



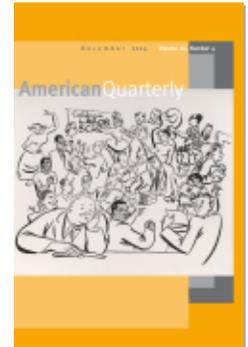
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American Quarterly, Volume 61, Number 3, September 2009, pp. 671-692
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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“My FEMA People”: Hip-Hop as Disaster Recovery in the Katrina Diaspora

Zenia Kish

Within two weeks of Hurricane Katrina touching down on the coast just east of New Orleans on August 29, 2005, Mos Def had penned, recorded and performed a searing critique of the rescue effort in his song “Katrina Klap.” Later renamed “Dollar Day,” the song laments the “water water everywhere and babies dead in the street,” and damns President George W. Bush’s “policy for handlin the niggaz and trash.” Ending with a call to action, Def urges sympathizers to not only “talk about it,” but “be about it.”¹ A year later, on August 31, 2006, the rapper pulled a flatbed truck in front of Radio City Music Hall in New York City where the MTV Video Music Awards were being recorded, and launched an impromptu performance of “Katrina Klap.” Drawing a large crowd, he was promptly arrested by New York City police for disorderly conduct. Discharged the following day, Def’s publicist issued a statement that declared: “Mos Def chose to use his voice to speak for those who are losing their own during this critical period of reconstruction.”²

The immediate effects of Katrina were stark: more than 800,000 Gulf residents displaced, approximately 1,500 dead, and tens of thousands left behind in the flooding city without food, water, or a means of escape.³ Appalled by the suffering, many hip-hop artists, from New Orleans and nationwide, recorded tracks decrying the tragedy and branding those seen to be responsible. From underground New Orleans bounce artists like the 504 Boyz, Mia X, and 5th Ward Weebie to some of mainstream hip-hop’s most recognized names, including Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, and Public Enemy, a veritable subgenre of Katrina hip-hop was born on waves of backlash against the unnecessary suffering and institutional failure that transformed the natural disaster of Katrina into a national one. Folding individual stories of suffering into larger structural critiques of the human catastrophe, these musical responses both engaged the violence, racism, displacement, and vulnerability that came to represent the experiences of the Katrina diaspora, and became a cultural force of identification and activism that intervened in constructions of the event as a national emergency.

Although politicians, the media and witnesses repeatedly asserted that Katrina was without precedent in U.S. history, the experience of massive upheaval and displacement in the face of natural disaster was not new for the African-American community. The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and the Vanport Flood of 1948 in Oregon both provoked massive waves of African-American relocation. In each case, black and often poor communities bore a disproportionate share of the environmental and economic risks of natural disaster as underwritten by discriminatory housing, job distribution, and rescue efforts.⁴ These floods, along with epochal forces such as Abolition, Reconstruction, and the Dust Bowl, have made migration one of the enduring thematics of black cultural production: musical forms from minstrelsy to the blues to hip-hop work through the dislocation and urgency of cultural survival provoked by a history of forced migration. Often unable to return, the African-American migrant is repeatedly figured as a stranger in search of a new home. To the surrounding community, this stranger was a *refugee* whose foreignness marks the limits of majoritarian identity and hospitality.⁵

The United States' ambivalence toward refugees greeted Katrina's predominantly poor and black evacuees in the wake of the storm. Literally called refugees by most politicians and the mass media in the first week after the hurricane, the displaced population was also figuratively construed as outside the norms of middle-class white citizenship—and indeed, a threat to it. Across the mediascape, evacuees were depicted as anonymous black masses, poor and often dangerous, and their apparent vulnerability became framed as a long-term drain on American resources and government spending.⁶ The designation of refugee helped construct the exceptional—and exceptionally *un-American*—nature of the emergency: images of the disaster defied the belief that a humanitarian catastrophe of this magnitude couldn't happen *here*, in the United States.

The black public sphere responded immediately. Black activists protested the xenophobic racism and disenfranchisement suggested by the use of the term *refugee*, and post-Katrina hip-hop became vital in disrupting such discourse by asserting a politics of voice against a regime of representation in which black and poor suffering bodies were everywhere seen, but very rarely heard from. As a political strategy, giving voice to “those who are losing their own” is an attempt to lay claim to what Peter Nyers calls the “onto-political status of a speaking being,” by which outsiders or aliens, defined by legal or other forms of social exclusion, may interrupt the dominant political—which is to say *speaking*—order, “not just to be heard, but to be recognized as a speaking being as such.”⁷

I will explore how the aesthetic strategies and logics of intelligibility given form in Katrina protest hip-hop narrate experiences of exile and persecution, expendability and community, vulnerability and renewal in the wake of an American tragedy. Attempting to speak for the voiceless is always a fraught project, and hip-hop artists combined musical modes of resistance with strains of self-critique that recognized the contradictory location of rap within the commercial music industry, which itself capitalizes off of a culture of consumption that valorizes spectacle, violence, and racialized exploitation. In Katrina hip-hop we can thus hear a plurality of speaking positions, grappling with identification, empowerment, and objectification in response to a collective trauma that was both local and constitutive of what Mos Def identifies as “the storm called . . . America.”

In particular, I am interested in the ways in which these themes are refracted through the figure of the refugee. I will examine how both national and local New Orleans artists identify with and rebel against the forces of marginalization that produced different senses of being a refugee, and also how they exploit marginality and the hustle as strategies to return home, however different or new that home may be. Providing listeners with an affective mapping of the social, economic, and discursive contradictions that produced the Katrina diaspora as refugees, post-Katrina hip-hop is a critical site for interrogating the ongoing tragedy of African American bodies that don't matter.

Music and Displacement

Surveying twentieth century black American migration narratives in fiction and song, Farah Jasmine Griffin observes that far from tending towards integrated or static representations of displacement, these narratives are “as diverse as the people and the times that create them.”⁸ Interpreting new urbanisms, articulating the development of modern black power, and, in some cases, expressing a desire to return to the South, migration narratives voice the complex emotional and social experiences of divided communities and structural homelessness that follow in the wake of displacement. Survival, however, often became the starting point for cultural rebirth among African-American communities as scattered evacuees regrouped in new areas, forged new musical collaborations, and invented expressions for their experiences and hopes.

Flooding 26,000 square miles up to a depth of 30 feet and displacing an estimated 700,000 people, up to 300,000 of whom were African Americans, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 sparked a phenomenal outpouring of blues music that transcribed this historical moment.⁹ This creative proliferation of

music contributed to the elaboration of what Clyde Woods terms the “blues epistemology.” For Woods, the blues grew out of specific social and historical conditions grounded in the plantation economy to become not just an aesthetic movement but also a complex *epistemology*, a mode of knowing and interpreting the world, motivated to achieve an “autonomy of thought and action in the midst of constant surveillance and violence.”¹⁰ Where the early blues served to “sp[ea]k the desires which were released in the dramatic shift in social relations that occurred in a historical moment of crisis and dislocation,” as Hazel Carby observes, I would argue that the post-Katrina moment is the first time that mainstream American hip-hop has taken up the thematic of *contemporary* black migration as a mass phenomenon in any significant way.¹¹ The resulting musical structure of feeling marks a significant contribution to the history of black American creative output in response to disaster.

Inheriting much from the blues tradition, hip-hop continues to develop the productive tension in the blues between a narrative drive for coherence and development, and the reflexivity of structured repetition and recursion. On the one hand, William Jelani Cobb identifies hip-hop as the “folklore of the twenty-first century” wherein MCs’ narratives extend the blues tradition of story-telling such that hip-hop is now “so central to the development of the post-civil-rights generation of black people that it’s nearly impossible to separate the music from our politics, economic realities, gains, and collective shortcomings.”¹² Supplementing hip-hop’s narrative functions, Robert Walser stresses the importance of the music’s creation of “horizons of expectation that enable dialogue and participation” and the joy it takes in repetition, thus destabilizing and challenging the flow of the very narrative that it tells. This is especially so in the case of diasporic narratives, which are invested in the teleological progression from origin to resettlement.¹³ “The homeland,” writes Jasbir Puar of diasporic cultural productions, “is not represented only as a demographic, a geographical place, nor primarily through history, memory, or even trauma, but is cohered through sensation, vibrations, echoes, speed, feedback loops, recursive folds, and feelings.”¹⁴

The tension thus produced between musical and lyrical forms, and between progression and repetition, opens up access points to the political interventions animating Katrina hip-hop. These tensions, however, also expose the seams of unequal power relations that can be reconstituted through restrictive models of gender, agency, sexuality, racial identity, exploitation, and representation mobilized in the music. Space and time are also reconfigured through narrative and musical forms, and it is often claims for repetition and return in Katrina protest hip-hop, rather than demands for a clean break from the

past, that are its most revolutionary features. At the same time, investing in repetition as return—to New Orleans as well as to African American histories of migration—hip-hop narrates the progressive adaptations and innovations of black American communities.

Where New Orleans At? Bounce and Katrina

Musicologist David Evans observed of the blues music produced after the 1927 flood in Mississippi that most of the songs were written from the position of having personally experienced the storm, even when the songwriter had not. It is striking that so much hip-hop about Katrina likewise directly addresses audiences from a first-person speaking voice, regardless of the artist's origins in or lack of connection to New Orleans, lending the music candor and emotional urgency. This is particularly the case in bounce, a form of hip-hop born in New Orleans. From New Orleans resident Mia X's colorful rap "My FEMA People" to Chopper's "Crescent City Crisis" to 5th Ward Weebie's disaster anthem, "Fuck Katrina (The Katrina Song)," much of the hip-hop after the flood narrated, from an often collective first-person perspective, the frustrations, humiliations, and pleasures grounded in specifically local knowledge of the multiple socioeconomic disasters that intersected with Katrina. Deeply rooted in, and for the most part bounded by, the geography and social relations of New Orleans, bounce was transformed by a new activist engagement that arose as the music remapped its conventional identifications with its audience, the spaces of the city and its own musical forms.

Born in the late 1980s and oriented toward dancing, bounce has consistently used two basic, up-tempo beats—Triggaman and Brown Beat—as well as highly repetitive hooks, a heavy reliance on call-and-response with the audience, and simple lyrics. Music journalist Nik Cohn notes that "In days gone by, 95 percent were sex and violence songs" meant to get people dancing in the clubs or courtyards of housing developments where bounce has always been a fixture of block parties.¹⁵ The music has always been explicitly articulated in relation to the city's geographical features and social world, with constant references to natural landmarks, famous shops, housing projects, and neighborhood rivalries. Many rappers, for example, assume aliases that cite (and site) where they grew up, including 5th Ward Weebie and 10th Ward Buck. Songs often fix on specific spatial referents, such as Juvenile's 2003 song "Nolia Clap,"¹⁶ which is named after a housing project nicknamed the Magnolia, and is filled with shout-outs to different areas of the city ("Where that Iberville at? The Eighth Ward at?").

The music emerges from the charged social networks formed in New Orleans's high density public housing, which was one of the poorest and most ghettoized cities in the country when Katrina hit, and rappers often addressed their music to audiences they knew intimately.¹⁷ In addition to lyrical self-referentiality, bounce also reproduces localism musically through sampling patterns, rhythms, and sounds drawn largely from autochthonous music history. After Katrina, signification of the local inhabited these familiar musical forms in entirely new ways, pushing them to express new configurations of space, distance, and community by engaging with the meaning of home now that most bounce artists were far away from it. It was, according to some observers, a radical politicization of a previously ludic form of music-making.¹⁸

In her song "My FEMA People," veteran Seventh Ward resident Mia X raps,

*Ride through my city
Beirut. Iraq. Ride through my city
I ride and cry all through the city
Looking for the culture all through the city
We were left for dead for vultures all through the city
It's so much bigger than the weather*¹⁹

Rather than attempting to speak for those apparently losing their voices, as Mos Def claimed to do, Mia X situates herself in conversation with those she hears all around her. Her relationship to the site of devastation allows her to move through the city and recognize how it has changed, but it also moves her to link New Orleans to a global matrix not of natural disasters, but of foreign war zones.

New Orleans is presented in the song as a city under siege on multiple fronts. The reference to Beirut connotes a long drawn-out civil war, analogizing the violence and self-destructive crime that made New Orleans one of the most dangerous cities in the United States prior to Katrina. But the Lebanese Civil War was also fought against external occupying forces, and X's reference implicates foreign forces in the local proliferation of violence.²⁰ X is commenting on the violent rhetoric that saturated public discourse in the chaos immediately following the storm. In response to the appearance of anarchy in the streets, martial law was imposed in the disaster zone and Louisiana governor Kathleen Blanco issued her infamous "shoot-to-kill" order to soldiers to halt looting. "These troops are . . . under my orders to restore order in the streets," Blanco told the media. "They have M16s, and they are locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill and they are more than willing to do so if necessary and I expect they will."²¹

Mia X's reference to Iraq suggests parallels between local and international occupation by U.S. imperial interests, but also cites economic exploitation by the oil industry—whether the extractive industries of the Persian Gulf, or the refineries off the Louisiana shore in the Mexican Gulf—which generates enormous wealth in areas that consistently rank among the poorest in their respective regions. Implicit in Mia X's "ride through my city" is an open predicate that implies the singer is moving through her city, looking for the life that used to be there, but it could also be read to take Beirut and Iraq as its subjects, as though these foreign disasters are themselves moving through her city, hunting down local lives and cultural forms as its targets.

New Orleans artist 5th Ward Weebie also expresses the ire of forced homelessness on his track "Fuck Katrina (The Katrina Song)," which became something of an anthem for the Katrina diaspora after he first improvised it onstage at a club night for evacuees in Houston, October 2005. Working up the audience, he played the prerecorded FEMA phone message that frustrated many evacuees trying to contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency for assistance or the infamous second support check that everyone was promised and no one seemed to receive. After playing the message, he burst into a chorus of "Fuck Katrina!" calling back and forth with the audience as it erupted in dance to the novel combination of political invective and a familiar bounce beat. Weebie disses George Bush and the Red Cross for abandoning storm victims, and personifies Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as "hoes" who "fuck over my people." At the end of the song, Weebie inverts the practice of shouting out to specific locations in the city as a metonymic address to one's friends or acquaintances. Instead, Weebie invokes the city's wards, districts, and housing projects like Calliope and Iberville to name not the people who lived there, but rather their absence and the suffering they continue to experience now that they have left:

*Ninth Ward shattered
Eighth Ward suffered
Seventh Ward gone but my man said fuck it
Sixth Ward empty
Fifth Ward through
Calliope and Iberville ain't a thing we can do*²²

Many bounce songs written post-Katrina channeled the anger, fear and sadness of evacuating New Orleans as it drowned. These songs were often born at music nights in relocation centers such as Houston and Atlanta, and served as much to reclaim community bonds and suggest strategies for getting home as to lodge criticism. Cursing Katrina, George Bush, and FEMA,

the dancehall music addresses audiences directly and invites the release and spontaneity of dance and being together. Strength, they suggest, will arise collectively. In the post-Katrina context, bounce takes on new meanings as both strategy and metaphor for survival, a rebounding on the dance floor as well as into new ways of life, a pleasure-filled resilience in the face of adverse conditions. Two months after Katrina touched down, New Orleans producers Master P and the 504 Boyz released a compilation CD dedicated to disaster victims titled “Hurricane Katrina: We Gon’ Bounce Back.” The theme of bouncing runs throughout the collection, and proposes the music itself as an inseparable aspect of New Orleans’ renewal. As Halleluyah raps on the title track, “Now let me tell you we gon’ bounce back, bounce back/ I’m straight New Orleans like a bounce track, bounce track.”²³

Mainstream Hip-Hop Represents

While New Orleans rappers spoke from direct experience, refusing alienating labels such as “refugees” by expressing the traumas of Katrina as something artists and audiences underwent together and could only recover from collectively, many mainstream hip-hop artists took up Katrina as a political cause with broader import. Some mainstream artists like Lil Wayne and Juvenile grew up in New Orleans, continue to have strong ties to the city, and in several cases, lost property, friends or family members to the storm. Others such as Kanye West, Papoose, Chuck D, and Mos Def had no direct links to the region, but felt moved by their identification with the victims of entrenched racism and hierarchies of power. Appearing on an NBC telethon for Katrina survivors in the first days of September, West went off-script, saying, “I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a black family, it says, ‘They’re looting.’ You see a white family, it says, ‘They’re looking for food.’”²⁴ From this perspective, then, it wasn’t only residents of the disaster zone who were being victimized, but the African-American community more generally. Blame for the systemic disenfranchisement was frequently attributed to George Bush and the government for devaluing the lives of the poor and African Americans to the extent that they were abandoned and, following Foucault’s formulation of the racist calculus of biopower, “let die” while others were made to live.²⁵

The mainstream hip-hop discourse shared some features with New Orleans-based artists, but often diverged in its political agenda and scope of critique. Continuous with some New Orleans rappers, many professional artists anchor their critiques in the geography of human disaster by mapping the local in relation to global sites of poverty, such as Haiti, or zones of U.S. military

intervention, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Numerous rappers also comment on the spatial refraction of the disaster via technologies of representation and surveillance, which distorted images of the disaster and distanced the media (and by extension, media audiences) from the unfolding events, discouraging personal involvement. Jay-Z, for example, raps, “Helicopter swooped down just to get a scoop/ Through his telescopic lens but he didn’t scoop you”²⁶ and Juvenile concurs, “Fuck Fox News! I don’t listen to y’all ass/ Couldn’t get a nigga off the roof with a star pass.”²⁷

One of the catchiest songs to hit the street following Katrina was “George Bush Doesn’t Care About Black People”²⁸ by The Legendary K.O., also known as K-Otix, a rap group out of Houston. One of the largest destinations for those fleeing the disaster zone, Houston extended assistance and shelter to many thousands in need through a broad network of grassroots and national non-profit organizations, but also manifested xenophobic fears of hurricane transplants. Media reports sensationalized violent crime committed by evacuees, and high-profile comments by locals such as Barbara Bush betrayed a deep ambivalence regarding the influx of apparent outsiders.²⁹

K-Otix released “George Bush Doesn’t Care About Black People” online on September 6, just one week after the storm, and it very quickly gained publicity through radio play and internet-circulated videos; the first day the song was available online, it received 10,000 downloads.³⁰ The song in part ventriloquizes a first-hand account of living through the storm, thus constructing intimacy with diaspora audiences in Houston, and in part lashes out at those deemed responsible for the rescue failure, especially George Bush. K-Otix member Micah Nickerson comments that the song was born of a desire to put the lived experiences of the storm in the context of the structural problems that multiplied human suffering: “I had really wanted to write about this in the first-person, as someone stuck in New Orleans and left by this administration to basically fend for myself, but was having trouble putting the emotions I felt into words. When I heard Kanye during the benefit, the rest as they say was history.”

The group raps over the music of Kanye West’s popular 2005 song “Gold Digger,” in which West slams a woman he perceives as a materialistic manipulator who uses her wiles and sex appeal to seduce him, and then drains his bank account. In the chorus of the West song, Jamie Foxx sings “She take my money, well I’m in need/ Yeah she’s a triffin’ friend indeed/ Oh she’s a gold digger way over time/ That digs on me.”³¹ West’s song is itself an inversion of Ray Charles’s song “I Got a Woman” in which Charles extols the beauty and generosity of a lover who gives him money and “saves her lovin just for

me”³² (Charles’ vocals can be heard in the background of the K-Otix version). In the K-Otix song, West’s music and Foxx’s vocal line are kept, but George Bush is interpolated as the gold digger, and West’s infamous denunciation of Bush on the NBC telethon, “George Bush doesn’t care about black people,” is paraphrased and made into the chorus:

(Foxx: *She take my money . . .*)
I ain’t sayin he a gold digger
(. . . when I’m in need)
But he ain’t messin with no broke niggaz
(I gotta leave)
*George Bush don’t like black people*³³

The song shifts voices and perspective, at times speaking from the perspective of a New Orleans resident stuck on his roof, at others turning to directly address George Bush, who took nearly a week to visit the Gulf Coast because he was on vacation: “Five damn days, five long days/And at the end of the fifth you walkin’ in like, ‘Hey!’”³⁴ The narration then reverts to third-person references to Bush, and decries the president’s apparent indifference to the region’s most exposed, and apparently disposable, populations:

I guess Bush said niggaz been used to dyin
He said, “I know it looks bad, just have to wait”
Forgettin folks who too broke to evacuate
Niggaz starvin and they dyin of thirst
I bet he had to go and check on them refineries first
Makin a killin off the price of gas
*He woulda been up in Connecticut twice as fast*³⁵

The seemingly simple musical structure of the song, which sounds at first listen like an endlessly repeating series of Foxx’s background vocal line set over a spare syncopated beat, is belied by complexities of voice, address, and shifting referents. Where Ray Charles celebrates a woman who saves her loving for him morning and night and gives him money when he’s in need, West’s female gold digger and K-Otix’s feminized Bush (“She take my money”) both benefit from not “messin with no broke niggaz.”³⁶ The lack of musical embellishment and repetitive rhythm collaborate with the constantly revolving historical referents of the song in ways that call on the cultural competence of audiences. “George Bush Doesn’t Care About Black People,” in other words, encourages an active listening that hears not only the changing gender and power relations implied in the evolving narratives of exploitation, but also,

significantly, the deliberate repetition of elements that are retained across these versions of the song.

Whereas Bush and the state are portrayed as heartless gold (and grave) diggers by K-Otix, many other rappers testify to the devaluation of black life using language that draws attention to the ways in which the color line in the United States is often experienced through structural economic inequities. Mos Def's "Katrina Klap (Dollar Day)" is dedicated to "the streets, the streets everywhere/ The streets affected by the storm called . . . America" and situates the poverty of the U.S. South within the global context in which almost half the world subsists on a dollar a day.³⁷ Dismissing "Mr. President" who is "'bout that cash," Mos Def notes that in the United States, "if you poor you black."³⁸ He connects the racially selective rescue efforts of the state with George Bush's larger biopolitical designs, such that the administration's response to Katrina serves as a synecdoche for the pervasive systems of racial oppression structuring American life. While asserting that Bush is "out treatin' niggaz worse than they treat the trash," he reasons through the mathematics of racialized state violence:

*No opinion my man it's mathematical fact
Listen, a million poor since 2004
And they got illions and killions to waste on the War
And make you question what the taxes is for
Or the cost to reinforce the broke levee wall
Tell the boss he shouldn't be the boss anymore³⁹*

Critiquing "dollar day" in New Orleans as symptomatic of the nation's hierarchies of distribution, Def's song also recognizes the individuals who suffered in the storm and pays tribute to local musical production by deriving his clap from the 2003 hit "Nolia Clap" by New Orleans rapper Juvenile. While he implores God to "save these streets/ One dollar per every human being," he also admonishes those around him to do more to help: "Quit bein cheap nigga, freedom ain't free! . . . Let's make them dollars stack/ And rebuild these streets." Although part of his declared agenda is "to use his voice to speak for those who are losing their own," Def is also adamant that talk isn't enough and ends his song by exhorting his listeners, "Don't talk about it, be about it." Mos Def himself continued to be active in fundraising and drawing public attention to the inequitable conditions of resettlement and reconstruction after the storm.

While many rappers from Mos Def to K-Otix to Jay-Z narrate cycles of poverty and racism that set the stage for the human disaster long before

Katrina hit shore, others work to undo the fiction that the black residents of the disaster zone were all economic deadweights. As wealthy residents of New Orleans, many local rappers situate themselves within the matrix of loss by enumerating their personal property losses: Lil Wayne, for example, laments losing two Jags in his song, “Georgia Bush,”⁴⁰ and rapper Juvenile and producer Master P were both known to have lost houses in the storm surge. Brooklynite Papoose takes his cue from New Orleans rappers when he opens his elegiac song “Mother Nature” boasting of his wealth, and asks why the property and citizenship of black residents are so easily devalued by the state and mass media:

*A lotta property was lost, crushed by the trees
Evacuated the city they was forced to leave
They was forced outta their homes; they would never leave
So why the media keep callin’ ‘em refugees?⁴¹*

He refutes the stereotype that urban black residents of New Orleans, and the Ninth Ward in particular, were unproductive or second-class members of society, inclined to homelessness like refugees: many in the most devastated neighborhoods were in fact homeowners. The Ninth Ward, renowned for being a working class neighborhood in a low-lying section of the city that was virtually razed by the floods, had a homeownership rate of more than 50 percent, one of the highest rates in the city. Many thus did not want to flee, and a large proportion of the evacuated had strong reasons to return. However, media sensationalism, combined with racist xenophobia in different evacuation receiver sites, produced a moral panic that gave local and national news media a good scoop.

Fear of the storm’s poor spilling over into the rest of the country became highly territorialized and at times assumed the language of sovereign protection against foreign invaders. For example, one white resident of Greensburg, 80 miles northwest of New Orleans, articulated his fears several weeks after the storm at a meeting regarding the temporary resettlement of evacuees in the town:

The only thing we see about these people in the news is what happened in the Superdome. They’re rapists and thugs and murderers. I’m telling you, half of them have criminal records. I’ve worked all my life to have what I have. I can’t lose it, and I can’t stand guard 24 hours a day.⁴²

Similarly, the black mayor of Baton Rouge lent authority to the racially charged prejudices already circulating when he declared to the press, “I want to make sure that some of these thugs and looters that are out shooting officers in New Orleans don’t come here and do the same. I am not going to allow a New Orleans situation, shooting at people and looting, to happen here in Baton Rouge.”⁴³ In the many cases like these where surrounding populations—but also farther afield in centers like Houston and Atlanta—feared the invasion of Katrina “refugees,” the storm survivors were cast as a threat to property and white privilege. They embodied a dangerous “remainder or excess” which, for Prem Kumar Rajaram, is recognizable in the figure of the refugee as “that which is expelled or which cannot fit, and is *out of place*, following the territorialization of life and of existence.”⁴⁴ It is within these various public discourses that Katrina hip-hop had to situate itself—both as a response to what was being said in the public sphere, and as a means to reinforce a sense of community, or at least shared suffering, by those being labeled and treated as refugees.

Chuck D assiduously observes that the devaluation of the racialized other is not merely a domestic issue, but is also reflected in the discursive and physical exporting of America’s problems to “faraway places” where they can appear to belong to someone else. In his protest lyric “Hell No (We Ain’t Alright),” written and recorded with Flavor Flav days after Katrina hit, Chuck D lashes out at the widespread objectification of victims, intoning that this is no longer “the same old keep it real,” in spite of what audiences are hearing:

*Disgraces, all I been seein is hurtin black faces
 Moved out to harm in faraway places
 (Flavor Flav: Emergency) statements, corpses, alligators, and snakes
 . . . (This ain’t no TV show) ain’t no video (this is really real!)
 Y’all hearin the same old keep it real⁴⁵*

While the mass media frequently resorted to representing the disaster zone as a place literally *other*, rendered vivid in frequent comparisons between the U.S. Gulf Coast and the 2004 Tsunami in Asia, third world refugee camps, and war zones, Katrina hip-hop often cut through such uncritical analogies to make not metaphorical but causal connections between the tragedy unfolding on home soil and foreign conflict zones. Juvenile, in his song “Get Your Hustle On,” points to government abandonment when he declaims, “We starving! We livin like Haiti without no government,”⁴⁶ while Mos Def bemoans the “illions and killions”⁴⁷ spent on the Iraq war instead of reinforcing levees and rescuing people, and Papoose is shocked that George Bush “took

a whole army wit him when he came to war/ But when he traveled to New Orleans he came with his dog.”⁴⁸ Chuck D. also observes that the making of an American third world is connected as much to dehumanizing regimes of mass media representation as to the Bush administration’s complicity with the global military industrial complex (to the neglect of, what rapper Chopper identifies as, “the battlefield”⁴⁹ at home). Chuck D:

*Now I see we be the new faces of refugees
 We ain't even overseas, but stuck here on our knees
 Forget the plasma TV, ain't no electricity
 New world's upside down and out of order
 Shelter? Food? Wassup (Flavor Flav: where's the water?)
 No answers from disaster, them masses burtin'
 So who the f- we call - Halliburton?
 Son of a Bush, how you wanna just trust that cat
 To fix shit, when all the help is stuck in Iraq?
 Makin war plans, takin more stands than Afghanistan
 2,000 soldiers there dyin in the sand . . .
 But that's over there, right? (What's over here?)
 Is a noise so loud
 That some can't hear
 But on TV I know that I can see
 Bunches of people
 Looking just like me
 And they ain't all right⁵⁰*

With the “New world upside down and out of order,” it is clear to Chuck D that the apparently exceptional nature of the disaster is in reality a corollary of the military, economic and cultural colonization subtending the project of the American modern.

While much post-Katrina hip-hop is deeply critical of the reifying gaze of the mass media, the failure of politicians, and the discriminatory actions of local and state police who Lil Wayne notes are “killas in my home,”⁵¹ there also emerged in the Katrina hip-hop epistemology a strain of heightened self-knowledge and self-criticism by rappers who recognized their own position in the structures of power and consumerism that contributed to the injustices they critiqued. Artists like Kanye West, Jay-Z, and Mos Def grapple in their music and public statements with being denigrated, as black men and as commercial musicians, by the same racist state, commercial media industry, and social structures that they buy into and profit from. When Kanye West went off script on the NBC Katrina fundraiser, he not only railed against the

bungling rescue effort, media mis-representations, and President Bush, but he also admitted his own culpability, telling TV audiences that

even for me to complain about it, I would be a hypocrite because I've tried to turn away from the TV because it's too hard to watch. I've even been shopping before giving a donation, so now I'm calling my business manager to see what is the biggest amount I can give, and just to imagine if I was down there, and those are my people down there.

Jay-Z concurs in his song “Minority Report,”

*Sure I ponied up a mill, but I didn't give my time
So in reality I didn't give a dime,
I just put my monies in the hands of the same people that left my people stranded
Nothin' but a bandit
Left them folks abandoned
Damn, that money that we gave was just a band-aid⁵²*

These references point up the self-consciousness some rappers feel about benefiting from the very structures of capitalist accumulation, exploitation, and consumerism that help perpetuate the polarization of privilege that divided those who could escape the storm from those who couldn't. The dynamic of *us* and *them*—the citizens successfully integrated into the American capitalist dream and those relegated to its peripheries—is therefore problematized in relation to the color line. On the one hand, rappers like Kanye and others with no personal links to New Orleans embrace all the victims of the storm as “my people,” while on the other, they are forced to admit that economic privilege in fact carves up the very racial community they wish to produce.

In response to the structures of exploitation and dehumanization acting on Katrina evacuees, many rappers call out to survivors to hustle their way back to agency, autonomy, and the restoration of selfhood. The hustler is seen to be economically productive and to construct new social networks. In “Georgia Bush,” New Orleans native Lil Wayne suggests that people in receiving cities show their goodwill by providing the displaced with means that will help them recover because Bush “ain't gonna drop no dollas.” “See us in ya city, man,” he raps, “give us a pound / Cuz if a nigga still movin then he holdin it down.”⁵³ 5th Ward Weebie and the 504 Boyz call for those who are in distant evacuation centers to hustle their way home, and Jay-Z promotes hustling as the only means by which Katrina evacuees can hold their own in the racialized economy of scarcity:

*For life is a chain, cause and effected
 Niggas off the chain because they affected
 It's a dirty game so whatever is effective
 From weed to selling kane, gotta put that in effect
 Wouldn't you loot, if you didn't have the loot?
 Baby needed food and you stuck on the roof⁵⁴*

Pointing out, along with K-Otix and others, the structural inequalities that already criminalize the black, especially male, body even before he acts, Jay-Z concludes that if the white person's "finding food" in a flooded store is automatically the black person's "looting," then agency and indeed survival can only be obtained by black minoritized bodies outside the law.

The call to hustle carries problematic connotations of both economic and sexual exploitation since the hustling recommended by these rappers reproduces their wealth through the exploitation of women's bodies and of the already impoverished drug-users in inner city neighborhoods. These economic enterprises tend to maintain themselves through cultures of violence; New Orleans was especially devastated by the drug wars of the 1990s and consistently high rates of murder, violent crime and incarceration afflicted the music industry as much as the wider community.⁵⁵ Others, however, counter that it is too simplistic to read figures such as pimps and hustlers in these reductive terms. Mark Anthony Neal, for example, suggests that rappers use these tropes to position themselves above the relations of exploitation: "It's the ultimate hustle, a hustle predicated on the hustle, or as writer Beth Coleman described it, an example of the pimp's ability to 'exploit exploitation.'"⁵⁶

Juvenile's Katrina song "Get Your Hustle On" supports this interpretation, urging evacuees to hustle the government—which is itself depicted as the ultimate exploitation operation under Bush the golddigger—for FEMA checks that they can turn around for profit by drug-dealing:

*Fuck [New Orleans Mayor Ray] Nagin!
 Ah-listen to me, I got the remedy
 Save your money up and find out who got 'em for 10 a ki'
 Bubble, if you don't hustle don't use your energy
 Cause you gon' be a cellmate or wind up as a memory
 . . . Everybody need a check from FEMA
 So he can go and sco' him some co-ca-llina⁵⁷*

The (presumably male) listeners addressed by Juvenile are expected not only to regain economic leverage where the state-built levees failed them, but also to rebuild their sense of community. This community is founded not only

on a rejection of the state that does not care for them (“your mayor ain’t your friend, he’s the enemy / Just to get your vote, a saint is what he pretend to be”), but also in the shared practice of preparing and selling street drugs. In the video for the song, Juvenile stands with his friends in a circle in the debris of the Lower Ninth Ward, collectively demonstrating with their hands how they prepare crack in Pyrex pipes: “We take the Pyrex and then we rock with it, roll with it/ Take the Pyrex and then we rock with it, roll with it!”⁵⁸

Arguably, these mainstream rappers are immersed in a musical economy that itself explicitly capitalizes off of sampling the works of other artists and turning their profit to some extent through their own creative recombinatory skills in circulating pre-existing cultural capital (“rock with it, roll with it!”). Hip-hop artists are deeply implicated in circuits of capital, branding, marketing, and consumption-fueled lifestyles, and their glamorized accumulation of private wealth and power is often perceived to be connected to (and profit from) the drug trade and cultures of violence—if not directly, then at least through their representations of drugs and violence. These discourses are reproduced through a typically gendered and homophobic logic that defines agency against the dependence and even abjection imputed to women and practitioners of nonnormative sexuality. This situates the music and its artists ambivalently in regard to many of their post-Katrina critiques of the violence of the biopolitical state, the production of categories of subhumanity, and the capitalist system of exploitation.

However, acknowledging, as some self-conscious rappers do, that these contradictions are constitutive of their ability to position themselves so as to voice political interventions in the public sphere, I would argue that it is important to recognize that the hustler—whether seen as liberated entrepreneur or as predator who capitalizes on further exploiting the exploited—functions in some significant ways as an answer to the figure of the refugee. The hustler is not cast outside the dominant political/speaking order by the sovereign right of exclusion like the refugee, but is instead conceived in Katrina hip-hop as a self-defining free agent who takes responsibility for himself and his immediate community. The aggressive gendering and heteronormativity of the hustler derives in large part from a defensive masculinity incubated in hip-hop culture, but also, in this context, serves to compensate for the dominant discursive splicing of Katrina survivors into criminally violent and looting young men on the one hand, and helpless racialized women, children, and elderly on the other. Rejecting these two denigrated models of deviance, the hustler positions himself outside the reach of law-enforcement and dependence on government aid, and instead fashions an autonomous social and economic sphere in which

his wealth and social standing are strengthened through predominantly masculine networks within his community and in the cities he visits.

The hustle is also a means of ensuring self-reproduction into the future: Juvenile raps that unless you're hustling, you will wind up in jail or just "a memory," and Jay-Z justifies hustling to meet the basic needs of feeding and sheltering one's children. Unlike the refugee, who, as Jay-Z reminds us, "seeks refuge," the hustler does not ask for or presumably desire inclusion in any preexisting community; spurning inclusion in the dominant political order, the hustler instead springs from necessity to empowerment, and, unlike the refugee, exposes no public vulnerability. Enriching himself and his immediate circle through recurrent circuits of exploitation, in some ways similar to the commercial hip-hop artist, the hustler also adapts to the challenges of his permuting environment and innovates new strategies of survival. Many post-Katrina rappers suggest that this figure has the power to resist the chronic homelessness characterizing the dominant African-American migration narrative by promising self-determination, and perhaps the only means to return home for those most disenfranchised by America's recurrent un-natural disasters.

Conclusion

As soon as Katrina degenerated into a human disaster, the discourse of Katrina "refugees" erupted into a charged controversy with some, such as Lou Dobbs, validating the label by claiming that it best reflected reality, while many others vocally disavowed the term as disenfranchising and demeaning.⁵⁹ Although many major news outlets and even President Bush came to denounce the use of the term, the aftereffects of the widely circulated portrait of the Katrina refugee remained. Everywhere depicted—when not "looting"—as long-suffering, unfortunate multitudes in need of rescue, Katrina survivors continued to be seen but not heard, used as an emblem of otherness for consumption by a presumptively white, middle-class public, but excluded from the rights and protections of full citizenship.⁶⁰ As blues and jazz artists have historically responded to the displacement of African Americans, hip-hop artists from New Orleans and the national stage intervened against regimes of representation that they saw to be inherently racist.

Voicing alternative interpretations of what was really going on was a vital practice of resistance for post-Katrina hip-hop, as both an epistemological project and as political activism. As an epistemological project, the music worked through various forms of racism, penetrating political and mass media responses to the disaster, and proposed new frameworks for understanding

what was happening. These frameworks included historicizing the economic and racial marginalization of Katrina victims as entrenched modes of biopolitical governance not only in the South, but as a national problem. They also included spatial mappings of the connections between events in the Gulf and U.S. interventions overseas, and attempted to make sense of the complex, and at times contradictory, vectors of distance that seamlessly collapsed New Orleans into the third world or Iraq, but at the same time rendered photographers and George Bush flying over the devastation too far away to assist those stranded on roofs. These epistemological frameworks destabilized the exceptionalist claims made throughout public discourse that Katrina was an unprecedented natural disaster, and forced a greater accounting of the inequities that have supported such human tragedies, including U.S. imperialism, throughout history.

As political expression, post-Katrina hip-hop voiced concern for those whose representation as refugees in their own land silenced them and devalued their lives. Many rappers negotiated the constitutive contradictions of, as Lil Wayne points out, being “born right here in the USA/ But due to tragedy, looked on by the whole world as a refugee,”⁶¹ and recognized that the story of Katrina is now a story of diaspora as much as it is about rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. While Katrina didn’t incite a large-scale return of the protest ethic that marked the early days of hip-hop, the hip-hop artists who did interrupt the silences of the storm registered self-conscious dissent against the historic cycles that produce black American diasporas as vulnerable and homeless.⁶² Corresponding with Jacques Rancière’s assertion that “Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account,” Katrina hip-hop calls for return but also, in the same act, disrupts the repetition of African-American disaster migration.⁶³ It locates new points of departure for politics: through professional artists who donate their money, music and voices; through the music’s aesthetic innovations; through local underground rappers who convene community in the diaspora and enact rites of return; and through the listeners who engage with those who do not deserve to be silenced yet again.

Notes

I would like to thank Clyde Woods, Michael Ralph, and Tavia Nyong’o for their help and input on this article, as well as the editors at *American Quarterly* for their feedback. I would also like to express gratitude to Darwin Bond-Graham for his suggestions at the earliest stages of this project.

1. Mos Def, “Dollar Day,” *True Magic*, Geffen, 2006.

2. Jayson Rodriguez, "Mos Def Arrested After Impromptu Performance Outside VMAs," *MTV News*, September 1, 2006, http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1539981/20060901/mos_def_j.html (accessed June 30, 2007).
3. John L. Beven II et al., "Annual Summary: Atlantic Hurricane Season of 2005," *Monthly Weather Review* 136.6 (March 2008): 1110–73; "Katrina's Diaspora," *The New York Times*, October 2, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2005/10/02/national/nationalspecial/20051002diaspora_graphic.html (accessed April 28, 2007); "Katrina Index Monthly Summary of Findings: March 2, 2006," Brookings Institution, http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/200603_KatrinaIndexes.pdf (accessed April 26, 2008). Another 750 were still missing and presumed dead more than a year later. Michelle Krupa, "Presumed Missing," *Times-Picayune*, March 5, 2006.
4. Jason David Rivera and DeMond Shondell Miller, "Continually Neglected: Situating Natural Disasters in the African American Experience," *Journal of Black Studies* 37.4 (March 2007): 502–22.
5. See Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xiii. On the development of the migration narrative in black music, see Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Who Set You Flowin?": *The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
6. The term *refugee* was ubiquitous in the mass media in the week following the storm, and was generally deployed to reinforce the exceptionality of the event in American history. Media watchdog Global Language Monitor released findings one week after the storm that the term *refugee* appeared in world media five times more frequently than the more neutral term *evacuee*. "Media Abounds with Apocalyptic-Type References in Coverage of Katrina," *Global Language Monitor*, September 7, 2005, <http://www.languagemonitor.com/Katrina.html> (accessed October 17, 2005).
7. Peter Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism: The Politics of Protection in the Anti-Deportation Movement," *Third World Quarterly* 24.6 (December 2003): 1078–93.
8. Griffin, "Who Set You Flowin?" 4.
9. "Delta Geography," Delta Cultural Center of the Department of Arkansas Culture, <http://www.deltaculturalcenter.com/geography/> (accessed October 8, 2008).
10. Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998), 29.
11. Hazel Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18.4 (Summer 1992): 738–56. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the themes of historical migration and diaspora are absent in hip-hop. Indeed, much American hip-hop production (as well as earlier blues, jazz, dub, and arguably electronic music and rock) is very much interested in themes of displacement, exile, and longing for distant homelands, usually in the South, the Caribbean, and Africa; just listen to Afrika Bambaataa or the Fugees or Talib Kweli, for example. Such music, however, generally relates diasporization to imagined and experienced *historical* displacements rather than contemporary migration.
12. William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip-Hop Aesthetic* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 4.
13. Robert Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy," *Ethnomusicology* 39.2 (Spring-Summer 1995): 193–217.
14. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 171.
15. Quoted in Bonisteel, Sara. "F— Katrina: New Orleans Hip-Hop Remembers the Hurricane." Fox News, August 28, 2006. Retrieved June 27, 2007, from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,210845,00.html>.
16. Juvenile/Skip/Wacko, "Nolia Clap," *The Beginning of the End*, Rap-A-Lot Records, ASYO 42046-CD, 2005.
17. 100 percent of public housing residents were black. See David Dante Troutt, "Many Thousands Gone, Again," in *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina*, ed. David Dante Troutt (New York: New Press, 2006), 3–28. A Brookings Institution study shows that in the 1990s, New Orleans was second among the nation's large metropolitan areas for locating tax-credit subsidized housing in extremely poor neighborhoods, and ranked first for locating such housing in predominantly black neighborhoods; Lance Freeman, "Siting Affordable Housing: Location and Neighborhood Trends of Low Income Housing Tax Credit Developments in the 1990s," Brookings Institution (April 2004), <http://www.brookings.edu/metro/katrina.htm> (accessed April 13, 2007). For more on the relations between the history of bounce and the geography of New Orleans, see

- Matt Miller, "Bounce: Rap Music and Cultural Survival in New Orleans," *HypheNation* 1.1 (April 2006): 15–31.
18. Bonisteel, 2006.
 19. Mia X cited in Bonisteel, 2006.
 20. In 2004, New Orleans logged a murder rate of 56 per 100,000 people, four and a half times the average for cities of similar size in the United States. The New Orleans police force has long been known for racism, internal corruption, and abuses of power. Nicole Gelinas, "New Orleans Still Drowning in Crime," *Dallas Morning News*, May 13, 2007, http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/points/stories/DN-gelinas_13edi.ART.State.Edition1.4310bb0.html (accessed November 15, 2008).
 21. Commenting on Blanco's order and media reports of wanton criminality among the stranded, right-wing pundit Robert Tracinski wrote, "There were many decent, innocent people trapped in New Orleans when the deluge hit. But they were trapped alongside large numbers of people from two groups: criminals—and wards of the welfare state, people selected, over decades, for their lack of initiative and self-induced helplessness." "Hurricane Katrina Exposed the Man-made Disaster of the Welfare State," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, September 11, 2005.
 22. 5th Ward Weebie, "Fuck Katrina (The Katrina Song)," "Bounce Back," 2005. Retrieved June 10, 2007 from <http://www.myspace.com/fifthwardweebie>
 23. Master-P and Halleluyah, "Bounce Back," *Hurricane Katrina: We Gon' Bounce Back*, Guttar, 2005.
 24. Lisa De Moraes, "Kanye West's Torrent of Criticism, Live on NBC," *Washington Post*, September 3, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/03/AR2005090300165.html> (accessed June 30, 2007).
 25. In his later lectures, Foucault discusses how, to manage the question of who will live and who will die, governmentality increasingly regulates populations along the axis of race, with racism functioning as "the basic mechanism of power, as it is exercised in modern States." This mechanism consists in "making live and letting die." Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003): 254, 247. Peter Nyers brings this discussion to bear on the question of refugees: national sovereignty consists, in part, in the power to decide membership—the right to permit or refuse entry and citizenship. Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism," 1071.
 26. Jay-Z, "Minority Report," *Kingdom Come*, Roc-A-Fella/Island Def Jam, DEJ B000804502, 2006.
 27. Juvenile, "Get Ya Hustle On," *Reality Check*, Atlantic, 2006.
 28. The Legendary K.O., "George Bush Doesn't Care About Black People," 2005, digital download at <http://www.rappersiknow.com/2005/09/06/day-24-myone-hands-up-featuring-kay-produced-by-symbolc-one-bw-the-legendary-ko-george-bush-doesnt-care-about-black-people-produced-by-kanye-west/>
 29. Visiting the Houston Astrodome, where many evacuees were being sheltered, Barbara Bush commented to the media, "What I'm hearing, which is sort of scary, is they all want to stay in Texas. Everyone is so overwhelmed by the hospitality. And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them." "Barbara Bush Calls Evacuees Better Off," *New York Times*, September 7, 2005, 22.
 30. Press release, www.k-otix.com, September 11, 2005 (accessed October 11, 2008).
 31. Kanye West, "Gold Digger," *Late Registration*, Roc-A-Fella/Island Def Jam, 2005.
 32. Ray Charles, "I Got a Woman," *Hallelujah I Love Her So*, Atlantic 8006, 1962.
 33. The Legendary K.O., "George Bush Doesn't Care About Black People," 2005.
 34. Ironically, when Bush did finally make it to the Gulf, he went straight to Biloxi, Mississippi, which is 71 percent white and has a Republican mayor and governor and two Republican senators. It took him another couple of days to get to New Orleans and other hard-hit areas that were majority black and Democrat before the storm. Jacob Weisberg, "An Imperfect Storm: How Race Shaped Bush's Response to Katrina," *Slate*, September 7, 2005, <http://www.slate.com/?id=2125812> (accessed May 17, 2007).
 35. The Legendary K.O., "George Bush Doesn't Care About Black People," 2005.
 36. Feminization is repeatedly deployed in post-Katrina hip-hop as a form of intense denigration. Bush is often figured as a woman, as in Lil Wayne's "Georgia Bush." Another trope is the personification of Hurricane Katrina (and sometimes category 3 Hurricane Rita, which devastated parts of the Louisiana coastline on September 24, 2005) as a bitch or hoe. For example, 5th Ward Weebie raps in "The Katrina Song," "I say fuck Katrina that ho is a creeper for hangin' with Rita."

37. "A Dollar a Day," BBC World Radio Service, December 7, 2007, http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2007/12/071227_dollar_a_day_1.shtml (accessed November 15, 2008).
38. Mos Def, 2006.
39. Ibid.
40. Lil Wayne and DJ Drama, "Georgia Bush," *Dedication 2*, 101 Distribution 2120, 2006.
41. Papoose, "Mother Nature," *The Best of Papoose: The Mixtape*, 2006.
42. Jeremy Alford, "In One Parish, Divide Over Housing Newcomers," *New York Times*, September 28, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/28/national/nationalspecial/28race.html?ex=1182571200&en=fbd4073ff3592a7c&ei=5070> (accessed June 18, 2007).
43. Quoted in John Valery White, "The Persistence of Race Politics and the Restraint of Recovery in Katrina's Wake," in *After the Storm*, ed. Trout, 41–62.
44. Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Making Place: The 'Pacific Solution' and Australian Emplacement in the Pacific and on Refugee Bodies," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24.3 (November 2003): 290–306.
45. Public Enemy, "Hell No (We Ain't Alright)," *Rebirth of a Nation*, Guerilla Funk 31021, 2005.
46. Juvenile, 2006.
47. Mos Def, 2006.
48. Papoose, 2006.
49. New Orleans rapper Chopper narrates the self-reproducing cycle of racialized poverty that trapped him growing up: "I came from the slums where we were on welfare because we had to be," he said in an interview with MTV. "It's hard for a black man to get a job. I'm 19, but I've never had a job in my life. I applied for them when I was 16, but no one wants to hire you. So you gotta do what you can 'cause bills won't wait. It's hard for black people there. Louisiana is ranked the #2 worst-educated state. Mississippi is #1. You come on the battlefield and see how it really is." Corey Moss, "Juvenile, 3 Doors Down Among Those Affected by Disaster," MTV.com, September 7, 2005, <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1509095/20050907/juvenile.jhtml> (accessed October 12, 2008).
50. Public Enemy, 2005.
51. Lil Wayne and DJ Drama, 2006.
52. Jay-Z, 2006.
53. Lil Wayne and DJ Drama, 2006.
54. Jay-Z, 2006.
55. Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the country, with 816 sentenced prisoners for every 100,000 residents. Although Louisiana's population is made up of 32 percent African Americans, 72 percent of inmates are black, and most of them end up in the main penitentiary of Angola, a former slave plantation. Henry Giroux, "Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability," *College Literature* 33.3 (Summer 2006): 171–96.
56. I would like to thank Darwin Bond-Graham for pointing out this argument. Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man: Rethinking Black Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 135.
57. Juvenile, 2006.
58. Ibid.
59. Lou Dobbs, "Seeking Refuge from Political Correctness," September 8, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/09/08/political.correctness/index.html> (accessed October 8, 2005).
60. Hazel Rose Markus remarks that "the talk of refugees and the third world allows people to imagine that poverty and non-whiteness are non-American things." "Race and Representation" (lecture delivered October 24, 2005, for "Confronting Katrina: Race, Class, and Disaster in American Society," Stanford Special Course), http://ccsre.stanford.edu/EV_events.htm#katrina (accessed March 29, 2007). It is important to note that the racism laid bare in the "refugee" controversy was not only directed against African Americans, but simultaneously revealed how refugees generally have been so degraded in popular opinion as to automatically summon the image of an abject, racialized, and expendable population.
61. Lil Wayne, "Tie My Hands," *Tha Carter III*, Cash Money B0013ABI48, 2008.
62. Several commentators, including rap reviewer Steve "Flash" Juon and Steven Waddy of the National Hip Hop Political Convention, suggest that many mainstream rappers were scared away from writing about Katrina for fear of censorship or political backlash. Steve "Flash" Juon, "Papoose: The Best of Papoose," RapReviews.com, April 10, 2007, http://www.rapreviews.com/archive/2007_04_bestof-papoose.html (accessed November 18, 2008); Bonisteel, 2006.
63. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 27.