Hello “Rhythms and Rhymes” FIG student!

My name is Brandon Parry and I will be your FIG Assistant this fall at the UO. When fall term comes around I will be a junior. I am a double major in General Social Science and Ethnic Studies. I also study Arabic! I am originally from Orlando, FL but have lived in the Eugene area for much of my life. It is a really cool place to live and I hope you enjoy it here as much as I do! My interests include basketball (I’m a fan of the Magic of course), playing video games, riding my bike and hanging out with my friends. Naturally, being the FA for “Rhythms and Rhymes”, I have a strong interest in hip-hop. In fact, I am kind of a nerd when it comes down to it (I will in fact be hyped anytime we talk about anything hip-hop related in our FIG). You will take two courses with the other members of our FIG: MUS 360 The History of Hip-Hop Music which is taught by Dr. Loren Kajikawa, and LING 296 Language and Society in the U.S. which is taught by Dr. Tyler Kendall. In addition to these two courses, you and your fellow FIG students will be enrolled in a College Connections course that will be co-taught by your LING 296 professor, Tyler Kendall, and me. I already introduced myself to you, and I wanted to give Professor Kendall the chance to tell you a little more about himself:

Hello. I’m Tyler Kendall, an assistant professor in the UO's linguistics department. I study what’s called sociolinguistics, the connections between language and society. Among other things, sociolinguists investigate how language changes and how language differences (like dialect features, accents, and slang) are used, and created, in order for people to assert their individual and group identities. The words we use, and the specific ways we pronounce those words, tell us so much about each other: Who we are, how we think of ourselves, what we think about one another, and more. Language has been an important part of the Hip Hop movement since its beginnings. And Hip Hop has been a primary vehicle for bringing aspects of African American English to other groups. Language has also been a defining difference between many African American and European American communities and continues to be a topic of interest and controversy in a number of public discussions, from issues in education to cultural differences in the U.S. I’m very excited to spend the Fall term looking at this fascinating intersection of music, culture, and language with you.

We want to take the time to talk to you a little more about what we will be doing in this FIG. Our College Connections class will be used in order to find connections between your two general education courses. As you already know, this is a Challenge FIG. This means you get the opportunity to take upper division courses early in your college career, which is something that not all freshmen get a chance to do. Don’t let this intimidate you, though, as you will have me, your FIG Assistant, as well as your fellow classmates to help you with your studies. In addition to finding connections between your two general education courses, we will introduce you to resources around campus that will help you throughout your entire academic career. We want to help you build relationships with faculty and peers that will make your transition to the UO an enjoyable one. Throughout the term we will do a number of activities in class that explore the
connections between hip-hop and language. We will also be able to do some activities that are not so academic, maybe go to a show at one of the nearby venues, if that is something enough people are interested in. Professor Kendall and I are very excited for all of the possibilities that fall term holds for us as a FIG.

Our first opportunity to meet will be a mandatory meeting during the Week of Welcome on Friday, September 21, at 11 a.m. in Columbia 150. We will all meet and get a chance to get to know each other a little better before we start the academic year. Please be sure to be a little bit early as we will be re-locating to another location soon after 11 a.m. On Sunday, Sep. 23, 2012 we will be attending University Convocation as a group. We will give you more details on meeting place and time at our first meeting during Week of Welcome. One more reminder: Please bring your Student Handbook with you. You can just keep it around throughout the term because we will be using it periodically and it is just a helpful tool to have with you.

Please note that we have a summer reading assignment. Attached following this letter you will find passages from H. Samy Alim’s book on hip-hop and sociolinguistics, “Roc the Mic Right”, please read these passages and write in response to these questions:

1. How do you think the author uses his language in this chapter to frame language as something that is lived and not something that is just studied under a microscope?

2. Why do you think it is important to study language from inside the community it is used? Why might it also be important to study language from an outside perspective?

Please email me at bparry@uoregon.edu after you read this to let me know that you received the summer reading assignment. Also I would love it if you introduced yourself a bit! Have a great rest of your summer, we look forward to hearing from you soon and are even more excited to meet you in September!

Peace and Love!
Brandon Parry and Professor Kendell
bparry@uoregon.edu
Chapter 1

‘The streetz iz a mutha’

The street and the formation of a Hip Hop Linguistics (HHLx)

The Black Language is constructed of—alright let me take it all the way back to the slave days and use something that's physical. All the slavemasters gave our people straight chittlins and greens, you feel me, stuff that they wasn't eatin. But we made it into a delicacy. Same thing with the language. It's the exact same formula. How our people can take the worst, or take our bad condition, and be able to turn it into something that we can benefit off of. Just like the drums. They didn't want the slaves playin drums because we was talkin through the drums. "What the hell did my slaves do? Oh, no, cut that! Take them drums!" you feel me? So through the music, that's kinda like goin on now with the rap thang. It's ghetto music. People talkin about they issues and crime and, you feel me? "Don't push me cuz I'm close to the eedg!" [Rappin Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message”] You feel me? He talkin about, "Man, I'm so fed up with you people in this society, man." So this is the voice of the ghetto. The rap come from the voice of the ghetto . . . Hip Hop and the streets damn near is one, you might as well say that . . . Straight from the streets.

(Interview with rapper JT the Bigga Figga, cited partially in Alim 2000)

Finally, of what use is linguistics? Very few people have clear ideas on this point . . . But it is evident, for instance, that linguistic questions interest all who work with texts—historians, philologists, etc. Still more obvious is the importance of linguistics to general culture: in the lives of individuals and societies, speech is more important than anything else. That linguistics should continue to be the prerogative of a few specialists would be unthinkable—everyone is concerned with it one way or another.

(Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics [1916], 1960: 7)

I begin this book with an anecdote from the “Hiphop Community Activism and Education Roundtable,” at Harvard University's W. E. B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research. The roundtable was organized by Marcyliena Morgan, Director of the Hiphop Archive (now at Stanford), the first national archive established to preserve, document, and support the development of Hip Hop Culture around the globe.
On September 28, 2002, Harvard brought together many of the leading scholars in their respective fields with pioneering and progressive Hip Hop artists and community activists from around the US. Looking around the roundtable, one could see a wide range of participants including Black American literary critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "the Godfather of Hip Hop" Afrika Bambaataa and representatives from the Universal Zulu Nation, urban education scholar Pedro A. Noguera, politically conscious Oakland-based Hip Hop artist Boots of The Coup, journalist and pioneering Hip Hop scholar-historian James G. Spady, LA-based Hip Hop artist Aceyalone, Rap Coalition's Wendy Day, political scientist Michael Dawson, and many, many others.

I begin with this anecdote from the conference because it illustrates, in part, the motivation for the type of work that I do. In addition, it reflects the fact that Hip Hop Culture is an egalitarian forum and an enabler of dialogue among and between diverse communities. With such an eclectic group of participants, all of whom have dedicated their lives to the development of Hip Hop Culture and Black American youth and youth around the world, there were bound to be some heated moments. These moments of critical engagement seemed to be fashioned after the intense rhyme battles that occur in the Hip Hop ciphers—they were carried out in a highly energetic and expressive space that is both competitive and communal. The ciphers offer all participants a chance to sharpen their skills, while sharing ideas in the spirit of both teaching and learning. As James G. Spady commented during the meeting, "Upon entering the ciph, all borders disappear." That means that conventional notions of power, authority, and the hierarchical construction of knowledge melt within the flow and exchange of ideas. The idea takes center stage. Like a Hip Hop sista once told me, capturing the essence of the value of critical thinking to the Hip Hop Nation (HHN), all we is is our ideas.

One moment, in particular, helps to frame this discussion. Cashus D, a member of the Universal Zulu Nation, was considered by many to be the "conscience of the conference," since his presence and that of Afrika Bambaataa and the other artists kept the scholars honest. Throughout the day-long event, he made several passionate statements about the nature of Hip Hop Culture that, to some participants, seemed like an idealization rather than an accurate depiction of what Hip Hop truly is, that is, how it is played out in the lives of everyday people. After Cashus D finished his powerful statement about the cultural unity and nationhood found within the HHN, one Black American literary critic stood up, grabbed the mic and entered the cipers. In a two-minute flurry of some of the most animated talk at the conference, he challenged Cashus D and posited that Hip Hop Culture may actually be a drug to seduce young Black Americans from a productive lifestyle into one of criminality and nihilism. In other words, here at Harvard, we were observing two colliding constructions of "Hip Hop Culture" at battle in the cipers: (1) a Hip Hop-centered idealization and (2) a mainstream-centered, pathological perception of Hip Hop Culture. Critical Hip Hop studies (Rose 1994, Perry 2004) reveal that Hip Hop Culture is neither of these; rather, Hip Hop is constituted by popular cultural production and practices that are as contradictory as they are conscious (or like Jigga say so concise on The Black Album, it's like Che Guevara with bling on, complex).

The literary critic continued to lambaste the HHN and asked what seemed, to many in the room, to be a strange series of questions. Bemoaning the educational reality of most Black Americans (and it is something to moan about), he asked, "Where are our writers?" "Where is the wonderful, literary tradition found in centuries of African American literature?" "Where is the literacy tradition?" He continued to make several comments that clearly privileged written literacy over oral literacy, and commented on how Hip Hop artists and those interested in Hip Hop should be working roughly "moving Black youth from oral forms to written forms." In his conclusion, he suggested that the most politically subversive act of the HHN—"the Blackest thing you can do," in his words—would be to take the "white man's literacy" and empower Black youth.

There are several assumptions in this critic's remarks that need to be addressed. First, the "blackest thing" we can do, as a Nation of Hip Hop Headz is to appreciate our own culture, history and traditions. I say this for two reasons. First, Black people are not only the first people to produce spoken language, but they are also the first to invent writing systems. In addition to privileging written literacy over oral literacy, the critic was also quite nostalgic about older Black American literary forms while completely failing to recognize the literary, linguistic, and poetic sophistication of young Black American Hip Hop MC's. The second point, in particular, represents the pervasive attitude that young Black Americans face everyday in America's schools, an attitude that emerges due to the cultural-linguistic disconnect between Black American culture and school culture, and is ultimately rooted in racist views of Black people. It is important to note that such a well-respected scholar, one who clearly has a healthy respect, love, and admiration for Black American literary forms, did not comment on the artistry and creativity found within the Hip Hop Cultural Movement. In moments like these, I often ask myself: Will we appreciate the full complexity and creativity of our contemporary culture and literary production only after it's dead and gone? At what price will we continue to ignore the extraordinary linguistic, literary, and literacy skills of this generation of young Black Americans? One could argue that the great lesson from Harvard's Hiphop Community Activism and Education Roundtable is that the "blackest thing" we can do—that is, the most politically subversive strategy—is to learn to appreciate the totality of Black American culture, its contradictions, fluid possibilities, dynamism, and the power potential evident in the newly emerged (and constantly emerging) Hip Hop Nation Language.
The scholar and the Hip Hop-saturated street

It ain't even necessary for me say that this scholar is not alone in his misguided critique of Hip Hop Culture. He is but one of a legion of folks who are still sleepin on what some critics see as the most profound lyrical and musical movement to rock the twentieth century. The Hip Hop Cultural Movement has captured the minds of youth “all around the world, from Japan to Amsterdam” (like the homie Kurupt say) as it “whirlwinds through cities, from Chicago to Cairo” (like the god Afu-Ra say) shaping youth identities, styles, attitudes, languages, fashions, and both physical and political stances. Still, many scholars who comment on Hip Hop Culture do little more than reproduce the public discourse. There are a variety of reasons for that and much of the confusion is surely due to a complex array of class and racial politics. However, when we consider the research methodology informing the critiques, it becomes clear that far too many commentators are simply too socially distanted from the focus of Hip Hop cultural activity—the street. Writing in Black Street Speech, in a chapter entitled “The scholar and the street: Collecting the data,” Baugh (1983: 36) notes the challenges of collecting speech data in Black and other marginalized communities: “It is one thing to recognize the need to gather data from representative constituents, but it is another matter altogether to get the job done.” Can we imagine Baugh’s (1983) classic study of “Black street speech” being carried out anywhere else but in the streets? Can we imagine the study of Hip Hop Culture beginning anywhere but in the streets?

Hip Hop Culture is sometimes defined as having four major elements: MC’ing (rappin), DJ’ing (spinnin), breakdancing (streetdancing), and graffiti art (writing). To these, KRS-One adds knowledge as a fifth element, and Afrika Bambaataa, a founder of the Hip Hop Cultural Movement, adds standing. Bambaataa, in an interview with noted Hip Hop journalist Davey D, provides a more comprehensive definition of “Hip Hop:”

People have to understand what you mean when you talk about Hip Hop. Hip Hop means the whole culture of the movement. When you talk about rap you have to understand that rap is part of the Hip Hop Culture. That means the emceeing is part of the Hip Hop Culture. The Deejaying is part of the Hip Hop Culture. The dressing, the languages are all part of the Hip Hop Culture. So is the break dancing, the b-boys and b-girls. How you act, walk, look and talk is all part of Hip Hop Culture. And the music is . . . from whatever music that gives that grunt, that funk, that groove, that beat. That’s all part of Hip Hop.

Rappin, one aspect of Hip Hop Culture, consists of the aesthetic placement of verbal rhymes over musical beats, and it is this element that has dominated Hip Hop cultural activity in recent years. Thus, language is perhaps the most useful means with which to read the various cultural activities of the HHN.

Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have always been interested in analyzing language and language use within varying contexts. Given these scholars’ healthy respect for vernacular languages, and given the richly varied and diverse speech acts and communicative practices of the HHN, it is surprising that until the late 1990s no American sociolinguist had written about Hip Hop Culture in any major academic journal. It was a Belgian student of African history and linguistics at the University of Ghent who first collected data about Hip Hop culture in the Lower East Side of New York City in 1986–87. In his quest to learn about the social and cultural context of rap performances, Remes (1991) produced one of the earliest sociolinguistic studies of rappin in a Hip Hop community. His pioneering study provided a brief account of the origin of rap, identified several “Black English” linguistic features found in rap, and highlighted the communicative practices of call-and-response and verbal battling. Only in 1997 did sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman publish her pioneering analysis of the communicative practices of the HHN (Smitherman, 1997; presented before an audience in South Africa in 1995).

Since then, language scholars have presented papers at professional conferences and published in academic journals. In 2001 at the thirtieth anniversary meeting of NAWV, the major gathering of sociolinguists, I participated in a panel called “The Sociolinguistics of Hip Hop: New Ways of Analyzing Hip Hop Nation Language.” Every year since then, scholars of language at various professional conferences in anthropology, sociolinguistics, cultural studies, education, and others have presented academic papers on language and Hip Hop Culture. Most recently, in July 2005, I participated in a symposium about Hip Hop Culture, ethnicity, and the politics of language education at the Fourteenth World Congress of Applied Linguistics. To paraphrase the poet-dramatist Amiri Baraka, a leading figure of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, scholars of language are now celebrating Hip Hop Culture and beginning to see that the “Hip Hop Nation is Like Ourselves.”

To be fair, at least since 1964, there has been considerable scholarship on language use within what are now called Hip Hop communities. It started with investigations “deep down in the jungle” in the streets of South Philly (it’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from goin under) that recorded “black talkin in the streets” of America (Abrahams 1964, 1970, 1976), the analysis of “language behavior” of Blacks in Oakland (Mitchell-Kernan 1971), the narrative syntax and ritual insults of Harlem teenagers “in the inner city” (Labov 1972a), the critical examination of “the power of the rap” in the “Black Idiom” of the Black Arts Movement rappers and poets (Smitherman 1973, 1977), and an elucidation of the “language and culture of black teenagers” who skillfully “ran down some lines” in South Central Los Angeles (Folb 1980). In myriad ways, then, scholars had prepared the field for the extraordinary linguistic phenomenon that was about to leave an indelible mark on many languages of the world. This linguistic phenomenon is, of course, Hip Hop Culture. Most of the works cited above (with the exception of Folb)
were published before the advent of the first Hip Hop recording in 1979, the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight." By describing the linguistic patterns and practices of Black Americans in the "inner cities," these scholars were studying the linguistic forebears of the HHN.

The work of these pioneering scholars, and others, demonstrated the creativity, ingenuity, and verbal virtuosity of Blacks in America by examining language use at the very loci of linguistic-cultural activity. One scholar puts it succinctly: "The street is hardcore and it is the rhythmic locus of the Hip Hop world" (Spady in Spady and Eure 1991: 406, 407). Foregrounding the streets as the site, sound, and soul of hiphopological activity allows one to gain a more thorough understanding of the origins and sociocultural context of Hip Hop Culture, which is critical to understanding language use within this Nation.

My own research on HHNL and Hip Hop Culture in general has led to the streets, homes, cars, jeeps, clubs, stadiums, backstage, performances, hotels, religious centers, conferences, and ciphers (highly competitive lyrical circles of rymers) where Hip Hop lives—up inside the "actual lived experiences in the corrugated spaces that one finds reflected in the lyrical content of rap songs" (Spady et al. 1995). What I have attempted to do in this book is to demonstrate the creativity and complexity of language use in contemporary Black American expressive culture, particularly HHNL, language use in the Hip Hop Nation Speech Community, and the Hip Hop cultural modes of discourse. By excavating the broad range of linguistic-cultural activity of the HHH, I hope to have deepened our understanding of this highly complex discursive zone. However, each of the aspects of HHNL covered in this book deserves more critical attention. I have used various sources in the writing of this book, but it is important to note that my research is informed by members of the HHNL—from underground street-level heads to multiplatinum, international playas. The main point is that this research utilizes Hip Hop's culture creators as a primary point of departure. As we shall see, the Hip Hop artists represented in this book, from Mos Def and Pharoah Monch, to Ras Kass and Kurupt, to Eve, Juvenile and JT the Bigga Figga, are all quite capable of being the interpreters of their own culture.

Language scholars of the Hip Hop generations (we are now more than one) are needed to uncover the linguistic inventiveness and innovativeness of HHNL speakers. In order to represent—to reflect any semblance of Hip Hop cultural reality—these scholars will need to be in direct conversation with the Hip Hop communities under study. More fieldwork in the Hip Hop-saturated streets of America, and the world, is required to elucidate the dynamics of this black-culture-turned-global-culture. It's time for a Hip Hop Linguistics.

**The formation of a Hip Hop Linguistics (HHLx)**

What I have attempted to do in this book is to provide a modest example of a new area of inquiry, Hip Hop Linguistics (HHLx), and present a diversity of approaches to the study of the language of Hip Hop Culture, from sociolinguistic variation and applied linguistics, to poetics and the critical approach of cultural studies, to the ethnographic fieldwork required in anthropological studies. Through this work, I seek to contribute to all of these areas, as well as the broader field of Hip Hop Studies. There is a cross-disciplinary legion of scholars who are now producing more and more work in Hip Hop Studies as Hip Hop scholarship enters a new phase of maturation and expansion (see Forman and Neal's *That's the Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, 2004). As Michael Eric Dyson writes in the foreword to that reader,

Hip-Hop is being studied all over the globe, and the methodologies of its examination are rightly all over the map. They are multidisciplinary in edifying, exemplary fashion, borrowing from sociology, politics, religion, economics, urban studies, journalism, communications theory, American studies, transatlantic studies, black studies, history, musicology, comparative literature, English, linguistics, and many more disciplines besides.

While the reader is described as an "intellectual mixtape," I offer this book as a full-length album in HHLx. I present this study in the hopes that it will launch a series of in-depth analyses of the many varieties of HHNL—an analysis that will collectively represent the creativity and complexity, the dynamism and diversity, and the power, politics, pleasure, and the potential of youth language.

HHLx gives props and pays homage to the studies of Black Language (BL) mentioned above, cuz them the ones that really laid down the foundation for what we do. Without them, without that intense field-based inquiry into Black street culture, HHLx would have no academic legs to stand on. Much respect due, HHLx is informed by the recently codified "Black Linguistics" (Makoni et al. 2003) and shares with it the mission of "decolonizing Black language and thought," as Ngugi wa Thiongo wrote in the foreword. More generally, we are interested in exploring the relationships between language, literacy, life, and liberation.

Some two decades before the publication of *Black Linguistics*, one of the pioneering researchers of BL stated: "Black scholars now define the role that their white allies can play in advancing the study of Black English... Members of an oppressed people have entered an academic field, taken up the tools of linguistic research, and used them for the advancement of their nation" (Labov 1982: 24, cited in Baugh and Smitherman in press). Many Black linguists approach the study of BL as more than merely an academic pursuit. In fact, linguistics is often seen as a direct means to quantify and reverse the myriad social injustices facing Blacks in America, including educational, economic, and political subordination.

Since language permeates all aspects of our lives, for Black scholars, the scientific study of language provides one way to make a way outta no way in the wilderness of North America. Black scholars have been at the forefront of educational, cultural, historical, and legal debates involving language, culture, race, and racism. Recent sociolinguistic scholarship (Baugh 2003) has
examined the relationship between racial profiling and “linguistic profiling”—the racial identification and discrimination of an individual or group of people based on their speech and/or writing. This research seeks to address the very real problem of housing discrimination (among other forms of discrimination) against linguistic minorities on the basis of their speech. Recognizing a Black or Latino/a voice on the opposite end of the phone, for example, they falsely claim that there are no apartments for rent. Such research is a quintessential example of how the scientific study of language can be utilized to create social change.

Black linguists have long been concerned with issues of social justice and social change. Long before the “Ebonics controversy” caught the media’s attention, Black linguists (Bailey 1969, Smitherman 1981, Taylor 1985, Rickford and Rickford 1995, Baugh 1999) have been committed to the educational welfare of Black American students. They have joined forces with many Black American educational researchers who view BL as a resource to be utilized rather than a problem to be eradicated (Lee 1993, Ball 1995, Perry and Delpit 1998, LeMone 1999). These researchers support policy and pedagogy that acknowledge the linguistic resources of Black American students and further the development of “standard” English proficiency. (See DeBose 2005.)

Black linguists have also provided an important perspective regarding the dynamic nature of BL structure and use. From detailed descriptions and analyses of language use within the Black American community (Mitchell-Kernan 1971, Smitherman 1977, Morgan 1991) to the identification and quantification of several “new” linguistic features (Baugh 1979, Spears 1982), Black linguists continue to enhance our understanding of how Black American speech breathes. Struggling for linguistic liberation, Black linguists have been instrumental in shattering the myth of the linguistic tabula rasa, i.e., the myth that the African Holocaust completely eradicated any trace of African linguistic heritage in Black Americans. Many Black linguists and scholars (Turner 1949, Bailey 1965, Williams 1975, Rickford 1977, Alleyne 1980, Baugh 1983, Asante 1990, DeBose and Faracall 1993, Smith 1998) have demonstrated the linguistic connection between BL and creole languages (as well as African languages) in an effort to provide a more accurate historical account of BL. Early researchers were responding to the White supremacist view that Black Americans were intellectually inferior and, therefore, could not produce “the white man’s English.” Later, many became involved in producing a historical reconstruction of BL that recognized the linguistic contributions of both Anglican and African sources.

The central focus of HHILx is language and language use within Hip Hop communities. Since language ain’t neva neutral, HHILx interrogates the development of unequal power relations between and within groups in an effort to make a contribution to our understanding of the world around us. As cultural theorist Raymond Williams wrote about language in his classic Keywords: “A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world” (Williams 1976: 21). There is a reason why Hip Hop communities resist others’ attempts to control their language varieties (you can slap on all the “explicit lyrics” stickers you want). Heads know that policing language is a form of social control that amounts to nothing less than policing people. And we already got too many pigs up in this piece, you know what I’m saying?

As much as HHILx views the poetics of puns, wordplay, and playin with words as a source of pleasure, HHILx situates Hip Hop expression within what we know are highly politicized contexts. Like JT the Bigga Figga can be heard sayin, “This shit ain’t for play, cuz it’s not a game no mo.” As editor of a special issue of the Black Arts Quarterly, which focused on “emergency art,” I contextualized Hip Hop voices within larger discursive and political struggles against oppression:

We are talking/ writing/ painting/ photographing/ analyzing/ poeting/ collaging/ languaging/ creating in a critical time. Attempts to censor Black liberatory voices and perspectives continue. From the Anti-Defamation League and New Jersey Governor James McGreevey’s grievous call to remove Amiri Baraka from his post as poet laureate of New Jersey . . . to MTV’s (Viacom’s) censoring of Public Enemy’s latest video, “Give the Peeps What They Need” (they requested that Public Enemy delete images of Mumia Abu Jamal and remove the word “Free” from the phrase “Free Mumia”—you can peep the uncut video on www.rapstation.com), to the political ousting of progressive Black politicians Cynthia McKinney (D—GA) and Earl Hilliard (D—AL) (both of their opponents reportedly received outside financial support from AIPAC—The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee), to the death threats used to intimidate Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D—CA) for her opposition of Bush’s “war on terrorism,” to the British and Israeli government’s ban on Minister Louis Farrakhan from speaking to their constituents (out of fear that his speech will further divide an already racially divided nation, on the British side, and fears of “anti-Semitic” comments on the Israeli side), to the censoring of the cover art of dead prez’s Hip Hop album (the cover art for Let’s Get Free! which contained an image of South African schoolchildren raising rifles in solidarity during the 1976 Soweto Uprising; they were fighting for the right to be educated under an oppressive apartheid regime), among other high profile incidents in recent times.

Writing about the psychic and symbolic violence enacted upon colonized Africans and their relationship with the French language, Frantz Fanon (1967) stated plainly, but heavily, “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.” HHILx takes as its point of departure the linguistic culture of the HHIL. That is, language is far more than linguistic variables, polysyllabic utterances, and turn-taking in conversation, though all of those are important aspects of language. HHIL takes a broad,
multidisciplinary approach to the study of language. As Ferdinand de Saussure, who some refer to as the “founding father” of modern linguistics, wrote in 1916 (see this chapter’s opening quotation), HHNx is not the domain of a few specialists known as “linguists.” As an interdisciplinary area of inquiry, HHNx includes studies of language and language use from various methodological and theoretical perspectives. While studies are grounded in the streets, contributions come from cultural studies, communications studies, ethnic studies, literacy studies, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, poetics, literary analysis, and discourse analysis, among other approaches to the study of language.

We begin with language as power, that is, the view that language is the revolution, a powerful discourse in and of itself. We know that the most powerful people in society tend to control speech and its circulation through mass media. We know, cuz the Wu-Tang Clan’s Rza told us, that “words kill as fast as bullets.” Words are far more than parts of speech; they’re weapons of mass culture to be deployed in the cultural combat that we, invariably, as humans, find ourselves in. Unfortunately, with teachers of young Hip Hop Heads still saying that the language of their students is the very thing that they “combat the most,” we learn this lesson very early on. In this sense of cultural warfare—the micro and macro forms of social control through culture—Hip Hop Linguists are “combat linguists.” Yeah, we know it’s a war going on, but don’t get it twisted. We are never the aggressors. The task of the Hip Hop Linguist is to both analyze and mediate the struggle. We operate like the Arab-American combat linguist who recently saved an Iraqi family’s house, and possibly their lives, from being destroyed. What US soldiers thought were terrorist plots scribbled on pieces of paper throughout the living room turned out to be sewing instructions. The combat linguist’s Arabic language skills helped him explain that fact to the other US soldiers. In an analogous situation, Hip Hop Linguists are cultural translators who mediate between Hip Hop Culture (and its languages) and the dominant classes and societies (and their languages) within which they exist.

While this book is mostly about the Black American Hip Hop community, the HHNx agenda focuses on Hip Hop language practices in global context, with particular attention to the global social and linguistic processes that both gave rise to HHNL in the US and reformed and reconfigured HHNL varieties as they are spoken in other contexts (such as Brazil, France, and Japan, for example). HHNL, as a variety of BL in the US, was formed by the sociolinguistic and sociopolitical processes of creolization, as language structure and use were reconfigured in the involuntary transatlantic movement of the African slave trade. As Hip Hop Culture continues to be adopted/adopted by heads all over the world, the syncretization of local street languages and Black American language practices has produced multiple HHNL varieties. HHNx seeks to explore these “global linguistic flows” (Allim and Pennycook in press) of a worldwide movement that has impacted youth language from Tanzania to Turkey. How have Algerian youth, rapping in Arabic, French, and an English influenced

by the HHNL model (Meghelli 2005) adapted Hip Hop Culture and HHNL to suit their needs and tastes? How do we begin analyzing Palestinians and their trilingual “lyrical intifada (uprising)” (Arabic, Hebrew, and a HHNL-inspired English)? What do we make of South African rappers who spit heat in five languages (Xhosa, Zulu, Tsotsi-Taal, Sotho, and a HHNL-inspired English), or the codeswitching and codemixing that take place in Canada when Haitian, Dominican, and African immigrants practice Hip Hop as a critical site of identification with Black Americans and the development of hybrid identities (Ibrahim in press, Sarkar and Allen in press)? HHNx is clearly an international enterprise and heads are needed from every corner of the Hip Hop globe to study the HHNL’s expressive richness and diversity.

**Hiphopography: Contents under pressure**

My particular approach to HHNx has been strongly influenced by five related, and in my mind, overlapping perspectives, each with diverse theoretical traditions and a multi-methods approach—those of “hiphopography” and Hip Hop Studies, language and cultural theory, sociolinguistics and anthropology, education and literacy studies, and English and literary analysis. Hiphopography, coined by Hip Hop scholar-critic-historian James G. Spady, of the Black History Museum Committee in Philadelphia (see the Umum Hip Hop Trilogy beginning with *Nation Conscious Rap: The Hip Hop Vision*, 1991; *Twisted Tales in the Hip Hop Streets of Philly*, 1995; and *Street Conscious Rap*, 1999), has had a critical and central impact on the way that I conduct my research. Hiphopography is to my research what the streets are to Hip Hop Culture—as Method Man says, “It’s where I got my stripes at.”

Importantly, the hiphopography paradigm integrates the varied approaches of ethnography, biography, and social, cultural, and oral history to arrive at an *emic* view of Hip Hop Culture. It is hiphopography that obligates HHNx to directly engage with the cultural agents of the Hip Hop Culture-World, revealing rappers as critical interpreters of their own culture. We view “rappers” as “cultural critics” and “cultural theorists” whose thoughts and ideas help us to make sense of one of the most important cultural movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Hiphopography’s insistence on direct engagement with the “culture creators” also demands the inclusion of theories of linguistic practice into the study of Hip Hop Culture. While scholars have made mention of the centrality of language to Hip Hop Culture, hiphopography presents language as not only central to the notion of a Hip Hop Nation, and to reading the HHNL theoretically, but as central to its study in the field and the narration of its history.

Hiphopography began as the study of Hip Hop cultural practice, a Hip Hop Cultural Studies, if you will—not as a subparadigm within cultural studies, but as a movement lying somewhere between cultural studies and cultural anthropology. My own studies seek to reinvigorate cultural studies’ commitment
to the people and put into practice what cultural anthropology espouses, that is, a nonhierarchical, anticolonial approach that humanizes its subject. What captured my mind as an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania in Philly was that deceptively simple point. Hiphopography humanizes Hip Hop. Check it. While most folks was busy talkin' about Hip Hop's impact on today's youth, or on this or that culture industry, or on the far corners of the globe (all important areas of inquiry)—what it meant to be Hip Hop, to exist in a Hip Hop Culture-World, to possess a Hip Hop mode of being and way of viewing the world was lost in obscure analyses, shit that ain't even feel like Hip Hop to me. To paraphrase Mos Def (peep his already classic album, Black on Both Sides, 1999), as he holds up a mirror to Hip Hop critics, Hip Hop ain't no big ole giant livin' on the hillside comin' down to visit the townpeople. He adds emphatically, in an effort to put a face on Hip Hop, "We are Hip Hop! Me, you, everybody, we are Hip Hop. So Hip Hop is goin' where we goin.' Mos, frustrated by the construction of Hip Hop artists as somehow supernaturally, grotesque or non-human, asks critics to take a look at themselves the next time they find themselves asking where Hip Hop is going. Hip Hop is cultural practice embedded in the lived experiences of Hip Hop-conscious beings existing in a home, street, hood, city, state, country, continent, hemisphere near you. Too often in scholarship on Hip Hop Culture, Hip Hop artists and practitioners are talked about, but very seldom are they themselves talking. It may seem extreme, but this can be seen as both tragedy and tyranny. How have we as scholars reproduced the hierarchies that we are trying to dismantle? How has our methodology silenced and disempowered the very folks we claim to be giving voice to and empowering? These are questions that I have grappled with in the writing of this book and will undoubtedly continue to grapple with in my future work.

In Chapter 2 of this book, "Verbal Mujahidin in the Transglobal Hip Hop Umma: Islam, discursive struggle, and the weapons of mass culture," I view BL and HHHN not as checklists of linguistic features, but as discourse, that is, as potentially powerful weapons of mass culture (WMC). I discuss the complex relationship between Hip Hop Culture and Islam, which have both been separately constructed by dominating discourses as "threats to American civilization." As Foucault (1984: 110), and history, have constantly taught us, "discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but it is the thing for which and by which there is struggle; discourse is the power which is to be seized." Hip Hop Culture represents a counter-discourse that is not only mass-based, but also mass-mediated, circulated, and communicated to millions of youth.

Like the Islamic umma, the Global Hip Hop Nation functions as a worldwide network of "believers" around the world who have created "nationhood" through imaginary, ideological, and discursive means. In this chapter, I view Hip Hop artists—particularly those engaged in what I have called the "transglobal Hip Hop umma" (Alim 2005)—as "verbal mujahidin," with their speech activities serving as alternative media sources narrating the beliefs and experiences of a "nation." Their very experiences, when verbalized, represent a discursive struggle against oppression. I also show how Hip Hop artists are engaged in a battle over the manipulation and control of discourse on both Hip Hop Culture and Islam. This battle is not fought in the language of classical religious texts—it's fought in that sacred, steeffied, slick-ass BL.

It is that same sacred, streeified, slick-ass BL that is dissected in Chapter 3, "Talkin' Black in this White Man's World: Linguistic supremacy, linguistic equanimity and the politics of language," where I analyze the language and linguistic practices of Hip Hop youth. In the chapter, I discuss issues of language, racism, and power in American institutions, particularly schools. I show how well-intentioned teachers are enacting whiteness in their pedagogical praxis and subscribing to a hidden ideology of linguistic supremacy within a system of daily cultural combat. One of the major goals of my research in this area has been "to make the invisible visible" by examining the ways by which well-meaning educators attempt to silence BL in White public space by inculcating speakers of heterogeneous language varieties into what are, at their core, White ways of speaking and seeing the world/world, that is, the norms of White, middle-class, heterosexist males. As Fairclough (1989: 7–8) argues, the job of sociolinguists should be to do more than ask, "What language varieties are stigmatized?"

Rather, we should be asking, "How—in terms of the development of social relationships to power—was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being? How is it sustained? And how might it be changed to the advantage of those who are dominated by it?"

This chapter explores the politics of language in order to call for the eradication of the ideology of linguistic supremacy—the unsubstantiated notion that certain linguistic norms are inherently superior to the linguistic norms of other communities, and in this case, the practice of mapping White norms onto "the language of school," "the language of economic mobility," and "the language of success." In its place, I argue for linguistic equanimity, which, simply put (but difficult to achieve), is the structural and social equality of languages.

In Chapter 4, "Bring it to the cypher: Hip Hop Nation Language," I move from issues of discourse and power (though never leaving them behind) and begin to explore the anatomy of language and language use within the HHNL, providing a thorough description of HHNL. My research on the language and linguistic practices of the Hip Hop Nation Speech Community examine how HHNL both builds upon and expands the Black American Oral Tradition. The chapter outlines several Hip Hop discursive practices and cultural modes of discourse—call and response, multilayered totalizing expression, signifin and bustin (bussin), tonal semantics and poetics, narrative sequencing and flow, battling and entering the cipher. While some scholars (like the one mentioned at the beginning of this introduction) and educators (like those in Chapter 3) are quick to point to Hip Hop Culture's "illiteracy," Hip Hop Headz are even quicker to point to Hip Hop's
ill literacy. ("Yo, that’s ill, yo!") From the perspective of the HHN’s linguistic culture, one must come prepared to speak “Advanced Street Language (the study and application of Street Communication),” which is:

commonly referred to as “Black English,” “Urban Slang,” and “Ebonics,” it is Hip hop’s street language and linguistic codes; the verbal communication of the “streets.” Advanced Street Language includes the correct pronunciation of one’s national language as it pertains to life in the inner-city. Its practitioners are known as “Hiphoppas.” Popularized by Rappers, Comedians, and Hiphoppas.

(KRS-One, “Reinications,” www.krs-one.com)

Hip Hop artists been known that they language is “advanced.” KRS is reversing “standard” notions of correctness and appropriateness, realizing that the HHN has distinct values and aesthetics that differ from the majority culture (although simultaneously and implicitly reproducing values of “correctness”). Jubwa of Soul Plantation builds on this Hip Hop-centered perspective and refers to “standard English” as limited and “Black Language” as limitless. This move takes the burden of the communicative work off of the speakers of marginalized languages and puts it squarely onto those of dominating languages. Sounding a lot like Toni Morrison, who wrote about the Black child who suffers the “cruel fallout of racism” in school because he possesses more present tenses than the school’s language (see Chapter 3), Jubwa describes the language education process for Black Americans as one of learning a “limited version” of language:

You have to teach them that in everything there’s limits. You have to teach their mind limits. To grammar. To everything. Because it’s structure. They want the words to come in this order. If the words don’t come in this order, these people [speakers of “limited English”] that live by this language and thrive by this language, won’t understand what you’re talking about. So, you have to get the word order in the way they want it to be in cuz they’re limited.

(Unpublished interview with author, 2000)

Maaan, talk about flippin the term “Limited English Proficient” right on its head! “Standard English,” in Jubwa’s words, is limited by its own prescriptivism: “You’re only right when you do it the way that the rules prescribe.” While recognizing that BL is a rule-governed system of speech (“It’s the speech pattern and stuff like that”), he states:

But it’s not defined at any state in time, and it’s not in a permanent state. It’s sorta like—and this is just my opinion—it seems to be limitless . . . So, I feel that there’s no limit and there’s no real rules of structure, because

they can be broken and changed at any time. And then a new consensus comes in, and then a new one will come in. And it will always change, and it will always be ever free-forming and flowing and it’ll be reflected in the artform.

Chapter 4 exemplifies the power of the hiphopographic approach. There is no way to arrive at the meaning of some of these linguistic practices without direct engagement with the culture creators. One example of this is in the rich, linguistic description of flow. When rappers like Lil Kim say they “ridin a beat,” they are talking about what is known as flow in HHL. Flow can be defined generally as the temporal relationship between the beats and the rhymes. In discussing the concept of flow with rapper Raekwon, I asked him directly what he meant by flow, in order to develop an understanding from the artist’s perspective. His definition provides useful insight:

Flow is like, how you say it. Flow is like poetry going to the beat, but you making it connect like a bridge, you know what I mean? It’s like building a bridge with your rhymes. You want to be able to let everybody know that, “Yo, I could rhyme like this, but off of this type a beat. But when it comes to another beat, I could switch it up,” you know what I mean? And make it still flow, but just a different way of using it, you know what I mean?

(Alim 2000, unpublished interview)

In discussing the relationship between rap and poetry, Pharoahe Monch provides additional insight with his definition:

P: I mean, poetry is a awesome art form in itself. I dabble in it before I write some of the songs that I do. I try to be poetic with some of the songs. Hip Hop is based upon a mixture of that, but more writing musically. Points and timing, you know. So is poetry. But on a level where it’s based upon the music, you have to be more rhythmically connected with your listener and crowd, in terms of rhythm, you know. And how are you riding that beat. You know, you could do the same thing with poetry without any music at all, you know what I’m saying? Get a response rhythmically. So, I’m not disrespecting that. I’m just saying, Hip Hop, it’s about where you are on that fourth bar, where you are on that first bar . . . You got to have flow, and I think that’s something that just comes natural.

A: What exactly do you mean by that, by flow?

P: I mean, how the person rides the beat, you know. Some MC’s ride the beat soulfully 100 percent like Slum Village, and they’re funky with it. Some MC’s go against the grain of the beat, but they’re so on point and you understand what they’re doing, you know.

(Alim 2000, unpublished interview)
One of the most remarkable aspects of Hip Hop poetics is that the artists manage to convey a message of great import to the Hip Hop community while flexin these off the hook rhyme skillz. For instance, peep the perfectly put paragraph by my potna Saigon, who know he ain't no P.I.M.P. even though he rap about “I do got a pistol In my pocket.” Here, he levies an internal critique of Hip Hop culture (what’s externally referred to as the “conscious” vs. “commercial” Hip Hop debate), all while P’in on those pretenders who purposely perpetrate, “Personally, I preach prophecies/ these punks puttin out poems about pimpin, pushin, and property, pleeease . . .” Then without missin a beat he changes up the flow real quick to match the staccato beat, “people ain’t prepared to be persuaded by political paraphrases.” Gettin real street widdit, Saigon boasts about his rhyming abilities by using humor to work a clever metaphor—he ain’t gotta shit on other MC’s, he just be P’in on ‘em with his skillz!

In Chapter 5, “Spittin the Code of the Streets: The strategic construction of a street-conscious identity,” we realize once again that the streets iz a mutha. That is, the streets gave birth to, nourished, and raised Hip Hop Culture, and continue to advise it well into its adult years (the mother of creation). At the same time, like my man Kurupt say, “the street iz a mutha . . . shhhh, hush yo mout, and he stops short like Sista Sonia did on stage in the 1970s (see Chapter 6). In this chapter, I present an analysis of the conscious stylistic variation in the language of Black American Hip Hop artists. Specifically, I focus on an analysis of two artists’ (Eve and Juvenile) lyrical and conversational speech. Recognizing the high degree of linguistic creativity and verbal virtuosity present in the HHH, this research demonstrates how Black American youth, like the Hip Hop youth in them Sunnyside streets in Chapter 3, possess extraordinary, chameleon-like linguistic capabilities. Further, this chapter focuses on Hip Hop artists’ strategic construction of a street-conscious identity through language. By consciously varying their language use, these rappers are forging a linguistic-cultural connection with the streets (meaning both members of the Black Street Culture and the sets of values, morals, and cultural aesthetics that govern life in the streets—peep the Gto Boys’ “G-Code,” The Foundation).

While drawing upon variationist methodology, I explore variation in BL with the additional perspective of linguistic anthropology, which views language as social practice and as a tool for constructing one’s identity. This chapter challenges sociolinguists (particularly scholars of BL) to go beyond the mere quantifying of linguistic variables and to problematize the perceived passivity of linguistic variation and change. Speaker agency, the conscious and strategic use of language, must be considered when discussing these processes. At the same time, linguistic anthropologists are urged to embrace quantitative analysis, which would add tremendously to their already rich descriptions.

Chapter 6, “Every syllable of mine is an umbilical cord through time”; Toward an analytical schema of Hip Hop poetics, takes a close look at the literary ingenuity of Hip Hop lyricists. Importantly, this chapter does not simply state that “Hip Hop is poetry,” in an attempt to legitimize Hip Hop lyrical production. While many scholars emphatically claim that Hip Hop is poetry—and it is—Hip Hop Headz are sayin, “Don’t just limit us by sayin what we do is just poetry.” What Pharoahe Monche’s comments earlier and other Rappers’ comments reveal is that Hip Hop is similar, but different, to most poetry in that multiple layers of complexity are required in order to “get a response rhythmically.”

The chapter begins with an exploration of the relationship between the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the Hip Hop Cultural Movement. I take the reader straight into a conversational cipher between Hip Hop artists and Black Arts Movement poets. We hear from baaddDDD poets like Sista Sonia Sanchez and Brotha Amiri Baraka and dope Hip Hop artists as diverse as Chuck D, Zion I, and the self-proclaimed “baddest bitch,” Trina. From there, we move into an in-depth, or deeply deep, poetic analysis of Hip Hop lyrical production. My analysis of Hip Hop poetics reveals that Hip Hop artists not only use the conventional poetic constructions (feminine rhyme, masculine rhyme, end rhyme, etc.), but they travel far beyond that, using innovative rhyming techniques such as chain rhymes, back-to-back chain rhymes, compound internal rhymes, primary and secondary internal rhymes, polysyllabic rhyme strings of octuple rhymes, and creating a multi rhyme matrix that is unparalleled in American poetics. There is an educational point to be made here: Rather than using Hip Hop Culture in urban classrooms only as a means to cultivate an appreciation for poems such as Chaucer and Shakespeare (those that use the so-called “white man’s literacy”), or even Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez, and their use of poetic devices, why not turn our attention to the study of some of contemporary Black America’s most innovative and inventive poets (like Pharoahe Monch, Eve, E-40, Busta Rhymes, the Rza, Redman, Method Man, Ludacris, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, Common, Lauryn Hill, Beanie Sigel, Black Thought, Nas, Bahamadia, Raekwon, Kanye West, Jay-Z, and Scarface, to name a few off the top of the dome)? After all, it is these rhymin who are continually influencing contemporary musical and literary production around the globe, like the poets of Japanese Hip Hop artists (Tsujimura et al. forthcoming), for example, or the rhymes of Hip Hop youth from China, Germany, Brazil, Tanzania, Australia, and Singapore, to name a few sites examined in recent literature on the Global Hip Hop Nation (Ibrahim et al. forthcoming).

In Chapter 7, “I’m Pharoahe when I’m on stage; I’m Troy when I’m home in Queens”: An interview with Pharoahe Monch,” the final word is left for the Pharoahe. It is one thing to analyze an artists’ lyrical production, and quite another to speak with the artist himself. I caught up with Pharoahe Monch in San Francisco’s Maritime Hall after one of the livest Hip Hop tours to sweep the country in 2000, “The Spittkicker Tour,” which featured artists like De La Soul, Biz Markie, Common, Talib Kweli, DJ Hi-Tek, Pharoahe Monch and others. After viewing and photographing his performance, I was invited backstage where I conducted interviews with many of the artists on the tour. I connected with
Pharoahe as we rode in the jeep to his hotel where we conducted an exclusive one-on-one interview. This interview, combined with the poetic analysis in Chapter 6, allows us to go far beyond an analysis of lyrical production alone. Not only was Pharoahe instrumental in the interpretation of his lyrical skills (we sent this manuscript back and forth several times before it actually went to print—thanks homie), but his interpretation of Hip Hop Culture contextualizes cultural production in ways that greatly enhance our understanding of this literary and linguistic phenomenon.

**Enter the cipha of HHLx**

Hip Hop cultural modes of discourse are at their peak in the *cipha*, the hyper-activated, communal, and competitive Hip Hop lyrical testing and stomping grounds of verbal mastery. If HHNL itself is both a communal and competitive discourse, and it is, then the cipha is the height of community and competition within the HHN. In the opening anecdote to this introduction, I likened the heated verbal exchanges between those present at Harvard’s “HipHop Community Activism and Education Roundtable” to an intellectual cipha. Conventional notions of authority, power, and the hierarchical construction of knowledge disappear in the cipha, and the flow and exchange of ideas take center stage. The cipha offers all participants a chance to sharpen their skills, while sharing ideas in the spirit of both teaching and learning—but you gotta have *heart*. Let’s take our lead from Pharoahe Monch and his cohort of word warriors. Listen in as he describes the value of having a competitive community of lyricists to help sharpen his skillz:

I’m just so inspired, you know, just watching how the people are reacting to Talib and Common and De La. And it’s what’s inspiring me to go back and record my new album, which is what I feel this is all about. *360 Degrees of Inspiration*. You hear my album, you’re like, “Okay.” Friendly competition, you know. “When I put my shit out, I’ma let the people know!” And that’s healthy for Hip Hop because it keeps it elevating on a lyrical level and a music level. I mean, you got to come with some shit now to come better than the Common album. You got to come with some shit now to come better than the De La album. Talib’s letting me hear his new album, I’m like, [Eyes buggin] “Yo, man!” ... I got to go back! ... It’s dope. And, I mean, we did a song for Lyricist Lounge where me and Common and Black Thought were just, you know, freestyling on it, rapping, some written, some off the top. And we were just saying how—Black Thought was saying how straight up and down he picked up the Pharoahe Monch album, enjoys it, listens to it. But then he’s like, “Fuck that!” You know? “When my album come, I’m comin better than that!” You know what I’m saying? And I expect him to elevate. And I expect him to inspire me when he drops his shit. That’s what art is about, you know.

Let’s bring all of our varying methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives to the HHLx cipha. In the spirit of Pharoahe’s *360 Degrees of Inspiration*, let’s build a community of scholars that’s real enough to offer critical advice, comments, and suggestions in a communal flow of information so that we can arrive at a more thorough description of HHNL—from the streets on up. Let’s take the tools of our varying fields, as elitist and hierarchical as they may be in their current condition, and revise them. Let’s bring that Hip Hop flava up into the academic study of language. Let’s take, like my man JT the Bigga Figga said in the opening quotation of this introduction, straight chittlins and greens and turn them into a delicacy.