the main success stories of independents joining forces with majors and their efforts skyrocketing" (Kenon 2001, 26). However, while Cash Money Records' 1998 partnership with global entertainment company Universal embodied parallels with No Limit's rise, important differences distinguished the two phenomena, especially with regard to their relationship to the local rap scene and style.

Like No Limit, Cash Money was a family business, founded in 1991 by brothers Ronald ("Slim") and Bryan ("Baby") Williams. The two had grown up "in an apartment adjoining Court No. 6" in the Magnolia (later C.J. Peete) Project in an uptown Third Ward neighborhood called Central City. Their mother died of kidney failure before either boy reached the age of ten, and "their father, Johnny . . . raised them alone while running a neighborhood grocery store and lounge, the Gladys Bar, named after their mother" and located uptown on Saratoga Street in the uptown section (Fine 2000, 82). According to Slim, the single father "was working so much to make sure we had everything that he never really had the time to spend with us"; that the brothers were just two of a dozen or more children that he fathered surely did not help matters (quoted in Fine 2000, 82; Sarig 2007, 262).

Still, Johnny Williams (who died in 1995) passed his entrepreneurial spirit on to his sons ("He told us you should have a business of your own"), as well as some of his practical knowledge (such as how "to handle the money, the books" (quoted in Farber 2000; quoted in Fine 2000, 83). He also imparted lessons about the interpersonal aspects of running a small business in the highly competitive local environment: "He let us know . . . that to deal with people, you never let anybody know your right hand or your left hand. That you had to watch people" (Slim quoted in Green 1999b, 70).

The Williams brothers were not able to resist the promise of easy money held out by the illegal drug trade, and Bryan spent three years in jail in the late 1980s (Wartofsky 2003), but by the early 1990s, they were looking for a legitimate business opportunity. They were inspired to capitalize a record label in 1991 as they watched a concert by local rap veteran Tim Smooth in nearby Opelousas (Green 1999b, 67), and founded Cash Money with funds borrowed from their father, as well as unspecified assistance from promoter Bobby Marchan, who Hannusch described as "a key figure in the formation and success" of the company (1999).

The fledgling label's first release was Rob "Kilo G" Johnson, Jr.'s maxi-single *The Sleepwalker*, which briefly surfaced on *Billboard's* "Hot Dance Breakouts" chart in September of 1992. This was followed in 1993 by an album by Baby (rapping under the name B-32, a reference to the number of gold teeth he claimed to have in his mouth), backed by DJ Byron "Mannie Fresh" Thomas and a mysterious (and possibly nonexistent) producer named "DJ Crack Out." The cassette-only album also featured contributions from a variety of artists who released music for Cash Money in the early to mid-1990s, including Lil' Slim, the singer/rapper Trishell "Ms. Tee" Williams, P.M.W. ("Project's Most Wanted" or

"Pussy, Money and Weed", led by Darryl Howard), and the trio U.N.L.V. ("Uptown Niggas Living Violent"). The distinct roles of the two Williams brothers in the company's operations and public image began to emerge in these years; the taller, older brother Slim was known as the "business mastermind" of the company, a reputation enhanced by a taciturn personality and abstemious lifestyle (Fine 2000: 82). His stocky, gregarious younger brother Baby served as the public face of Cash Money, flaunting a high-rolling lifestyle and releasing several albums as a soloist or group member despite his limited abilities as a lyricist and performer.

Around 1993, Cash Money's owners formalized their relationship with Mannie Fresh, making him the label's sole producer, a move that would turn out to be a valuable long-term investment for the company and an important development in the establishment of the local rap scene and style generally, as well as its subsequent mediation for wider consumption over the course of the next decade. When he signed on at Cash Money, Mannie Fresh had built up nearly a decade of experience in the local scene and beyond, beginning with his early work as a member of New York Incorporated and backing MC Gregory D (see chapter 3). Subsequently, he worked "cutting tracks in Los Angeles for rappers including Tupac and for famed Chicago house producer Steve 'Silk' Hurley," (Fine 2000: 85) and toured as a DJ supporting the work of West Coast rappers Spice 1 and Too Short (Green 1999b, 70). Through these experiences, he gained technical expertise and creative networking opportunities that further enabled the expression of his keen and lively musical sensibility, which provided Cash Money with a seemingly bottomless supply of backing tracks. In his tenure as the label's sole producer (with a few minor exceptions) from 1992 through

2005, Mannie Fresh exercised considerable stylistic influence over rap music produced in New Orleans and elsewhere.

With the exception of gangsta rapper Kilo G's material (which, like that of Houston's Scarface, combined a celebration of crime and lawlessness with motifs of interior psychological disturbance), the music released by Cash Money in 1993 and 1994 was strongly tied to the established conventions of bounce. As rapper Sporty T recalls, "they were . . . a straight bounce label at that time, except for Kilo G. He was on some gangsta stuff." In these years, the label strengthened its grip on the local scene and released several artists whose work was foundational to the bounce genre, including Lil' Slim, P.M.W, Ms. Tee, and U.N.L.V. The Williams brothers lured Edgar "Pimp Daddy" Givens, "the music's star who most credit for the sing-songy delivery used by many modern bounce artists" (Green 1999b, 67), away from rival Pack Records, releasing recordings both before and after the rapper was murdered by a sixteen year-old in April of 1994. Within less than two years, Cash Money became the top label in the New Orleans rap scene: as Scott Aiges reported, it "dominated the local charts by consistently claiming four of the top five spots" between 1992 and 1994 (Aiges 1994c, 30). While remaining largely a regional force with minimal promotion or media coverage, the company "moved nearly 100,000 units each year between 1991 and '95" (Green 1999b, 67).

As Mystikal's mid-decade success boosted the profile of competitor Big Boy Records, Cash Money rallied: "We're upgrading our music and our lyrics," vowed Ronald "Slim" Williams in 1996; "We've got some bombs comin'" (Cortello 1996a). The period around 1995 and 1996 was a transitional one for the label, in which the Williams brothers made important changes in their roster and the style of music on their recordings. Like Master P, Cash Money's owners moved away

from groups and rappers strongly rooted in the bounce aesthetic and towards artists whose work could transcend regional markets without losing its grounding in the danger and authenticity associated with New Orleans's neighborhood culture.

Part of the process of "upgrading" involved a dramatic reduction in the number of rappers recording for the label, a move which allowed the Williams brothers to devote more resources to promoting each artist. They dropped many of their established local acts, including Ms. Tee, Lil Slim, U.N.L.V. , and others, and began the process of rebuilding a new roster made up of younger artists who could work in a solo or group context and who would, presumably, be less "hard to control" (Farber 2000). The new direction was indicated in the 1995 album, *True Story* by a group called "B.G.'z" (or "Baby Gangstaz"), led by fourteen year-old Christopher "Lil' Doogie" Dorsey (b. 1980) (Crosley 2006).

Dorsey had grown up around the Magnolia projects, although he and his family later moved to eastern New Orleans. After his father was shot to death in a robbery, his mother enlisted the Williams brothers to help raise the troubled preteen, who was gravitating to the street life of drugs and crime. He was essentially adopted by the aspiring moguls, who "helped raise [Dorsey] like a son, housing him, schooling him and teaching him about hip-hop" (Fine 2000, 84). Dwayne "Lil' Wayne" Carter Jr., a preteen rapper who had come to the label after an impromptu audition for Baby at an event, made his recorded debut on the *True Story* album as a member of the "B.G.'z" group. An only child, he grew up in the Carrolton neighborhood before moving with his family to eastern New Orleans. While Carter stayed in the background for most of the late 1990s, he later rose to become Cash Money's biggest star ever (see next chapter).

Under the Williams' tutelage and guidance, Dorsey and Carter honed their rap skills and focused their lyrical efforts on tales of ruthless pimps, dealers, and thugs in a ghetto war zone. Like No Limit, the Williams brothers and their artists emphasized the 'family' metaphor as their business model, although both labels operated as almost exclusively male enterprises, structured by patriarchal relationships between controlling 'fathers' and loyal 'sons' (Spera 1999f; 2000a; Fine 2000, 81). Shortly before he left the label, B.G. commented, "I'm Cash Money for life. Baby and Slim is fathers to me" ("Interview with BG" 2000). Lil' Wayne, who has remained with Cash Money, expressed similar sentiments: "I'm always more than just a rapper to Cash Money . . . I'm Baby's son." (quoted in Wartofsky 2003). To an important extent, these expressions are tied to the absence of effective and successful male role models (including fathers) which has structured the experience of many young African American men in places like New Orleans: "We act as father figures . . . They didn't really have fathers. So we bring them up." (Bryan Williams in Farber 2000).

Building on the local success of *True Story*, Cash Money released the solo debut by Dorsey (now operating under the name "B.G.") in 1996, and quickly followed with two additional B.G. solo albums (*It's All On U*, volumes I and II) in 1996 and 1997. The label gained significant momentum with the signing of Terius "Juvenile" Gray in 1996, which marked the beginning of a highly productive relationship between the rapper and in-house producer Mannie Fresh, who collaborated on five albums for Cash Money between 1997 and 2004. Juvenile and Mannie Fresh were keenly attuned to the local cultural and musical vernacular, and created a body of work that would transform the image of New Orleans within the wider national rap landscape, where mainstream audiences

were warming to previously obscure southern interpretations of the genre (H. Nelson 1993, 32).

Gray came to Cash Money with substantial experience in the local rap scene, beginning with his popular song "Bounce (for the Juvenile)," included on DJ Jimi's 1992 album on Isaac Bolden's Soulin Records. Bolden licensed other Juvenile material from these sessions to the New York-based independent Warlock Records, which released an album, *Being Myself*, in 1995. The album eventually achieved "gold" sales status in the late 1990s, after Juvenile's Cash Money breakthrough, but at the time of its initial release it suffered from disappointing sales and a lack of critical interest. After graduating from high school, Gray worked in the oil and gas industry to make ends meet before finding a home at Cash Money (Soeder 2000).

Local and regional sales of Juvenile's debut album for Cash Money, 1997's *Solja Rags*, were driven by the success of a single, "Solja rag," which took as its theme the street hustling "solja" and his iconic accoutrement of a camouflage bandanna. In its delivery and concept, the song bore many similarities to Juvenile's 1998 hit single "Ha" (a key turning point in the rapper's career), and contains several phrases in its lyrics which would be adapted for use in "HA". Like "HA", its lyrics took the form of an imagined conversation with another male participant in the New Orleans street life.

In *Solja Rags*, and in subsequent releases for the label, Juvenile played a key role in bridging Cash Money's late-1990s output and the grassroots vernacular that had helped the label grow earlier in the decade. He often used imagery and concepts typical of gangsta rap, but his overall presentation was oriented less towards first-person narratives of violence and criminal activity and more toward description of and commentary on the everyday life of people in the

communities in which he grew up. In interviews, the rapper frequently identified his "people" in and around the housing project where he spent much of his childhood (still known as "the Magnolia" despite having been renamed "C.J. Peete" in 1981) as his main source of lyrical and conceptual inspiration: "Growing up back there, I had a chance to see how the people are. My people played a big part in my career"; "I like to talk about my people, how we doing, how we enjoying ourselves" (quoted in Spera 1999f; Fine 2000, 87).

Juvenile's description of his style as "off-the-porch flowing" further establishes his work's grounding in the spontaneity of public, communally-oriented oral culture as it exists in the grassroots milieu of New Orleans's projects and poor neighborhoods (S. Jones 2000). His allegiance to this vernacular is a proud part of his self-presentation: "I basically use broken English in all of my songs. I try to get you my way rather than trying to talk proper." This connection to the expressive sensibility of the black poor and working class informed the title of his 2001 album for Cash Money, *Project English*.

To some extent, Juvenile's heartfelt appreciation of (and related talent for exploiting) the vernacular, everyday culture of one of New Orleans's poorest and most violent areas may relate to the fact that his childhood experience was not narrowly constrained to this context. His family sent him to a private Catholic school in nearby LaPlace for his elementary school years, after which he attended Fortier High and graduated from Booker T. Washington High. Not only did these experiences (and the family support that they suggest) provide Gray with a broader perspective on the social environment in and around the Magnolia Project, they also helped him cultivate an awareness of the socioeconomic condition of its residents. "New Orleans has extreme poverty," he stated flatly; "all my people are struggling" (quoted in Fine 2000, 88). These comments give

voice to a sociopolitical consciousness that underlies many of his party-oriented songs.

Juvenile's lyrical emphasis on the everyday activities, attitudes and vernacular expressions of project dwellers communicated a sense of place, but this was not the only way he and critics understood his creative relationship to his hometown. His performance style (or delivery) and approach to composition incorporated catchy riffs, hooks and chants that lent themselves to call-and-response. Like Mystikal, Juvenile's performance on *Solja Rags* and subsequent releases relied upon the rendering of complex narrative constructions. Unlike Mystikal, however, Juvenile relied heavily upon melodically-inflected, repetitive rhythmic cadences in his lyrics. His sense of rhythm (in hip-hop terms, his "flow") and his nuanced use of accents and 'offbeats' (see chapter 2) to make his cadences 'swing' cemented the connections between Juvenile's music (and the New Orleans sensibility that informed it) and a wider, afro-Caribbean cultural context. As one critic observed, Juvenile's style was shaped by his "husky voice and . . . offhanded delivery that switches between chanting and singing like a Jamaican dancehall rapper" (Pareles 2000).

Juvenile's ability to build upon the success of *Solja Rags* was greatly enhanced by a deal between Cash Money and global entertainment company Universal (itself a part of the Seagrams empire) in early 1998, "a three-year, \$30 million pressing and distribution contract . . . which provided upfront financing" for the New Orleans label (Forman 2002, 335). Universal took over the manufacturing, distribution and promotion of Cash Money's product, but (as in Master P's deal with Priority) the Williams brothers retained ownership of their master recordings, which allowed them to collect healthy percentages of the income from royalties and publishing.

Dino Delvaille, Universal's senior director of A&R ("artists and repertoire"), reportedly "'discovered' Cash Money while on vacation in New Orleans" in 1998 (Muhammad 1999). Given the New Orleans company's prolonged dominance of the local rap scene at this time—"the label was six years old and moving between 50,000 and 150,000 albums per release," figures which would be available through SoundScan—as well as the fact that Priority's deal with No Limit was at the peak of its profitability, it strains credulity that Universal was not more deliberate in seeking out a New Orleans-based business partner, especially considering Delvaille's stated strategy: "research, research, research" (quoted in Mitchell 2000). Regardless, the deal between Universal and Cash Money represented another coup for a New Orleans-based independent record company. Like No Limit's deal, and (to a lesser extent) Mystikal's signing to Jive, the agreement represented a sudden and dramatic bridging of the geographic, cultural, and economic divides that separated New Orleans's rap scene from the established mainstream music industry.

The Cash Money-Universal partnership resulted in a string of highly successful releases in 1998 and 1999, beginning with Juvenile's breakthrough album *400 degreez*. The local flavor in the hit songs "Ha" and "Follow me now" drove sales of the record as it rose to the top of both the rap and pop charts. It was covered by critics from a diverse range of publications, including rock magazines like *Rolling stone* and *Spin*. *400 degreez*, which by 2004 had sold over 4.7 million copies, marked the moment when "Cash Money surpassed No Limit Records as the dominant force in New Orleans rap" (Spera 2006b). Based on the popularity of Juvenile and, to a lesser extent, B.G., "Cash Money's variation on the city's homegrown bounce style came to define Big Easy rap for the nation."

The following year, the Williams brothers released B.G.'s fourth solo effort, *Chopper City in the Ghetto*, which sold over a million copies. The lyrics of the first single from the album, "Cash Money is an army," used a military metaphor for discipline and competitiveness, a common trope within the New Orleans rap scene of this period. However, the album's biggest hit was "Bling Bling", with a hook based in "onomatopoeia, mimicking the imaginary sound of light hitting diamonds" (Sanneh 2005a). Over the course of a few years, the term ("bling") crossed over into general usage in the wider media and popular culture environment. "Bling bling" featured guest appearances by the Big Tymers and Hot Boys, and, like Juvenile's most successful material, relied upon the rhythmic repetition of a catchy 'hook.'

Part of Cash Money's strategy in the late 1990s involved maximizing the potential of their relatively lean roster by uniting their solo artists in a label "supergroup" called the Hot Boys. Led by marquee artists Juvenile and B.G., the quartet also included Lil' Wayne and Young Turk, and released its debut album, *Get It How U Live!!*, in 1997, which sold around 200,000 copies. Their subsequent full-length effort, 1999's *Guerilla Warfare*, benefited from the new arrangement with Universal. Propelled by singles "I need a hot girl" and "We on fire," the album sold 2.4 million copies and reached the number five spot on the *Billboard* 200 pop albums chart.

Not content to remain on the sidelines, label co-CEO Bryan "Baby" Williams formed a duo, Big Tymers, which featured himself (rapping under the name Birdman) and Mannie Fresh. They debuted in 1998 with the album *How You Luv That* (soon followed by *How You Luv That v. 2*), and in 2000 released *I Got That Work*. Cash Money's ascent continued in 1999. That summer, the second album by the Hot Boys, *Guerilla Warfare*, reached the number five

position in the pop albums chart and the top of the rap/r&b albums chart. Lil' Wayne's debut as a soloist, *Tha Block is Hot*, rocketed towards platinum sales, and, just in time for Christmas, a third Juvenile album, *Tha G-Code*, hit record store shelves. The combined sales totals for the year topped nine million.

Cash Money and the Local/Global Nexus

The imagination and representation of Cash Money's relationship to the local music scene and style by critics (as well as the company's owners and artists) have been marked by baffling contradiction. By many accounts, the label struggled to break out of the bounce mold in order to avoid being pigeonholed as "regional" or "local," despite its key role in the rise of bounce. Some critics viewed B.G.'s 1996 album *Chopper City* as signaling a transition in Cash Money's relationship to the particular stylistic and thematic dimensions of bounce. In 2000, *Rolling Stone's* Jason Fine wrote that the record "marked a major change in direction for the label, mixing New Orleans bounce with hardcore, gangsta-style rhymes, and introduced the melodic synth-and-guitar party sound that has become Fresh's trademark" (Fine 2000, 85). This assertion of a stylistic shift is confirmed by Mannie Fresh, who asserted that he and his Cash Money bosses were "kind of scared" by the departure from their previous orientation: "we were always known as a bounce label. But when it hit the street, it was like the new craze. It left all the other cats that was doing bounce, like, five years behind."

In B.G.'s album and other mid-1990s releases, Cash Money's artists moved away from bounce's collective, dance- and party-oriented chants and cultivated a narrative voice and thematic orientation that was keyed to the isolated perspectives of street corner hustlers and aspiring dope kingpins. This shift encompassed important gendered dimensions; the innuendo and insult that

focused earlier efforts on issues of sexuality and male-female relationships was phased out in favor of narratives animated by tension related to the individual struggles of male subjects who vied for dominance in an environment shaped by treachery, ruthlessness, and violence. This shift further constrained the already narrow set of possibilities enjoyed by female artists, who experienced increased marginalization as New Orleans rap moved closer to the thematic conventions of the commercial mainstream.

When examined in the context of other Cash Money releases that preceded and followed it, however, *Chopper City* sounds less like a radical departure from previous stylistic and thematic preferences and more like one step within a general progression toward a more subtle use of local signifiers and preferences in lyrics, musical style, imagery, and artistic personae. The backing music remained highly danceable, with tempi that often conformed to the general orientation of bounce (95-105 beats-per-minute).

Much of Cash Money's success can be attributed to the musical sensibility of Mannie Fresh, who engineered and produced dozens of albums for the label between 1992 and 2005. His approach to production was heavily dependent upon "instruments" (a category which includes programmable drum machines, synthesizers, samplers and sequencers as well as guitars, bass and keyboards) upon which he composed original backing music, sometimes using studio musicians (Reynolds 1999; Fine 2000, 88). While he did occasionally 'sample' sounds from other recordings, his skill at playing, composing, and arranging his own original music allowed him to borrow ideas and 'feel' without relying upon this method of composition. His ability to capture the dynamic polyrhythm of bounce without using any of its key samples contributed to Cash Money's reputation as a source of exciting and original rap music.

Interviewed in 2003, Mannie Fresh rejected ideas of musical diversification or change in favor of consistency and reflective musical expression of his own identity. When asked to quantify the stylistic differences between two of the label's releases, the prolific producer replied that they amounted to "almost nothing. Because that's the way we do it, we aren't going to go forward with it [,] you know? It's just me and my life, that's the way it is. If the other one was Tuesday, this one is Wednesday" ("Mannie Fresh Interview").

As Cash Money's artists became more familiar to national audiences, the increased critical attention focused questions of their stylistic relationship to New Orleans's vernacular music traditions. Ironically, while some earlier successes had been attributed by critics and label affiliates to a brave move away from bounce and local content, Juvenile's national breakthrough pushed the discourse in the opposite direction, making Cash Money "the label that brought bounce music to the nation." (Sarig 2007, 250; Spera 1999a). Because of the distinctive qualities of "Ha" and other material on Cash Money, journalists at the national level understood it to represent authentic, unmediated ties to New Orleans and its expressive cultural forms, an assertion that those associated with the company were careful not to contradict. Having risen to national prominence, Cash Money's owners and artists helped to perpetuate the idea of their label's music as an unchanging and organic representation of their own place-bound identities. As rapper Juvenile explained, "Down here we always stuck to our own thing, and it finally broke for us."

Critics and audiences responded to the distinctive qualities of "Ha", which were tied to both Juvenile's vocal performance and composition (the lyrics consisted of a string of phrases or questions ending in the interrogative, "ha?") and Mannie Fresh's production work, which featured a propulsive, polyrhythmic

blend driven by handclaps and (at ninety-four beats-per-minute) within the range historically defining bounce. Ronald "Slim" Williams recalled, "when we were in New York, watching people react when they first heard 'Ha'. They couldn't understand it, because they hadn't heard anything like it before" (quoted in Green 1999b, 68). *Times-Picayune* critic Keith Spera recognized Juvenile's 1998 album *400 degreez*, with its singles "HA" and "Follow me now," as "an undeniable *refinement* of bounce's call-and-response," but many critics and commentators understood it as a representative example of the local genre, which was itself easily conflated with "southern" rap styles at the wider, regional level (1999f, my emphasis).

In a wider context (the national rap marketplace in the late 1990s), the expression of ties to a local rap sensibility and the portrayal of Cash Money's artists and producer as representative of a local, organic music scene—as "remaining true to their New Orleans sound and style"—underwrote the authenticity and distinctiveness of the company's music, during a period in which certain key cities in the southeast were rising to become the new capitals of rap production (Spera 1999a). After Juvenile's breakthrough in 1998, critics in mainstream, nationally circulating publications often blurred the lines between Cash Money's music, the grassroots New Orleans bounce scene, and the rap music of the wider U.S. South of which it formed a part. One alluded to the influence of distinctive climatic and social dimensions upon the label's music: "the Hot Boys' joyous sound provides its strongest draw. The group makes a typically Southern brand of hip hop, complete with humid horns and heavy use of the 'bounce' beat, marked by a faster rhythm and a richer, friendlier bass sound" (Farber 1999). New Orleans's distinctive local style of rap was conflated with Southern rap in general, as a New York-based writer explained that Mannie Fresh

"calls his sound 'bounce,' a common Southern term for dance music" (Farber 2000).

Another critic linked Cash Money's local musical identity to Mannie Fresh's recording practices: he "uses his drum machines and keyboards to give the Cash Money-label records he produces that Southern "bounce" or party feel" (S. Jones 1999). Simon Reynolds offers a more sophisticated interpretation of the relationship: "The bounce element is what gives Fresh's drum programming its hop, skip, and bump—those rat-a-tat-tat snare rolls and double-time/triple-time hi-hats that feel simultaneously frisky and martial" (1999). Still, few critics understood that the almost exclusive use of originally composed music in Mannie Fresh's late 1990s productions represented a departure from the conventions of the early 1990s bounce scene, in which sampled recordings provided a significant portion of the musical content of local rap.

With regard to his own decision to embrace the local style, the producer recalled a conversation with his father, who had urged him, "Don't change your stuff. Show them what your town sounds like," during a period in which New Orleans was uncharted territory on the national rap map (quoted in Fine 2000, 88). He explained his motivation as "[wanting] to be able to go home when all this is over and still have New Orleans behind me. That's the thing you keep — not the money" (88). Bryan Williams expressed the importance of a generative (and gendered) connection between place, culture, and identity more forcefully: "In this (rap) game, you've got to be true to your culture. Once you lose your culture . . . it's like losing your manhood. I could never see that happening to me. You've got niggas who do that, and fall short" (quoted in Spera 1999a).

Conclusion

In the years 1991-1994, national companies had shown little to no interest in the New Orleans rap scene, which remained largely a world unto itself, with the horizons of record companies and their artists constrained to a local or, at best, regional level. The conservatism of the 'majors'—based in "anxiety, . . . lack of expertise and incomprehension"—allowed or even encouraged a scene to develop in which locally-based record companies could dominate the market by catering to local preferences, often racking up higher sales numbers than their national competitors (Negus 1999, 90; Aiges 1994c, 1; 1994a; Cortello 1996c, 13-14). Had they been located closer to New York or Los Angeles, Cash Money, Big Boy and No Limit Records would likely have been approached by larger companies much earlier in their history; as it was, these companies and their artists were able to grow and prosper by exploiting a remote and idiosyncratic market, and enjoyed exclusive access to the city's rap and production talent.

When the 'majors' belatedly caught on to the potential for profit that New Orleans rap represented and scrambled to stake their claim in the city, independents like No Limit and Cash Money had years of experience and a store of available capital; for these reasons, they wielded a substantial amount of leverage in the bargaining process. The rise of No Limit and Cash Money also influenced the ways in which the New Orleans scene was organized, resulting in significant concentration of production and rapping talent on the two labels, to the detriment of second-tier independents like Parkway Pumpin', Pack, or Big Boy

While the fortunes of individual performers and companies rose and fell, the events covered in this chapter, taken together, constituted a dramatic reversal of the situation prevailing in the earlier part of the decade with regard to New

Orleans's profile in the national rap music landscape. Often framed in opposition to the bounce era, these achievements nevertheless built on the pre-existing New Orleans scene and local style in important ways, and the local 'bounce' scene remained a basic frame of reference for aspiring artists, producers, and record label owners, whatever their relationship to or opinion of it. To a large extent, the isolation of New Orleans from national companies and audiences in the early 1990s set the stage for the subsequent success of Big Boy, No Limit and Cash Money later in the decade. These three labels were able to exploit the vast and untapped talent pool of rappers and producers in the city, benefiting from the absence of outside competitors.

In a general sense, the cases of Mystikal, Cash Money and No Limit exist within a trajectory of expanding access to national companies and artists on the part of New Orleans-based artists and companies and a progressive movement towards more explicit and substantive associations with locally oriented lyrical and musical content. However, while they share many similarities, the three cases presented here are also distinguished by important differences. They diverged both in the ways that they connected to the prior or contemporaneous New Orleans rap scene and in the ways that they represented this connection in discourse. Each of these intersections between New Orleans's rap scene and the wider, national-level music industry happened at a particular point in time and according to particular (culturally-influenced) values. For this reason, in each of the three cases, the relationship between New Orleans's grassroots rap scene and national audiences had its own stylistic and thematic particularities.

Mystikal's creative and biographical relationship to the local scene and the bounce style was complex and conflicted. While he rejected local conventions and challenged prior assumptions about what a New Orleans rapper could sound

like, his inclusion of local legend T. Tucker as the protagonist in the lyrics of a song set in the context of the burgeoning bounce scene spoke to his own formative engagement with and participation in the phenomenon. Still, his successful deal with Jive hinged on his status as a somewhat anomalous performer rather than as a representative of an underappreciated local scene or style. For this reason, his development of a national career failed to carry Big Boy Records along with it, and the company was increasingly sidelined by other New Orleans-based labels at the leading edge of changes in the tastes of audiences at the larger, national level.

While Mystikal tried to escape from the limiting aspects of bounce and local style, Master P found ways to exploit them. He drew heavily upon the New Orleans scene for recording talent; the voluminous output of No Limit between 1995 and 2000 included many memorable and influential songs and performances, by artists and producers who had deep roots in the New Orleans scene and who drew inspiration from the local musical and cultural vernacular. Still, the defining quality of No Limit's relationship to the local scene was its contingent nature, as it formed merely one prong of an ambitious strategy based on branding and identity marketing which aimed to transcend both the music business and local culture generally. Over time, Master P continued to plot a course away from locally-themed expressions, as the number of producers and rappers on the label with meaningful connections to the grassroots, early 1990s scene dwindled. Outside of the profit motive, a commitment to helping his immediate family members was his only strategic constant; creative relationships and artistic quality both suffered from Master P's disinterest in music as a central focus. No Limit soon ceased to be relevant, and whatever success the many side-

ventures had enjoyed evaporated as the company's musical output went into a creative tailspin.

Cash Money shared many similarities with No Limit. Both companies were founded by individuals whose perspective was shaped by a childhood spent in the housing projects and poor neighborhoods of New Orleans, and produced music that often exploited this theme or setting. Both signed lucrative contracts with major entertainment companies, at a point when they were sufficiently capitalized to be able to prioritize a long-term strategy based on retaining ownership and control of their master recordings. This in turn solidified their status as the conduits connecting New Orleans-based artists to national audiences and defining the city's image for rap audiences at the national level. Both propagated metaphors of 'family' to describe their highly centralized and hierarchical business models and enforced an insular and isolationist approach to collaboration with other local companies.

On the other hand, Cash Money maintained a much narrower focus on music, supporting rappers' development over the course of multiple albums and allowing them a significant degree of creative freedom (Mitchell 2004c, 17). No Limit made millions for Master P and his associates, but the rise to popularity of Cash Money artists B.G. and Juvenile in 1998 and 1999 represented an unprecedented breakthrough in terms of achieving chart success with dynamic, participatory ideas drawn from the local vernacular music sensibility. In contrast to No Limit, Cash Money went 'national' after years as a central player in the local 'bounce' scene, a background that influenced their creative and marketing decisions later in the decade. As the next chapter shows, this put Cash Money in a better position to continue its success into the next millennium, while No Limit abruptly dropped off the map.

The success of Mystikal, No Limit and Cash Money ended a long period of geographic and commercial isolation for the city, but the associated profits and networking opportunities were concentrated in the hands of a few individuals who were strategically positioned to mediate the dynamic and idiosyncratic New Orleans rap scene and style for wider audiences. These labels (and by extension, their partners at the national level) operated according to an extractive model, in which the New Orleans scene was exploited for its resources but did not benefit from any significant expansion of possibilities or infrastructure in the longer term. As in previous eras, the big companies stayed around only as long as the hits were coming; when they had gone, as the next chapter will show, the local scene remained almost as if they had never been there in the first place.

Chapter 6: Stagnation, Decline and the Resurgence of the Local (2001-2005)

"Just imagine, if Master P, at one time having three hundred and fifty million dollars, and Cash Money . . . If they were the type of guys that felt like, 'Well . . . let's clique up and let's . . . start some of the other labels that's in New Orleans, bring them up a little bit,' you know what I mean? . . . But stuntin' [flaunting wealth] . . . and hogging it to yourself—a lot of cats fall like that. . . " (Scott 2005).

The previous chapter was devoted to a period—1996 to 1999—when the exposure of New Orleans-based artists and labels within the national rap music industry reached its zenith, due to successful partnerships between major music corporations and local independent record labels. By 2000, *New York Times* critic Neil Strauss wrote, "Louisiana [was] fast becoming the nation's capital of filthy-rich rappers," and the success of No Limit and Cash Money was the stuff of legend, fueling the aspirations of artists and entrepreneurs in New Orleans and elsewhere (2000b).

However, in the subsequent years, between 2000 and 2005, the city's standing with regard to national rap audiences and companies suffered a precipitous decline. I begin this chapter by examining the later years of No Limit and Cash Money Records; While both labels became increasingly detached from the grassroots New Orleans scene upon which they had built their early successes, my comparative analysis shows that important differences marked their relationship to the local scene; these differences reflected distinct long-term business strategies which were expressed in multiple ways, including through musical style and content. No Limit's gangsta rap empire collapsed in on itself by 2002, suffering from market saturation, a dwindling roster of talent, and the overweening ambitions of Master P, among other problems. Cash Money's position also began to slip beginning in 2000, as the label scored fewer hits and

lost many of its star rappers. However, unlike No Limit, Cash Money has managed to retain a presence in rap at the national level, most recently through the meteoric career of Lil' Wayne.

Not only were these two powerhouses past their prime and becoming increasingly irrelevant to the grassroots New Orleans scene from which they grew, but none of the smaller labels in New Orleans showed any likelihood of reaching anything close to a similar level of exposure, as my examination of the independent label Take Fo' demonstrates.

I have chosen the cases discussed in this chapter to highlight the ongoing role of local identity in New Orleans's rap music in the postmillennial period. On one hand, the local labels which had risen to national prominence in the late 1990s continued to try to identify and exploit artists or concepts from the local rap scene. However, these efforts were hampered by their disconnection from the day-to-day life and experiences of New Orleans's black and poor communities. Not only were Cash Money and No Limit becoming increasingly detached and isolated from the grassroots rap scene that had nourished them in the mid-1990s, the stylistic and thematic dimensions of local rap in the city seemed to be moving farther away those which marked the national mainstream, a fact which found confirmation in the experience of Take Fo' Records. The label, an important force in the local market since 1993, tried to replicate the success that No Limit and Cash Money had enjoyed using artists and producers from the local scene, but with disappointing results. Take Fo' artists like Choppa and Katey Red remained too idiosyncratically local to win over national audiences, whose appetite for emerging southern styles seemed to be waning.

The years 2000-2005 were marked by important shifts in the organization of New Orleans's rap scene and the imagination of its possible

connections to national companies and audiences. Major label interest in the city's rap music waned, and along with it that of national audiences. With the important exception of Lil' Wayne, New Orleans-based artists largely disappeared from the national rap consciousness and charts after 2000, providing a stark contrast with the preceding period. With the exception of one or two artists who achieved national exposure, the rap music scene in the city became increasingly reoriented towards local audiences in nightclubs and block parties, who shared many of the central concerns and preferences that had defined bounce. The diminished national profile of New Orleans rap on the eve of Katrina is evidenced by the list of finalists in the 2005 *Billboard*/American Urban Radio Networks R&B/Hip-Hop Awards, which "honor the genres' most popular albums, songs, artists and contributors, as determined by actual sales and radio airplay data" (I. Jones 2005). The well-connected Atlanta scene contributed three artists (Lil Jon & the East Side Boyz, T.I., and Ying Yang Twins), who between them garnered nearly a third of the twenty-nine nominations listed for rap. In contrast, Juvenile was the sole representative from New Orleans, and was only nominated in one category.

For those who had an interest in seeing New Orleans restored to the position of prominence it enjoyed in the late 1990s, the period after 2000 was marked by one disaster after another, beginning with the rise of a cohort of so-called 'sissy' rappers who because of their openly gay identity and highly local lyrical and musical content seemed to have no hope of developing a career outside of New Orleans. James "Soulja Slim" Tapp, a legendary local gangsta rapper who was on the verge of breaking nationally, was shot to death in late 2003, an event which still haunted the city's rap scene in the summer of 2005, when the Hurricane Katrina disaster unleashed a wave of devastation and

displacement in the low-lying areas of New Orleans, historically associated with impoverished black populations.

Notwithstanding the importance of the postmillennial efforts and successes of artists like Lil Wayne, Soulja Slim and Juvenile, the fact remains that in general, the New Orleans rap scene was losing ground to regional competitors like Houston, Miami, and especially Atlanta in its ability to maintain a consistent and diversified (i.e., involving more than one artist or label) presence within the national market. In the late 1990s, major labels had relied upon intermediaries like Percy Miller or the Williams brothers for their access to the New Orleans scene, and never established any local presence of their own in the city. Consequently, as Cash Money and No Limit disconnected from New Orleans's vital grassroots rap music scene, so did the national music industry, and, by extension, national audiences. As the new millennium dawned, New Orleans rap in general returned to a similar state of isolation as had characterized it in the early 1990s; a conflict-ridden but largely self-contained universe of small record labels and aspiring rappers who made music that was unmistakably marked by local values and preferences.

The events covered in this chapter demonstrate that New Orleans's privileged position at the forefront of the "Dirty South" movement was merely temporary, and did not constitute any wholesale shift in the city's relationship to the national-level rap industry and audience. That New Orleans had produced the two biggest independent label success stories of the late 1990s did not change the basic fact of its geographic isolation within the U.S. music industry, which continued to work against aspiring rappers, producers, and record label owners based in the city. Its historically-rooted cultural distinctiveness, kept alive through ongoing traditions of music, dance, and public spectacle, represented a

vast and vital resource for inspiration, adaptation, and appropriation, but could also contribute to a sense of provincialism, an undesirable distance between local values and tastes and those of wider, mainstream rap audiences.

The analysis in this chapter is guided by these questions: In what ways did the cultural and social particularities of New Orleans influence the style and content of rap music produced there in the post-millennial period? What was the relationship between the vernacular, everyday culture of rap music in New Orleans and the national/global rap music industry? How did participants in the city's rap scene understand their position vis-à-vis national audiences and companies? How did this understanding guide their stylistic and organizational approaches to music making? What sort of long-term effects resulted from the establishment of No Limit and Cash Money as two of the most successful independent rap labels of the late 1990s? Why did Cash Money continue to thrive while No Limit went under?

No Limit Records: Decline

It may have been inevitable that the No Limit juggernaut would start to slow after several years of record-breaking success, but the label's steep decline after 1998 seems to have several root causes. In the late 1990s, many of No Limit's artists departed under a cloud of dissatisfaction; according to a former artist, Miller "started concentrating on himself" and his immediate family, allowing No Limit's promising roster to disintegrate: "it stopped being about [the artists] and started being about the Millers" (Magic quoted in Braxton, 2003). While he insisted that family ties were irrelevant in his calculations ("If you're not qualified, I don't care if you're my cousin, my sister, my mama, my brother — if you can't keep up, I'm getting rid of you"), he and his brothers enjoyed the

longest careers at the label, despite a pronounced lack of critical enthusiasm for their work (with the possible exception of that of Corey "C-Murder" Miller) (quoted in Spera 2000b). Outside of his family, the most enduring relationships within the company linked Miller to a "core of trusted friends and business associates . . . including Anthony 'Boz' Boswell, whom P [had] known since they attended St. Monica Elementary together, and Tevester Scott, another longtime acquaintance" who departed the label to manage rapper Mystikal in 2000.

No Limit suffered "a mass exodus" over the course of the late 1990s, as rappers including "Fiend . . . , Mystikal, [and] Skull Duggery, and [producers] KLC and the Medicine Men defected" (Braxton 2003). The company lost market share quickly from 1999 onwards: "Of No Limit's 15 releases in 1999, only half reportedly sold 500,000 or more copies; in previous years, anything No Limit touched was almost guaranteed to break the half-million barrier" (Spera 2000b). The rise of Cash Money Records—an established and dominant presence in the local market—to national prominence challenged No Limit's monopoly on New Orleans-based rap music. In 2000, a *Times-Picayune* writer observed, "the brisk pace of No Limit CD releases slowed to a trickle while Cash Money Records ... stole the national spotlight" (Spera 2000b).

No Limit's inability to reverse these trends related in some measure to the rigidly vertical organization of the company, with its CEO exercising tight control over nearly all its creative and business decisions. The autocratic, military-inspired approach which had helped No Limit conquer the heights of the music industry in the mid-1990s became a liability in later years, as Master P's instincts increasingly proved to be out of sync with the tastes of national rap audiences. Artists on No Limit suffered from his failure to build relationships with other rap companies (both inside and outside of New Orleans), evidenced by his insistence

that No Limit recordings should only promote and feature artists associated with the label, rather than the guest appearances and other collaborative efforts that were increasingly becoming an important part of rap at the wider, national level.

However, Miller still had a few aces up his sleeve. In 2000, he formed 504 Boyz, a trio consisting of himself, Mystikal, and Silkk the Shocker, modeled after Cash Money's successful group Hot Boys. As the group's name (based on New Orleans's telephone area code prefix) suggests, the music of 504 Boyz as featured on the album *Goodfellas* and the chart-topping single "Wobble wobble" was more explicitly linked to the local rap style—as one critic observed, "the 504 Boyz CD, . . . tellingly, has more 'bounce' influences than past No Limit releases" (Spera 2000b). Soulja Slim's last album for the company, *The Streets Made Me* (released in 2001 on the short-lived "No Limit South" sublabel), was also distinguished by a closer connection to local values and preferences, especially in songs like "Make it bounce" and "Get cha mind right."

As No Limit lost ground in the rap marketplace, corporate restructuring prompted an end to its mutually beneficial relationship with Priority in 2001, as "parent company EMI folded Priority into Capitol and released most of the former label's staff," who departed along with CEO and founder Bryan Turner (Patel 2002, 54). Master P incorporated the New No Limit label and secured a partnership with Cash Money's longtime partner Universal/Motown (also known as Universal Music and Video Distribution, or UMVD). Hardcore rap releases, like the 2002 album *Ballers* by 504 Boyz, formed an increasingly minor part of the label's output, as Miller concentrated his efforts on conquering the pop charts with expressions devoid of regional identity.

These bore fruit in 2001, when his eleven year-old son Percy Romeo Miller debuted as a solo artist under the name Lil' Romeo, and reached the top of

the charts with the single "My baby," which relied heavily upon a Jackson Five sample in its backing music. Having sold almost a million records in 2001, Lil Romeo has continued to release albums and has (like his father) branched out into acting, appearing in several feature films and a television series, *Romeo!*, on children's network Nickelodeon. Other teen-oriented acts in development at the New No Limit in 2002 included "6-Piece, an all-white boy band modeled after 'Nsync, and Sera-Lynn, a blond, blue-eyed singer and dancer" whom Miller hoped—in vain, as it turned out—would be "the next Britney Spears" (Pulley 2002).

By early 2001, Brett Pulley wrote, the "No Limit empire was a shell of its former self, undone almost as rapidly as it was built. Outsize ambition, irrational growth and poor management caused several of the No Limit ventures to either stall or fail" (2002). Still, Master P forged ahead with an ambitious strategy of brand-driven diversification, with projects including "more films, two clothing lines . . . , No Limit Wireless and two books—*How to Win*, a business book, and *Father and Son*, co-written by Lil' Romeo" (R. Hall 2002). In recent years, the Miller family has also been distracted by the ongoing legal problems facing Corey "C-Murder" Miller, who was convicted of murder in 2003 for the fatal shooting of a sixteen year-old at a local nightclub. In 2006, "a new trial was ordered because prosecutors withheld criminal background information on three witnesses" (Purpura 2009). His retrial on the charges began on April 20, 2009; he faces a lifetime behind bars if convicted.

Master P moved closer to the grassroots scene and style in 2003, when New No Limit acquired rising star Choppa from the bounce label Take Fo', and released a remade version of his local hit "Choppa style," with an added guest appearance by Master P. The song made a respectable showing on *Billboard's*

Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Singles & Tracks chart, and the label released a full-length album, *Straight from the N.O.*, the title of which further demonstrates No Limit's trajectory towards more explicitly local sounds and imagery. However, Choppa's career failed to take root at the national level, despite concert appearances with No Limit's 504 Boyz and New York rapper 50 Cent. By 2004, he had departed from New No Limit for boxer Roy Jones Jr.'s Body Head Entertainment label, leaving Master P and his relatives as the only artists on the label's roster.

In early 2004, Master P pulled up stakes again, moving the New No Limit label from Universal to Koch Entertainment, an up-and-coming independent distributor known for its "ability to make profits in specific niche-oriented genres that are too small for the majors," according to label president Bob Frank (quoted in Martens et al. 2006, 43). Under the new arrangement, Master P continued to promote a roster consisting of himself (the first release under the deal was his tenth solo album, the double CD *Good Side/Bad Side*) as well as family members Lil' Romeo and Silkk the Shocker. However, in spite of Master P's impressive track record, the New No Limit fell short of the success attained by other Koch properties, including former Cash Money artist B.G.'s Choppa City label (Morris 2003/2004).

Miller obviously underestimated the extent to which the decline of audience interest in his label's music had impacted his company's ability to cross-market and spin off side ventures. No Limit's historical status as "one of the biggest independent record labels ever, [having sold] more than 50 million albums, several of which debuted at number one on *Billboard's* Top Album Charts" notwithstanding, the label had descended to a state of complete irrelevance in both the local and national rap music scene in the postmillennial period ("No Limit ends its six-year distribution deal with Priority Records" 2001).

In 2007, Miller had little to lose when he renounced gangsta rap and his label's contributions to the genre, testifying to the music's dangerous effects before a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing. Miller accused those in the rap industry of "inflaming this problem by not being responsible," and offered his apologies to "all the women out there" for his own role in the genre's popularization: "I was honestly wrong" (quoted in Leeds 2007). Ultimately, family ties and a relentless entrepreneurial drive trumped any commitment to the "street" or to New Orleans's distinctive cultural orientation, forces which he had fully and profitably exploited during No Limit's late 1990s commercial heyday.

Cash Money Records, 2000 - 2005

Both No Limit and Cash Money declined in prominence as the millennium passed, but, as in their ascent, important differences marked the experiences of the two companies. While No Limit had collapsed relatively quickly, Cash Money lost momentum but managed to retain some degree of relevance and profitability in the wider rap market. The label enjoyed a respectable level of chart success in the 2000-2005 period, and survived the departure of several of its most popular rappers during these years. The exodus began with B.G., who left after his sixth solo album, *Checkmate* (2000); "by the end of 2002, three of the four Hot Boys — Juvenile, Turk and B.G. — were no longer actively recording for Cash Money" (Spera 2004).

The unraveling of Cash Money's relationship with Terius "Juvenile" Gray was one of the more challenging developments for the label during this period. His 2000 album *Tha G-Code* had failed to capture the imagination of the rap-buying public to the same extent as his quadruple-platinum smash *400 degreez*, and the rapper claimed that he "didn't really play a big role" in the 2001 album

Project English, which he described as a collection of "songs they scraped up" (Spera 2004). His complaints about Cash Money (which eventually formed the basis of a lawsuit) included failure to pay royalties and tour revenue, and the related issue of a disadvantageous contract that "essentially made the Williams brothers his managers as well as the heads of the record label."

As their relationship with Juvenile faltered, Cash Money's owners focused on the handful of artists who remained on the label. Efforts to reinforce the dwindling roster by signing emerging rappers were unsuccessful. In 2002, the duo Big Tymers (Bryan "Baby" Williams and producer/rapper Mannie Fresh) released their fourth album, *Hood Rich*, which like its predecessor *Got That Work* (2000), sold over a million copies, and was the first rap album of the year to reach the top of the *Billboard* 200 albums chart. Baby's limited abilities as a rapper and lyricist likely contributed to the label's decision to break with its 'closed-shop' strategy for his 2002 solo debut *Birdman*, which boasted appearances by prominent producers, rappers and vocalists from outside of the Cash Money stable. Riding this wave of success, the Williams brothers "inked [a] second deal with Universal Records for an undisclosed amount" in spring of 2003 (Wartofsky 2003). That year saw the release of the final Big Tymers album, *Big Money Heavyweight*. In early 2005, Mannie Fresh released his first album as a solo rapper, *The Mind of Mannie Fresh*, but parted ways with Cash Money later that year, reportedly over financial issues.

Given Baby's and Mannie Fresh's limited abilities in writing and performing raps, the respectable level of commercial success that these efforts achieved can in large measure be attributed to Cash Money's successful branding efforts in the late 1990s at the hands of rappers like Juvenile and B.G. However, a more future-oriented line of artist development was embodied by Dwayne "Lil'

Wayne" Carter, Jr., the only artist from the label's late 1990s peak to remain on its roster after 2002. While the teenaged rapper had largely stayed in the background during Juvenile's tenure with Cash Money, he grew to become the label's top-selling artist in the post-millennium period. His albums *Lights Out* (2000) and *500 Degreez* (2002) failed to match the sales of his platinum-selling 1999 debut, *Tha Block is Hot*, but he regained his momentum with the 2004 album *Tha Carter*. The album sold over a million copies, driven by the single "Go D.J.," which drew substantial inspiration from a locally popular song of the same name released by former Cash Money artists U.N.L.V. in 2003.

With the exception of a brief foray into feature film with *Baller Blockin'* in 2000, the Williams brothers wisely avoided diversifying their efforts beyond music, and have managed to retain a presence on the national scene through the success of one or two highly successful artists. Both the style of music on the label and its approach to artist development have changed substantially since 1996, when Cash Money was strongly connected to the thriving local scene. In the years leading up to Katrina, Cash Money moved further away from the locally-keyed sounds and themes that had been its bread and butter during the mid-1990s and closer to the development of star artists with little or no explicit connections to New Orleans. Despite signing a handful of aspiring rappers (including Boo & Gotti, Mikkey and TQ), Cash Money disconnected not only from the local scene but from rap generally; in late 2004, the label's owners initiated a "new full-service label, Roun"Table Entertainment . . . [which will work] with Cash Money to develop artists beyond the rap realm," with a concentration on "R&B and urban/pop" (Mitchell 2004d). The most successful of Cash Money's ventures outside of rap has been 1980s R&B diva Teena Marie, signed to the Cash Money Classics sublabel around 2004.

Juvenile and Cash Money settled out of court, and agreed to terms which included another album for the label. Released in late 2003, *Juve the Great* was his sixth solo album, and produced the hit single "Slow motion," a collaborative effort with Soulja Slim. The song reached number one on the "Hot Rap Tracks" chart, and helped make distributor UMVD the top-selling company of the year in the genre (Mitchell 2004a). As the album's sales approached the one million mark, Juvenile enjoyed more chart success as part of a trio which included unknown rappers Skip and Wacko. The group released a successful single, "Nolia clap," and an album, *The Beginning of the End...*, on UTP/Rap-A-Lot 4 Life, which featured guest appearances by New Orleans local favorites Kango Slim (of the group Partners-N-Crime) and Ms. Tee. Around the same time, Juvenile finalized a deal as a solo artist with Atlantic Records, as well as a separately negotiated agreement for distribution of his UTP Records label.

The astounding profits generated by No Limit and Cash Money remained concentrated in the hands of a few individuals; they exercised a powerful inspirational effect upon aspiring artists and companies, but ultimately contributed little to the further establishment of the local rap music scene from which they had extracted much of their talent. However, both labels have undertaken a variety of charitable initiatives over the years (Jet 2006), including Cash Money's annual Thanksgiving turkey giveaway (a tradition since 1999) and Master P's donation in 1999 of \$500,000 to the Catholic elementary school that he attended, as well as "two nearby Catholic churches" (Christian 2006; Spera 1999b). While commendable, these efforts have done more to underscore the enduring poverty and neglect in New Orleans than to address its root causes, and ultimately represented only a tiny fraction of the companies' total profits, which were flaunted in public displays of wealth and conspicuous consumption (Cohn

2001). The chasm that separates the lifestyle and economic situation of these individuals from those of the vast majority of New Orleans's black youth in some ways merely served to put the bleakness of the latter's situation into starker relief. That No Limit and Cash Money built their fortunes by selling narratives and imagery of ghetto violence, poverty, crime, and excess further complicates the relationship between for-profit expressive culture and the day-to-day experiences of New Orleans's black poor.

The success of No Limit and Cash Money had diverse effects upon the local New Orleans scene in the 2000-2005 period. Whether or not they remained on the label in the long term, artists and producers associated with these two companies gained valuable experience and often forged productive contacts in the wider music industry. Some of the rappers who achieved national exposure between 1996 and 1999 built on their success by forming record labels to release their own music as well as that of their protégés. They included former Cash Money artists B.G. and Juvenile (Choppa City Records and UTP Records, respectively), as well as No Limit alumni Soulja Slim (Cutthroat Committy), Magic (The Vault), and Mystikal (Big Truck Records). Several of these labels secured distribution from Koch Entertainment, a New York-based independent. However, none of them succeeded in developing any new national artists between 2000 and 2005, and several became inactive as a result of the death or incarceration of their anchoring star rapper.

Smaller labels catering to local preferences continued to emerge in the post-2000 period. Releasing music by artists including Gotti Boi Chris, Déjà Vu, 10th Ward Buck, Hot Boy Ronald, and others, labels such as Black House, Big Face, Kings Entertainment, Money Rules, or Ditty Boo maintained a much closer connection to the local scene and local audiences. Like the independent bounce

labels of the early 1990s, they produce music which is distinctive in its adherence to local New Orleans-based aesthetic and thematic preferences.

Take Fo' Records and DJ Jubilee

Founded in 1993 by Earl Mackie and Henry Holden, Take Fo' and was one of the few labels from the early days of bounce to survive past the year 2000. The label outlasted promising competitors like Big Boy, Tombstone, and Mobo Records, eventually rising to become "New Orleans' third place rap label," although its profits and profile fell far short of those of No Limit and Cash Money (Spera 2004b). Its owners harbored aspirations of national success, but the company remained a local or, at best, regional phenomenon. Limited distribution and promotion outside of New Orleans made the chances of one of Take Fo's artists breaking through to national audiences remote, a fact which encouraged them to cater more specifically and exclusively to local audiences in their recordings.

Mackie, who helped run a family roofing business, was inspired to start a record label after staging a rap-oriented benefit party to raise money for a public access cable television show, "Positive Black Talk," which he and Holden produced. The effort was so successful that Mackie signed up his cousin and niece, Danielle Eugene and Rene Porche, to record under the name Da' Sha Ra'. Their 1993 single "Bootin' up" was the first release on Take Fo' Records. Produced by Henry Holden (who would continue as Mackie's partner in the label), the catchy dance number was driven by a propulsive horn sample from Rebirth Brass Band's "Feel like funk'in' it up." Da' Sha Ra' never succeeded in matching the success they enjoyed with their first single, however, and after several more releases, the group disbanded around 1995 or 1996.

Take Fo' found its next prospect in Jerome "DJ Jubilee" Temple, who had been introduced to the music business by his older brother Shawn "Lil Nerve" Temple when they were growing up in the St. Thomas housing project (Sarig 2007, 251). Jerome DJed parties while a student at Grambling University, a sideline that he continued after returning to New Orleans to work as a special education teacher. Impressed by the enthusiastic crowd response to Temple's DJ sets, Mackie signed him to his fledgling label. DJ Jubilee's first single, "Stop, pause (do the Jubilee all)", released in 1994, sold 30,000 copies locally (Aiges 1994c, 26). Jubilee continued to be the label's best-selling artist throughout the late 1990s and on into the post-millennial period.

DJ Jubilee's performance style was rooted in the core values of bounce, relying on chanted, repeated phrases designed to inspire dancing and audience participation. These themes, along with "shout-outs" to projects, neighborhoods, and schools, also predominated in his lyrics and imagery, which were completely devoid of 'gangsta' rap-influenced references to violence and criminal activities, helping cement his reputation as one of the "cleanest" rappers in the New Orleans rap scene and in the bounce genre. While his friendly and upstanding demeanor made him a favorite among younger listeners, however, he did not entirely avoid the erotic dimension. This was put more clearly into relief during his live performances, where he was often supported by a crew of male back-up dancers who distinguished themselves for their athletic and highly suggestive moves.

Mackie's vision for Take Fo' was profit-driven, but it was constrained by his financial realities. Nik Cohn's assertion that the company was "a rarity among Southern rap labels" because it was "not funded by drug money" and therefore "couldn't afford major promotion or the hefty bribes to radio DJs that were needed for widespread exposure" requires further evaluation and scrutiny, but it

nonetheless points to another way in which the label may have been strategically disadvantaged within the local rap scene (Cohn in Floyd 2003). Mackie also grappled with personal, religiously-based issues; he avoided associating Take Fo' with "songs that advocated killing or violence to women," and (with a few notable exceptions) released music that was oriented towards a more celebratory perspective than that of most of its local competitors (quoted in Cohn 2005, 74).

The tendency to foreground dancing, partying and sex over 'gangsta' themes had important consequences. Take Fo' served as a platform for a large number of women rappers (including Da' Sha Ra', 2-Sweet, Junie B, and K.C. Redd), in contrast to labels like No Limit, Cash Money, and Big Boy, all of which were moving towards more exclusively male-dominated rosters. The clean-living image of DJ Jubilee and the upbeat tenor of the music and lyrical perspective of Take Fo' artists generally had the potential to alienate fans of hardcore rap, but these dimensions also helped open other doors in terms of press coverage and performance opportunities.

Mackie was not above releasing music with sexually explicit and demeaning lyrics (as in Big Al & Lil' Tee's 1994 "Another story to tell") and his opposition to violent lyrics did not completely exclude gangsta themes and imagery from the Take Fo' catalog. Exceptions to the label's generally "family friendly" image include the 1994 song "Mob on a mission" by Flesh & Blood, laden with lyrical descriptions and sampled sounds of gun violence, or the material on the 2000 Tec-9 CD *Ready 4 War*. Take Fo' frequently borrowed ideas or strategies from No Limit and (especially) Cash Money over the years. The influence of the city's top independents can be seen in the way that Mackie and Holden managed and controlled collaborations and guest appearances, as well as in the marketing of rapper Willie Puckett as "the million dollar hot boy" (a

persona likely inspired by the "Cash Money Millionaires" and "Hot Boys"). The success of label 'supergroups' like Cash Money's Hot Boys or No Limit's 504 Boyz inspired the release of various artist compilations on Take Fo' under group names like "The Bounce Squad" and "The Take Fo' Superstars."

In early 1996, Take Fo' was in an expansive mode, and Mackie was sanguine about the future. He told a local music journalist that the label had 'six new artists', and was stylistically branching out from bounce to include "hip-hop, and . . . two R&B groups" (quoted in Cortello 1996a). Mackie spoke of a possible distribution deal with Solar Records and his intentions to open his own record store locally, although neither of these ideas panned out. Later in the decade, however, as two New Orleans-based record labels rose to dominate the national rap industry, the owners of Take Fo' felt that their own time was at hand, and were "poised to follow No Limit and Cash Money in graduating from the local to national ranks" (Spera 1999d). In 1999, DJ Jubilee was signed to "a multi-album deal with urban music powerhouse Tommy Boy Records" (owned by Capitol Records). But despite his aspirations to MC Hammer-level success, Jubilee's national career never materialized. Instead, it stalled as Tommy Boy balked and released him from his contract in 2000 (Strauss 2000b).

The resulting bitterness was compounded by the fact that, according to Jubilee and his record company, million-selling rappers Juvenile and 504 Boyz had made hits from catchphrases he had introduced (Strauss 2000b). A federal jury decided in 2003 that the similarities between Juvenile's 1998 song, "Back that azz up" ("among the most popular singles of 1999") and a similarly-titled song by DJ Jubilee released earlier in the same year were insufficient to require compensation, a decision upheld in early 2005 by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit (Spera 2002; Council 2005). Nevertheless, the case

highlighted the problematic effects of differential access to national audiences and channels of distribution, which allows well-connected artists or companies to profitably exploit elements drawn from the local music culture. At the grassroots level, these ideas are routinely borrowed and adapted within a network of mutual influence and significance, a fact which complicates legal notions of authorship and intellectual property.

With its anticipated access to national audiences stymied, Take Fo' still occupied a distinct niche in the New Orleans scene, producing a steady stream of music which was strongly oriented towards local preferences and perspectives. Following the collapse of DJ Jubilee's deal with Tommy Boy, Mackie developed another artist with the potential to cross over from the local scene to wider, national rap audiences. Choppa, a teenager from the West Bank, had made a name for himself by competing in Q-93's call-in rap contests, the "Nine O'Clock Props" (Koslow 2003). Take Fo' released his single, "Choppa style," followed by a full-length CD of the same name in 2001, and eventually signed his younger brother, who rapped under the name Baby Boy and who led Choppa's team of male backup dancers.

Driven by chanted, melodically inflected refrains, "Choppa style" became a local hit, enabling Take Fo' to broker a deal for national exposure with the New No Limit label. However, Master P's fading influence was insufficient to attract a national audience for Choppa's music. After more than a decade in the record business, Mackie and his partner Henry Holden stepped down from the leadership roles at Take Fo', passing the reins to younger protégés Eldon Anderson and Terrance "Terry" Wilburn in 2004 (Spera 2004a).

Sissy Rappers

While Take Fo' ultimately failed in its drive to launch an artist into the national rap mainstream, it pioneered one of the most remarkable trends of the 2000-2005 period in New Orleans when it signed an openly gay male artist, the first of several so-called "sissy" or "punk" rappers to emerge from the local scene in the post-millennial period. Born around 1980, Kenyon "Katey Red" Carter had been making up raps for fun with friends in the hallways of the Melpomene (now Guste) housing project, eventually making a spontaneous public debut at a 1998 block party (Wolfson 2000). The positive response to this initial foray led to further performances, including one at a 1999 block party where she was "discovered" by DJ Ron, a Take Fo' Records associate.

The packaging of Katey Red's debut EP *Melpomene Block Party*, released by Take Fo' in 1999, did not feature any pictures of the rapper, but her sexual identity was clearly manifest in the lyrics of the title track, which revolve around the subject of male prostitution. The EP was followed in 2000 by a full-length release entitled *"Y2Katey" (The Millennium Sissy)*, which featured pictures of Katey Red in feminine garb (on the front cover she appears costumed as the Statue of Liberty in front of the New York skyline), at times surrounded by her female backup group "Dem Hoes." The CD was the first full-length rap release by an openly gay performer in New Orleans, and one of the first in the larger national and international rap music field.

In the years between 2000 and 2003, other sissy rappers made their recorded debuts through small, independent record companies and built their local careers through performances at clubs, block parties and on public access cable television programs like *It's All Good in the Hood*. Coming fast on the heels of *Millennium Sissy* and bristling with vitriolic attacks on Katey Red, Vockah

Redu and Tha Cru's CD *Can't Be Stopped* was released by the Tampa, Florida-based C2K label in 2000. While Katey Red and Vockah Redu had performed in drag, most of the sissy rappers that followed them were not cross dressers but rather out, effeminate gay men. In 2002, King's Entertainment released Chev's album *Straight Off the Ave*, while the fly-by-night Too Cold Records released two volumes of the *Battle of the Sissies* CD compilations, which featured all of the previously mentioned rappers as well as Sissy Jay, Sissy Nobby, and the group S.W.A. (a play on the name of gangsta rap group N.W.A., "niggas with attitude"). In 2003 Big Freedia released a double CD entitled *Queen Diva* on the Money Rules label, which included locally popular songs like "Gin in my system" and "A'han, oh yeah."

The character of the "sissy" has a long and rich history within African-American vernacular culture, and the participation of gay performers in New Orleans rap builds upon similar efforts in the city's popular music scene dating back to the early twentieth century, if not earlier (Garon 1975, 71; C. White 1984, 10). Jazz legend Jelly Roll Morton held the musical abilities of Tony Jackson (1876-1921) in the highest esteem, despite the fact that the pianist "happened to be one of those gentlemens that a lot of people call them lady or sissy" (quoted in Lomax 1973, 45). Guitarist Danny Barker, who played in Storyville during the early decades of the twentieth century, recalled performing at a gay bar called Beansy's Boudoir, where

"people were crammed and jammed like sardines in a can. Each night there were present about two hundred sissies, faggots, punks, moffydice, she-men and she-boys— all colors, all sizes and all ages (from sixteen to sixty.) They were high-class, low-class, well-dressed, ragged, dignified, loud-mouthed" (1998, 110).

The sexual experimentation and boundary crossing that took place in Storyville was often commodified, heteronormative, and structured by ideas of racial

hierarchy, but it nonetheless held out possibilities (albeit limited) of social and sexual freedom for gay men and lesbians.

Drummer Earl Palmer (1924-2008), raised by a lesbian or bisexual single mother who performed on the vaudeville circuit, grew up surrounded by individuals like "Van Epps, . . . a gay dancer I called my Uncle Van, and Clifton Phelps . . . [who] was what you might call Van's old lady. When I was coming up, I didn't know nothing about no closet gays" (quoted in Scherman 1999, 12, 24). Palmer remembered several gay or bisexual male performers from the R&B era of the 1940s and '50s, including Bobby Marchan, Patsy Valdalia, Chalida, Esquerita, and Larry Darnell, who performed at clubs like the Dew Drop Inn, often in the role of emcee and usually in drag. The mostly instrumental quartet The Meters included several references to the sissy concept in their song titles—their first four singles included "Sophisticated Cissy" and "Cissy Strut."

The acceptance of these openly gay performers was always qualified; even in the sheltered world of segregated black show business, their ability to openly express their sexuality was constrained within particular stereotypes. In the wider social context of New Orleans, as Palmer observed, "running gay was [not] a popular thing. . . the only place you'd see three or four gays going down the street together was the French Quarter and they were white" (quoted in Scherman 1999, 94). However, working-class and poor African American gay men have always been among those who sold their bodies for sex in New Orleans. Barker remembered "Titanic . . . , the District's most famous homosexual. He had a whole lot of homosexual friends who dressed as women and hustled as women, even back in the twenties" (1998, 107).

While their participation remains controversial within the New Orleans scene, the sissy rappers' adherence to local preferences and perspectives has

helped them attain a substantial level of general popularity in the city. The performance style employed by sissy rappers, as well as the production values that underlie their raps, represent in many ways a return to the core values of bounce, with lyrics structured by call-and-response rather than extended narrative, and musical accompaniment that is marked as local by tempo and samples, including "Drag rap." Rather than remaining contained within "an openly gay hip hop world," sissy rappers in New Orleans are, to a large extent, able to participate in creative and commercial relationships—with producers, record label owners, and other artists—that are not limited to people who self-identify as gay (Touré 2003).

Their highly local orientation has helped sissy rappers achieve widespread exposure and popularity within the vernacular spaces of the city's clubs and block parties. The audience for their music is often imagined in particular gendered terms, with women as the primary, driving force: as Katey Red asserted, "The guys come by because they want to see the girls bend over and shake their behinds . . . And the girls come by just so they can shake their behinds" (Strauss 2000a). This essentially unverifiable claim provides an excuse of sorts for straight men to listen to sissy rappers' music. While homophobia might drive some straight listeners to shun them, the central connections between their music and the wider cultural environment of New Orleans made them largely unavoidable for those wishing to participate in the social events around rap music and dancing in the city.

In their lyrics, sissy performers adhere to many of the established conventions of bounce, including prominent call-and-response, reference to neighborhoods, housing projects, or wards, and a lyrical emphasis on dancing, pleasure, and commodified sexual relations. In addition, however, some themes—

including male prostitution, the public antagonism towards those who transgress the dominant sexual order, and acrimonious attacks on other sissy rappers—stand out as relatively unique to sissy rappers as a group.

Amongst the handful of sissy rappers on the scene in the years before Katrina, a range of attitudes and expressions existed with regard to the openness with which sexuality and identity were addressed. In their lyrics, some use humor and irony to counter anti-gay attitudes present in their social environment, ridiculing the secrecy and denial that sometimes characterize gay identity in working class African American communities through lyrics which express pleasure in "having" or "breaking" men who present themselves as not gay ("A'Han, oh yeah", "Stupid"). These themes may suggest that the sissy rap perspective is characterized by a deep and abiding cynicism with regard to matters of sex and intimacy, which would be in continuity with the female perspective expressed in many of the early bounce songs from the early 1990s.

Though the sissies' appeal would ultimately remain highly contained within the immediate New Orleans area, Katey Red's releases generated a significant amount of national publicity, despite being ignored by the *Times-Picayune*. The sheer novelty of an openly gay performer in a notoriously anti-gay genre of popular music helped drive coverage in *The New York Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *The Village Voice*, which, although fleeting, represented a new peak of exposure for Take Fo' and its artists (Strauss 2000a; Seymour 2000; Liz Armstrong 2001).

Neil Strauss, a music critic for the *New York Times*, attended a concert by Katey Red in New Orleans and penned an article in May 2000 which is notable for its treatment of the rapper as a freakish anomaly and its failure to adhere to appropriate standards of gender pronoun use with regard to cross-dressing or

transgendered individuals which, by 2000, should have been established at the nation's newspaper of record. Strauss's insistence on using the male pronoun in reference to Katey Red would be less offensive if the article itself did not mention "his wish to be referred to as 'she,'" which was respected by the various rappers and New Orleans music scene participants whose comments were quoted (2000a). Strauss's article was the subject of irate commentary in *PlanetOut*, which excoriated the writer for the pronoun misuse and for his conflation of "homosexual" with "cross-dresser" or "drag queen." The article's author also points out that a white transgendered individual profiled in the same issue of the *Times* by a different author was referred to consistently as "she" (Alsdorf 2000).

After the brief sensation caused by Katey Red's debut, the goings-on in New Orleans once again sank below the radar of national critics as well as, to a large extent, local music journalists. The emergence of sissy rappers and their continuing popularity in the local music scene seems to have been the subject of little discussion in the larger world of music and cultural criticism or in the New Orleans press, which is usually eager to celebrate local musical achievements. Katey Red was the subject of a 2000 article in the free weekly *Offbeat* magazine, but the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* has not carried a single article profiling a sissy rapper or discussing the phenomenon (Wolfson 2000).

James "Soulja Slim" Tapp

The sissy rappers remained a local phenomenon, and brought to light another dimension in which New Orleans differed from other U.S. cities in its cultural and social orientation. However, other participants in the post-2000 rap music scene in the city sought out the national mainstream, and experimented with expressions that drew authenticity and context from a New Orleans-based

local identity, but which were not defined by the idiosyncratic tastes of local audiences. In late November, 2003, James "Soulja Slim" Tapp was gunned down in the front yard of a house he had just purchased for his mother. At the time of his murder, many saw Tapp (who had a decade of experience in the local scene) as the next New Orleans-based artist likely to cross over to national audiences.

Tapp grew up in the Magnolia (now C.J. Peete) housing projects, and (as noted in chapter four) began his career under the name "Magnolia Slim," releasing an album on the local Parkway Pumpin Records in 1994 and an EP in 1995. He appeared on Master P's *Down South Hustlers* compilation, but was locked up for much of the second half of the 1990s, serving time for armed robbery beginning in 1995 and returning to prison for parole violation on the eve of his solo debut on No Limit. Prior to the release of 1998's *Give it 2 'em raw*, he changed his stage name from Magnolia Slim "to Soulja Slim in a conscious effort to 'go national'" (Perlstein 2004b). The album's sales fell just short of "gold" record status (500,000 copies sold) despite minimal promotion. After a final album with No Limit South in 2001, he released *Years Later* independently in 2002 before signing with Koch, which distributed his Cut Throat Committed Records label. After his death, the song he recorded with Juvenile, "Slow motion," became a number-one hit.

Like Juvenile, Soulja Slim had cultivated an approach to performance and composition that presented complex, rhythmically imaginative lyrical constructions grounded in a persona and narrative perspective that was linked to the vernacular culture of New Orleans's housing projects and black neighborhoods. Tapp had family ties to the 'second line' subculture; his mother, Linda Porter, was the President of the Original Lady Buck Jumpers club, and her husband, Philip Frazier, was the longtime tuba player for the renowned Rebirth

Brass Band (NTSPC 2006, 212-217). Tapp's own funeral was marked by a rowdy wintertime second line parade.

In his murder, Tapp fell victim to New Orleans's violence-plagued street culture, within which he served as both chronicler and participant. Tapp had a fairly extensive criminal record and had survived two previous shootings, both of which occurred in the Magnolia projects (Perlstein 2004b). Ultimately, no charges were filed in Soulja Slim's murder, despite suggestions that twenty-two year-old Garelle Smith had killed the rapper for \$10,000 over a dispute having "something to do with the record industry and a rival record label" (2004a). The fact that police implicated Tapp himself in another, unrelated murder two months prior to his own did not diminish his reputation as a fallen hero among young rap fans in New Orleans.

Hurricane Katrina

Over the twenty-five years leading up to Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans rap scene experienced many important shifts in style and commercial organization, as well as in its position with regard to national audiences and major music corporations. The rise of bounce in the early 1990s was a watershed event that simultaneously energized and isolated the city's rap scene, which bubbled over in the mid- to late 1990s, as two record companies from the city shot to the top of the industry, only to see their influence and prominence fade over the next decade. The bleak socioeconomic conditions of the city took their toll on the participants in the local scene, as rappers, producers, DJs, and record label owners were among those affected by violence and crime. Whether victims or perpetrators, their careers were interrupted or cut short by incarceration or violent death, adding to the larger picture of unfulfilled potential in a city whose

residents struggled against the interlocking forces of racism and poverty. Kelefa Sanneh writes, "the story of Katrina is in large part a story of poverty and neglect," forces that were rampant in the city long before the storm (2006; see chapter 2).

The Katrina disaster of September 2005 exercised a deep and transformative impact upon the rap scene and every other aspect of African American middle- and working-class life in New Orleans. Like the vernacular traditions of Mardi Gras Indians and second line parades, New Orleans's rap scene was rooted in the city's low-lying, largely poverty-stricken black neighborhoods. The disaster affected black and poor New Orleanians disproportionately, and for this reason also removed a significant portion of the grassroots audiences for aspiring rappers and producers.

Juvenile was almost finished recording *Reality Check*, his first post-Cash Money solo album, when Katrina and the related flooding turned his life upside down, "destroying his newly constructed mansion on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain" (Spera 2006a). He recorded a new song for the release, "Get ya hustle on," in which he responded to the hurricane and the political-economic circumstances that enabled its devastating effects. The song's lyrics offered sharp criticism of New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin, and the accompanying music video drew widespread commentary for its depiction of figures wearing masks of Nagin, Vice President Dick Cheney, and President George Bush picking through the rubble of the devastated Lower Ninth Ward, formerly a stronghold of black working-class culture in the city.

Individuals associated with the rap scene experienced the loss of family members and property. While the most prominent members of the city's rap scene (including Lil' Wayne, Mannie Fresh, and B.G., and others) were able to

relocate to other major cities like Miami, Los Angeles, or Detroit without interrupting their careers, less established artists found themselves struggling to maintain momentum in regional centers like Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta. Many of these places offered more promise in terms of connections to the national music industry, but for the most part they lacked the cultural center of gravity that had helped New Orleans maintain a distinctive and, to a surprising extent, consistent musical sensibility (and thriving local market) that was expressed through rap just as it was through jazz and R&B. While individual rappers or producers were, to varying extents, able to physically relocate and maintain their careers, the collective energy that had infused New Orleans's vernacular traditions and which had contributed a vital spark to the city's popular music production was diffused and dissipated in the post-Katrina diaspora.

Ironically, as the vitality of New Orleans's grassroots scene reached its lowest ebb, Lil Wayne emerged to become the most popular rapper in the genre at the national level (Sanneh 2005b). His 2005 sequel *Tha Carter II* reached double-platinum sales, fueled by the hit single "Fireman." he was named President of Cash Money in 2005, and founded the sublabel Young Money Entertainment (he has since removed himself from the executive functions of both companies). In late 2006, he and Baby released the album *Like Father, Like Son*. His 2008 album *Tha Carter III* achieved phenomenal success, which built on singles including the danceable "Lollipop" and the idiosyncratic "A Milli." The album sold over a million copies in its first week on the market, and has since been certified triple platinum. Nominated for eight Grammy Awards (including "Album of the Year"), it won four, including "Best Rap Album."

For civic leaders, the fact that Katrina flushed out the city's poverty-stricken underclass was cause for celebration; but along with the problematic

aspects of concentrated urban poverty in New Orleans, the storm also laid waste to a highly productive social nucleus in the form of the collective energy that animated New Orleans popular music from jazz to rap. Philip Frazier, the tuba player for the Rebirth brass band, spoke of the effects of the disaster upon New Orleanians' consciousness of their own distinctive and rich traditions: "It took Katrina for everybody to realize what we really got" (quoted in NYSPC 2006, 157). For reasons relating at least in part to their socioeconomic circumstances, the residents of New Orleans's poor and working class black neighborhoods supported a vital culture of day-to-day entertainment and occasional celebration that provided a reservoir of direct and indirect inspiration for creative artists within that world.

Conclusion

The foregoing history, description and analysis of rap music in New Orleans has been motivated by more than a basic conviction that such details are worth knowing in their own right. They also, I hope, shed light on the dynamic, transformative ways in which different levels and forms of cultural production and identity can relate to one another. Over nearly thirty years, rap in New Orleans has served as a point of intersection between mass mediated expressions at the national level and highly localized and idiosyncratic styles and perspectives. In important respects, this relationship has unfolded episodically, and in ways which are themselves influenced by the cultural and geographic particularity of New Orleans.

In its formative period, bounce was characterized by insularity, a very vital and dynamic music scene that enjoyed a unidirectional relationship with more mainstream forms of rap music—national music went in, but the local music scene did not contribute in any meaningful way to the rap music scene or industry on the national level. The reasons for this include the short-sighted conservatism of the national record labels, who saw only belatedly that New Orleans could be a source of profit in wider markets, a dynamic which was exacerbated by the geographic isolation of New Orleans. By the time they bought into the New Orleans rap game to any significant degree, the major companies were forced to negotiate from a position of weakness due to the dominance of the local market by labels like Cash Money. In a sense, then, the local rap industry benefited from the neglect of the major corporations, a dynamic that may have relevance in wider questions of cultural practices in a mass-media environment.

Within the New Orleans context, interested parties employed a variety of strategies in their attempts to define the parameters of local identity and style.

Artists and independent companies competed for the dollars and acclaim of an enthusiastic local audience; they also offered divergent accounts of local identity and style in discourse, with an aim toward establishing themselves in national markets. Strategic calculation (with regard to the interrelationship of imagined audience, musical style, forms of collective or individual identification, and place) determined, in large part, the sound and content of releases on Big Boy, Cash Money, No Limit, Take Fo', and other independent labels.

The ways in which a New Orleans place identity would be marketed to national audiences were significantly different from those used by rappers and record labels to connect with local crowds. Both in terms of musical style and content, companies like No Limit and Cash Money operated according to gut-level strategic calculations about what the wider market could bear. No Limit, which rose to national prominence in 1996 and 1997 after sealing a lucrative deal with California-based Priority, represented a tightly controlled engagement with the local New Orleans scene and style, which allowed the company to reap the benefits of local talent and flavor while avoiding any taint of provincialism. However, The label's continuing trajectory away from any connection with the grassroots New Orleans rap scene put it at a disadvantage in the late 1990s, when the tastes of national audiences shifted to include a growing appreciation for southern styles which had previously been considered substandard.

As New Orleans rap became a national phenomenon in the late 1990s, the discourse around the music's relationship to its place of production also expanded, with critics in places like New York offering their perspectives. The idea of "New Orleans rap" was defined in different ways at different levels of scale and in different contexts. It was collectively and dynamically defined by an

intersection of musical expression, verbal discourse, and historical events, which render it multivalent, contested, and paradoxical.

The equation driving musical change and popularization is a complex one in which national companies, local companies, national audiences and local audiences all exert substantial mutual influence. From the perspective of the local New Orleans rap scene, then, local actors did what they could to find the blend of the novel and the familiar that would tilt the balance in their favor. Trial-and-error based experimentation is an important process towards this goal, but the selection of artists and material is far from random—at each stage, decisions about style and content are made which are essentially cultural in nature. As these case studies show, the relationship between place, collective identity, and musical style is not only constructed but also fluid, multiple, fragmentary, inconsistent, and subject to rapid change based on developments within the local context and beyond.

Another important aspect of the bounce phenomenon relates to Roger Abraham's observation that "there is an ultimate and fascinating relationship between social and psychological adversity and the black cultural mechanisms that promote emotional flexibility and creativity" (1970, 2). The very persistence of bounce as a distinct subgenre of rap music is in itself evidence that it plays an important role in black New Orleanians' ability to cope with an ongoing but constantly evolving succession of hardships, insults, exclusions and neglect.

To the extent that the destroyed communities and neighborhoods of the city can be revived, bounce or similarly distinctive locally oriented rap will play a central role in this process. Bounce is one of the channels through which community is forged "on the ground" in New Orleans, a site for the imagination of collective identity that is more real and more complex than (and yet, in

dialogue with) more shallow and commercial ideas of place identity. Investigation of the ways in which bounce and rap music in New Orleans and the recently-created New Orleans diaspora will "establish, maintain, and transform social relations, and . . . define and shape material and geographical settings for social action" remains a productive area of future scholarship (Cohen in Leyshon, Matless and Revill 1998, 287).

Looking at bounce and New Orleans rap as a site of conflict rather than harmony frees us of some of the constraining and limiting effects of looking at genres of music or local music scenes (or, for that matter, places in general) as natural, harmonious unities. In New Orleans rap, we see not only the negotiation of a local and national lyrical themes and musical aesthetics, but also the contestation of the local scene (and the possible national stakes that accrue from its domination) by various actors and constituencies. Bounce derives much of its creative energy by negotiating the tension between ideas of a pan-New Orleans culture that exists as an alternative to national musical expressions and allegiances to neighborhood and ward which promote divisions in the local scene, and which sometimes escalate into interpersonal violence. Further investigation needs to be devoted to understanding how these social and spatial processes and tensions are elaborated in musical forms. However, it is likely that the energy produced by this creative tension will be crucial to the psychic survival of many New Orleans residents as they work to reestablish lives and communities destroyed by Katrina and her bureaucratic accomplices.

Further questions

I have tried to give a thorough account of rap's evolution in New Orleans, but many major and minor details of the personalities, business, style, and

discourse around rap in the city remain to be explored by future scholars. What sorts of organizational, stylistic, and thematic changes can be attributed to the effects of the Katrina disaster? The particular responses of artists, record label owners, producers should be examined; further investigation will also be concerned with the ways in which the disaster impacted the more diffused, grassroots base of support that rap in the city has enjoyed up until 2005. How has the Katrina disaster affected the isolation and containment of New Orleans's rap scene? How does rap fit into the wider, mediated portrayal of New Orleans's cultural environment? In what ways has the disaster provoked changes in the role of rappers, some of whom have moved into a more explicit engagement with political issues at the local and national levels. With working-class and poor African-Americans suffering disproportionately from the displacement caused by the disaster, how will their diminished presence effect the wider cultural environment of New Orleans?

Further work remains to be done to explore the role of new technologies, such as cable television and internet, both within the New Orleans rap scene as well as regarding its exposure to wider audiences. Some of the shortcomings of the present work can be connected to the fact that rap is still an ongoing, viable commercial genre of popular music with a wide audience base. Rap in New Orleans has yet to achieve the same sort of "historical" status as older forms like R&B and Jazz. As Sanneh observes, those who are concerned with restoring the cultural patrimony of New Orleans often focus on musicians and performers who are "old, poor and humble," taking for granted that participants in more recently introduced and more explicitly commercial the explicitly commercial orientation of most rap problematizes the efforts to restore the music and traditions of New Orleans's neighborhoods (2006).

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SOUND RECORDINGS

- Battle of the sissys, round 1, Too Cold Recs.
- Battle of the sissys, round 2, Too Cold Recs.
- B.G., "Bling bling," Cash Money Recs. 0121156483-1.
- B.G., "Cash Money is an army," Cash Money Recs. U8P 13541998)
- B.G., Chopper City in the ghetto, Cash Money Recs. UD-53265.
- B.G.'z, True story, Cash Money Records CSH-9503.
- Big Al & Lil Tee, "B***h, you know who I am," Take Fo' Recs. TFP-302.
- Big Freedia. Queen diva. Money Rules Ent. MRE-4141 741331-41412.
- Bust Down, Nasty bitch, Effect Recs. E3004-2.
- Bust Down, "Putcha Ballys on" / "Nasty bitch," Effect Recs. E-716.

Chev. Straight off the Ave., a sissy with class, King's Ent. 821798-00052-8.

Choppa, Choppa style, Take Fo' Recs. TFR-1901.

Choppa, "Choppa style," New No Limit, 440019400.

Da' Sha Ra', "Stuntman" / "Eastbank boy with a Westbank booty" / "Bootin' up,"
Take Fo' Records TFP 102.

Derek B, "Rock the beat," Music of Life Note 3.

DJ Jimi, "Bounce (for the Juvenile)" / "Take it like a dog," Avenue Dist. AVE
1213.

DJ Jimi, It's Jimi, Avenue Dist. ACD 9105.

DJ Jimi, "Where they at?," Avenue Dist. AVE 1208.

DJ Jubilee, "Jubilee all," Take Fo' Recs. TFP 202.

Down south hustlers, bouncin' and swingin', Priority Recs. P2 53993.

Everlasting Hitman, "Bounce! Baby, bounce!," Mr. Tee Recs. T-92001.

Females in Charge, "Where's my trick," Pack Records DRP-9272.

504 Boyz, "Wobble wobble," No Limit Records 08724-81350-15.

Flesh & Blood, "On the map," Take Fo' Recs. TFP401.

FM, "Gimme what you got! (For a pork chop)," Avenue Dist. AVE 1212.

Full Pack, "I Like to #@*§!" Brutal Recs. BRU 1006.

Gregory D., Niggaz in da boot, Midwest Recs. MID-1020.

Gregory D, The real deal, RCA 07863 66078-2.

Gregory D & DJ Mannie Fresh, "D" rules the nation, Yo! Recs. X-101-1.

Gregory D & DJ Mannie Fresh, Throw down, D&D Ent. DD5252.

Gregory D & Mannie Fresh, "Where you from (party people)" / "Buck Jump time
(project rapp)," Uzi Rec. 9MM-007.

Hot Boys, Guerrilla warfare, Cash Money Recs. UD-53264.

Juvenile, 400 degreez, Cash Money Recs. UD-53162.

Juvenile, "Follow me now" / "Back that azz up," Cash Money Recs. U8P 1483.

- Juvenile, "Ha," Cash Money Recs. U12 56234.
- Juvenile, Project English, Cash Money Recs. 422 810 913 2.
- Juvenile, Solja rags, Cash Money Recs. UD-53166.
- Katey Red, Melpomene block party, Take Fo' Recs. TFP1101.
- Katey Red. "Y2 Katey" (the millenium sissy), Take Fo' Recs. TFR-1102.
- Lil Elt, "Get the gat," Parkway Pumpin Recs.
- Lil Slim, "Bounce, slide, ride," Cash Money Recs. BSR01.
- Mayes, Warren, Canivin' boys, Hot Crescent Recs.
- Mayes, Warren, "Get it girl (don't stop)," Atlantic Recs. 0-86049, ST-DM-60089-SP.
- MC E, "Lick the cat," Avenue Dist. AVE 1214.
- MC J' Ro' J, "Let's jump," Rosemont Recs. RRS 1288.
- MC Thick, "Marrero (what the f____ they be yellin)," Atlantic Recs. PR4310, ST-DM-61280/61278-SP.
- MC T-Tucker, "Let the booty shake" / "Where dey at? Part II," T-Tucker Prod. 71664TTP.
- MC T. Tucker & DJ Irv, "Where dey at," Charlot Recs.
- Mia X "Da payback," Lamina Recs. LR9002.
- Most Wanted Posse, "It was a Westbank thing" / "First come first serve," Mugz Recs. MR2728.
- Mystikal, Mystikal, Big Boy Recs. BB0012.
- Mystikal, Mind of Mystikal, Jive/Zomba Recs. 01241-41581-2.
- Ninja Crew, "We destroy" / "Baby T rock," 4-Sight Recs. 3-86-FS-11.
- N.P.C., "Georgia bounce," Critique Recs. EPID3478321.
- Parlez, "Make it, shake it, do it good!," SuperDome Recs. 150.
- Partners-N-Crime featuring DJ Jubilee, "N.O. block party (they don't like that)," South Coast Recs. SCMG7LP.
- Partners-N-Crime, "Pussy n a can (fuck U& L.V.)" / "Ride it roll it," Big Boy Recs. BB0003.

Partners-N-Crime, Pump tha party (puttin' in work), Big Boy Recs. BB019.

Pimp Daddy, "Got to be real," Pack Recs. DRP-9301

P-popper / club hopper, Take Fo' Recs. TFR-1702.

Rebirth Brass Band, Feel like funkin' it up, Rounder Recs. 2093.

Rebirth Brass Band, Here to stay!, Arhoolie 9002.

The Showboys, "Drag rap, " Profile Recs. PRO-7111.

Silky, Bouncing in a 6 tray, Big Boy Recs. BB0007.

Silky Slim, "Sister sister," Profile Recs. PRO-7377.

69 Boyz, "Don't Start No Shh," Home Bass.

Soulja Slim, Give it 2 'em raw, No Limit Recs. P2 53547.

Soulja Slim, The streets made me, No Limit South NLS2001.

Sporty T, "Sporty talk -n- sporty 93," Big Boy Recs. BB0001.

Tec-9, Ready 4 war, Take Fo' Recs. TFP-1601-2.

39 Posse, "Got what it takes to make it" / "Ask them hoes" / "Pass the snake" /
"Clockin'" / "Pumped in power," Parkway Pumpin Records PKY-1001.

39 Posse, 39 automatic, Parkway Pumpin Recs. PKY 1021.

Too Short, "I Ain't Trippin'," Jive 1232-1-J2.

TRU, True, No Limit Recs. P1 53983.

U.N.L.V., Mac Melph Calio, Cash Money Recs. CSH-0187.

U.N.L.V., Uptown 4 life, Cash Money Recs. CMR-9609.

Vockah Redu, Can't be stopped, C2K Ent. C2K001.