

**Mic Check One Two One Two - Washington's Diplomatic Version
of Hip-Hop**

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Cover Page

Abstract

This research looks at uncovering the relationship between the cultural phenomenon that is Hip-Hop, and the United States State Department. This work successfully argues that Hip-Hop is an artform that has been used as an exercise of soft power by the State Department. I demonstrate that Hip-Hop culture, and especially underground hip-hop/rap music is used in a particular way to send a tailored message to certain areas of the world where they might not be too fond of the United States policies and way of life. The message essentially reads that ‘it is perfectly fine and acceptable to disapprove and disagree with the United States’ policies and way of life, therefore it is even better to demonstrate your displeasure of said United States in an acceptable, creative nonviolent manner, as Hip-Hop culture, rap music etc. does.

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“Life is good” Nas

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Mic check one two one two - Washington's diplomatic version of Hip Hop.

Introduction

“From ghetto to ghetto, to backyard to yard.”¹ Witty analogy; compelling descriptive rhetoric; playful jargon; all attributes that can be given to this lyric as it illustrates via an innovative manner the socio economic conditions restricted to environments that more often than not, appear to be occupied by economically disadvantaged groups of people (and or visible minorities). *Pusha T, No Malice and Pharell*, African American mainstream rap artists, and co-authors of the lyric, can be heard reciting it, amongst a plethora of other lyrics that compose their mid-2000's released song labeled “*Grindin*” over the cadence of a musical rhythm to diverse multicultural audiences across the world, that religiously recite the lyrics as parishioners do when attending church services. When further analyzing this lyric and electing to orient the focus on the “to backyard to yard” mention, we can assess that the juxtaposing of those words were done with a significant objective. One could say that the backyard reference represents the ability for one element or person to elevate or transfer from a relatively confined environment – (backyard) within a particular (suburban) setting to an environment that is amply more spacious – one that offers plenty more real estate to navigate, as (yard) is made reference to in this sense. This analogy speaks volume of the dimension to which Hip-Hop culture in general and rap music in particular has penetrated, infiltrated and enveloped itself into all spheres of society – irrespective of barriers that might emerge, whether geographical racial or economical etc. This in a way, metaphorically speaks to what I intend to do with this thesis that will mostly be centered around Hip-Hop. Hip-Hop possesses

¹ Pharell, Williams et al., “Grindin;,” Lyrics, 2002., <https://genius.com/Clipse-grindin-lyrics>

this intriguing ability of being transmutable and adaptable to all spheres of society without ever losing its essence. This is a significant attribute that's even been recognized and welcomed by governments across the world, notably the United States' government, which we will understand via this thesis, utilizes Hip-Hop as a diplomatic component within its State Department's cultural division. American culture is promoted abroad by the State Department to areas which have at times, been in total disagreement with American policies and ideologies; notably in certain Islamic countries within the world that are more prone to be bastion for developing and hosting ideologies of terrorism and violence.

This research will try to put some light on the capacity within which the US State Department has used Hip-Hop via cultural diplomacy – hence a soft power, throughout the globe. We specifically want to know why the State Department sends Hip-Hop practitioners and in particular, countercultural or underground hip-hop musicians to select areas of the world where American governmental policies are repeatedly questioned.

In order to get a clear answer to that question, we will first have to look at the definition of power. Many great thinkers have theorized over that concept from previous centuries until now, causing for a number of remarkable theories to emerge leading up to the arrival of soft power, the theory which will be the main anchor for our work. Secondly, we will have a look at Hip Hop. We will unravel it in order to gain an understanding of what it is and how it functions. This section will articulate why underground hip-hop is the export “material” of choice of the State Department which will then segue the third section which will provide a pronounced look at the State Department's modus operandi when subjected to the soft power regime and how Hip-Hop fits into the equation.

Following these three sections will come the conclusion which shall recap what we've learned, provide an answer to the question and offer avenues for further research. The subsequent section will discuss power.

Chapter I. Power

As it is customary for all foreign ministries, the US State Department conducts some of its foreign operations within the confines of diplomacy. Diplomacy exists within the realm of international relations and is distinguishable by the mediation and negotiation activities that are conducted by and between different actors. The actions of negotiation and mediation imply the existence of power relations between actors.

The notion of “power relation” is part of a matrix of figures that could be associated with the complex concept of power. All things considered, the concept of power has been the subject of intense research by an abundance of scholars who navigate the vast universe of social sciences. Consequently so, it is imperative to recognize, acknowledge and expose the multiple variances the concept of power has been placed in before reaching soft power.

The soft power theory will be instrumental for the comprehension of this work labeled: soft power. This theory was defined by American scholar Joseph Nye. We will get a more pronounced explanation of this understanding of power as this chapter progresses. But, before we get there, we shall go through the numerous ways through which power is understood.

1. Force equals Power

A very common understanding of power stipulates that power consists of coercing an individual or a group of individuals into doing what a party or parties would want them to do.

This generally against the individual or group's will via the use of force or authority. Power translates in other words, into coercion with an emphasis placed on force or domination. An American scholar named Robert Dahl supported this idea while proposing a vision of power that discussed communities being put in relation to the interests of ruling elites following the second World War.² He devised the theory of "community power" which expresses that power is used in order "to cause those who are subject to it to follow the private preferences of those who possess the power."³ Furthering his analysis, Dahl remarked that power was the "production of obedience to the preferences of others."⁴ Very specifically, according to Dahl, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do."⁵ Ultimately, power is viewed as existing between agents via force.⁶

Another advocate for this vision of power is Italian philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli whose most acclaimed book *The Prince* advocates for it. Machiavelli defines power "as a means, not a resource, and seeks strategic advantages, such as military ones, between his prince and others."⁷ Throughout his book, Machiavelli provides elongated advice on how one should and/or could acquire and maintain (political) power. From Machiavelli's point of view, power should be regarded as an instrument responsible for the advent/birth of strategic alliances between a dominant party, in relation to a party that is being dominated.⁸ Power presupposes organization, as well as strategy, within a certain context. From this particular understanding, power is therefore viewed as a strength that an actor possesses.

² Elisheva Sadan, "Empowerment and Community Planning - mpow.org - PDF Drive," Empowerment and community planning, September 2004, http://www.mpow.org/elisheva_sadan_empowerment.pdf.

³ Sadan, 36.

⁴ Sadan, 36.

⁵ Felix, Berenskoetter. 2016 *Concepts in World Politics*. SAGE, p 30

Felix Berenskoetter, *Concepts in World Politics* (SAGE, 2016) P 30.

⁶ Felix, Berenskoetter *Concepts in World Politics*. SAGE, 2016 p 30
Berenskoetter, 30.

⁷ Sadan, 33.

⁸ Sadan, 34.

Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher who was active between the 16th and 17th century furthered this vision of power assessing power to be an instrument used to affix “hegemony.”⁹ Basically, “elements of control” are observable within the concept of power. In one of his most recognized books called “the Leviathan”, Thomas Hobbes introduced the notion of “social contract” which extensively expounds on the concept of power. In his book, Hobbes theorized that power is transferred from one sphere of society (or group) to another.¹⁰ Furthermore, we learn that “the notion would argue for the providence of individual liberty in order to obtain security from the government.”¹¹ We understand Hobbes to be expressing that there are occasions upon which the authority of power is conferred unto certain entities that are “centralized and focused on sovereignty.”¹² It is fair to say that Hobbes conception of power is centered around sovereignty and community.¹³ Again, this demonstrates that power is viewed from a coercive lens with roles being played by the dominant and dominated parties.

2. Economic and Social observation of power

Secondly, departing away from this particular understanding of power, we are to now be exposed to the social and economic conditions orienting an understanding of power.

Karl Marx, a German scholar well known for his ideology of Marxism, expressed that power is focused on class domination within capitalist societies. What this scholar essentially conveys is that one group (the dominant one) tries to impose its “policies” onto another (the dominated or working class). During his 19th century era, this translated into the

⁹ Sadan, 35.

¹⁰ Sadan, 35.

¹¹ Sadan, 35.

¹² Sadan, 35.

¹³ Stewart Clegg, “Frameworks of Power: An Overview of the Argument,” in *Frameworks of Power* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1989), 3, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446279267>.

bourgeoisie oppressing the proletariat. It's a case of domination by the stronger class versus the resistance of the dominated class. From his perspective, power is in a way unidirectional. "Marxists focus on capacities grounded in structured social relations rather than in the properties of individual agents considered in isolation. Moreover, as these structured social relations entail enduring relations, there are reciprocal, if often asymmetrical, capacities and vulnerabilities."¹⁴

Two scholars of American decent by the name of Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz subscribed to Marxist ideologies articulated for a theory of power that introduced the notion of "two faces of power"; a notion mostly centered on the decision-making process within communities, indicating that power could be assessed in two ways. According to them, there exists an overt face of power – which indicates the way that decisions are made; and a covert face of power – which indicates the ability to prevent decision-making.¹⁵ These scholars looked at the decision-making process within communities.

A British scholar named Steven Lukes pushed Bachrach and Morton Bratz's ideas about power a bit further by shifting the discussion from community power to introduce a three-dimensional model into the equation.¹⁶ This added dimension was the "latent dimension of power" which dealt with the relations between political preferences and real interests¹⁷. Luke basically viewed power as the ability to implant in people's minds interests that are contrary to their own good.¹⁸

¹⁴Bob Jessop, "(PDF) Marxist Approaches to Power," ResearchGate, 2012, 8, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312587446_Marxist_Approaches_to_Power.

¹⁵ Sadan, 36.

¹⁶ Sadan, 37.

¹⁷ Sadan, 37.

¹⁸ Sadan, 37.

3. *Structural view of power*

Thirdly, power can also be viewed as structural, which would mean that it exists as a consequence of a system or an order. Power is bestowed upon those who control the system that is in place. It is a reactive element pertaining to the condition within which it is placed. We could say that, when a system is set up in a particular way, some actions are more likely to occur than others.

This calls for an understanding of power to be structural when we are discussing international politics¹⁹. It may help explain the domination that exists within that arena²⁰. When discussing domestic politics, however, power can be understood and “used synonymously with government... .”²¹ Basically, you are holding the reigns of power because of the system that has been established.

The highly influential French scholar Michel Foucault intervened in the discussion on power by mentioning that “power exists only when it is exercised, and it does not depend on agreement or resistance. Power operates only upon free subjects and hence it presupposes the concept of freedom. Freedom means the ability to choose from a range of possibilities in different ways of behavior. The relations between power and the freedom of the person who refuses to surrender to it are part of a single whole picture and are inseparable.”²² The structural element of power can clearly be identified in Foucault’s beliefs.

Furthermore, during the 20th century, Anthony Giddens, a British scholar conceptualized power around the structure of modern societies. Giddens advanced that “power

¹⁹ Guzzini” p25” in Berenskoetter, Felix. *Concepts in World Politics*. SAGE, 2016.

²⁰“Guzzini” p25 in Berenskoetter, Felix. *Concepts in World Politics*. SAGE, 2016.

²¹ Stefano Guzzini, “The Ambivalent ‘Diffusion of Power’ in Global Governance,” in *The Diffusion of Power in Global Governance: International Political Economy Meets Foucault*, ed. Stefano Guzzini and Iver B. Neumann, Palgrave Studies in International Relations (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 26, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283559_1.

²² Sadan, p 60.

is not a quality or a resource of people, (...) but a social factor which influences components of human society and is also created by them.”²³

4. Soft power

We have now seen the concept of power being theorized over centuries. We have assessed, understood, and seen the contextual attributes surrounding them. It is therefore just to dig deeper and question as to the role that power has to play when not being coercive but being attractive. Joseph Nye, a scholar of American descent theorized on the concept by bringing forth the theories of hard power and soft power. We get to comprehend via his work that hard power is the action of employing influential methods – whether military, economic etc. (roughly speaking, aggressive means of coercion), by an entity (that is superior), and applying it onto a less powerful one²⁴. As an example of that, we could look at the relatively recent United States and NATO economic sanctions applied to Russia in the Ukrainian problematic²⁵. However, on the other hand, soft power, which will be the object of this work, operates in a totally different fashion. Soft power can “guide the capabilities, culture, ideology and the social system of others.”²⁶ Let’s understand that there are three main resources for introducing soft power into the territory a country would like to penetrate; culture, political value and foreign policy.²⁷ When looking at culture, Joseph Nye defined it as “the set of values and practices that create meaning for a society. It has many manifestations. It is common to distinguish between high culture such as literature, art, and

²³ Sadan, 38.

²⁴ Tim Quirk, “Soft Power, Hard Power, and Our Image Abroad,” n.d., 1.

²⁵ Wan Wang, “Impact of Western Sanctions on Russia in the Ukraine Crisis,” *Journal of Politics and Law* 8, no. 2 (March 26, 2015): 2, <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v8n2p1>.

²⁶ Li Lin, Leng Hongtao. “Joseph Nye’s Soft Power Theory and Its Revelation Towards Ideological and Political Education”. *Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 5, No. 2, 2017, p 69

²⁷ Li Lin, Leng Hongtao. “Joseph Nye’s Soft Power Theory and Its Revelation Towards Ideological and Political Education”. *Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 5, No. 2, 2017, p 70

education which appeals to the elite, and popular culture which focuses on mass entertainment.”²⁸

Joseph Nye also expressed that soft power and hard power were different. He specifically said that “soft power plays a role well on the basis of resources. Whereas hard power grows out of a country’s economic, technical and military might, soft power arises from the attractiveness of its culture, political ideas and policy.”²⁹ Reading further on soft power, which this research will heavily depend on, Joseph Nye argues that it “is not merely the same as influence. After all, influence can also rest on the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence. Simply put in behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power”³⁰. Soft power basically operates with instruments or tools that would bring that attraction to life. In another way, the idea of systemic power remains while we are presented with a conduit for others to follow or adopt.

Seduction is persuasion in a delicate way. Not rushed nor forced, but acquiesced acceptance. Soft power works in a seductive manner. The party subjected to that seduction consciously accepts the seducer’s purpose and would alter his or her behavior to meet them halfway. The example of Adam Smith, a Scottish economist whose theory of the invisible hand certainly applies to the soft power theory, according to Nye. “Adam smith observed that people are led by an invisible hand when making decisions in a free market, our decisions in the marketplace for ideas are often shaped by soft power – an intangible attraction that persuades us to go along with others; purposes without any explicit threat or exchange taking

²⁸ Joseph Nye, “Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics - Joseph S. Nye Jr. - Public Affairs,” 2009, p 48.

²⁹ Li Lin, Leng Hongtao. “Joseph Nye’s Soft Power Theory and Its Revelation Towards Ideological and Political Education”. *Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 5, No. 2, 2017, p71

³⁰ Joseph Nye. “Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics” –Joseph S.Nye Jr *Public Affairs*, 2009. P 14

place.”³¹ Joseph Nye, arguing for the validity of his theory, mentioned that a former French foreign minister observed that “Americans are powerful because they can inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through film and television because, for these same reasons, large numbers of students from the other countries come to the United States to finish their studies.”³² What we can understand from that is that soft power, whether operating via films, music, Hip-Hop etc. alters behavior. Also, according to Nye, “the United States benefits from a universalistic culture.”³³

The object of this research is therefore to understand Hip-Hop’s role and usage within the US State Department soft power efforts in select areas of the world. Hip-Hop is a phenomenon that would subscribe to the “popular culture” appellation that Nye enunciated and differentiated from the “high culture” appellation found in his book. One could expect Hip-Hop to be used via the cultural diplomacy imprint that the State Department promotes abroad. Cultural diplomacy is a strategy that “involves the systematic intervention of governments in the arts, sciences, and other cultural expressions as the basis of an official categorization of national identity.”³⁴ Cultural diplomacy certainly subscribes to the realm of soft power. Via cultural diplomacy, one is to comprehend that structural power doesn’t have to be coercive. You may seduce others to do what you want by showcasing an attractive trait about yourself, making other parties wanting to do it. This is how the State Department intends to use Hip Hop.

The rest of this research shall indicate how the United States has used Hip-Hop under the soft power umbrella abroad while acknowledging the work of scholar Luka Glušac on the

³¹ Joseph Nye, “Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics - Public Affairs,” 30.

³² Nye, 32.

³³ Nye, 38.

³⁴ Mariano Zamorano, “Reframing Cultural Diplomacy: The Instrumentalization of Culture under the Soft Power Theory,” *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 8 (November 8, 2016): 169, <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.1608165>.

topic of “Hip Hop and diplomacy.”³⁵ We will push his discussion further by looking at the new dimension soft power has taken under the American context.

³⁵Luka Glusac, “(PDF) Cultural Diplomacy in Action: The United States’ Export of Hip Hop to the Muslim World,” January 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313108962_Cultural_Diplomacy_in_Action_The_United_States'_Export_of_Hip_Hop_to_the_Muslim_World.

Chapter II. Hip Hop History – From the Bronx to the World

1. *'Hip-Hop's genesis*

Hip-Hop is a cultural phenomenon that emerged in the late 1970's and early 80's in the Bronx, a borough of New York City, USA. It is a phenomenon under which several artistic movements emerged; artistic movements that have the particularity of being outlets for those feeling or having felt marginalized by society. These artistic movements, more often than not, are viewed as being countercultural. Nowadays, Hip-Hop has become a global phenomenon that managed to add many tentacles to its arc. It has managed to traverse political realms, define cultural identity and form trends globally.

In order to gain a broader understanding of its origin, it is quite important to consult the work of renowned scholars. Through countless years of research, scholars such as Emmett George Price and Jorge Iber were able to determine that “Hip Hop evolved during the 1970s as a liberation movement in the form of diverse culture. It was a next-generation civil (human) rights movement sparked by ostracized, marginalized, and oppressed inner city youth. Grounded in the traditions of U.S born blacks and first- and second – generation Latinos and Latinas as well as people of Caribbean origin (primarily Jamaican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Bahamian)³⁶. Their research helps us to understand that Hip-Hop culture finds its origin and inspiration in society and the evils that populate it. Working extensively on the topic they let us understand that Hip-Hop culture primarily came to existence “as a product of urban neglect and a descendant of the civil rights, Black Power, and Black arts movements. Hip-Hop arose as a unifying force for young people of all races and ethnicities who had two major things in common: an experience with Black expressive culture, (whether through

³⁶ Emmett George Price and Jorge Iber, *Hip Hop Culture* (ABC-CLIO, 2006), 1.

birthright or adaptation), and an experience with the brutal clutches of poverty.”³⁷ Renowned Hip-Hop scholar Tricia Rose indicated via her research, that Hip-Hop culture is composed of four distinct elements. Dancing- which would be characterized by Breakdancing or Bboying, Deejaying which consists of music creation via the manipulation of vinyl records playing on turntables (in addition to other musical instruments); Graffiti art – which is a form of visual communication consisting of painting, drawing etc. on walls, concrete surfaces etc., and Mcing also known as Rapping which consists of an individual or a group of individuals uttering words that generally rhyme and follow the rhythmic cadence of a musical backing.³⁸ Also, we have to recognize that Hip-Hop culture has the particularity of being revered and adopted all over the world to the point that it has become a transcending global cultural phenomenon. “Worldwide, from South Africa to Poland and from the Bronx to Beverly Hills, the popularity and global significance of rap music and Hip-Hop culture has been observed and chronicled by media outlets, social commentaries and scholars.”³⁹

The centerpiece within Hip-Hop that this paper would like to investigate is Rap (music) - which can also be referred to as hip-hop music (I will use hip-hop music and rap interchangeably in this work). It is extremely important to differentiate hip-hop music or rap from Hip-Hop, the overall cultural movement to which rap music belongs. They are not the same but rather one (hip-hop music/rap), operates under the umbrella of the other (Hip-Hop culture).

Hip-Hop music’s sonorities can be identified as being rooted in the Afro American musical genres of Jazz, Funk, rock, R&B etc. that emerged and became very popular in the southern and Midwestern part of the United States.⁴⁰ What is even more so important and

³⁷Price and Iber, 20.

³⁸ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 10.

³⁹ Marcella Runell Hall, “Education in a Hip-Hop Nation: Our Identity, Politics & Pedagogy,” n.d., 268.

⁴⁰ Steve Stoute and Mim Eichler Rivas, *The Tanning of America: How Hip-Hop Created a Culture That Rewrote the Rules of the New Economy*, Reprint edition (New York: Avery, 2012).

significant for our research is that this musical genre can be classified in several formats: commercial or mainstream rap music, religious hip-hop, underground rap and many more. Commercial or mainstream rap music would be the genre of rap that is easily available to the masses based on the readily available distribution media channels – television, radio, internet etc...⁴¹

Before going any further, it is important to realize that hip-hop music can (...) “be roughly divided into its “old school” (which roughly corresponds to its first two decades) and its “new school” (during which it became much more commercially viable, also merging with other genres and forms, such as pop, heavy metal, and techno/house).”⁴² With that being said, we must acknowledge that quite frequently, some old school hip-hop is associated with the notion of underground hip-hop music and new school hip-hop with that of commercial hip-hop.

The structure of this musical genre having been defined; it is necessary to take a deep dive into the different categories ruling it – starting with underground rap music. Underground rap has a different *modus operandi* than commercial rap music as it looks to tackle the plights of society in a more unfiltered manner, offering a critique of society, the government etc. which gives the auditor a more intellectually sophisticated content to listen to. Scholar Joseph Jones eloquently defined this genre by saying that “underground hip-hop, which usually has an entirely different sound than mainstream hip-hop, can be categorized into the three broad categories of political, B boy/B-girl, and religious sounds. Its political sound usually relates to criticism of the government and or governmental institutions, as well as the economic, political, and social conditions that have resulted from state action. B-

⁴¹ Joseph L Jones, “Hegemonic Rhythms: The Role of Hip-Hop Music in 21st Century American Public Diplomacy,” n.d., 144.

⁴² Siobhan Brooks and Thomas Conroy, “Hip-Hop Culture in a Global Context: Interdisciplinary and Cross-Categorical Investigation,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764210381723>.

boy/B-girl, an expression that is more of an artistic approach to rapping, focuses on lyrical styles and metaphors through rapping.”⁴³

*“Most hip-hop music heard abroad is mainstream hip-hop music.”*⁴⁴

2. Underground/old school Hip Hop

For historical purpose, we must take a look at the early 80’s, a time which basically corresponds with the birth of the movement as some of the pioneering rap groups started creating and recording songs. One of the songs serving as the flag bearer for the movement superbly embodying the essence of this new musical genre, which meant providing an unfiltered commentary of the ills and injustices America’s inner city inhabitants faced on a daily basis, is called the “the message”. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five – one of hip-hop music’s pioneering groups, released it 1982. The chorus of the song bluntly says: *“Don’t push me, ‘cause I’m close to the edge/ I’m trying not to lose my head/ ah-huh-huh-huh-huh/ It’s like a jungle sometimes It makes me wonder how I keep from going under.”*⁴⁵ The lyrics depict the adventures of someone being on the brink of losing his moral compass while bringing forward the analogy of a jungle where he feels trapped. The artist’s choice of words characterizes how chaotic, dangerous, mentally challenging and troublesome his/their environment is and how taxing on the mental state his/ their area is. Some additional digging into the song’s lyrics gives us more pertinent material that states:

⁴³ Jones, “Hegemonic Rhythms: The Role of Hip-Hop Music in 21st Century American Public Diplomacy,” 11.

⁴⁴ Jones, 11.

⁴⁵ “Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five – The Message Lyrics | Genius Lyrics,” accessed June 11, 2020, <https://genius.com/Grandmaster-flash-and-the-furious-five-the-message-lyrics>.

*Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far⁴⁶*

Grandmaster Flash and the furious five expand their lyrical argumentation by depicting the realities some residents of the Bronx, NY faced on a daily basis. Inequality, poverty, subpar living conditions, envy to reach greener pastures but unable to meet the objective and plenty more factors that are decried in their music. Factors that could potentially 'push them as they are close to the edge' as they said. The edge meaning not being able to contain their frustrations any longer and reacting in a manner that would be unacceptable in a societal context. The system being discussed is the one of oppression that has kept minority groups marginalized for years in the United States. The country is quite famous for having been unfavorable to minorities groups since slavery, segregation etc. One may even go further and say that Grandmaster Flash and the furious five used Hip-Hop to channel their frustration because there is an organic, "real", soul liberating, attribute that this medium provides.

As time evolved, plenty more rap groups emerged. One of the most importance is be Public Enemy, a rap collective hailing from New York whose message also objected the unfair living condition they were being subjected to. Public enemy composed a song titled "fight the power", a song that was politically charged filled with intonation of civil disobedience, black empowerment, anti-racial/police violence/brutality, and dislike of systemic racism towards minority individuals.

⁴⁶ "Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five – The Message Lyrics | Genius Lyrics."

Some of the song's lyrics say:

*Got to give us what we want
Gotta give us what we need
Our freedom of speech is freedom of death
We got to fight the powers that be⁴⁷*

Emotionally charged and powerful lyrics that encapsulate what rap music represented during this old school, underground era.

A deeper dive into the song's lyrics and we read:

*I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
Sample a look back you look and find
Nothing but rednecks for four hundred years if you check⁴⁸*

Public Enemy made a conscious effort of sharing their reality with the listener who they hoped would become more aware of society's inequalities and become or stay 'woke'- basically reposition themselves vis a vis the system.

3. Hip Hop's transitional period hence transformation

As time proceeded, the Hip-Hop culture developed further within the inner cities in the midst of the 80's. Numerous rap groups took form and introduced a lyrical content that promoted a different kind of vision. The group RUN DMC, an African American collective hailing from the inner city of Queens in New York City, is often indexed with being the catalyst behind this content transition and introduction to the commercial facet that hip-hop

⁴⁷ "Public Enemy – Fight the Power Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," accessed June 21, 2020, <https://genius.com/Public-enemy-fight-the-power-lyrics>.

⁴⁸ "Public Enemy – Fight the Power Lyrics | Genius Lyrics."

would take when they released their song called “My Adidas”. The song, which was an ode to the German footwear brand, tackled elements of mundane life which would resonate more with a diverse and larger audience. They did it while keeping the vernacular and attitudes that were true to individuals who made hip-hop music and came from the inner cities. Ultimately a certain diction and “street attitude” that was unique to the inner city and Hip-Hop culture and music, (therefore a subculture) had now been introduced and exported to the masses. It was embraced by many of those strangers to the inner cities and generally curious about their vision of the world.

A quick read into the song’s lyrics gives us:

*Me and my Adidas do the illest things
We like to stomp out pimps with diamond rings
We slay all suckers who perpetrate
And lay down law from state to state
We travel on gravel, dirt road or street
I wear my Adidas when I rock the beat
On stage front page every show I go
It's Adidas on my feet high top or low
My Adidas
My Adidas⁴⁹*

To put it frankly, the song could be regarded as one of the catalysts for the emergence of consumerism within rap music that is a characteristic of commercial/mainstream hip hop. Major record companies and brands started showing a deep interest in hip-hop music which, from that moment, drove the emergence and diversion of the content from socially conscious to commercial.⁵⁰ This interest from major corporations helped propagate Hip Hop all throughout the world and make it a global phenomenon. The essence of Hip-Hop remains via underground hip-hop but the direction it now takes is altered. It is now no longer about

⁴⁹ “Run-D.M.C. – My Adidas Lyrics | Genius Lyrics,” accessed June 11, 2020, <https://genius.com/Run-dmc-my-adidas-lyrics>.

⁵⁰Stoute and Rivas, *The Tanning of America*.

addressing or channeling messages that want to better the society, it is more so promoting a message of “be all that you can be” within this system. In a way, it advocates for the using the system to your advantage.

4. New School Hip-Hop; commercial Hip-Hop

For analysis purposes, being very different from underground hip-hop, we could say that “mainstream hip-hop’s entertainment aspect focuses on dance and partying/club music; its materialistic aspect focuses on hyper-consumerism and the attainment of wealth and or material items; and its gangster aspect focuses on territorial representation, drugs, violence, misogyny, or forms illegal behavior although each category has its own distinct sound and lyrics, rappers sometimes combine the categories together into one song (i.e., a song may have both a gangster and materialistic focus).”⁵¹ Some of the commercial hip-hop music nowadays is quite easily identifiable by the lyrics rappers give. Let’s for example, take the case of Curtis “50 cent” Jackson, a multiplatinum selling commercial rapper hailing from the South Side Jamaica neighborhood of Queens, New York City.⁵² 50 cent came to prominence in the early 2000’s and has nowadays attained celebrity status all over the world based off his music and image. Certain of his songs depict how wealthy he is. On others, he explains how he used to sell narcotics in his neighborhood or even how he was the target of multiple assassination attempts etc. 50 cent raps about many more ‘controversial’ topics that are certain to generate support for massive airplay over radio and other music listening channels.

⁵¹ Jones, Joseph L., "Hegemonic rhythms: The role of Hip-Hop music in 21st century American Public diplomacy" (2009). ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library. Paper 94

⁵² Ethan Brown, *Queens Reigns Supreme: Fat Cat, 50 Cent, and the Rise of the Hip Hop Hustler* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010), 139.

Let's analyze the lyrics of one of his most chart-topping songs labeled "I get Money".

In a section of the song, 50 cent raps:

*I come up out the jeweler, they calling me Rocky
It's the ice on my neck, man, the wrist and my left hand
Bling like bloaw, you like my style
Ha Ha - I'm heading to the bank right now⁵³*

We can identify a pronounced importance being placed on the material possessions he has and most definitely his wealth. 50 cent tremendously exemplifies the attitude of the commercial rapper when he speaks of "ice" and "bling" which are colloquial jargons referencing jewelry. The commercial rapper, more than likely, adorns expensive pieces of jewelry because he has to display a wealthy ostentatious image in the faces of society and system.

Ultimately, after reviewing both types of hip-hop music, we can argue that something quite particular is found within hip-hop music in particular, and the Hip Hop culture in general. This thesis might not give you a complete breakdown of Hip Hop's history because there are plenty more factors involved with that movement. What I'm wanting to showcase in this chapter, as it is important for my argument, is to first outline the distinction between counterculture hip-hop music and mainstream hip hop music. What has been shown is that the two have certain common point of references even though they remain very different from each other.

For that purpose, I chose a few acts who are stylistically representative of this transition.

⁵³ 50 Cent – *I Get Money*, accessed May 19, 2020, <https://genius.com/50-cent-i-get-money-lyrics>.

5. Weighing both genres and acknowledging the State Department's pronounced interest

When comparing underground rap to the commercial one, individuals who become rappers more often than not, are representatives of the disparaging ills society brings. These folks belong to the group of those marginalized by society and therefore, decide to combat their predicament making use of different means within an art form. This, they expect and hope, will yield substantial results. The struggle of being a “marginal” within a society prompts individuals to either speak about the ills of society and try to bring forth a conscious legitimate collective community revolution , or it prompts individuals to combat their condition by embracing the system, offering their experience to the commercial system for personal gains. In this latter case, they opt not to be disruptive - but rather cooperate with the machine or system, by becoming a player in the matrix and hoping to use the system to obtain personal gains; whether financial gains, celebrity status etc.

To use an interesting analogy, it is as if to say they force themselves to make an otherwise dysfunctional / forced marriage on paper, work in real life. This is quite interesting as hip-hop music is the medium through which this is operated. For Hip-Hop being such an artform gifted with that much power is quite interesting.

In the end, we recognize that Hip-Hop has evolved and has acquired the privilege of penetrating almost all spheres of society. From having humble beginnings in the south Bronx to being utilized by state governments for diplomatic/ convincing purposes, there is an intriguing element that prevails and lives on. An analogy here would be fitting, I believe. Kendrick Lamar, a famous American contemporary rapper labelled one of his most

acclaimed albums to date released in 2015 “to Pimp a Butterfly.”⁵⁴ A pimp, I would reckon, is an individual (quite often male) who reaps benefits from persons (most of the time females) who happen to be at his service. The Pimp makes the females work for him by prostituting themselves and he collects the benefits from their prostitution (the monies). The analogy would be to view Hip-Hop as the butterfly, and the State Department as the pimp. Money might not be the exchange or the benefit that the State Department gains here, but a sphere of influence on the world is what it is seeking – which Hip-Hop helps bring, at least to an extent. The channeling of negative energy to positive action that we can observe via Hip-Hop is perhaps what makes hip-hop appealing to the State Department. Minorities complain that they are being victimized and suffering from ills within the society however, they utilize this medium as a platform to channel their frustrating societal experience. Perhaps the State Department might have wondered if this platform could be introduced and used in different contextual settings abroad to the benefit of American diplomacy. It might have ultimately led to a multitude of questions asked within the State Department after having observed this Hip Hop’s ability to channel negative energy, anger into something that is socially acceptable. The most important question for the State Department to ask therefore would be to know if Hip-Hop diplomacy would function abroad for America?

⁵⁴ “Kendrick Lamar - To Pimp a Butterfly Lyrics and Tracklist | Genius,” accessed June 11, 2020, <https://genius.com/albums/Kendrick-lamar/To-pimp-a-butterfly>.

Chapter III. World Order & the State Department – How does the State Department behave

1. *State Department's soft power record – Jazz Diplomacy & Ping Pong diplomacy*

The US State Department is the nation's organ that is operating and overseeing its foreign policy and diplomatic efforts throughout the world. Over the years, this organ has devised strategies geared towards establishing and maintaining relations throughout the globe. Soft power, as theorized by Joseph Nye, is an approach that the State Department has utilized within its diplomatic arsenal of tools to influence regions that were not too receptive of America's, values, lifestyle, and government. As the previous chapter indicated, Hip Hop culture, (an American creation) has become extremely popular all over the world. This may indicate why the State Department, conscientious of that fact recognized the opportunity it could gain from being associated with it.

History has recorded countless moments where the State Department introduced what we could consider to be “innovative” or “creative” ways to conduct diplomacy, when subscribed to the ideology of soft power. That is evidenced by the “Jazz Diplomacy” program which was commenced during the 50's in the midst of the Cold War, with the intention of spreading democracy throughout the world as a combative method to communist ideologies. The entire project's vision was to promote successful American Jazz musicians (known as Jazz ambassadors) to communist countries and have them diplomatically spread the gospels of the American way of life in addition to democracy. Scholar Lisa Davenport eloquently explained that phenomena informing us that in order “to counter Soviet propaganda, the

United States attempted to substantiate claims that it had a superior Western culture and civilization. Policy makers sought to employ the arts to help transcend a compelling ideological, political, and racial divide- by the mid-1950s the world had divided into several ideological blocs established because of the exigencies of the Cold War. Unavoidably, the U.S. government appropriated American culture in the midst of political upheaval at home and Communist revolutions abroad.”⁵⁵ Unique about the Jazz diplomacy program was the utilization of successful mainstream Afro American Jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong etc. “The Duke Ellington orchestra's 1971 visit to the Soviet Union (USSR) marked their most important and publicized State Department tour...” “Ellington made a strong impact, the strongest that any American artist had yet made in the Soviet Union.”⁵⁶

During this same Cold War era, precisely during the 70’s, the State Department utilized sports as a way to diplomatically spread the American ideologies of freedom, liberty etc. “Ping Pong diplomacy”, a program which put together the United States and China, both nations operating under different ideological regimes, was thus born. The sport of ping-pong was used by the State Department to establish relatively friendly relations between the two nations.

As research indicates, “in April 1970, the American Ping-Pong team’s surprising visit to China made them the first group of Americans allowed into China since the communist takeover in 1949. This historical event marked a thaw in the Sino-American relation and started a series of momentous incidents including President Nixon’s visit to Beijing in 1972 and the following normalization of diplomatic relation.”⁵⁷ Further research into this topic makes us understand that athletes were used as ambassadors for the USA – using “friendship

⁵⁵ Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010), 40.

⁵⁶ Harvey G. Cohen, “Visions of Freedom: Duke Ellington in the Soviet Union,” *Popular Music* 30, no. 3 (October 2011): 297, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143011000237>.

⁵⁷ Pu Haozhou, “From ‘Ping-Pong Diplomacy’ to ‘Hoop Diplomacy’: Yao Ming, Globalization, and the Cultural Politics of U.S.-China Relations,” 2012, 14, <http://fsu.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fsu%3A183073/>.

first, competition second” and they “emphasized friendship and camaraderie in their sports exchanges with other countries, playing down the competitive angle.”⁵⁸ Basically, the usage of ping-pong as a diplomatic tool by the State Department restored a relationship between the two nations that had been frozen for a while. Within the context of the cold war, The State Department understood and recognized that “Jazz Diplomacy” would not have been adequate for China, even though it was used in another Cold War “terrain”. That first shows how soft power is adapted to the context within which it is placed, as well as how American diplomacy attentive to the concept and context, follows suit.

2. It is now Hip-Hop’s turn

Now, in more recent time, Hip-Hop as a culture and specifically underground hip-hop music is being exported to select areas where American governmental policies are vehemently disapproved. Whether it be in predominately Arab Muslim areas of the world that are prone to developing terrorism, or areas within South America that might be known for drug activities etc. The State Department’s modus operandi is to target youths before they harbor negative ideologies towards the United States. “Hip hop diplomacy” which is an term that has been coined by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural affairs – (a division within the State Department)- advocates for the United States utilization of Hip Hop to reach audiences abroad and promote democracy a’ la USA. On that note, the State Department makes a conscious effort to refrain from utilizing and promoting commercial hip-hop (music, artists) but rather employs underground hip-hop when engaging in its diplomatic efforts. Workshops are proposed by musicians and artists. As underground hip-hop is often linked

⁵⁸ Haozhou, 14.

with negative claims of exploitation, inequality, poverty etc. that marginalized groups endure in the USA, it resonates better with the participatory audiences. This surprisingly is best suited for the State Department's cause. We will give an indication as to why towards the end of this section.

It was mentioned earlier in the section that the State Department adapts to challenges. Contemporary times therefore call for contemporary measures. One of the programs brought forth by the State Department in recent times is the "The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad" program, started in 2005. This program promotes amongst other genres, Hip-Hop culture and sends Hip-Hop practitioners, especially underground hip-hop artists to select Muslim countries amongst many other areas. The State Department's website lists a clear definition of the program indicating that "American Music Abroad artists represent the new generation of musical ambassadors; reaching beyond concert halls to interact with other musicians and citizens around the globe. Each year, approximately 10 ensembles of American roots music in different genres are selected to embark on a month-long, multi-country tour, where they engage with international audiences through public concerts, interactive performances with local musicians, lectures and demonstrations, workshops, jam sessions, and media interviews. Performances with local musicians, lectures and demonstrations, workshops, jam sessions, and media interviews."⁵⁹

3. Talents recruited by the State Department

Taking an explicit look at some of the artists who were sent to the Arab/Muslim countries under the sponsorship of the State Department's Rhythm and road would service us

⁵⁹ "American Music Abroad | Exchange Programs," accessed June 21, 2020, <https://exchanges.state.gov/us/program/american-music-abroad>.

quite well for this research. ‘Chen Lo and the Liberation Army’ also known as the ‘Liberation Family’, an underground hip-hop collective hailing from Brooklyn, New York, toured North Africa – principally countries where a majority of the population identify as Muslims. They held a series of performances and workshops for the populations.

Scholar Kendra Salois remarks in her book that “in March of 2010, the US Embassy in Morocco hosted a hip-hop band named Chen Lo and the Liberation Family, currently known as The Lo Frequency, as the first stop in the group’s North African and Middle Eastern tour. The band, consisting of emcee Chen Lo, turntablist DJ Scandales, bassist BAASSIK and drummer Ken White, performed four times and led several workshops during their weeklong stay in Morocco before moving on to Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, and Lebanon.”⁶⁰

One of the group’s performances in Algeria is documented on YouTube, which allows for the public to access it. When watching the performance, one can identify Chen Lo and the group performing several songs with quite particular lyrics. At the beginning of the video, exactly at the 35-second mark, Chen Lo raps:

*Around the globe it’s the same old stress in a different time zone,
We drifting high and drifting low, we struggle the same in every area code*⁶¹

At the 6.12 mark of the video, Chen Lo can be heard rapping:

*I’m picking cotton with no shoes on this property
Stripped of everything while someone else is profiting
Forced to believe in the same God they worshipping*⁶²

Further, along in the video, precisely at the 6:27 mark, Chen Lo can be heard rapping:

⁶⁰ Kendra Salois, “The US Department of State’s ‘Hip Hop Diplomacy’ in Morocco,” in *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, ed. Rebekah Ahrendt, Mark Ferraguto, and Damien Mahiet (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014), 231–49, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137463272_12.

⁶¹ *Chen Lo & the Liberation Family Concert in Algiers, Part 2*, accessed June 21, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqQ3evyhi9o>.

⁶² *Chen Lo & the Liberation Family Concert in Algiers, Part 2*.

*The root cause of a lot of what we up against,
Visit any hood in America for the evidence,
Work for centuries, no pay and benefits
Move from plantations to projects and tenements,
We slaving' now with not much to show for it*⁶³

The group, Chen Lo and the Liberation Family, composed of African-American artists make a claim in their music for what they “African Americans” consider to be unjust treatments at the hands of the United States. What’s quite interesting and needs to be reiterated and reemphasized is that this group was sent abroad under the sponsorship of the State Department and promoted under a program that brings together local populations (that could otherwise fall into a deep hatred of America and perhaps resort to violent methods to channel that anger had it not happen, from the State Department’s perspective). These particular Hip-Hop artists express their American plights on a microphone under government sponsorship, abroad.

Another group having participated in the State Department’s program worth mentioning is “Native Deen”, a Muslim underground Hip-Hop group which is composed of three African-Americans hailing from Washington DC. This group is quite particular as their motto is to “spread an uplifting message of Islam.”⁶⁴ They have toured a few predominately Muslim countries (Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Palestine). Interestingly, under the Rhythm and Road program, they were being promoted by the State Department as a Muslim hip-hop group from the United States, which naturally encouraged somewhat of a more personable Muslim to Muslim approach during their tours.⁶⁵ In Mali for example, they performed one of their songs called ‘remember the days’ which lyrics says:

⁶³Chen Lo & the Liberation Family Concert in Algiers, Part 2.

⁶⁴ Mark Katz, *Build: The Power of Hip Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 157.

As a son of a crescent, I'm not an adolescent / I've done a lot of growing I consider a blessing / Hmm, I think about my situation/ I need to increase my Islamic education."⁶⁶

The Approach the State Department took with this particular Muslim hip-hop group was to demonstrate to Muslims from outside of America that the United States is a diverse country to the point that it welcomes religious tolerance "employing a beloved American art form."⁶⁷ From the State Department's viewpoint, "these connections can not only enhance the image of the United States Abroad, it could also improve security."⁶⁸

Hip-Hop is quite an interesting element to use within the diplomatic apparatus of the United States. Even former secretary of state Hilary Clinton seemed to suggest that it could be a chess piece within the diplomatic arena.⁶⁹ It is flexible enough to resonate with those marginalized, enough so that they find a community that decides to channel their discontent in a way that questions the overall structure of the system/ society. It is adaptable enough to be recognized by the government as being a resource important enough to be used by a government organ.

4. Different State Department sponsored programs and their functionality.

In more recent times, 2013, the State Department introduced a newer program that functions in a similar manner as the Rhythm and Road did. This program however exclusively focuses on Hip-Hop and promotes exchange programs. This program named 'Next Level' brings the focus "to small-scale workshops and other participatory programs

⁶⁵ Katz, 157.

⁶⁶ Katz, 157.

⁶⁷ Katz, 158.

⁶⁸ Katz, 158.

⁶⁹ Katz, 92.

aimed at fostering connections between visiting American artists and citizens of host nations.”⁷⁰

The way this program works is that Hip-Hop practitioners, artists and educators are selected, grouped into teams and sent overseas where they participate in workshops with local populations. It is administered by the State Department in collaboration with the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill’s department of music and the Meridian International Center. The idea behind this novel initiative is to foster mutual understanding and connection between visiting American artists and citizens of both nations.⁷¹ Again, using Hip-Hop as the structural basis or as the catalyst, conflict resolutions discussions are being held, and tactics are being taught to those who attend the workshops. For example, “Hip Hop artists Charles Burchell (Beatmaker), Daniel Zarazua (DJ), Moné “Medusa” Smith (MC), and Danny J. “Dan Tres Omi” Rodriguez (Dancer), visited El Salvador held workshops and interacted with the Youths.”⁷² “El Salvador is known for harboring the “world’s most dangerous gang” ⁷³(the Mara Salvatrucha – MS13). Gang lifestyle is quite attractive to those who happen to be young, less fortunate, and reside in El Salvador⁷⁴. Joining the gang as a youngster, specializing in gang activity and potentially immigrating to the United States in the future might not be an option the State Department would want to entertain, as it could be a threat to national security. It is a form of power that would not resonate with what is deemed acceptable by the United States. Again, Hip-Hop is a tool amongst many others that can be employed by the State Department to prevent youths from joining that organization, or any such organization which has been known to cause havoc on the streets of the United States.

⁷⁰ Adam Bradley, “In this U.S. government program, diplomacy has a hip-hop beat,” *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/in-this-us-government-program-diplomacy-has-a-hip-hop-beat/2019/12/13/c98634d6-f72b-11e9-8cf0-4cc99f74d127_story.html.

⁷¹ “El Salvador,” Next Level, accessed June 21, 2020, <https://www.nextlevel-usa.org/wha/el-salvador>.

⁷² “El Salvador.”

⁷³ Kelly Padgett Lineberger, “The United States - El Salvador Extradition Treaty: A Dated Obstacle in the Transnational War against Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) Note,” *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 44, no. 1 (2011): 190.

⁷⁴ Lineberger, 193.

Conflict resolution or prevention have been quite essential in this particular context and Hip-Hop is one of the tools that can help in this particular situation. The program's website even indicated that, "beyond focusing on Hip-Hop artistry and technique, the San Salvador Academy used Hip-Hop as a means to discuss the ongoing violence in El Salvador and its impact on the daily lives of the participants."⁷⁵

In recap, under the Jazz Ambassador's program that was operational during the Cold War that, we learned that successful, mainstream Jazz musicians were utilized and sent in one area of the world, and "Ping Pong diplomats" were sent to another during the same Cold War era. For contextual purposes, we need to comprehend that from the times of the Cold War until now, the understanding of power has changed. We have to understand and acknowledge that the methods employed by the State Department to conduct diplomacy differ from each other because they are individually designed to meet the challenges faced at the time. The State Department has developed a sense of situational awareness and is quite sensitive to the regional context it gets itself into. Now, we also recognize that the concepts of liberalism and power relations that prevail within the world orient the designs and usages of the (soft power) methods the State Department utilizes. The bipolar world order that prevailed during the Cold War is no longer present. This attest to the fashion within which the State Department deals with particular troublesome situations. Scholar Stefano Guzzini theorized that "global politics is increasingly characterized by debates and struggles over what type of governing is seen as appropriate for different groups and phenomena."⁷⁶ Not one seldom solution could therefore be proposed by the State Department to address all the power displaying terrains it is trying to reach.

⁷⁵ "El Salvador."

⁷⁶ Guzzini, "The Ambivalent 'Diffusion of Power' in Global Governance," .

5. *Reasons for Hip Hop*

It is very important to restate and reinforce the idea that the world keeps changing and developing. The concept of power by default keeps evolving. The State Department is indubitably aware of that fact and is astutely looking to meet the demands of this new world order. We can even refer to the work of scholar John J. Mearsheimer who theorized that, after the end of the Cold War, a multipolar world order emerged.⁷⁷ Based off that, we can ascertain that power relations behave differently between actors. Whether it be on a local level, national level, or on a regional level, state and non-state actors etc., power is present and nowadays demonstrated via diverse channels. In other words, power has been diffused and is no longer concentrated into a bipolar world order as it was the case during the Cold War era. Scholar Stefano Guzzini theorized that “the shift towards neo-liberal governmentality involves the responsabilization and disciplining of the diaspora, while at the same time opening space for resistance and empowerment.”⁷⁸

Viewing this idea from the perspective of the State Department is to comprehend that there are numerous hotbeds of resistance, violence and more that have emerged and that are still in activity. These particular hotbeds operate within a spectrum of power that is contrary to the State Department’s ideal. In some areas of the world, they might be driven by religion; in others, they might be driven by poverty etc.

If for example, we take a look at what is defined as “terrorism”, the former chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations, Peter G Peterson argues that “ a consensus is emerging, made urgent by the war on terrorism, that U.S public diplomacy requires a commitment to a

⁷⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security* 43, no. 4 (April 1, 2019): 7–50, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342.

⁷⁸ Guzzini, “The Ambivalent ‘Diffusion of Power’ in Global Governance,” .

new foreign policy thinking and new structures.”⁷⁹ When we zero-in on a specific kind of terrorism, that being ‘Islamic Terrorism’, according to the Pew research center, it proliferates more in mostly Arabic areas of the world where the Islam is the predominant religion.⁸⁰ The State Department, well aware of these new challenges and threats to America, might argue that the mechanisms that were used in the past to quell former ‘problems’ might not be adapted to these newer challenges. This is where Hip-Hop as a culture becomes handy to the State Department. Not only is Hip-Hop culture a movement that breeds a ‘cool’ element domestically, it is enamored by youths around the world.⁸¹

The State Department looks to penetrate “problem areas” within the globe through the utilization of American culture – (Hip-Hop) - to impact the youths abroad and format their ideologies before they fall into the trap of honing negative ideas towards the United States. Hip Hop, and underground hip-hop to be exact, is the perfect element that would resonate with those who are “marginal” from the State Department viewpoint. American underground hip-hop artists don’t particularly like everything about the United States as they decry all the injustices present in their music. They promote a certain critique of the US’s way of life that condemns the system. They express themselves via hip-hop and they are not using terrorism or physical violence. The youths from those “troubled areas”, that the State Department is looking to seduce could certainly relate to them. They might hone a hatred centered towards certain aspects of the United States, just like the artists do and they could learn not to resort to violence or terrorism but find other ways – such as hip-hop – to redirect their anger towards the United States.

⁷⁹ Peter G. Peterson, “Public Diplomacy and the War on Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2002): 74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20033270>.

⁸⁰ 1615 L. St NW, Suite 800 Washington, and DC 20036 USA 202-419-4300 | Main 202-857-8562 | Fax 202-419-4372 | Media Inquiries, “Where Terrorism Finds Support in the Muslim World,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project* (blog), April 1, 2010, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2006/05/23/where-terrorism-finds-support-in-the-muslim-world/>.

⁸¹ Carl Taylor and Virgil Taylor, “Hip Hop Is Now: An Evolving Youth Culture,” *Reclaiming Children & Youth* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 210–13.

The ideology embodied within Hip-Hop suggests that any individual can extirpate himself from the detrimental, hateful, negative physical and psychological conditions that might surround and hamper his existence; cultivate and conserve his essence that he has generated living within such circumstances; the codes, information, language etc. develop and harbor a hatred for the conditions out of which he/she comes from and most importantly, transmute that hatred into a format that's accepted by the society – becoming a version of himself better than what the condition out of which he/she emerged wanted to dictate, while retaining the authenticity of his/her person. Simply put, this would entail that you can protest in a song, a painting, graffiti, a dance etc. and still be welcomed and accepted by society at the same time. That is exactly what goes on in the United States with Hip-Hop artists and especially underground hip-hop musicians as their protests via musical formats are in an acceptable form for the system and US governmental establishment. As it was mentioned earlier, the State Department makes sure to send underground hip-hop artists as opposed to mainstream commercial ones because; the youths in those “troubled areas” would relate more to these underground artists due to that very particular fact.

In the end, from the State Department's view, utilizing Hip-Hop directly feeds into the overall promotion of democracy and civil society. It helps ignite bottom-up pro-democratic sentiment, which generally tends to suppress all anti-establishment rhetoric. In a way, by being part of the Hip-Hop culture, the message being sent is that you do not necessarily need to love the US, but you need to learn how to hate what is wrong in your neck of the woods. Hip-Hop promotes American values of freedom, respectful protest, etc. in a seductive way. It is not about violently demanding change or acceptance from the other party, but a realization and understanding that “we are the same and in this together”. The State Department uses counter cultural hip-hop not to overtly promote the US way of life but rather to promote a certain kind of critique that is acceptable. That is the message the State

Department is looking to send by welcoming Hip Hop into its diplomatic arsenal of soft power.

Conclusion

We have now come to the end of our Hip-Hop odyssey with the State Department. We set out to understand the way in which Hip Hop was used by the US State Department as a measure of soft power. In order to do that, we initially had to ascertain the many understandings of power leading up to soft power; following that, we briefly looked at the history of Hip-Hop – understanding the difference between commercial hip-hop and underground hip-hop; then ultimately, we looked at the State Department’s relationship with Hip-Hop and its usage abroad. The research determined that under its cultural diplomacy programs, the State Department uses Hip Hop as a soft power measure by sending particular countercultural Hip-Hop artists to select ‘agitated’ areas of the world. Their hope is that their manner of “permissible objecting” of the United States could translate to those youths abroad also dissatisfied with United States – especially those youth potentially thinking of protesting in a more unconventional (violent) - unacceptable way.

Soft power as a concept has held an influential and impactful position within the United States diplomatic efforts for centuries. We have to remember that by definition, soft power’s attribute is to seduce and or convince an actor to engage or participate in seeing another actor in a positive light. When we look at the Cold War for example, the United States elected to coerce two nations by utilizing two very unique and independent solutions from each other. We learned about the Jazz diplomacy program as well as of the Ping Pong diplomacy program that were respectively introduced in the former Soviet Union and in China. Even though the cold war indicates the time period within which these events transpired, the United States understood not to provide a single solution to all areas it had

wanted to apply its diplomatic efforts to. The US rather elected to adapt to situations that presented themselves, and adequately addressed the issues – with the hopes of resolving it. Then we saw that Hip-Hop culture, especially underground hip-hop music, is the weapon of choice for penetrating certain areas of the world nowadays – notably areas within the Arab world that might be plagued with terrorism, as well areas within South America such as El Salvador that could be plagued with gang violence. This is a consequence of the multipolar world within which the United States operates. New threats emerge from all over the world on a consistent, recurrent basis. Safe to say that not only does Hip-Hop have this particularity of being revered and appreciated throughout the world, it can serve the State Department quite well. Commercial hip-hop might not necessarily fit the bill that the State Department is looking to serve as opposed to underground hip-hop. The reason being that there is a recognition from the part of the State Department that the message produced by underground hip-hop musicians, which in all honesty, quite often subscribes to the genre of protest music and or sentiments of marginalization, discrimination etc. as a golden export opportunity for youths in troubled areas. African-Americans artists decrying their displeasure and dislike of the United States via songs as opposed to afflicting violence on the street of the United States is the soft power technique by excellence that shall be presented to youths in the areas the State Department sponsored programs such as next Level and Rhythm and Road operate. These techniques can demonstrate to the youths from those areas that are listening and participating to the concerts and workshops, that there are other ways to dislike the United States not called violence. From the United States perspective, pacifist methods of protests are absolutely tolerated and most certainly welcomed.

This research looked at a particular aspect of Hip-Hop usage within the State Department as a soft power measure. It might be too early to tell whether Hip-Hop works or not, or exactly how effective it is at preventing individuals to delve into a level of negativity

that would potentially become a threat for American society. We did not do a full-on empirical research to determine the degree to which Hip-Hop has prevented people originating from predominantly Arab Muslim countries or South American nations such as El Salvador etc. to join terrorist organizations or gangs. We only made some tentative assessments based on our research being focused on soft power as a tool used by the State Department. There may be a need for further research on the topic, bringing in empirical data in order to assess whether or not Hip-Hop diplomacy has benefited US diplomatic efforts by reducing the number of youths joining terrorists' organizations, or if gang activity has diminished etc. This thesis prepared the ground for that research to come about.

Joseph Nye even mentioned that “when a country’s culture includes universal values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty that it creates.”⁸² We are clearly seeing that via the State Department’s use of Hip Hop as a soft power instrument.

⁸² Nye, “Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics - Joseph S. Nye Jr. - Public Affairs,” 38.

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