



**The Challenges for Race and Community  
in Post-Civil Rights America**

*Comparative Perspectives in Contemporary Literature, Education, and Practice*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores contemporary responses to visions of more inclusive and egalitarian forms of society, which have emerged in the post-civil rights era from South American intellectuals, new Latino/a voices, and African American scholars. These theories imagine a diverse society mutually respectful of cultural heritage, with new concepts of community and new configurations of social, economic and political power, wherein everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity. The ultimate dream is of a society which transcends the perceived divisions of race, gender, and class, and heralds the elimination of oppression. With these visions in mind, the research investigates both conceptual and practical work which seeks to unite different races and ethnicities who are discriminated against, and which promotes multiethnic, multiracial collective action to address shared forms of oppression or injustice. The exploration is multidisciplinary, using source material from three influential domains - popular fiction, education, and social and political justice activism.

The interrogation uncovers contrasting perspectives on identity and community, differing perceptions of race and ethnicity, and competing agendas and strategies for social justice activism. Additionally, the emergence of a sizeable middle class within minority groups has created an unprecedented and complicating factor for social justice activism, overlaid upon the enduring racial and ethnic issues. The unique combination of contrasting material in different settings also adds another dimension and exposes disparities between theory and practice, disconnection between generations, and dislocation between classes, opening up opportunities for further research in such areas. Whilst the findings reveal diverse, integrated activism is being promoted by radical theorists, scholars, writers, and educators, and practised in a number of organisations, with some successful outcomes at local, and sometimes state and federal levels, this body of work is fragmented and does not have a unified or national profile. In contrast with these radical initiatives, the longstanding, national civil rights organisations, though welcoming diverse membership and actions, have a more liberal, accommodating, and non-confrontational approach, and have witnessed a general decline in progress in recent decades, with none of the landmark cases seen earlier. The substantial demographic changes over this period have yet to translate into radical, collective action across the perceived racial and ethnic divide on a large scale. The thesis therefore concludes with a contemplation of the challenges which lay ahead for social justice activism in America.

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## **Author Declaration**

The author declares that both the research and the writing are his own, and that the research has been ethically approved. A copy of the request for ethical approval and a copy of the confirmation of that approval are contained in the Appendix.

## **Note on Terminology**

The terms 'African American' and 'black' are treated as having the same meaning, and are used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

## **Key Words/Phrases**

race, community, diversity, civil rights, social justice, Black Lives Matter, hip-hop pedagogy, street literature

*For Jill*

We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color

Maya Angelou

***Source of quotation***

Page v      Angelou, M. (1993) *Wouldn't Take Nothing For My Journey Now*. New York, NY.: Random House, p.124.

## Introduction

*Where others saw borders, these nepantleras saw links; where others saw abysses, they saw bridges spanning those abysses... A bridge...is not just about one set of people crossing to the other side; it's also about those of the other side crossing to this side.*

*Gloria Anzaldúa*

*pluralism is the watchword of the future*

*Randall Kenan*

The aim of this thesis is to explore how contemporary texts and initiatives in America are responding to visions of more inclusive and egalitarian forms of society, which have emerged in recent decades from South American intellectuals, new Latino/a voices, and African American scholars. By way of background, the personal journey to this enquiry came from an original exposition of the post-black aesthetic in present-day America. This work raised some important questions about individualism and communitarianism, and specifically how they are reconciled with the enduring social justice issues, interwoven with endemic racism, which affect minority group citizens, not least the poor and disadvantaged in deprived neighbourhoods. These questions persist with the arrival of President Trump in 2016 after eight years of the Obama administration. Whereas the liberal intentions of Obama were sometimes thwarted or diluted by the Republican presence in Congress, the rhetoric of Trump now raises the spectre of intolerance, in the form of a proposed wall of exclusion on the southern border and tight controls on Muslim immigration. For Van Jones, the election of Trump is “a whitelash against a changing country...[and]... a black president” (2016, online), though Melissa Harris-Perry is not surprised, since “for most of American history, racism has been a prerequisite to win the American presidency” (cited in Crockett 2016, online). Indeed, the nation has recently been reminded in no uncertain terms by the emergent Black Lives Matter movement that racism and oppression persist, unchanged and unchanging. The movement presented a radical challenge to liberalism and postracial assumptions in the Obama era, but now faces an even bigger challenge as the Trump administration evolves.

These developments therefore make it more important than ever to consider those voices of inclusion, whose ultimate aim is to dismantle all forms of oppression. The contemporary nature of such an enquiry necessarily brings with it a focus on the present generation, raised with new technology, accustomed to instant, global communications from multiple sources,

and acquiring knowledge and learning in new ways. This in turn demands the use of multidisciplinary sources of material to both inform and strengthen the interrogation. The Introduction now proceeds by setting out the broad contextual background, before describing the specific research question and aim, the methodology to be used, and the objectives, which structure the argument developed in the following chapters.

In the last fifty years America has experienced huge change in its demography, with the arrival of multiple, ethnically diverse groups from the Caribbean and Central and South America, bringing with them a mosaic of cultural influences and myriad new voices. These changes were gathering pace as the momentum of the civil rights era was beginning to fade, and continued throughout the subsequent period of African American identity politics, and debates over essentialism, separatism, and integration. In the same period America has been at the forefront of globalisation, fuelled by rapid technological advances, promoting its cultural, political, and economic values to the extent that the terms Americanisation and Westernisation became synonymous with its global aims. In more recent decades, though, shifting balances in international politics and economics have witnessed the emergence of new economic powers, in China, Brazil, and Indonesia, for example, which are challenging and changing the world order. America therefore faces a future which will reposition it in this new world order, even as the demographic changes within its own boundaries will present challenges to its values, beliefs, and democracy.

In a similar time frame postcolonial discourse has sought to challenge the residual effects of the colonial era and ensuing neocolonialism (in the form of Westernisation and globalisation), and to reclaim a place for cultures suppressed by imperialist ideologies, and latterly by cultural imperialism. The discourse is marked by a number of seminal figures, such as Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth* 1961), Edward Said (*Orientalism* 1978), Gayatri Spivak (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 1988), and Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture* 1994). Taking inspiration from this discourse, grand visions of a quite different, pluralist future have emerged, wherein decolonising Latino/a voices posit a worldview distinct from Western philosophy and politics, and imagine a society beyond the polarity of capitalism and communism, one inclusive of multiple cultures and new epistemologies, embracing new concepts of community, and forming new configurations of social, economic and political power. The core principles of the pluralist credo - the acceptance of diversity and the equality of existence - transcend the perceived divisions of race, gender, and class, and imagine a

diverse society mutually respectful of cultural heritage and identity, wherein everyone has an equal voice and equal opportunity. These visions are described and critiqued in the first chapter, employing a number of these voices, including Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Ramón and José Saldivar, and Paulo Freire, alongside the seminal voice of Gloria Anzaldúa, whose radical thinking is cited in the epigraph (2002, p.4). In African American culture, after the civil rights era and the decline of the Black Power and Black Arts movements, some radical black voices emerged which also embraced inclusion and equality, such as feminists Audre Lorde and Alice Walker, and scholars bell hooks and Henry Louis Gates Jr. The notion of blackness and black identity, however, continues to be a contested area, explored in the work of writers such as Paul Beatty and Ta-Nehisi Coates. Black voices such as these will likewise be explored in the first chapter.

As the progress of the civil rights era stalled, the last 35 years also witnessed the emergence of Critical Race Theory (CRT). This theory asserts that racism is endemic, expressed in either a conscious or unconscious way, not only in multiple everyday interactions between individuals but, crucially, at systemic levels in many major societal institutions, including the justice and education systems, and in many social, economic and political policies and programmes. CRT intersects with pluralist principles both in its championing of the individual voice from the margins, and in its potential to inspire strategies for addressing oppression. This theory is also described and critiqued within the thesis, with reference to key scholars such as Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.

Though the imagined future world order expressed through these discourses and theories is far from the realities of today, this thesis explores one small, albeit important, aspect of these visions, and considers present-day responses to the principles of equality and diversity in both theory and practice. Thus the research question was formed – to what extent do contemporary texts and initiatives promote the notion and reality of diverse communal activism as a strategy in challenging shared forms of oppression and inequality? The specific aim of the thesis is therefore to look for both conceptual and practical work which unites different races and ethnicities who are discriminated against, and creates multiethnic, multiracial collective action to address social, economic and political oppression or injustice in contemporary America. These formations will very largely be acting on behalf of the less well-off and the poor of all races and ethnicities, but are not conceived of as exclusive, but rather inclusive of all classes.

An initial review of contemporary texts, principally African American and Latino/a (the largest minorities whose experiences apply, to a greater or lesser extent, to other minority groups) revealed quite contrasting perspectives in terms of identity and community, which can be encapsulated into two broad categories. The first, and by far the most common, exhibited personal, individualistic positions, often wrestling with a sense of identity, perhaps not surprising in an era of significant demographic change, which has brought multiple new cultural voices into the US. The second, smaller category was more outward-facing, other-centred, and communitarian. This group was more focused on social justice issues and the politics of oppression, in its various guises. Whilst there was an abundant mixture of racial and ethnic culture in the first category, there was a marked difference between the minority groups in the second. African American texts were fewer and very largely black-centric, whilst the predominant Latino/a production was frequently more inclusive and accepting of diverse ethnicity and race.

This review informed the selection of material for the thesis, and the consequent choice of research methodology. The material incorporates voices with cultural backgrounds or worldviews different from traditional Western understanding, and at the same time recognises that the present generation also experiences the world in non-traditional ways, communicating instantly around the globe, and acquiring knowledge through making connections between multiple sources of information. The evidence for the argument therefore comes from an original, innovative, multidisciplinary perspective, using texts and initiatives drawn from three quite different, but influential domains - popular fiction, using both canonical and 'street lit' works, featuring authors Danzy Senna and Sofia Quintero; education, employing hip-hop pedagogy both in the academy and in urban public high schools; and social and political justice activism, exploring both liberal and radical examples. Taken together, these domains present some contrasting responses to the principles of diversity and equality, and engage with both theory, applied theory, and practice. They encompass the themes of the individual and the communitarian, and address the enduring issues of race and ethnicity, class difference and lived experience, and gender and sexuality. This combination of contrasting material in different settings also adds another dimension and exposes disparities between theory and practice, disconnection between generations, and dislocation between classes, opening up opportunities for further research in such areas.

The comparative case study method is used, being considered the most suitable for the

interpretation of complex social phenomena, in this case analysis and evaluation of material from multiple, interdisciplinary sources. This method “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin 2009, p.18), and this is so here, with pluralist and race theories underpinning the thesis. However, the intention is not to be constrained by methodology but, as Gilles Deleuze said, “to find the conditions under which something new is produced (creativity)” (2002, p.vii). The thesis therefore searches for innovative theory and practice across disciplines, and is open to ideas or practices which may be in development, reside outside formal classifications, or cross boundaries, like the *nepantlero/as* (in-betweeners) of Anzaldúa in the epigraph, who see bridges over seeming chasms of cultural difference, across which each side walks to experience the other. The research looks for intersections, coherence, or collaborations between these different voices in the way they imagine a healthy society with equal opportunities and justice for all, and in their position on the politics of oppression which permeate American society.

The material is evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in stimulating reflection and its potential to inspire an individual along certain pathways, ultimately leading to the development of political consciousness and active engagement in the quest to eliminate forms of oppression. At the individual level, the evaluation must therefore consider the matter of personal growth evoked within the material. In brief, this journey begins with self-awareness, understanding the external influences impacting upon sense(s) of self and identity, in particular the history and mechanics of oppression, and the consequential internalisation of false beliefs and feelings. Recognising and challenging these embedded beliefs develops self-knowledge and thereby self-worth, and with it the impetus to resist being predefined and to determine one's own future. Within this learning process, the experiences of other oppressed people can be understood as equally valid, and shared forms of oppression across perceived differences, including race and ethnicity, may be recognised. This level of awareness sows the seeds for collective action to challenge these inequalities and injustices, and the journey has the potential to take the individual towards wider, social and political consciousness and engagement. Then, in a different register, the evaluation must also take into account the practical elements of the material. This is most relevant in the chapters dealing with education and activism, where it is necessary to consider the real-life barriers and limitations facing these initiatives, and the strategies in place to try and overcome them. Ultimately, the combination of these theoretical and practical criteria will produce a stronger, more relevant conclusion.

The thesis develops in stages through the following chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the first, two-stage objective, which is to examine the historical context from which visions of a more inclusive, egalitarian society have emerged, and to consider practical steps towards that ultimate goal. This backdrop forms a framework within which the selected material can then be analysed, equitably evaluated and fairly compared, in order to reach a balanced conclusion. The chapter therefore begins by exploring key societal changes, spanning the period from the civil rights era to the present day. This includes commentary on major demographic changes and the impact on the politics of identity and culture, together with the intersecting economic and social changes, which engendered a variety of perceptions of lost traditions, values, and community. With the focus predominantly on minority groups, and principally the poor and disadvantaged, a range of shared forms of oppression across racial and ethnic lines is revealed. The second half of the chapter then turns to examine and critique Critical Race Theory and versions of pluralism which foreground inclusion and equality, and which respect and take into account voices from the margins, depicting the future imagined by Randall Kenan in the epigraph (2008, p.21). At this point the first small steps towards inclusion and equality are contemplated, in the form of the concept and actuality of diverse groups, collaborations, and alliances working for social, economic, and political justice at both local community level and in a wider context.

Chapters 2 - 4 address the second objective, which is to assess how contemporary texts and initiatives respond to the notion and actuality of diverse communal action as a strategy in challenging oppression and inequality. Chapter 2 presents the first domain, that of popular fiction, and compares the work of authors Senna and Quintero in the way they address concepts of identity and community. In the course of the examination contrasts are drawn between the introspective, reflective individual and the outward-facing, but also reflective communitarian, whose sense of self in relation to others is a compelling characteristic. The analysis foregrounds the notion of race and ethnicity, and its effect upon the individual; explores the assumptions of multiculturalism against a backdrop of persistent racism; and presents interactive exchanges across perceived cultural boundaries, using a strand of contemporary hip-hop feminism as a model. The chapter concludes with reflections on the writers' response to diversity and equality, and their understanding of community, along with the impulse towards collective action for social and political justice.

Chapter 3 builds on the communitarian impulse and broadens the interrogation into the crucial area of educating the adults of the next generation. Initiatives employing hip-hop pedagogy in urban public high schools in major cities and in the academy (including elite institutions) are compared and evaluated in the way they engage students in critical analysis, notions of the self and the self in community, citizenship, rights and responsibilities, and social and political justice issues. The initiatives each lead to the application of learned theory by involving students with local community groups.

The public school case study features socially and politically conscious hip-hop material, whose stories of discrimination, injustice, and resistance represent the lives and experiences of many of the students in a very personal way. Texts are used to engage the students and explore notions of identity, community, social justice, and ways to bring about change. The style of teaching reflects the way in which the techno-savvy, hip-hop generation acquires information and knowledge, makes interconnections, shares ideas, and learns in new ways. Lessons therefore use an interdisciplinary mix of sources, both hip-hop and traditional, and create a mutual learning environment between teacher and students. Dynamic exchanges between students from different backgrounds and cultures promote mutual understanding and identify common personal and public interests and concerns. The lesson programme develops incrementally towards engagement with social and political issues at local community level, and explores broader political agency. Hip-hop in the academy is a more recent phenomenon. Today, however, there are modules engaging with hip-hop history, politically conscious hip-hop in America and beyond, concepts of community, and social justice issues; there are research possibilities, archives, and use of hip-hop material in racial and ethnic studies programmes; and there are secondments of students to community social justice projects. The two initiatives are evaluated and compared, revealing some tensions, institutional resistance to change, and some conflicts of interest.

Chapter 4 takes the final, logical step, moving on from theory and its application in a learning environment, and entering the arena of social and political justice activism. Material selected ranges from grassroots neighbourhood and community groups through to national and international organisations, and is critiqued in terms of the extent to which it works towards the ideal of the diverse and egalitarian community, and society, in its practice.

Research exposes a mass of local and regional groups and initiatives, alongside some wider networking organisations, and a small number of major, long-established, national organisations. The agendas of these groups may be narrow or broad, radical or liberal, with short-term or longer-term goals; the composition can be diverse or limited; the strategies confrontational or accommodating; and the impact significant or minimal. Alongside these there are government-inspired initiatives intended to improve the lives of the (mostly minority group) deprived neighbourhoods, the site of the most intense forms of oppression. Representative examples are compared and evaluated as indicated above, with the additional criteria of visibility, strategy, and appeal to the present generation, all factors which will materially affect their impact and chances of success at the highest levels.

The chapter then devotes a section specifically to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which has risen to prominence in the last few years. The movement is analysed, evaluated, and compared with the other groups in order to draw out what has driven this rise and propelled it into the public consciousness. This process tracks the growth of BLM, which tapped into a deep vein of pent-up anger and frustration in the present generation at the continuing deaths of young black men and women in police incidents. The developing organisation, agenda and strategy of this seemingly fresh form of politics are interrogated in terms of coherence and potential for success in the present political climate.

The conclusion of the thesis presents a summary of the findings in terms of the research question, commenting on current levels of engagement with diversity and equality in both theory and practice, and exposing key themes, interconnections, areas of progress, challenges, and complicating factors. The final section addresses critical questions concerning multiethnic, multiracial, social justice activism in the immediate and longer term future, taking into account the contemporary political climate, enduring barriers, and forecast demographic change. Chapter 1 now begins the argument, setting out and commenting upon the contextual background, before presenting analysis and assessment of the key theories and discourses underpinning the thesis.

## Chapter 1      Exploring the Present, Contemplating the Future

*You come to the United States and the United States begins immediately, systematically, to erase you in every way, to suppress those things which it considers not digestible. You spend a lot of time being colonized. Then, if you've got the opportunity and the breathing space and the guidance, you immediately - when you realize it - begin to decolonize yourself. And in that process, you relearn names for yourself that you had forgotten*

*Junot Díaz*

There have been rapid and significant demographic changes in the United States in recent decades, and myriad new voices with quite different worldviews are increasingly being heard. This chapter will begin by looking at the substantial changes in the racial and ethnic minority presence, exploring behind the raw statistics to reveal diverse cultures and histories, multifaceted and complex senses of identity, and multiple and fluid notions of community. Further analysis will confirm that large numbers within these minority groups have shared experiences of economic and social discrimination and inequality. The focus will then shift to voices emerging from these changes, voices which conceive of the world in a more inclusive way, where tolerance and respect replace discrimination, and minimise inequality. The relevance of these visions as inspiration and a potential strategy for addressing racial and ethnic injustices and inequalities in the US today will then be contemplated, with the focus on multiracial, multiethnic activism as the primal force for change. The chapter concludes with a restatement of the research question - to what extent do contemporary texts and initiatives promote the notion and reality of diverse communal activism as a strategy in challenging shared forms of oppression and inequality?

### ***Exploring the Present: Diversity, Community and Oppression***

The most significant demographic change in the US over the last fifty years has been the rapid increase in the numbers of those identifying themselves as Latino/a. Since the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which ended a quota system favouring Europe, the 6 million citizens of that time have become 54 million today, making this not just the fastest growing minority, but also the largest, overtaking the 45 million African Americans. This

chapter will focus on these two groupings, although many of the issues discussed apply to varying degrees and in similar ways to the other minorities.

In reality, there are no figures which can truly express the multiple faces of the US. Indeed, on the 2010 census some 10 % of the population self-identified in the 'two or more races' and 'some other race' categories, which gives an indication of the multiple and complex stories behind the raw data. The census also shows that 63% of Latino/a people in the US declare themselves to be of Mexican origin and a further 22% from Central America and the Caribbean. However, behind these crude statistics lie earlier histories of migration, intercultural exchanges and unknown levels of mixed descent in all its permutations. Each of the many nation states of Latin America has its own history of colonisation, slavery, racial violence, and sometimes religious persecution; each has its unique political regime in the period since independence, some with experiences of civil war and genocide, some inflected with US imperialist interventions; and each has its own mix of cultures. As Dominican American writer Junot Díaz explains, "I have multiple traditions... I'm part of the mainstream 'American' literary tradition. I'm a part of the Latino literary tradition. I'm a part of the African Diaspora literary tradition as well as the Dominican literary tradition" (Céspedes & Torres-Saillant 2000, p.904). In *The Idea of Latin America* (2005) Walter D. Mignolo asserts that it is absurd to attempt to reduce and homogenise this vast geographical area. Tellingly, the term Latin America was created by the dominant Western capitalist world and understood in terms of its position vis-à-vis the West, namely as an underdeveloped region and a potentially rich source of raw materials. For Mignolo, this is the colonialist credo of racial hierarchy and economic exploitation transcribed into the postcolonial era by a West striving to retain its power and control. With such a reductive perception of the Latino/a population, the US has hitherto ignored its diversity, disregarded its cultures and discounted its knowledge, but Latino/a voices are increasingly being heard today, as this thesis will explore.

For African Americans, too, ever-increasing numbers identifying as mixed race are blurring the boundaries of blackness. The concepts of race and ethnicity originated as counterpoints to historical white hegemony and, whilst they may be useful as points of reference in challenging that narrative, it is doubtful that a 'racially pure' African American community ever existed anyway, as "America has always been 'the land of miscegenation'" (Danzy Senna cited in Milian Arias 2002, p.447). Slaves were from different regions or tribal groups in Africa, with different languages and cultures, arbitrarily or deliberately mixed up by traders

or buyers; families were casually split up as required in the sale process; slaves, indigenous people, colonialists and then 'Americans' mixed together over time; and then followed many generations of immigrants from around the world to further complicate the mixture. In the contemporary world many white Americans view this racial and ethnic integration as a sign that the race problem is over, and they live in a complacent, so-called colourblind state. Responding to this, Senna says that “one of the things I'm...wary of in the multiracial movement is a denial of the persistence of racism. In this Tiger Woods model, we're all just happy to be mixed” (Weber 2004, online). In his exposition of 'new racism' David Leonard says “colorblind racism is subtle, institutional, and composed of apparently non-racial practices, yet inequality, segregation, and white privilege remain intact” (2006, p.13). Referring to African Americans, he asserts that new racism accepts (but does not necessarily reward) black assimilation into the middle class, yet demonises the black poor, who are stereotyped as criminal and violent, and who can elicit social panic, leading to often violent and repressive state control, which is justified as morally necessary, not racially motivated. In a similar vein, Mary Romero questions the motivation behind state-controlled immigration raids targeting poor Mexican Americans, which serve to reinforce their subordinate status and stigmatise them by virtue of their ethnic origin, which in turn creates division and friction both within and between ethnic groups in Latino/a neighbourhoods (2006). To confound the picture yet more, Ytasha Womack refers to prejudice between African immigrants and African Americans in their various guises, saying that “mounting stereotypes on both sides of the black cultural fence foster a staggering friction” (2010, p.63). For bell hooks, “there is no longer a common notion of shared black identity” (2013, p.2), but did one ever really exist? Indeed, the same could be asked of any demographic group. The question therefore forms - how have these diverse individuals conceived of their identity, their belonging, their sense of community?

African Americans were the voice of racial protest in twentieth century America. During the early years of the civil rights movement they appeared as a community united behind their charismatic leaders who grabbed the media headlines, whilst their grassroots activists worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Yvonne Bynoe, though, reminds us that blacks “sublimated...internal differences and put forth a united front to fight racial discrimination” (2004, p.83). Agreement over top level objectives, like equal voting rights, were countered by differences between peaceful protest and direct action, and between assimilation and separatism. The leaders themselves sometimes changed their positions, and over time

different organisations with different agendas were formed. In the ensuing decades campaigns by African Americans featured far less regularly in national headlines. That is not to say that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), for example, is not actively engaged with issues big and small, and achieving some successes at local, state and sometimes national level (NAACP 2015, online). However, it is still in a period of recovery after significant internal, leadership and financial problems in the 1990s and beyond, when it was dogged by persisting questions about its demographic, membership levels and relevance to young people (*The Christian Science Monitor* 1995, online; Bloomberg Business 2005, online).

Amongst the numerous other civil rights organisations, The Rainbow PUSH Coalition and The National Action Network, founded by Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton respectively, are amongst the larger and better known. Sharpton has been the more visible activist, organising protest rallies against many perceived injustices, such as the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013 for the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin. More recently he became the "go-to black leader" for President Obama, according to '60 Minutes' (CBS News 2011, online). In the present moment though, the Black Lives Matter movement, formed by ordinary, mainly young citizens, is gaining valuable national exposure from their protest activities against the continuing deaths of black people in police incidents. A self-consciously black group with ambitions to be a global presence, they also set out a broad agenda against other forms of oppression, and present themselves as an alternative to, and different from, the established organisations. Chapter 4, on present day activism, takes an extended look at these, and other, groups. However, in spite of their activities, in the years following the civil rights era commentators became much more aware of the lack of cohesion within the African American community. Hank Willis Thomas, discussing the 1980s, says that "something broke in the community spirit of my generation" (2012, p.98), a view echoed by his contemporary Womack who notes that "the scope of our idealism was chain-locked to our moneymaking aspirations...[as]...we relegated our idealistic nostalgia to symbolic gestures" (2010, p.176). That decade was one of economic contrasts, with a culture of individualism and conspicuous consumption at one extreme and a bleak outlook for the poor facing welfare cuts at the other. Economic growth in the 1990s brought no respite for the less well-off, as they bore the impact of deindustrialisation, including increasing family and community breakdown, described by Henry Giroux as the "fracturing and menacing conditions of a postmodern culture" (1996, p.33). Black people and ethnic minorities were disproportionately affected by

the increasing wealth gap, only made worse by economic recessions in the 2000s. Some therefore yearn for a recovery of that lost community spirit. “We need to reaffirm the primacy of community, connectedness, and sharing” says hooks (2013, p.181), whilst Paul Gilroy wants to re-energise socially conscious debate and “find a political language for projecting utopias out into the public domain” (1993, p.223).

The Latino/a communities, by contrast, are many and varied in origin and have only relatively recently become significant in scale, with a large proportion being first or second generation immigrants. Their cultural histories were forged elsewhere and their American experience is comparatively new and raw. Whilst their primary sense of identity comes from their nation state of origin, once in the US they experience what many generations of immigrants have faced in varying degrees of intensity - a personal struggle to adapt to unfamiliar conditions and an alien culture. They often find themselves oppressed by demeaning assumptions and prejudgements, sometimes casting them as exotic and fascinating, yet at the same time inferior and underdeveloped, and sometimes as hypersexualised, immoral, violent and criminal (Gómez-Peña 1987), a position very familiar to African Americans (hooks 2013). They are alienated by forms of discrimination resulting from these prejudices, once again not so different from the racism experienced by black people, and this merely serves to expose the spurious classifications of race and ethnicity. They begin to lose the sense of who they are, as Esmeralda Santiago recalls from her experiences in the 1960s - “I silently grieved the dissolution of the other me” (1999, p.74) as she adapts to life in the US. Attending performing arts school, ironically she finds herself 'performing' not just as an actor, but in real life at multiple levels in the “extended improvisation” (ibid., p.74) of her life, as she learns to navigate social situations and adopt different personas. Living a kind of extended metaphor of experiences in wider society, she is typecast to play Cleopatra, based on her appearance, undergoes speech training to eradicate her accent, and learns to selectively conceal or reveal parts of herself to others. Decades later, in 2000, Díaz expresses this same sense of erasure in the quotation at the head of this chapter, expressing the immediate, enforced and oppressive adjustment to a new culture and language, and the gradual loss of the very different ‘you’ from before, leaving a sense of not fully belonging in either culture (Céspedes & Torres-Saillant 2000, p.896). As Gustavo Pérez Firmat writes in *Bilingual Blues*: “My subject: how to explain to you that I don’t belong to English though I belong nowhere else” (1995, p.3). Whilst Santiago represents earlier Latino/a experiences, Díaz comes from the more confident later period, recognising that

“Latinos of the generation right before me grew up in the United States at a time when they were invisible. They didn't talk about being Puerto Rican or Dominican... I think I became very aware of who I was because there was a nation asserting their Latino roots” (Céspedes & Torres-Saillant 2000, p.896). Overlaid upon these individual struggles, however, there are other societal forces which have served, in recent decades, to work against a sense of community right across the demographic spectrum. Analysis of the principal factors below provides a deeper understanding as to why the notion of community is so fragile for so many in minority groups.

There are many complex and variable factors which can contribute to these feelings of lost community, yet it is possible to discern some principal causes, the most significant being the emergence of a sizeable ethnic and black middle class in recent decades. Whilst there is no agreed standard definition of middle class in terms of net worth or income, a commonly agreed element is home ownership and, based on that factor, 47% of Latino/as and 44% blacks fall within the middle-class spectrum (US Census Bureau 2011, online). Certainly, the emerging Latino/a middle class is quickly becoming a new major target group for high-end retailers (Voxxi 2013, online). Within the different classes and social settings, however, experiences of racism and discrimination can also be very different, and more or less overt, which breeds intraracial and intraethnic tensions and divisions. Womack, for example, looks at present day inner city regeneration and gentrification adjacent to poor areas, where the aspirations of incoming black professionals clearly preclude the notion of an inclusive black community, as they wonder when the neighbouring poor black people will be leaving (2010, p.20). Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, in his sharply comic play *Neighbors*, presents us with black academic Richard, striving for acceptance among his white peers and horrified when a family of antebellum Negro stereotypes move in next door. “I grew up around some of these people!”, he yells at his (white) wife (2012, p.276). For Houston Baker, "the very idea of the bourgeois public sphere is shot through with contradictions" (1994, p.8), implying that bourgeois status is associated with self-interest, materialism and assimilation, in contrast with the communitarian, inclusive sensibilities linked with broader public concerns. Some in the middle class may espouse liberal egalitarianism, may be concerned about discrimination and inequality amongst the less well-off, and some will be socially and politically active in addressing such issues, whereas for others such concern and involvement may be restricted by fear of compromising their status and position within local society, and for others still there may be no such concern at all. Ironically, however, Steven Gregory elaborates on those

in the middle class who engage politically at local levels, making their voices heard and increasing the chances of having their own needs met at the expense of the working class and poor who participate rather less and so tend to be more overlooked. He finds that community investment is “disproportionately responsive to middle-class homeowners who are organized into tightly knit networks of block and civic associations...[thus]...deepening black class divisions” (1994, p.161). In her paper ‘Building Political Engagement in Multi-Ethnic Communities’ Michelle Kondo finds an example of just this situation in a neighbourhood near Seattle where large numbers of poor and minority races and ethnicities, comprising 23% of the area population, are virtually inactive politically and further marginalised accordingly in terms of public facilities (2008).

Another factor which has a detrimental effect upon minority cultures and their sense of community is the American tendency towards conformity and consensus. For example, there is evidence of what one might call homogeneous blackness, where powerful figures like Oprah Winfrey, who bought the film rights to several key black texts, have too much influence and are restricting blackness. Darryl Dickson-Carr refers to a number of contemporary black novelists, such as Paul Beatty, who believe this is the case and states:

The fact that...Winfrey or any other large, powerful corporation...  
would...buy the rights to black lives and creativity...and reduce them  
to a vision that jibes with...the corporation, to an endlessly reproducible  
commodity is an anathema (2013, p 43)

He asserts that dynamic leaders of black aesthetics are necessary to halt formulaic, cliché-ridden banality which provides no nuanced understanding of black experience. Cultural commodification tends to produce homogeneity and reduce variety, thereby limiting dialogue and resistant or challenging counternarrative, and producing a community which is anodyne, static and, critically, may therefore be unaware of or unresponsive to minority needs. The commodification process, whereby elements from minority cultures are appropriated and marketed within the dominant culture, may suggest inclusion and equality, but this is an illusion. This is not a free exchange, but pure commercial exploitation by a dominant group creating demand for a product from consumers who, ironically, include those from the minority groups being exploited. Commercial hip-hop music, for example, is rife with rappers like Lil Wayne who flaunt their wealth and extol the value of materialism and

personal gain. Gilroy sees how the lure of consumerism encourages self-indulgence and disrupts community, asserting that:

an unsubversive will to triumph in the game of consumerism and thereby to make consumer citizenship and brand identities eclipse the merely political forms of belonging...[producing a]...diminution of citizenship...that confiscates the possibility of collective experience, synchronised suffering, and acting in concert (2010, p.21)

The major effect of cultural commodification is to dilute or dispel the originality and signifying force of that which is appropriated. It is, as a result, a form of racial or ethnic disempowerment which subtly and cumulatively divides and rules the minority community.

Finally, and in some ways connected to the self-centredness of consumerism, is the tendency towards individualism, noted earlier, which became apparent in the economic climate of the 1980s but is evident still, in the celebrity culture phenomenon, for example. By definition, this impulse does not encourage notions of community. Recent generations have experienced rapid social change and the erosion of 'traditional' values and beliefs (such as primacy of family and community, and defined gender roles); they have been assailed by multiple new influences, fed by technological advances; and they find themselves in a poststructuralist world of fluid boundaries without the fixity and conviction of earlier perspectives. In African American life, for example, the influence of community institutions like the church was still very strong in the civil rights era, but pastors no longer have the same moral authority and leadership, and churches are no longer as active politically. Womack considers the reason for this to be the growth of personalised, individualist spirituality which "has played a prominent role in people's growing disinterest in being controlled by institutions" (2010, p.103). Some also argue that this is a postracial era, where race is no longer relevant. Indeed, the so-called post-black aesthetic is founded on this premise and its African American proponents, whilst not denying the persistence of racism, are determined not to be labelled as 'black', as they freely absorb influences from other cultures, principally white, to critique both white and black values and beliefs built upon untenable foundations and to expose the indefensible basis of intolerance and prejudice. This is laudable, but it is a self-avowed individualistic aesthetic with no social justice agenda or communitarian sensibilities. Erika Searles, in her study of the art of post-black conceptual artist Kara Walker, considers the art "less about

activism and representing the race as a group and more about personal experience and individualism” (2006, p.34), a view echoed by cultural commentator Touré, who considers that post-black productions represent the “dynamic hyper-creative beauty of modern individualistic Blackness” (2011, p.12). In the end then, this and the other factors outlined above conspire to significantly problematise and confound the notion of a coherent community in the contemporary world.

It transpires, however, that these complicating factors have by no means extinguished the existence of community in its various guises. John Garcia, in the second edition of his *Latino Politics in America: Community, Culture, and Interests* (2012), notes the recent emergence of pan-ethnicity, where community groups are formed between Latino/a ethnic sub-groups. He refers to these as communities of interest as opposed to communities of shared culture, although there are some shared cultural characteristics - a common language, the predominance of Catholic religious faith and its emphasis on family values, and mutual histories of intercultural exchanges between countries of origin. He cites examples of local political activism, such as environmentalist groups campaigning against toxic waste dumping near Latino/a neighbourhoods; instances of increasing representation in local politics in areas with a high concentration of Latino/as, referring to Mexican Americans in California; and the gradual spread of pan-ethnicity as Mexican American presence increases north as far as Chicago. Indeed, today Latino/a figures are much more visible in all areas of society, including mainstream politics and in non-governmental organisations. Though the sheer variety of the Latino/a presence in the US makes the idea of a national, unifying leader untenable, there are activist and influential personalities concerned with community issues and social justice for all Latino/as. For example, Antonio Gonzalez is President of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, responsible for significant increases in voter registration and turnout (Time 2005a, online); Anthony Romero is Executive Officer of the American Civil Liberties Union (Time 2005b, online); and Pablo Alvarado, co-ordinator of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, “is considered the César Chávez of...day workers” (Time 2005c, online).

While Garcia explores politically aware Latino/as, he also acknowledges that as yet there is not a great deal of research into Latino/a micro-communities, whereas the changes within the black communities at all levels in the period since the civil rights era are far more thoroughly documented. Black scholars and cultural commentators on both sides of the Atlantic reveal

various experiences of blackness and ideas about community. At one level, there is the underlying sense of cultural interconnectedness, as Randall Kenan contends that “[t]o be an African American is to be part of a larger diaspora, to be linked to a once-land, a place that no longer exists, but that binds us nonetheless” (2008, p.73). Within that, though, there are quite contrasting notions of community. At one end of the spectrum, one might say, these are quite black-centric. British scholar Mark Christian, in his analysis of the black intellectual and activist tradition, asserts that “[h]istorical evidence clearly indicates a need for African-descended peoples to unite in their respective struggles” (2002, p.128). He vents his frustration at the contemporary marginalisation of black-centred discourse in favour of what he sees as postmodern perspectives which underplay the race issue, and is highly critical of contemporary individualism and the avoidance of communal confrontation with white Western discourse and hegemony. His vision has a distinct leftist political edge and he cites Walter Rodney as the paradigm of black activism and intellectualism, a man who considered the role of the scholar to be a “guerrilla intellectual” (ibid., p.130), using the academy as a battle ground of ideas, not a place to engage in bourgeois intellectualism and adhere to Western discourse, but to transform knowledge into a source of power for black liberation struggles. The overall tenor of Christian’s approach seems somewhat at odds with the present day blurring of racial and ethnic boundaries, but his critique of individualism does have merit, in that it recognises the negative effect this can have upon community formation.

Another black British scholar, Stephen Small, takes a rather more inclusive view, asserting that politics is more important than racial identity and that collective action should not be based on perceptions of racial origin, but on common goals, community and family. However, at the same time he says that racial origins are still important and argues for the inclusion of black people of mixed origins within the ‘pure’ black community, “working to build what we share, rather than what divides us” (2002, p.189). In this way he envisages much bigger, stronger communities coming together to fight for common political goals. He justifies this vision by asserting that “we are all, from time immemorial, mixed, genetically... and, more importantly, our...Black identities...are mixed with so many factors other than racialised group membership” (ibid., p.189). However, whilst embracing diversity within blackness, Small does not appear to go beyond that position, as the ‘we’ he mentions refers only to people with varying degrees of black heritage.

Afrofuturism presents yet another, quite different, perspective on black identity and community. Artists in the Afrofuturist movement address the themes and concerns shared by black people by using fantasy, science fiction or magic realism in literature, art, music and mixed media to create new imagined possibilities for black communities of the future. These aesthetic techniques create a critical thinking space whereby artists can critique the present even as they envision the future. Womack tells us that Afrofuturism is rooted in diasporic heritage, which discopoet Khari B defines as “going back to ancient traditions so that we can move more correctly into the future” (cited in Womack 2013, p.160). In this way, scholar Marlo David maintains, the aesthetic occupies a discrete, third space, with elements of both 'old' black and post-black perspectives (2007). The artists take pride in their blackness, their unique culture and heritage and their separate codes, but they reject black essentialism and embrace self-definition and self-determination, though without the post-black strategy of rejecting blackness as a subject position. Afrofuturism is indeed an inspiring and enticing mix of heritage, real or imagined, and a re-envisioning of blackness outside the overdetermined definitions and politicised constraints of the present era, what theorist Kodwo Eshun calls the “chronopolitical” (2003, p.289). Ultimately, though, the aesthetic is black-orientated and its diverse imaginings, even as they enable a critique of present day oppression, lack coherence as an attainable vision of community, and are without a clear pathway from the now to the preferred future.

Film producer and screenwriter Tajamika Paxton expresses her view from a more privileged position perhaps, considering herself “one of a collective of people coming home from the same war...marching forward to a new way of being with and for each other” (2004, p.41), where the war is the common oppression facing black people and the new way of being is to move beyond that oppression through self-awareness and reflection, and accept responsibility for one’s own well-being and destiny. Her vision is of a world where it is possible “to live in harmony with those considered different, to practice spirituality in a world that overvalues the material” (ibid., p.42). This is a very personal vision, an individualist’s utopia, without specified social or political aims, and meaningful perhaps only to the better off. Gilroy describes such individualism as “a form of politics as therapy which is not, in fact, a politics at all and consequently has little to offer beleaguered black communities” (1993a, p.196). She does in fact acknowledge the dysfunction and emotional repression of black men in poor neighbourhoods. However, these underprivileged people struggle in broken families, with no clear moral compass and in harsh environments with low employment rates and poor public

facilities. They are stigmatised by wider society for their desperate turn to addiction and their presumed association with gang culture, crime and violence. Life does not teach them that the war is over, nor give them hope for a brighter future. Self-reflection is the ideal, survival is the necessity.

Finally, Henry Louis Gates Jr., a renowned public intellectual and a postmodern thinker with an acute cultural awareness, perhaps best encapsulates the complexities of the contemporary African American experience. In his Foreword to Rebecca Walker's *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness* he says “we are not a monolith, but we are a community“ (2012, p.ix), and yet states that “there are 40 million ways to be black” (ibid., p.ix). Here he recognises the reality that so many individuals who share culture and heritage act out of self-interest without regard for the wider black community. Indeed, it is not difficult to see how the 'talented tenth' of Du Bois was seduced by rising status and succumbed to self-interest over community loyalty, as he said in a 1948 memorial address, cited in hooks, “I assumed that with knowledge, sacrifice would automatically follow. In my youth and idealism, I did not realise that selfishness was more natural than sacrifice” (2013, p.165). He could hardly have imagined the much higher present day levels of this self-serving ethos. Indeed, for Gates, it is “necessary and productive ...to have a continuing conversation about this simple fact” (2012, p.x). He sets out his own beliefs and vision in *Tradition and The Black Atlantic: Critical Theory in the African Diaspora* (2010). Dismissive of utopian visions as incoherent, he asserts that the human condition is one of difference and conflict, and urges black people to think in inclusive terms and not be constrained by the 'us' and 'them' but to consider resolving difference and conflict through continuous dialogue and a reconstitution of community. Here he goes beyond the black-centric perspectives, where references to other racial or ethnic groups are not the norm, except for the white population and its continuing overt, subtle or unconscious racism. Crucially, he considers the possibility of a multiracial, multiethnic community in dialogue, and engages with the stark reality of the class divide, echoing the statement some years earlier by hooks, in conversation with Gilroy, that “we’ll be in danger if we don’t create an analysis of black cultural production that includes class” (cited in Gilroy 1993a, p.235).

The matter of class cannot be ignored in imagining any effective community organisations and it must be remembered that much cultural production, political energy and creative thinking emanates from grassroots levels. Valorie Thomas, Associate Professor of English

and Africana studies, accentuates the positive in her perspective on the history of poor black communities in the US and in so doing highlights a parallel with the experiences of disadvantaged Latino/as. She explores how black people have for centuries negotiated cultural trauma by improvising and adjusting to the multiple changes unfolding around them, and outside of their control, striving to move forward with their black consciousness intact and therefore “maintaining a narrative of themselves with integrity and coherence while traveling multiple paths through multiple personas, roles, and circumstances” (2012, p.53). For her this integrity is exemplified by the collaboratively constructed black vernacular tradition, a coded language as a form of resistance to white domination and its antipathy towards black experience and self-expression. The community here is one of oppressed black people retaining a black space as a counterpoint to the mainstream, to assimilation and cultural commodification, and in this way some self-esteem is retained. Within the Latino/a culture there already exists a separate language, and Latino/a authors writing in English (such as Junot Díaz, Ernesto Quiñonez, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat) often practise code-switching, breaking the rules of the English language, inserting Spanish words and phrases, sometimes translated, sometimes not, and introducing, but not explaining, cultural traits and features. Thus they make their monolingual readers work, showing them a little of what it feels like to be excluded or ignored, and in the process they make a political statement and retain a sense of control by choosing how much to impart. Not unlike the impulse behind black vernacular, they announce their presence, refute their invisibility, claim their own space by appropriating and changing English, and resist commodification and fetishisation. For José Saldívar, the seminal voice of Gloria Anzaldúa is a "subalternist tongue that is capable of cracking, fracturing, and braiding the very authority of the master's English-only tongue" (2012, p.18). In both of these minority groups, therefore, the primary focus is on resilience, resistance and retention of their black or ethnic community consciousness in the face of cultural trauma.

In summary, for African Americans it is easy to see how deep, lasting, untreated wounds from centuries of oppression in the US can in some ways explain why they may resist relations with those outside the community, and this to an extent illuminates their black-centric positions. For Latino/as, there is recent evidence of pan-ethnic collaboration, though Garcia notes that “[m]ovement across racial boundaries is more restricted by social traditions and customs than across ethnic categories” (2012, p.3). Race therefore stubbornly remains a way of creating hierarchy, of perpetuating myths, prejudices, assumptions, and it allows some minority groups to bolster their self-esteem by assuming a superior position vis-à-vis others,

and to feel more respected, even though this may not be the case. Indeed, since the 1980s there have been persistent tensions and often violent altercations between poor and lower-class blacks and incoming Latino/as, fuelled by the reduction in job opportunities resulting from deindustrialisation. At this point in the thesis, though, the time has come to consider what may unite the different minority groups rather than what divides them. In preparation for this, the first step is to show that poor and working-class people across the demographic spectrum share a range of problems and disadvantages in their local communities. A brief analysis of these issues will pave the way for a consideration of visions of society which seek to address such forms of oppression.

The tensions between blacks and Latino/as are hardly surprising when one considers that in 2014 the average poverty rate, commonly agreed as indicating those requiring forms of public assistance and with little or no earned income, was 15% overall but 27% for black and 24% for Latino/a people. After 30 years of deindustrialisation there are far more people in the public housing projects and the working-class rented sector fighting over far fewer jobs, many of which are now menial rather than skilled, and with lower pay levels accordingly. The discrepancies in the poverty rates are telling, given that for whites the rate is 10% (Pew Research Center 2014). This brings to mind the whole area of equality and integration as opposed to discrimination and segregation. The US has a history of social and public policies creating and maintaining segregation, such as Jim Crow and the redlining policy of the Federal Housing Administration, and these were founded upon discrimination and perpetuated inequality. Economist John Yinger is direct and blunt:

Even if there were no more discrimination in housing and mortgage markets (and this is not the case...) the legacy of past discrimination would continue to affect housing market outcomes, and hence poverty. Income disparities, wealth disparities, and residential segregation all contribute to the relatively high poverty rates for minorities (2000, p.52)

The Statistics Division of the Census Bureau, analysing the period 1980-2000, reports that blacks and Latino/as are the most segregated groups and, though segregation is decreasing in diverse urban areas in particular, and more in the west and south, it remains unclear whether greater racial and ethnic diversity is creating greater integration overall (2002, online).

Where there is poverty there are health issues. Poor quality accommodation, overcrowding, poor diet, and lack of public health facilities are all contributing factors. In 2011 a Research Service Report for Congress showed persisting differences in mortality rates and life expectancy between white and black people, at least partly related to socioeconomic conditions (Shrestha & Heisler), and in *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* (2013) hooks refers to studies which link economic deprivation and racial discrimination with mental health problems. She also maintains that “depression and despair...[make]...the setting ripe for widespread addiction” (2013, p.180), a desperate bid to escape the reality of fear and violence associated with gang culture and encounters with the police, and a strategy for mere survival within dysfunctional communities in the projects.

The war on drugs and associated gang violence, largely centred upon the projects, has lasted 40 years and seen a rapid rise in the prison population, officially explained by tighter legislation, lower tolerance and longer sentences. However, while African Americans and Latino/as constitute 14% and 17% respectively of the population as a whole they account for 57% of those in prison (US Department of Justice 2015). Many see the incarceration levels of these minority groups as a form of racially-biased social control, political disenfranchisement and modern day slavery, where inmates are used as labour in constructing the prisons. They claim that the prison-industrial complex, a tacit and mutually beneficial understanding between capitalist and political interests, creates ever more prisons and diverts investment away from public healthcare, housing and schools. Speaking in 2014, campaigner Angela Davis agrees, adding that “the prison system is also a psychiatric facility” (Democracy Now, online), claiming that prisons are repositories for social problems in the projects and beyond, incarcerating the mentally ill, the depressed and the poor. She lays the blame on reductions in funding during the 1980s, causing the closures of social services and mental health facilities, which have not been replaced. Luis Rodríguez made the same point as long ago as 2001, seeing prison and law enforcement as “preferred remedies to what are essentially economic, political, sociological...[and]...psychological... matters” (p.17) and noting that the war on drugs hasn’t stopped the drug trade but simply “served as a boot on the neck of the American people, particularly the poor” (ibid., p.88). Certainly in these poor neighbourhoods there are ever-present allegations of police brutality and a well-known history of deaths and riots, even to the present day. Ta-Nehisi Coates is blunt in his assessment, saying “[i]n America, it is traditional to destroy the black body – *it is heritage*” (his italics) (2015, p.103). The most publicised instances involve black people but Mary Romero asserts that racial profiling is

also used in the Latino/a community. She claims that urban spaces are classified racially and that bodily appearance as opposed to probable cause is the criterion for high levels of stop and search, and often abuse, producing a climate of fear and deterring social and political community engagement. Examining a series of raids in 1997, she notes that “the immigration sweep came to be known as the 'Chandler Roundup', reinforcing both the cowboy legacy of law enforcement in Mexican-American communities and the notion that Mexicans are 'strays' ” (2006, p.454). Perhaps the seemingly cynical remarks of Díaz are not so far from the truth. “There's no state in the world that can facilitate all the ambitions of its underclass. So it throws up obstacles - plenty of intoxications, bad schools, aggressive cops, no jobs - and depends on us to do the rest” (cited in Céspedes & Torres-Saillant 2000, p.893).

Neither are the black and ethnic middle classes immune from forms of oppression, more subtle perhaps, as noted earlier by Leonard. It is generally accepted that blacks and Latino/as are more adversely affected than whites during economic recessions and housing market fluctuations, strikingly evident after the 2006 housing market collapse and the major economic depression from 2008. The fall in the net worth (inclusive of owned property) of blacks was 53% and Latino/as 66%, compared with 16% for whites, in the period 2005-9. This naturally produces an increasing wealth gap, which is exacerbated by discriminatory and punitive lending patterns (Pew Social Trends 2011; Mink & O'Connor 2004; Yinger 2001). Finally, middle-class black men have a lower upward mobility factor than white men, measured in terms of numbers of their children dropping below the parameters for middle-class status in their adulthood (Pew Charitable Trusts 2011). This last point brings to a conclusion the exposition of the dark and enduring conditions experienced by very large numbers within minority groups, which can only emphasise the continuing importance of seeking a potential way (or ways) forward which address some of these multiple forms of oppression. This chapter therefore now turns to consider visions of more inclusive and egalitarian forms of society which have emerged against the contextual backdrop outlined above.

### *Contemplating the Future: New Voices, Grand Visions... Small Steps*

As the focus now shifts towards possibilities for the future, it is clear that many artists and scholars have neither clear nor consensual visions for the future of society in the US, perhaps

understandably in this period of change and transition. This is reinforced by the open-ended questions posed by scholars and in the absence of a sense of movement or change amongst writers and artists. Rachel Adams, in 'The Ends of America, the Ends of Postmodernism' (2007), and José Saldívar, in *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (2012), wonder if the mass movements into America from the south will be catastrophic or inspiring, whilst the stories of ZZ Packer (*Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*, 2004) and Danielle Evans (*Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*, 2010) reveal black characters who are isolated, uncertain or lost in the margins, with an undercurrent of persistent, unspoken racism.

Significant questions arise at this moment in history for large numbers within minority ethnic and racial groups in the US. Though finding themselves segregated from each other to varying degrees and despite their very different cultural histories, these groups in the less affluent and poor communities especially, but not exclusively, have been shown to experience common problems of discrimination and inequality. Thus the question underpinning this research forms - is there another version of community with which minority groups could engage in order to address forms of oppression, one which recognises and respects their history, cultural heritage and identity, and gives them an equal voice? One such possibility will now be explored – multiethnic, multiracial collective activism.

In the present day US, voices have emerged which acknowledge shifting demographics together with racially and ethnically diverse society, and which envision a more inclusive, egalitarian, pluralist form of politics. Classical pluralism, in political philosophy, is a model of democracy where the government, at every level, is responsible for making policy and decisions, but consults and is influenced by non-governmental groups and organisations at both local and wider levels. Pluralists therefore understand power as distributed throughout society, in which everyone has some opportunity to exert an influence. Societies based on this interpretation of pluralism would be founded upon the principle that all people are equal and that their beliefs, practices, culture, and history should be respected. In this thesis the focus is upon marginalised citizens of whatever race, ethnicity, or class, irrespective of gender or sexuality, claiming their rights to be heard and raising issues of discrimination, injustice, and inequality. Since many of these issues are shared by diverse and disadvantaged minority groups, the possibility of multiethnic, multiracial collective action to address such inequalities is formed, a notion rather different from the largely African American activism of

the civil rights era. In the ideal scenario, diverse groups such as these would present a united front and have an agenda and strategy reached by inclusive and participative debate, in order to minimise dissent and prevent factionalism. This vision of an inclusive and egalitarian society contrasts with the idea of assimilation, where minorities relinquish their traditional beliefs and embrace the culture and values of the dominant group; it differs from cultural separatism, where people preserve their traditions and risk being marginalised and disempowered by the dominant group; and it is distinct from transculturalism, whereby minority cultures blend in with, but also influence and change the mainstream culture in some ways, which is inevitable to an extent but, critically, is under the control of the dominant group as arbiter of what is desirable or tolerable. These terms may be understood in different, nuanced ways, but in the ideal pluralist community people will not be assimilated, marginalised or controlled, but “be seen for who they are in all their complexity, their history, their baggage” (Kenan 2008, pp.72-3).

For Mignolo, in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (2010), the grand task for the future is to strive towards an ultimate, global vision of life where differing ideologies are not proscribed, where multiple realities are accepted, and where human life is placed first and not determined from without by ideology or government. In this vision, oppressed, subaltern voices would be heard, their cultures and belief systems granted equal status, and their economic and political ideologies recognised. In the US today, though, minorities are only offered assimilation into a white, capitalist democracy and are forced to adapt to a greater or lesser extent in order to avoid marginalisation and oppression. Crucially, to enable substantial progress towards an eventual large-scale inclusive ethos, those with power in the dominant culture must also adapt and change. A decolonisation of the mind of these (perhaps unaware) oppressors requires an acknowledgement and understanding of their own internalised assumptions, prejudices and impulses, a recognition of the impact on others of their actions in accordance with those beliefs, and an unravelling of those tendencies, to enable them to look beyond their present horizons, engage with and seek to understand and learn from the oppressed and the different.

As long ago as 1916 the rare and radical voice of Randolph Bourne, in his prescient essay ‘Trans-National America’, exposed the “cultural wreckage” (p.91) created by the failure of the ‘melting pot’ to forge an inclusive, specifically American credo, instead swamping immigrant group cultures with foundational Anglo-Saxon values. Though he could never

have imagined the diverse America of today, even then he understood the need to listen to the voices of newcomers with “an intellectual sympathy which is not satisfied until it has got at the heart of the different cultural expressions, and felt as they feel” (ibid., p. 94). Today, Shakil Choudhury, in *Deep Diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them* (2015), understands internalised prejudice as existing “at the feeling, unconscious level” (p.xv) since, deep down, we feel more attached to those who are like us in appearance, our ‘tribe’. Such feelings within dominant groups may be expressed through hierarchical racial profiling and the establishment of cultural and social norms in the dominant image, thus tacitly perpetuating individual, institutional, and systemic racism. For Choudhury, a cognitive, rational approach to dismantling prejudice will only work to a certain extent and may not affect deeper, embedded beliefs and values at the emotional level, taken for granted through the human tendencies towards habit, cultural norms, and subliminal associations with a group. Tapping into current neuropsychological research and the notion of neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to reorganise itself (Merzenich 2013; Doidge 2008; Barwegen 2008), the argument is that changing thinking, and consciously repeating the change, rewires neural pathways in the brain and leads to changes in attitudes and behaviours. In this sense, stereotyping can be understood as an ingrained cultural habit, but one which can be changed by developing self-awareness, practising self-analysis, and repeatedly challenging one's assumptions, a point returned to in Chapter 3 in the field of education. Ultimately, however, beyond this individual decolonisation of the mind, the institutional pillars of power also have to be decolonised. At the present time, for Mignolo, “[i]ntra Euro-American critical thought,...while seeing the consequences of coloniality on subalternized peoples, is not well placed to understand, or even see, the decolonial impetus as a challenge” (2010b, p.19). A century on from Bourne, this remains something of an understatement.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) recognises the extent of the decolonisation required. A branch of critical theory, CRT emerged in the 1980s in response to the stalling or reversal of changes arising from the civil rights era. Although CRT addresses many of the issues of concern to civil rights groups, it understands and describes them in terms of the exercise and retention of power within mainstream political, social, and economic systems in contemporary America. It is therefore not only concerned with everyday, prejudiced microaggressions, conscious or otherwise, which individuals experience, but with systemic and structural racism at institutional level. The UCLA School of Public Affairs states:

CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of American society...This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color (2009, online)

CRT challenges the complacent, liberal embrace of colourblindness, referenced earlier, which has been unintentionally bolstered, as scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw points out, by the recent emergence of “post-racialism, a compelling ideological frame that is poised to exile racial justice discourse to the hinterlands of contemporary political thought” (2011, p.1313). The postracial stance is, on the face of it, a progressive one. Its proponents do not renounce their own cultural heritage (indeed they may be proud of it), but they step beyond racial constructs and essentialist determinants, refusing to be defined by them, and are open to values and beliefs from whatever cultural source, accepting or challenging them with equanimity. It is easy to see how this position could be misconstrued, deliberately or otherwise, as a sign that the race issue is over. Indeed, the arrival of President Obama was used as 'evidence' for this. (This matter is explored in detail in Chapter 2 regarding mixed race people and at length in Chapter 3 in respect of urban public school education). However, whilst it could be argued that, in its extreme form, “to be post-racial is to cease any engagement with or acknowledgement of racial injustice” (ibid., p.1328), the ideology per se does not deny the persistence of racism and inequality, nor does it ignore the vast numbers in minority groups who continue to endure blatantly unequal conditions. The challenge for CRT is, therefore, to emphasise this point and challenge the easy and comfortable idea that America no longer has a race problem, and is a meritocracy with equal opportunity for all.

The dominant white culture defines what constitutes merit, and CRT therefore posits that it is a (perhaps unconscious) social construct which merely upholds the status quo. Merit founded upon white Western values, beliefs, and rationality will determine what is 'acceptable' experience, knowledge, behaviour, and skills within that frame of reference. Merit so prescribed may, by definition, disadvantage or exclude those from other cultural backgrounds with different experiences, with knowledge acquired in other ways or skills developed in other settings, and who may express themselves differently. Accordingly, merit in this sense has no universal meaning and cannot be truly objective, and should be interrogated and challenged in situations where it results in apparent or continuing inequality. The arbiters of

merit, taste, and validity are challenged in Chapters 2 and 3.

CRT is aligned with the pluralist principles of inclusion and equality, superseding both the integrationist and separatist ideologies of the civil rights era, instead recognising the importance of all minorities and their unique cultural voices. Thus, experiential, subjective 'storytelling' is understood as a vital element of CRT, whereby different worldviews and ideologies, valid counternarratives to the mainstream, are introduced into the public sphere, acting as a catalyst towards the heteroglossic ideal. In this grand vision, these new voices permeate society, begin to exert influence, promote mutual cultural exchange, and ultimately lead to a reshaping of mainstream values and priorities, and a repositioning of policy and power. This process is quite distinct from the selective appropriation and commodification of minority group culture, and the retention of control, historically practised by the dominant presence. Indeed, CRT pioneer Derrick Bell asserted, in his 'interest convergence' hypothesis, that many civil rights advances and reversals only occurred when they were, directly or indirectly, also in the interests of the nation and did not materially diminish the interests of whites, again suggestive of the impulse to retain overall control (2004).

CRT also recognises that storytelling, being actively listened to, helps to restore self-esteem to the disadvantaged, and can be the first step towards self-determination and personal empowerment (this is discussed at length in Chapter 3 in respect of the use and study of hip-hop cultural material in classrooms). Rodríguez expresses the ultimate vision thus:

When those at the fringes of society...are empowered, educated, radicalised and liberated, all of society will advance....[for]... these particular communities carry the seeds of lasting peace and justice, 'the seeds of change', precisely because they are the ones directly confronting the official injustices and violence. Ultimately all of society will have to be brought into the fray. When the peripheries of society are carrying most of the emotions and the imagination, this is really a call not for abandoning a center but for a recentering (2001, p.196)

He imagines those on the margins developing a social and political consciousness, sowing the seeds of change by challenging the oppressor with their counter-stories of inequality and suffering, striving to dismantle the mechanics of oppression and to restore justice and, by

extension, peace, in a society where, ultimately, power is redistributed equitably and proportionately.

Scholars are acutely aware that these utopian visions face multiple hurdles at all levels and that emerging challenges to hegemony may be fragile and beset by contradictions and tensions. There are, consequently, degrees of interpreting these versions of pluralism which consider those problems. For example, since regular compromise and prioritisation will inevitably be required to deal with differences and tensions, Alasdair MacIntyre imagines a society of citizens and groups with goodwill and commitment who operate in a state of “constrained disagreement” (1990, p.231). Much earlier, scholar Isaiah Berlin believed that diverse groups could work together but recognised that “[w]e are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail irreparable loss” (cited in Hardy 2003, p.13), so there will always be “an uneasy equilibrium” (ibid., p.19). Then Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, in *Civil Society and Political Theory* (1994), explore the changes in Latin America and Eastern Europe during the 1990s, and describe a self-limiting society, governed by institutions which recognise that an authoritarian approach prevents society from flourishing and are sensitive to collaborative social movements, such that social, economic and political policy may be influenced from below. Arturo Escobar notes this phenomenon more recently. Referring to ‘Arguments about the Left Turn(s) in Latin America: a Post-Liberal Politics?’ by Benjamín Arditti (2008), he sees communal, self-regulating movements which “irradiate society and become structuring principles of social re/composition” (2010, p.393). Arditti himself characterises this ‘post-liberalism’ not simply as leftist in a Marxist sense, not just anti-liberal, and neither anti-statist nor anti-property, but more pragmatic towards capitalism, more layered and hybrid, engaged with electoral politics but, importantly, inclusive of non-electoral social and political justice movements operating outside the edifice of the mainstream institutions whilst simultaneously influencing them (2008). This latter concept has particular relevance for the idea of the multiethnic, multiracial alliance, which will be defined in detail below. In the end, one can say that a more inclusive society would by definition be a more tolerant one, where unique traditions, identities and languages may be preserved, and where government takes account of differing perspectives in framing policy, insofar as that is practicable. On the other hand, there is the potential paradox that tolerance of difference in a very diverse society could lead towards cultural relativism, where sharply conflicting moral values and lifestyles are treated equally, in turn leading to cultural separatism and the regeneration of prejudice. Equally, in such a diverse society the large numbers of competing interests may make a broad consensus

very difficult to attain.

In the US today, resistance to these visions, which foreground equality and diversity, naturally centres on the threats felt towards its sense of national identity, culture and values, borne out by the so-called culture wars between liberals and conservatives in the last twenty years, including within the academy. More and more voices want to be heard, considered and respected, not merely acknowledged. Escobar recognises that Caribbean, South and Central American cultures are the most active at this point in history in terms of social and political critique of both liberal capitalism and forms of authoritarianism. Crucially, he sees amongst these voices from the diverse cultures and politics of the many nation states of the region, increasingly being heard in America, a certain “convergence space” (2010, p.393), a potential confluence of ideological principles and progressive agendas. These counternarratives do not share the binary principles of the European Enlightenment project, which separated nature and sensation from culture and reason, established hierarchies of knowledge and being, and assumed the highest status for Western philosophy and politics in order to justify colonisation in the name of Progress. For Mignolo, that is the doctrine of ‘ego-politics’, unlike the emerging narratives which experience the world as an interdependent and interconnected whole, encompassing all existence, all knowledge, belief and action. He recalls the influential work of Anzaldúa, who imagined a world beyond this ego-politics, a world shifting the narrative to embrace voices previously disqualified by the West (‘geo-politics’) and to accept diverse peoples outside the Western imaginary (‘body-politics’), “from where an identity based on politics (and not a politics based on identity) emerged” (2010a, p.346). This worldview resonates in some ways with the ideals of pluralism, since it does not conceive of or construct hierarchies of being and, moreover, Escobar tells us its “locus of political action” (2010, p.396) is the community. Even in Colombia, a country locked in a 50-year-old civil war and riven with crime, violence, corruption and poverty, Joanne Rappaport uncovers indigenous communities and multiple diverse groups in dialogue with each other and the government, advocating “new notions of ethnic citizenship, the insertion of indigenous demands into those of other popular sectors, and the opening of dialogue among equals between members of the dominant society and indigenous citizens” (2005, p.3). She also notes similar movements in Ecuador and Mexico in recent decades.

Ideologies such as these emanating from the south have been seeping into the American intellectual consciousness as the demographic shift progresses. Indeed, so much so that Asian

American Lingyan Yang, inspired by the work of Edward Said, advances the thinking yet further, addressing the unspoken race line with the critical question, “is America ready to have its dominant racial paradigm between white and black contested, as already forcefully contested, by leading Latino/a and Asian American scholars and by millions of people of color?” (2006, p.5). Senna takes a similar view from a mixed race perspective, stating that “other ‘mixed’ groups, Latino, in particular, threaten the idea of American hegemony in a way that the blissful black-white mulatto...doesn’t” (cited in Milian Arias 2002, p.448). In partial answer to this compelling question, there are, in spite of the largely black-centric perspectives outlined earlier, a number of black and mixed race scholars openly calling for cross-cultural collaboration. In *Stand and Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership, and Hip Hop Culture* (2004), Bynoe asserts that, “in an increasingly multicultural nation, the continued progress of Black people is dependent on our willingness to work crossculturally” (p.192). Similarly, Cornell William Brooks, President and CEO of the NAACP, speaking at the National Convention in July 2014, asserted that “now is the time to stand for an NAACP which is multi-generationally diverse, multi- racially diverse, multi- ethnically diverse, diverse in every sense of the word, now is the time” (NAACP 2014, online). Tricia Rose, echoing Audre Lorde some 30 years earlier, reassures African Americans that “sustaining the category 'black culture' does not require the denial of incorporation, hybridity, transformation and exchange...[and]...to acknowledge...[this]... does not bring an end to the category 'black culture' or black people” (2008, p.viii). She accentuates the positive, envisaging the transformative possibilities of equal and nonthreatening engagement with other cultures becoming part of everyday life. This is a view not unlike that of Gilroy who, in *Darker Than Blue* (2010), calls for a better understanding of pluralism, suggesting that where there is everyday contact between racial and ethnic groups in urban environments an interdependency and cultural exchange can develop. He envisages multiracial, multiethnic groups acting upon shared problems and extending democracy by challenging national policies at local, regional, national and even international levels. Márcia Agustini agrees, declaring that “[t]he issue at stake is how to reorganize opposition to a system of oppression that affects individuals of diverse races” (2017, p.167). These forward-looking views are compatible with the ultimate outcome for the collective activism considered in this thesis and defined below. Certainly there is hope for the future if the young people of today, who are more comfortable with processing multiple influences and are more aware of the interconnectedness of things, can be inspired to join together, irrespective of perceived cultural difference, to work for social and political justice.

The question now is - how can a society move towards this ultimate vision? The first step, according to Mignolo, is a process he calls epistemic delinking, that is the decolonisation of knowledge, which has been almost exclusively the province of the controlling white Western narrative for centuries. The consequence of this process would be the liberation of the myriad subaltern voices, as equals. New texts and discourses from around the world would present “other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics” (2010a, p.307). Yang agrees, wishing to create “decolonising (not colonial or assimilationist) epistemologies, or theories of knowledge, of our own that empower, inform, and enlighten our own people” (2006, p.7). Agustin Lao-Montes advances the argument, recognising the potential of intercultural exchange, and asserting that “cross-fertilization of critical black and Latino Studies could be a crucial resource of liberation in both the epistemic as well as in the ethical-political fronts” (2010, p.182). Chela Sandoval takes this line of thought to a conclusion, envisaging the outcome to be the growth of intercultural exchange and understanding, ultimately leading to the erosion of old ideologies and the construction of a new meta-ideology emerging from the coming together of these knowledges, creating “an evolutionary seeing, interpreting, and changing of the planet” (2001, p.24). This 'mestiza' consciousness, accepting of the multifaceted world, has transformative potential which may ultimately lead to global reconfigurations of power and greater possibilities for peaceful coexistence.

These great theoretical imaginings have thus far been played out in the rarefied atmosphere of academe, yet it is clear from the above discussion that, for an individual to effectively engage at any level with inclusive, egalitarian thinking as a precursor to practical, multiethnic, multiracial communal action in the US today, two critical prerequisite conditions must be fulfilled. The first is to understand the history behind the creation of cultural hierarchy and the consequential, enduring inequalities. The colonisation/power matrix is a term used by Mignolo (2010) to describe how the Western colonial powers imposed their philosophical value and belief systems upon the colonised in order to gain and retain control for centuries, and how that imposition permeated every aspect of life and quelled dissenting voices from oppressed minorities. The second, related prerequisite is to understand how those external imposed values can gradually and imperceptibly become internalised as the colonised interact with the coloniser, learn how to navigate the dominant system, gain some acceptance, success and reward, and increasingly assimilate to a point where mainstream values are something to

which they aspire, a process Aníbal Quijano called the “colonisation of the imagination” (2010, p.23). Cherríe Moraga expressed these prerequisites succinctly as long ago as 1983, saying “without... grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place” (p.29). The concept of community in this thesis, though, is inclusive of not just the oppressed, but of anyone understanding the impact of that oppression and wanting to join forces to eliminate it.

At this point in the thesis, therefore, the focus shifts to those small practical steps which can be made on the long road towards the ultimate vision of an inclusive, participative, and tolerant democracy. There is, firstly, a fundamental need to create the nurturing conditions where people have the opportunity to reflect, as Díaz points out in the opening quotation (cited in Céspedes & Torres-Saillant 2000, p.896). Reflection is the foundation stone of self-awareness, and creating or being provided with the space for reflection is the first practical step on the journey. To reflect upon and question external and internalised forms of oppression, and to recognise the constructed nature of race and ethnicity, will bring an understanding of how these concepts are used to maintain spurious hierarchies of being, which generate prejudice, discrimination and inequality, and ultimately secure societal structures and institutions of power in the hands of the dominant group. Such critical reflection brings greater self-awareness, boosts self-worth and, critically, may ignite the desire to shed the yoke of societal assumption, to resist being predefined, and to determine one’s own future. This new awareness opens the door to understanding the experiences of other oppressed people as equally valid and, where there are common forms of oppression across race and ethnicity, this in turn creates the possibility of bringing to life united, diverse, communal action to challenge these shared inequalities and injustices. This personal journey potentially takes the individual towards a wider social and political consciousness and engagement.

The multiethnic, multiracial group envisaged in this thesis is the social unit at the heart of the imagined inclusive, egalitarian society outlined above. These groups are conceived of as being formed to address shared forms of oppression, and to have attainable goals in the areas of social, economic and political justice. Depending upon circumstance, these organisations may be either temporary or longer lasting, may focus on single or multiple issues, could remain at local level, or extend to state or national level, and may form alliances with other

groups and organisations across the nation and beyond. Sue Sohng and Melissa Chun, in ‘Multi-Ethnic, Multi-Racial Coalition Building: Connecting Histories, Constructing Identities and Building Alliances’, believe that “coalition-building around intersections of multiple identities other than race is not only viable, but also necessary to overcome all aspects of domination” (2005, p.41). Yang imagines a culture of equality, sharing, and collaboration:

a willingness to compare cultural and interdisciplinary histories, to borrow methodologies and critical models from each other, to exchange strategies of resistance and empowerment in various radical social movements, to seek solidarity, and to pursue freedom and equality for all, not just for one’s own immediate community or ethnic group (2006, p.8)

In their ideal formation, these groups would be accepting of all people, irrespective of class, gender or sexuality. Contingent and fluid, they would shift and develop in response to issues, having the hallmark of 'strategic essentialism', a concept derived from the work of Gayatri Spivak, which advocates limited or temporary cooperation for the purposes of social justice between people with different cultures and perspectives. This flexible engagement neither condemns nor condones, for example, essentialist or universalist positions, but temporarily focuses on points of value within these different worldviews, or as Sangeeta Ray puts it, “simultaneously critiques and endorses” them (2009, p.117). This is not unlike the viewpoint of Stuart Hall, who said that "the self is always...a fiction, just as the kinds of 'closures' which are required to create communities of identification – nation, ethnic group, families, sexualities - are arbitrary closures" (1987, p.45). For Hall, collective political action becomes possible when disparate individuals cohere into an arbitrary community for consensual action against oppression, accepting of their differences whilst retaining their own cultural sense of self.

In accordance with the theory underpinning this thesis, the groups must be accommodating, and have checks and balances to ensure that everyone has a voice, that power is not concentrated in the hands of a few, or policy unduly influenced by middle-class self-interest or ethnic or racial sub-groups; and there must be mechanisms for conflict resolution to give the group the best chance of sustainability. As John Betancur says in ‘The Possibilities of Collaboration and the Challenges of Contention’, “[s]imilarities and shared conditions do not

create unity by themselves...[and]...the challenge can be one of developing forms of cooperation that maintain the identities of each within a democratic framework” (2000, p.253). Indeed, social justice activist and author Sofia Quintero has advice from personal experience of participation in activist groups, where some members have advantages or good fortune, and some do not. She stresses the need for everyone to recognise any favoured position, for example “antiracist whites...[must]...acknowledge and relinquish their racial privilege” (2001, p.94). However, she raises the spectre of interpersonal conflict over who is the most oppressed, urging everyone to accept those with or without advantages on equal terms, and so avoid alienation. She also advises groups to be flexible and allow members to contribute in the ways they want, and not to risk losing them by exerting undue pressure.

Organisations such as those described here often develop organically from solid grassroots foundations, as in the civil rights era, and contrast with political initiatives, however well-intentioned, imposed from above, which sometimes falter without conviction and engagement at all levels. This is not to decry the mainstream democratic process, for casting votes at all types of election is critical for minority groups in making their presence felt (in the 2012 Presidential election the percentage turnout of black people was the highest of any group, according to the US Census Bureau 2013 (online)), and there are people from minority groups increasingly evident at every level of representative government. That said, the machinery of government moves slowly and has conflicting priorities at all levels, such that issues relating to minority groups may slip down the agenda. History also shows us that advances for minority groups may be halted or reversed by subsequent administrations, demonstrated by the persisting legal challenges in many states surrounding affirmative action in respect of public employment and higher education (Proposition 209 in California and Proposal 2 in Michigan being the most well-known examples). Multiethnic, multiracial groups therefore must stay alert to such political and social challenges, press their views in the political arena and exert influence at executive level.

In the end, “[t]he most fundamental goal of these ultimately radical alliances is to change interpersonal relations and social structures in order to eradicate all forms of oppression” (Bystydzienski & Schacht 2001, p.1). If, therefore, there is no multiracial, multiethnic collective action or collaboration then there is the enduring possibility of “the hardening of racial boundaries in the form of ethnic-minority identity politics” (Sohn & Chun 2005, p.41). It would indeed be unwise to ignore what Michelle Alexander chillingly asserts in her

sharp critique *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, that “something akin to a racial caste system currently exists in the United States” (2012, p.2).

Now, alert to the theories and developing discourses outlined above, and aware of the problems faced by very large numbers within minority groups in the US, the focus turns upon the core aim and objective of the thesis. The aim of this research is to explore how contemporary texts and initiatives in America are responding to the notion and actuality of diverse groups, alliances and collaborations, across perceived boundaries of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality, acting to address shared forms of social, economic and political oppression or injustice. The objective is to explore and compare specific and relevant contemporary material, applying the methodology and evaluation criteria set out in the Introduction, in order to assess the level of commitment to, and promotion of such organisations being able to arise and flourish in the US today.

It was noted earlier that self-reflection is at a premium in the projects, the site of the worst oppression and the greatest need, and this would suggest that the creation of multiracial, multiethnic organisations in such a place would be fraught with difficulties. However, this research includes enterprising work by advocates with communitarian sensibilities which target just this environment. Chapter 2 now lays the foundations of the argument, presenting works by Danzy Senna and Sofia Quintero, two contemporary, but quite different, young writers with contrasting lived experiences (one is from the projects). These texts are used to interrogate and contrast introspective, individualistic perspectives and community-focused ones, a theme foregrounded in the Introduction, where the latter position underpins the impulse towards communal social justice activism, which is developed in later chapters.

## Chapter 2 The Ivy League Homegirl and the Millennium Mulatta

### Comparative Literary Perspectives

*Strange to wake up and realize you're in style. That's what happened to me just the other morning. It was the first day of the new millennium, and I woke to find that mulattos had taken over.... Pure breeds (at least black ones) are out; hybridity is in. America loves us in all of our half-caste glory*

Danzy Senna

*Cultural activism has always been a strategy for making change, and it supplements not replaces things like civil disobedience or community organizing. The power of cultural activism - particularly using popular media to raise awareness and inspire action - is the tremendous opportunity to reach those people and broaden the political conversation beyond intellectual elites*

Sofia Quintero

This chapter presents the first of three influential domains, that of popular fiction, with the aim of analysing, evaluating and comparing the work of two hip-hop generation authors, Danzy Senna and Sofia Quintero, both born in 1970. The epigraphs appear to indicate they have little in common, but they do signpost key issues which will be addressed in the course of the analysis - matters of identity, community and justice, with allusions to race and class. Each of these aspects intersects in different ways with discourses outlined in the previous chapter, and the analysis will therefore support an evaluation and conclusion on the personal and community-focused perspectives of the authors, on their relative stance towards diversity and equality, the core tenets of pluralism, and on their attitude towards collective action for social and political justice.

#### **Danzy Senna: Who am I? The Woman with No Name in *Symptomatic***

Born in Boston, Senna is the daughter of Fanny Howe, a professor and acclaimed poet, novelist and short story writer of Irish-American descent, whose forebears include the prominent Boston DeWolfe and Quincy families. Howe, though, was not destined to be accepted into the local literary canon. She became a civil rights activist in the 1960s and a year after the landmark *Loving v Virginia* (1967) Supreme Court judgement married fellow activist Carl Senna, an author of African and Mexican heritage from the projects who had come from poverty in the South. Danzy Senna graduated from Stanford and earned her MFA in creative writing from the University of California, Irvine, and is married to professor and

novelist Percival Everett. She has written two novels, an autobiographical work, a short story collection, and chapters in anthologies.

Senna identifies herself as black, saying “I don't see...[blackness]...in contradiction with my white and Mexican ancestry. Nor does it negate these other parts of myself. I have come to understand that my multiplicity is inherent in my blackness” (2005, p.85). Her mixed race heritage is the driving force behind her writing, in which her characters struggle in the search for how and where they fit into a society where racial and ethnic assumptions and judgements continue to represent a significant barrier to the acceptance of diversity and equality of existence.

The appreciation and assessment of *Symptomatic* (2004), the second novel by Senna and the main work being explored in this chapter, will be made easier by an understanding of the primary themes in her first work *Caucasia* (1998), since in some ways the second novel starts from the point reached in the first. *Caucasia*, then, is a humorous critique of racial essentialism in the Black Power era, and features civil rights activists Sandy (white) and Deck (black) with two children, light-skinned Birdie and dark-skinned Cole. The idealistic parents treat their children almost as a social experiment in racial mixing but are forced apart in the race-conscious 1970s. Sandy, believing herself pursued by counterintelligence forces due to her former activism, ends up creating new Jewish identities for herself and Birdie, now living separately from Deck and Cole. Here Senna exposes the performative nature of identity and the arbitrary construction of racial and ethnic categories, as Lori Harrison-Kahan succinctly puts it, “[i]n passing for Jewish - in passing as one who passes - Birdie confirms that race is empty at its core” (2005, p.27). In fact, in the same example, Senna is effectively exposing “the plurality of whiteness itself” (ibid., p.22). Equally, she is questioning the notion of the stable family unit, also referred to in *Symptomatic*, by presenting “the tragedy...[of]...the betrayal of two bi-racial children by parents who can't see past their own skin” (Gómez 2001, p.364). At the end of the novel, Birdie has come to understand identity as multifaceted, fragmented and fluid, and this is the thematic platform from which Senna starts her second novel.

In *Symptomatic*, Senna explores the actions and interactions of a mixed race narrator and other characters with varying racial and ethnic heritage and, as prefigured in the epigraph from ‘The Mulatto Millennium’ (1998b, p.12), presents an extended critique of contemporary

multiculturalism from a mixed race perspective. America has always been genetically and culturally mixed in a variety of ways, as discussed in Chapter 1, but Senna says “[w]e’ve only recently begun to acknowledge this fact, and lately to celebrate rather than deny mixture” (cited in Milian Arias 2002, pp.447-8). The *Loving v Virginia* case, by legalising interracial marriage, accelerated the rise in recent decades of people identifying as mixed race, and this change, together with other factors, such as the rise in the black and ethnic middle class, has led to the common impression that contemporary America is a functioning, multicultural meritocracy where people can mix freely and have equal opportunities. As discussed in Chapter 1, and central to Critical Race Theory (CRT), this is an illusion, and one negative outcome of this utopian, ‘colourblind’ perspective is the complacent belief that the race (and ethnicity) problem is over. Indeed, Senna says “the mulatto represents assimilation, the end of blackness, and the end of the discussion on racism” (cited in Milian Arias 2002, p.448) and Márcia Agustini notes that “[m]ulticulturalism and the mulatto figure become symbols of racial and national integration” (2017, p.156). This fetishisation of hybridity as signalling the end of the race problem has, therefore, only served to perpetuate the dominant (white) value system. For example, Hershini Young observes how the mixed race phenomenon has worked against affirmative action and positive discrimination, and by extension reinforced racism, noting that “conservatives embraced the mixed-race movement...as useful to arguments hailing the end of race...[since they]...wished to end programs of what they termed ‘reverse discrimination’ against whites” (2008, p.289). Issues of race are therefore being misinterpreted or misconstrued, either unconsciously, at a more or less conscious level, or through a conscious concealment of underlying prejudice. Failure to acknowledge and confront the problem, be it at individual or institutional level, only serves to perpetuate this ‘new racism’, as described earlier by David Leonard. So long as this form of racism exists, with its duplicitous embrace of hybridity concealing a failure to truly engage with diverse heritage, let alone with the values and beliefs of the ‘pure breeds’ sardonically referenced by Senna, then it presents a critical barrier to the realisation of a truly inclusive, egalitarian community.

There are others, too, who recognise that the commodification of hybridity has the effect of defusing and diluting the race debate and promoting assimilation to white values as a panacea for the ills of society. In a similar caustic tone to that of Senna in the headline quotation, Lisa Jones, also a mixed race writer and daughter of poets Hettie Jones and Amiri Baraka, presents a sharp parody of the contemporary construction of race in her play *Combination Skin* (1996).

In the \$100,000 Tragic Mulatto Show, the effervescent hostess Vendetta Goldwoman celebrates assimilation and the end of the race debate, enthusing that “finally we have reached the glory days of color is a state of mind” (1996, p.219), even as she reveals its objectification (“like any state of mind worth having, it can be bought and sold” (ibid., p.219)) and exposes its underlying impulse (“[i]t's a wonderful moment to be young, gifted, and half and half, or better yet, young, buxom, and white at heart...” (ibid., p.220)). Three contestants, referred to as specimens, are hypnotised and speak of their unconscious dreams. Specimen 1 says “I’m not really black, I’m from the suburbs” (ibid., p.223) but Specimen 3 wins, wanting the most to be white.

Senna is perfectly aware that “race is not real, but rather is a social, political, and historical construct...[and]...has never been about blood, and it has never been about reason” (2005, p.85). However, the fact remains that race still carries a heavy weight of meaning, and referring to it is not just about “physical features or racial ancestry, but about racial fantasies and about what a person, given their appearance, their language, their financial status, their gender, represents in the national imagination” (Senna cited in Milian Arias 2002, p.448). *Symptomatic* looks at some of the effects of these unspoken inferences and distorted assumptions, as they impede the light-skinned, mixed race narrator in her search for fulfilling personal relationships and for a sense of belonging in a community. For Young, this “problematic idea of recognition as ensuring equality is at the heart of...[the novel]” (2008, p.289).

From the opening sentence of the novel we are introduced to this notion of recognition and its consequences. “This was the moment I savored every night, when I could see him but he could not see me” (Senna 2004, p.1) the narrator tells us, as she watches her white boyfriend Andrew through a crack in the door. In a society where race and ethnicity continue to rouse elemental feelings, such a moment is one of freedom, of not being the one gazed at, judged, exoticised, or fixed into some imaginary hierarchy by any oppressive Other, but of being the one gazing, in the position of power. This invokes the classic trope of the veil, from *The Souls of Black Folk* (W.E.B. Du Bois 1903), “the infant's caul that covers the face of the African American, 'gifting' him with second sight” (Young 2008, p.292) and allowing the black person “to peer between...the seen and unseen...[witnessing]...the horror that lies behind the everyday through the thin membrane of the real, much in the manner of Ellison's invisible man, who sees around corners” (ibid., p.292). This gift of second sight presents the narrator

with the Du Boisian sense of double consciousness, seeing herself through the eyes of others, being faced with not just their assumptions and prejudices, but also their different impressions and expectations of her. So accustomed is she to living with the oppressive weight and constancy of these judgements that she presents as someone whose only existence is through performing “different identities...[arising]...from how the various characters situate her” (ibid., p.292). As a consequence, beyond the ceaseless performances and without the perceptions of others to label or fix her, she exudes a sense of uncertainty about who she really is and, to emphasise the point, we never learn her name. Though she relishes moments of being unseen and unjudged, she is unsettled by the uncertainty, as evidenced in the analysis below, and prefers to engross herself in her work as a journalist, which again allows her to hide, to experience the “sense of disappearing into somebody else’s story. Of watching and not being seen. Then and only then do the secrets reveal themselves to you” (Senna 2004, p.6).

Indeed, the 'secret' of enduring racism amongst the white elite is revealed by Andrew and his affluent friends who, misrecognising the light-skinned narrator as white, feel safe and free to indulge their shared prejudice, crudely mocking black characters they had known, and exposing a total lack of insight into, and experience of, the abundant racial and ethnic variety of the American landscape. The shaken narrator escapes to the bathroom of the white host Sophie, where “[f]ancy skin products were lined aggressively on the sink counter” (Senna 2004, p.14), instantly reminding her of childhood bullying about the 'right' make-up, the right appearance, about how she covered up her natural appearance and concealed her difference to fit in. An unhealed primal wound is exposed here and powerful feelings are aroused - fear of mockery, abuse, rejection. As Claudia Rankine says, “the outside blistered the inside of you, words...had you in a chokehold” (2015, p.156). The stark reference to police brutality refutes any claim that words and attitudes cannot be deeply damaging. As an adult the narrator retains, and has internalised, these feelings, and become a fearful person, habitually and unconsciously suppressing her uniqueness and turning away from who she is or may be, still wanting to fit in, but running away to seek solace elsewhere when the wound is exposed. The skin products are a brutal symbol of a lifetime of pressure to conform to white, mainstream values. In pent-up anger and frustration she turns on the water full blast, and on the steamed-up mirror she traces an image, “an anxious tic I resorted to whenever I felt out of place” (Senna 2004, p.15), outlining the same face she had drawn since childhood of a long-forgotten woman with hints of Nubian features, a half-formed cultural memory of primeval

racial heritage. This automatic, compulsive behaviour has a calming effect, transporting her from the unbearable present to some ancient safe place of belonging. Eyes closed, sitting hugging her knees for comfort, she listens to the rain in the leaves outside, sounding “like a fireplace crackling” (ibid., p.15), as she regresses to being the little child before the hearth in the sanctuary of home.

In this state, the narrator falls asleep and her dream perhaps reveals the nearest the author gets to defining identity and expressing how it is affected by racial constructs. In the dream, the narrator has put a baby to bed and lost it under a pile of bedclothes. “I heard the baby's smothered cries, but no matter how many blankets I ripped away, I could not find the baby” (ibid., p.15). The dream is always about the dreamer, and she is like the baby being suffocated by layer upon psychic layer of expectation, assumption, and oppression, carried through the generations. However, no matter how many layers she removes, how deeply she delves, she can find no baby, nothing of substance, no core self, no answer to the question 'who am I, who was I'? This anti-essentialist, postracial position is a critique of the very construction of race itself, and at the same time it exposes the consequences of that hierarchical construction, the layers of historical cultural trauma pressing upon all those of non-white heritage. The sheer weight of this trauma left her unable to even respond to the racism she had just witnessed before the dream. Not for nothing did Joy Leary coin the term Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome in 2005, for descendants of slaves carrying with them the cultural memory of enslavement.

The consequences of misrecognition and misunderstanding for an individual of mixed race, the 'symptoms' indicated by the title of the novel, are reinforced throughout the narrative in different ways. On the surface, the narrator is unable to find friends amongst her fellow journalists and senses their resentment of her privileged, fellowship status, leaving her uncertain and uncomfortable amongst them. At a deeper level, a Gothic style uncovers a growing malaise in body and mind, as the unconscious, psychological impact of her conscious discomfort rises to the surface and is expressed physically. Her unformed sense of self and battered self-esteem present as body dysmorphia. Thus her body seems malformed and alien. She looks at the different sizes of her breasts, feeling “a surge of pity for this body - as if it were something separate from myself rather than something I lived inside” (Senna 2004, p.44) and, when faced with her reflection, she misrecognises her own self and sees a stranger. This dissociation, even when having sex with Ivers Greene, impairs her ability to

function. She wakes “as if paralyzed...I sent my body messages from my brain, but it didn't hear them” (ibid., p.47), for her body is responding to her unconscious reluctance to face another day of psychic pain, until it jolts into movement, leaving her “gasping, as if I'd been held under water” (ibid., p.47), almost drowned by the unconscious trauma of her oppression. Again, the words of Rankine perhaps best express this:

How to care for the injured body,  
the kind of body that can't hold  
the content it is living?  
And where is the safest place when that place  
must be someplace other than in the body? (2015, p.143)

These symptoms are compounded by her isolation and uncertainty in an unfamiliar environment, revealed on her early morning walk to work. She finds the “half-light more blinding than utter darkness” (Senna 2004, p.19), echoing the complications of a mixed race existence, and her “eyes didn't know which way to adjust” (ibid., p.19), for she is unsure who to be, what persona to present. This Du Boisian double consciousness is made all the more problematic for her being misrecognised as white, underlining the meaninglessness of the concept of race itself. As the drizzle “lay like a veil across my face” (ibid., p.19), signifying her second sight, she watches the faces of others for “warnings of what lay up around the bend” (ibid., p.19), fearful, on edge, wondering what trauma the misrecognition will bring. The raised anxiety levels present in disturbing images, “a wet pink fetus curled in the gutter, that was really just a raw chicken wing” (ibid., p.19). From shaken adult to bullied child to suffocating baby, she is now nothing more than a discarded embryo. In the apartment, too, unexpected and unsettling sounds and smells are expressed physically (“[n]ausea one day, a dull ache behind my eyes the next” (ibid., p.82)). The cumulative effects of misrecognition and the consequential assumptions and expectations of others have created a troubled, faltering narrator, with an inward-looking narrative which gives no indication at this point of the author's view on matters of community, equality, or diversity.

Parallel with, and related to, the physical and psychic decline of the narrator is her relationship with Greta, a mixed race junior office worker. Greta now introduces a new dimension to the narrative, incorporating a discussion of an imagined mixed race community, as she and the narrator begin to form a friendship. It is not long, however, before Greta begins

to exhibit a more insistent and unhealthy need for the relationship, determined to reinforce what she believes to be a mutual mixed race affinity, by pressing the reluctant narrator to undergo an expensive colour analysis session with a fashion consultant (clearly a literal and figurative moment). The narrator, attuned by her experiences of misrecognition to the dissonant, conflicting reality which lies just beneath surface appearances, barely listens to the practised spiel of the analyst, absorbing only the blemishes underneath the glossy veneer, her “giant blooming herpes sore...[which]... glistened with the ointment she'd put on it” (Senna 2004, p.64), her “dark and cluttered” apartment (ibid., p.64), and the incongruous signed photographs of actors who had allegedly been clients. There is further unease when this intended bonding experience is disrupted by an overheard fierce argument between the consultant and her son, who had interrupted proceedings. His teenage vitriol - “*bitch, cunt, I hate you*” (her italics) (ibid., p.68) - reveals the discord just beneath the façade of professional composure. Then, when the narrator is assessed as a 'dark winter' colour, like Greta, there are hints of deceit and collusion, as the analyst inadvertently discloses that Greta had planned this session (and possibly its outcome) months before. In presenting the analysis process as contrived, shallow, literally 'skin-deep', the implication is that simplistic forms of classification and definition, such as those based solely on skin colour and shade, are meaningless and artificial. The affinity imagined and desired by Greta with the narrator, founded purely on a similar skin colour and a mixed race heritage, is therefore absurd, as is, by extension, the assumption of a common bond felt between mixed race people in general. This expectation and assumption about others is reinforced by the depiction of a family unit fraught with underlying tension, similarly implying that surface appearances alone have no real meaning or value.

The unshakable assumptions of Greta about the relationship with the narrator are by definition narrow and limiting, and the converse of the embrace of diversity discussed in this thesis. Such an inflexible position carries with it the inherent risk of prejudice, and soon Greta starts to reveal a bitterness tinged with racism, first castigating Andrew, saying he would have “played Mr. Sensitive for a while, Mr. Curious, Mr. Enlightened, and then one night, when you were in real deep, he'd let his real self slip out” (Senna 2004, p.49). Later she makes crude, sarcastic, and racist comments about Ivers, imagined as the stereotypical, hypersexualised black male, and she berates the narrator for her relationships with black and white men, saying “[i]t's two-faced bitches like you that give us a bad name” (ibid., p.124). Eventually she descends into vitriolic and irrational rants about various races and ethnicities,

through which Senna is countering the belief that the mixed race movement heralds the end of the race problem, and refuting the concomitant assumption that hybridity, of itself, means that mixed race people cannot themselves be racist. Indeed, the author recalls seeing an advertisement with a picture of a mixed race girl holding a sign reading “I'm a mulatto. I can't be racist” (cited in Milian Arias 2002, p.448), which only serves to bolster this false assumption.

Greta personifies the naive assumptions about the mixed race movement, telling the narrator “[w]e're a new race. A new people” (Senna 2004, p.154), and dreaming of a separate community. As the narrative proceeds, she becomes increasingly unstable and, when rejected by the narrator, she is manic, aggressive and controlling, eventually declining into insanity and trying to kill herself along with the narrator, which would be the ultimate antithesis of her dream. In the last scene in the apartment Greta has written 'Xanadu' on the dresser. Prosaically, this was the ancient capital of the Yuan dynasty founded by Kublai Khan, in an ultimately failed attempt by the Mongols to bring China into their empire. Poetically, it is a reference to 'Kubla Khan' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a vision of paradise created by man, beautiful and seductive, but dangerous, haunted by evil, and plagued by elemental forces foretelling war. Either way, an unfulfilled dream of utopia. At the start of the doomed friendship Greta quotes from the poem but, tellingly, only the early visionary lines. Later come the consequences, for the alluring dream of a hybrid utopia is undermined by the powerful forces of racism and a critical failure to recognise the Other as equal. This is the inverse of equality, diversity, and pluralism.

In a final twist Greta is revealed to be none other than the apartment owner Vera, living under an alias (and not for the first time) to avoid pressing debts. This revelation casts doubt on her integrity, questions her motives, and suggests opportunism. Symbolically, however, this twist reveals the enigmatic, unfathomable Greta as the oppressive dark double of the narrator, the source of her increasingly troubled feelings and her discomfort in the apartment, and the vision of what she might become if she allowed herself to succumb to the imagined mixed race bond – an embittered and lonely soul fixated on finding another like herself, irrationally distrusting and blaming all those who are different for her plight, and incapable of moving beyond this state to find fulfilment. In the final struggle, a *dénouement* recalling the 'tragic mulatta' in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), the narrator physically overcomes Greta, who falls to her death, in the symbolic exorcism of the inner torment, and simultaneously the

eradication of the notion of a mixed race utopia. This outcome suggests that affinity based solely on racial and ethnic similarity is neither reasonable nor sustainable simply because of imagined likeness. Quite the contrary, as the character of Greta illustrates, such an affinity becomes restrictive, coercive, and separatist, retaining 'us and them' binary thinking and thereby feeding the dark side, the source of prejudice and racism, once again the antithesis of the pluralist vision.

The epilogue to the novel places the narrator back on the west coast some years later, in a much improved, more self-aware, psychological state, and no longer writing nonfiction. Now she does not hide from herself and her pain through writing about the lives of others, nor shrink away or regress to childhood in the face of misrecognition and its consequences, but consciously looks within to her own sense of herself beneath the surface, behind the performative identities, “climbing into that abyss where nothing is certain” as her study guide advises her (Senna 2004, p.211). Standing on the precipice, looking down into that void, she accepts the unknown and acknowledges her difference without fear. This acceptance allows her to be more open to new experiences, including the diverse journeys of others, and she has found new friends who come from all over the world. Also remaining friends, she and Ivers share their personal journeys literally and figuratively, going for drives “[n]ot to get anywhere, just to move” (ibid., p.213), absorbing the beauty and ugliness of the world with equanimity. Beside him, the narrator says, “I feel that I am everywhere and I am nowhere” (ibid., p.212), psychologically and emotionally at ease in the friendship and in herself, and where they are is of no import. Now, the symptoms of her former malaise seem very far away, and she accepts the imperfections of her new apartment, her new environment, and her new life. At the same time, however, she does not deny the existence of imperfection and ugliness in the world, its people, and in herself, for there are still moments when she recalls the malaise, when she imagines she sees or hears Greta, the dangerous, dark side of the psyche in all of us. In the end, in terms of the thesis, the narrator's new and old friends testify to her acceptance of difference and diversity, and her experiences confirm her inner strength to resist restrictive and dangerous liaisons, and to eschew circumscribed and excluding ideologies. Ultimately, though, it is a personal journey.

There are contrasting interpretations of Senna's work, not least over the extent to which she appears as an individualist or a communitarian, which is a central concern of the thesis. This area seems to be something of a conundrum amongst critics, given the range of views

expressed. Some, for example, appear to situate her as a post-black writer, without using those precise terms. Daniel Grassian, in *Writing the Future of Black America: Literature of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2009) says of Senna that her characters “try to find places beyond race, a kind of postracial or postethnic condition” (p.116). Of the post-black writer Trey Ellis he is more explicit, saying that his writing “suggests that individualism and subsequent narcissism are what mainly endanger the contemporary African American community” (ibid., p.43). Certainly, the prevalence of individualism is both a contemporary tendency and a hallmark of post-black production, as discussed in Chapter 1. Erikka Searles, also previously cited, is clear that the post-black aesthetic is a personal experience without a focus on a particular racial or ethnic community. It should not be overlooked, though, that some are strongly opposed to the aesthetic. Bernard Bell, for example, in *The Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches* (2004) raises the subject of class in his assessment of post-black writers, who “displace rather than complement and expand African American proletarian and vernacular tropes of core black personal and collective identity with African American middle-class satirical tropes that privilege individualism and indeterminate multiculturalism” (p.303). Whatever the view, individualism is a key word for this aesthetic, yet does Senna sit within it?

Richard Schur thinks the work of Senna is in a different register. He sees a crisis in black literature, where old pre-civil rights era black stereotypes have disappeared and been replaced by newer versions, and for him writers like Senna and Colson Whitehead are seeking to “craft an authentic racial identity against these popular stereotypes and misconceptions” (2013, p.251). He uses the phrase the “New New Black Aesthetic” (ibid., p.250) from a work in progress by Monica Miller, *Affirmative Actions: Ways to Define Black Culture in the 21st Century*, which aims to assess “the consequences of thinking of black identity as 'post-black' or 'post-racial' ” (Miller 2014, online). Schur therefore imagines Senna in a search for new identity beyond both essentialism and post-blackness. However, from her work and pronouncements discussed in this chapter, it is hard to imagine Senna accepting that she is crafting a 'racial' identity, let alone an 'authentic' one, if that could ever be defined. She says, after all, “I am interested in deconstructing the premise of race itself” (cited in Milian Arias 2002, p.448).

In contrast with most commentators, Young, in a wide-ranging critique of *Symptomatic*, asserts that Senna has a lot to say about community. She notes that the novel “critiques overly

optimistic cultural understandings of hybridity both as the source of community formation and as racial (non) identity” (2008, p.288), when referring to the colourblind, multicultural movement, where mixed race people are imagined as happily assimilated, and race is irrelevant. Equally, she says that Senna issues “an imminent warning about the danger of racialized communities” (ibid., p.288), driven by “a simplistic recognition of inherent similarity” (ibid., p.288). Such communities would be inauthentic in the sense that they are solely based on perceptions, rather than being underpinned by shared principles and beliefs, and they might therefore simply be communities in a shared space, where there is no serious interaction on major issues. Young conceives of such communities as disengaged, passive and anodyne. It is certainly possible to infer from the narrator's experiences the sense of mixed people assumed to be well-adjusted and assimilated into the *wider* community, whereas in fact their social interaction is only superficial and there is no real shared sense of belonging or membership. Such a community can be unfulfilling and lonely, and may have invisible boundaries, factional interests and, accordingly, low levels of social capital, described by Robert Putnam as “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (2000, p.19). A fractured community such as this works against effective civic engagement and inclusive public discourse.

The novel is clear enough in suggesting that presumptions based on perceived ethnicity can expose endemic racism and make a mixed race existence fraught with underlying, suppressed tensions, and equally clear that associations based on phenotype are limiting and potentially harmful (recalling the 'tribes' of Shakil Choudhury discussed in Chapter 1). However, whilst these points are transparent within the text in terms of personal, individual relationships, and like-minded friendship groups, it is much less so in terms of community. It is rather more difficult, therefore, to understand how Young makes the transition to credit Senna with articulating “the need for new models of community based on noncompulsory politicized identifications and strategies for redressing historical injustice” (2008, p.288), achieved through “engaged interactions based on common agendas and concerns” (ibid., p.297), which are “essential in the formation of...communities with common historical memories” (ibid., p.297). It is important to note here that her focus is the black experience within what she calls a “racial community” (ibid., p.297) with shared cultural history, and it is not the multiracial, multiethnic, diverse community groups with a multiplicity of cultural histories discussed in this thesis. Even so, though the novel may allude to community in general and suggest historical injustice, and though the narrative presents existing and developing relationships

which are compatible and mutually satisfying (while others stall without this bond), the notions of strategies, common agendas and concerns seem to be presumptions beyond the intentions of the text, and an extrapolation of individual experience into a collective one. The principal reference to community is Greta's mixed race dream, used to critique identity and community founded upon racial and ethnic constructions, and to contrast this with the development of compatible individual relationships marked by affinity, mutual understanding and, critically for this thesis, being formed irrespective of race or ethnicity. These liaisons may or may not therefore be marked by common cultural histories or shared experiences of racism, assumption or discrimination, and though they may have a degree of shared values and beliefs, there is no suggestion in them of wider, common political concerns, or of any larger group or community of such people with a common political agenda, and certainly no inference of collective activism. The novel ends emphasising the uncertain, the inconclusive, and the unresolved, and if there is any 'message' it is one of being open to connections with like-minded people from all races and ethnicities, not just those with black heritage, as signified by the narrator's friends. This is a paean to the acceptance of diversity.

Finally, in spite of his notion of racial authenticity, Schur takes a more plausible view that the freedom of choice of the mixed race person in terms of self-identification “does not mean there is no responsibility to one's family or one's community. Rather, this freedom requires that individuals and communities take responsibility for their choices” (2013, p.244). He understands, for example, that both Cole and Birdie in *Caucasia* are focused on how to situate themselves in the broader community, not just the black or white one, whilst being true to their shared cultural history, though Grassian recognises that both Birdie and the narrator will find this quest difficult, since they “both live in a state of postethnicity, but the world in which they live still categorizes and judges people on the basis of ethnicity” (2009, p.133).

Unlike the positive responses to *Caucasia*, *Symptomatic* had mixed reviews. Promisingly, Young refers to it as “a dense and disturbing satire of the post-1967 mixed-race movement” (2008, p.287) and credits it with referencing numerous seminal writers besides those cited above, such as Frantz Fanon, Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. Even she, though, acknowledges its implausible plot; and one can say that some characters are simply drawn, whilst stylistically, its symbols and metaphors are clichéd and obvious. In terms of content, however, it does seriously engage with the notion and formation of identity and makes a

sturdy critique of contemporary multiculturalism. By exposing the self-delusional or cynical embrace of hybridity and the underlying racism from all sides, it lays bare the oppressive consequences for the mixed race person - the sense of uncertainty, of not belonging, and of performing for others, all problems in the search for kindred spirits and, ultimately, obstacles in the way of progress towards the realisation of a properly functioning diverse community. A fuller evaluation and conclusion on the personal and community-focused perspectives of both Senna and Quintero, as well as their standpoints on the key pluralist tenets of diversity and equality, will be undertaken after the analysis of Quintero in the next section.

### **Sofia Quintero: Broadening the Conversation in *Picture Me Rollin*'**

Sofia Quintero was born in the Bronx, where she still lives, of working-class Dominican and Puerto Rican parents. The self-styled 'Ivy League homegirl' graduated in history and sociology at Columbia and earned her MPA from the university's School of International and Public Affairs, and her MFA in writing and producing TV from Long Island University. She held several posts in not-for-profit organisations and government agencies before becoming a writer, educator and multimedia producer, and is a social and political justice activist. Her writing encompasses adult and young adult novels and short stories, including so-called 'chick lit', noir and erotica, "with a feminist hip-hop edge" (Quintero 2015, online), and she is co-publisher of the hip-hop education book *Conscious Women Rock the Page: Using Hip-Hop Fiction to Incite Social Change*, discussed in Chapter 3. Her multimedia work includes the not-for-profit TV production company Sister Outsider Entertainment (referencing Audre Lorde), which supports young minority group women in the industry, and has produced *Sangria Street*, a Latina version of *Sex in the City*. She is also co-founder of the film company Chica Luna Productions, which makes socially conscious films and seeks "to seize popular culture as another strategy for making change" (Quintero 2006a, online).

Before a detailed analysis and evaluation of the work of Quintero is undertaken it is essential to understand the context in which she writes and to know her target readership, and thereby the style she adopts to reach this audience. Primarily, but not exclusively, she writes for teenage and young adult females from poor urban neighbourhoods, an environment in which she herself was raised and one which was discussed in Chapter 1. The literary and social context in which she writes, however, requires some analysis in order to understand why and how she positions herself within this backdrop in seeking to attract her readers.

The starting point for this contextual background is the emergence and rapid growth, in the last twenty years, of a new wave of so-called 'street' or 'urban' literature, stories about the lives of characters in poor inner city neighbourhoods, composed by new, young writers who know the environment. In the early days of this revival authors produced their own books and sold them on the street, hoping for word of mouth recommendation to boost their sales, since their readership was largely from the local area. Internet self-publishing soon followed, with some writers, like Rasheed Clark, becoming very successful from such beginnings; and now there exists a variety of online book clubs and street literature magazines. Since 2000 there has been a surge of new Latino/a writers emerging, such as Jerry Rodriguez, Deborah Cardona and Jeff Rivera, though there are also a number of popular black authors, including Nikki Turner and Relentless Aaron.

This hip-hop generation phenomenon was generally ignored by mainstream publishers until the volume of sales caught their interest (in much the same way as the commercialisation and commodification of other aspects of hip-hop culture, discussed in Chapter 3). Contracts were signed, marketing campaigns initiated, and soon 'street lit' writers were rich, and their titles outsold many classic authors. Little regard was paid to the quality of these 'products', however, and critics dismissed them as crude, sensationalist, lacking in character development, and unworthy of serious attention. Kristina Graaf, in her book chapter 'Street Literature and the Mode of Spectacular Writing: Popular Fiction Between Sensationalism, Education, Politics, and Entertainment' (2013), acknowledges that the sensationalist mode of writing focuses on the dramatic, the immediate, the physical and the visual, and presents black male bodies as spectacle in the drama, while the women remain objectified by the dominant male gaze. Such externalised narrative presents no inner dialogue or processes, allows for no character development or growth, and features no epiphany or redemption. Furthermore, the subject matter is rooted in the singular world of impoverished and often neglected urban neighbourhoods, and the storylines reflect the realities of crime, violence and drug culture, thereby sustaining the widespread perception of hip-hop culture as predominantly misogynistic and homophobic. This in turn only serves to reinforce mainstream prejudices about the amorality of the mostly black and Latino/a people who live in these neighbourhoods. These stereotypes loom large in the dominant psyche to the extent that extreme official enforcement measures are seen as a social necessity, and thus the racist

undercurrent is both concealed and satisfied as official violence and excessive incarceration are carried out in the name of justice, as explored in Chapter 1.

Over time, though, some critics and educators began to see a positive impact on adolescent literacy arising from the resurgent street literature phenomenon, and some teachers started to use street titles to engage students in both urban and suburban schools, since its readership had extended well beyond the urban environment with the advent of commercialisation. Indeed, Graaf issues a plea for critics to look at this popular fiction in a different way. In spite of the sensationalist writing noted above, she claims it can also be educational, and even political. For example, she cites the use by some authors of a prologue and epilogue, the former introducing the story and guiding the reader in interpretation, stating that the narrative does not condone and is not intended to encourage antisocial and amoral actions, but rather is intended as a warning of the risks and dangers inherent in such behaviour, whilst the epilogue reinforces this didactic message. She suggests that readers will understand the downfall of lead characters as a cautionary tale, and asserts that descriptions of the harsh conditions endured in prison and the brutal treatment by police on the streets in everyday life can be read as political statements by the authors. She submits that “identifying and empathizing with the protagonists’ fates may even have a cathartic or deterrent effect on the reader. Moral instruction would thus also be achieved through the readers’ emotional and mental ‘cleansing’ ” (2013, p.124). Here, the 'may even' and the presumption of some moral lesson reveal a certain lack of conviction. Reflection may be advised by some authors in the prologue and epilogue, but this has rather limited meaning or effect if within the story itself there is no growth of self-awareness, no moral development or sense of self-determination amongst the characters. Unsurprisingly, critical opinion of this literature has remained unchanged.

Against the backdrop of the rise in street literature and its dismissal by literary critics, a brief yet relevant illustration is worthy of mention. The author Percival Everett, frustrated by the critical reception and classification of African American literature within the ongoing culture wars discourse (described in the previous chapter), wrote the novel *Erasure* in 2001. This sharp parody of the publishing houses features Thelonious 'Monk' Ellison, a middle-class, highly educated and high-minded black academic and writer of obscure, intellectual (and not particularly well received) books, who is criticised for his writing not being 'black enough'. Annoyed by a television book club selection which claims to represent contemporary black

experience, but is merely another stereotypical street lit story, he adopts the pseudonym Stagg R Leigh and composes a stinging satirical response entitled 'My Pafology', which references Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Sapphire's *Push* (1996), but is an extended parody of what he considers the worst kind of street literature. It is crudely written, with a brutal, amoral and unredemptive storyline, and he considers it "demeaning and soul-destroying drivel" (Everett 2003, p.156). Surprised when a sizeable contract is offered by Random House (not to mention an even larger sum for a Hollywood film) he changes the title to 'Fuck', to make things as difficult as possible for the publisher to accept, but to no avail. Finally, in a moment of extreme irony, Ellison finds himself on an award committee which, unaware of his pseudonym and despite his objections, votes for the now best-selling 'Fuck' as its choice, considering the book an authentic expression of contemporary urban black experience. To his fellow judges, who fail to understand why he denigrates a black author, he says "[t]hese are no more my people than Abbott and Costello are your people" (ibid., p.289) and in his journal, perhaps speaking for Everett, he muses that his postracial stance ironically makes him "a victim of racism by virtue of my failing to acknowledge racial difference and by failing to have my art be defined as an exercise in racial self-expression" (ibid., p.238).

Whatever the critical opinion of street literature, though, a strand of writing has emerged alongside it which deals with the same urban environment but has what is considered a more sophisticated style, with use of metaphor, signifying and other literary devices, enabling the prose to be appreciated on more than one level. For example, stories which can be read as pure entertainment or escapism may also have a deeper meaning or message. Critically for this thesis, though, within this 'literary' strand there are a number of writers who engage with ethical, social justice and political issues arising from the urban environment in which the narrative is set. Their principal characters have inner thought processes, reflect upon their experiences and, sometimes in dialogue with mentor characters, question the morality of their actions and of the events they witness. Their developing self-awareness gives them the self-confidence to make personal, principled life choices and resist the unwanted path of a future predetermined by their environment and circumstances. Understanding the effect of their environment on them and their own oppression within it, some seek education, wider knowledge or experience as a pathway to a different future, and in the process connect with and learn to respect others from diverse backgrounds on a similar personal journey. This journey sows the seeds for potential engagement at a wider level in society, employing their understanding of resistance and choice to join with others in action for social justice at

community level. This is the foundation stone for social and political consciousness, which lies at the heart of this thesis.

A pioneer in this strand is Sister Souljah, a community activist who organises events for young people in urban environments, seeking to motivate them to take control of their lives, and she encourages hip-hop artists to act as role models and give back to the community. Also, as a strong critic of the level of black history taught in schools, she was the inspiration behind some of the educational activists described in Chapter 3. Her early autobiography *No Disrespect* (1995) is a direct and honest depiction of life in the projects and how the conditions there both create and perpetuate the problems discussed in Chapter 1. Beset by “so many layers of oppression” (1995, p.244), few in this environment know what safety and stability feel like, either at home or in the streets, and they have limited self-awareness, no positive role models and no clear sense of morality. Indeed, her first novel *The Coldest Winter Ever* (1999) tells the bleak tale of a product of this world, an amoral girl who is unable to heed advice and guidance offered, or escape the trap of the environment. These seminal works inspired writers such as Elisha Miranda, Heru Ptah, Ferentz Lafargue, Felicia Pride and others, young hip-hop authors with a moral, social and political message, who have inherited the mantle of the 1980s socially conscious rappers like Talib Kweli, Mos Def and KRS-One. Though the latter are still active, the massive rise in commercialised hip-hop music has diminished their profile and impact.

As discussed in the Introduction and expanded upon in Chapter 1, many of these new voices with a social and political consciousness are Latino/a, such as Quintero. The full range of her work encompasses a variety of aspects and themes, including personal growth, feminism, diversity, education, and community activism for social and political justice. This chapter focuses on her writing, specifically her books for teenagers and young adults, with the primary focus on her 'chick lit' novel *Picture Me Rollin'* (2005). In order to reach her target audience, in this case young women and girls in poor urban environments, she consciously adopts a pseudo-street lit style, delivering a sensationalist, edgy story imbued with street slang and popular hip-hop culture. The narrative is not sanitised or simplified, and is open and direct about the dangers of the environment and the challenges, dilemmas, and contradictions faced by those living there. Gradually she weaves notions of empowerment into the narrative, by the use of mentor figures, as she explained in an interview with the National Book Foundation: “[a]s a writer, educator and activist, I always say, ‘Meet them

where they are then take them some place better' ” (2010, online). In order to retain interest, this engagement at a deeper level is not introduced in an overt, didactic way, but builds by degrees in the form of an emerging awareness within the principal character. At the same time Quintero does not shy away from the tough choices this personal growth brings, or from what is to be lost on the journey towards a greater gain.

For Quintero, “writing fiction is another form of activism” (cited in Bussel 2006, online) and she has a clear vision of how to engage with people and take them forward:

If I find out, for example, that the book that’s all the rage is a street lit novel about a girl dealing with, say, colorism, then I’ll say, ‘Oh, if you like that, you’ll love *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison.’ Depending on their age and sophistication, I may start with a bridge book like *The Skin I’m In* by Sharon Flake

(National Book Foundation 2010, online)

At the same time she is realistic about the support required for this personal growth, saying that “[a] young person is not going to evolve from Relentless Aaron to F. Scott Fitzgerald unless a knowledgeable and caring adult leads the way” (ibid., online). In *Picture Me Rollin'* she approaches her aim of empowerment on two interrelated levels. The first is through the introduction of key feminist texts to present the concept of equal rights and the equality of existence for women and, critically, the second is by exposing the intersections between the oppression of women with other forms of inequality, discrimination, and domination, making references to social and political consciousness and historical, collective resistance and struggle. Quintero uses role models and mentor characters, both real and fictional, to introduce these ideas and engage reflectively with the central character Esperanza (Espe) on their meaning and the possibilities they present. The mentors are older and experienced, some with strong convictions and histories of protest and resistance, and who understand the history and mechanics of oppression, the detrimental effects of depressed environments, and the importance of education and knowledge.

*Picture Me Rollin'* tells the story of Latina sisters Espe and the older Dulce, living in the South Bronx projects. At the start Espe is about to leave prison after a year for possession of firearms, having thereby protected her crew, led by Jesus, from incarceration. Once free and

on probation, Espe decides to 'go straight' and get a job, whilst studying for her GED tests in order to get a place at college. At the same time, however, she is constantly drawn back into her former life as the girlfriend of the gang leader. The narrative revolves around the struggles and dilemmas arising from these conflicting lifestyles, before the dénouement brings a critical moment of choice.

At the start Espe is soon to be released from prison and leave behind her first mentor, Isoke, her cellmate and a prison librarian, a former Black Panther who says “[g]ot caught out there with a conscience... [a]nd they gave me life” (Quintero 2005, p.3). Isoke has political books smuggled in, which she conceals under false covers and names on the library system, passing them around the prisoners, including Espe, whom she has sought to educate throughout the year, in the hope that she will not return to her former life. Since Espe was besotted with the music of rapper Tupac Shakur, Isoke pressed her to read the biographies of his mother, Afeni, and 'aunt' Assata, also Black Panthers and political activists, seeking to make her aware that Tupac “*had a political analysis, a social vision...[and]...the intention to liberate*” (her italics) (ibid., p.2). At the same time, though, Isoke tried to impress upon Espe the difference between the thug and the revolutionary, telling her that “[i]t makes no sense to rage against the machine without purpose or principle. You cannot be a gangsta and a soldier... so you must choose” (ibid., p.2). At this stage, though, Espe still has an undeveloped social and political consciousness and cannot grasp the full significance of this advice. As the narrative progresses, however, she becomes more self-reflective and aware, and exchanges letters with Isoke, whose critical influence she begins to recognise.

Once out of prison Espe returns to live with Dulce, who is a constant role model for her. Dulce introduces the theme of love and violence, which runs throughout the novel, taking her sister to a women's group discussion on *All About Love: New Visions* (2001) by bell hooks. The group considers the fate of abused women, whose experiences give them serious problems with trust and love, and perpetuate a cycle of violence against others, including their children. An abused mother in the group, who smacks the child she claims to love, is angry at the suggestion in the text being discussed, that "love and abuse cannot coexist" (Quintero 2005, p.35), failing to grasp the underlying connections. Espe, however, now begins to question her experiences within the crew, where male abuse of women is considered normal. She bears a scar from such violence and yet believes that Jesus loves her, whilst from his amoral perspective he believes that “[h]is rare violence made Esperanza

lucky” (ibid., p.231), because she was his favourite. Dulce had previously been associated with the same gang and had been abused by gang member Xavier, and she herself had engaged in violence, beating up a 'disrespectful' girl in front of Espe. Now, with the support of the women's group, she has moved on from this destructive cycle and wants to lead Espe along the same path. The reader also learns that Brenda, the sisters' mother, killed her violently abusive husband in self-defence, but was convicted of murder. In prison, she actively supports other women who may have been wrongfully condemned, not unlike Isoke, and the girls see her as an inspiration. Quintero uses this theme of love and violence primarily as a feminist critique of gender roles as they are acted out in the poor urban environment, awash with sensationalist street literature and countless commercial hip-hop productions which reinforce the stereotypes of the misogynistic, homophobic, violent male and the subservient, objectified female. At the same time, referring to Brenda, it is a political critique of a criminal justice system with excessive and discriminatory sentencing practices, which fails to investigate thoroughly and differentiate between premeditated violence and desperate self-defence. Equally, the examples of violence here and elsewhere in the novel imply a wider socio-political critique of an urban underclass trapped in a cycle of self-destruction, as Junot Díaz described in Chapter 1.

A second theme present throughout the novel is the value of knowledge and education. Soon after her introduction to hooks, Espe finds Dulce reading the seminal feminist text *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) by Audre Lorde. It is clear that the women's group has inspired Dulce to keep learning and growing away from the destructive lifestyle of her past, and though Espe is struggling to follow in her footsteps, she is keen to make it to college, where “[y]ou had to think for yourself, present your thoughts, stand by them. Esperanza was down for that” (Quintero 2005, p. 37). In her GED preparation classes, Espe meets the inspirational figure of Maite Rodriguez, the first teacher ever to praise her for her contribution in class, just as she was awaiting the usual dismissal for her challenge on a point of irregular grammar. Significantly, the exchange with Espe, along with her nascent understanding of hooks and Lorde, impresses and inspires Maite to consider using other, proscribed, and irregular material for study, in order to engage the students. Echoing the ‘storytelling’ espoused in Critical Race Theory, as well as its critique of an education system fashioned by the dominant white culture, the teacher presents the class with one of her early political, feminist poems written “not to reinforce what we were learning in class but...what we *weren't* learning...[i.e.]...[t]he histories of Black and Latino people not just in this country

but the nations from which our ancestors came” (her italics) (Quintero 2005, p.71). This makes a connection with the students, who see that their heritage is being respected, not ignored, and sparks their enthusiasm for more. Seeing the potential for learning by using material beyond the set programme which directly appeals to the students, Maite commissions Espe to research and select rap lyrics as material for analysis in later lessons, telling the class that “[t]hings are going to be very different in this classroom for the rest of this program” (ibid., p.69). This experience so boosted Espe's self-confidence and self-worth that she bounced on the sofa “like a kid on her birthday” (ibid., p.103).

The character of Maite is an important referent in a number of ways. Firstly, she openly critiques what Mikhail Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination* 1981) might have termed monoglossic education, delivering only the 'authoritative' voice of the dominant culture, presenting a version of history and value systems intended to produce citizens of a like mind, which in its extreme form is social and political control, and maintenance of the status quo. She champions more flexible, heteroglossic education to respond to the cultural diversity of a population, to reflect the variety of its history, heritage and beliefs, and thereby to foster a more inclusive, tolerant and democratic ethos. This is the cross-fertilization imagined by Agustín Lao-Montes in Chapter 1 and is at the heart of the culture wars debate discussed there. Secondly, still referencing Bakhtin (along with Paulo Freire and others) Maite represents the dialogic approach to education whereby, through egalitarian exchanges (as with Espe), all participants debate and develop their understanding. She therefore both learns from and teaches the students. Initially inspired by Espe to try out her poem, she discovers that different, more challenging material can engage and develop the students (and herself), and thus realises the relevance and potential of popular culture as a rich source of such material. These matters are explored in detail in the following chapter. Then, aside from the educational implications, Maite also transparently represents activist feminism and its place within, and intersections with, wider social and political justice activism. More than this, though, she is the symbol of the potential unity of cultures of resistance by oppressed groups and minorities, through her connection with the Black Panther Isoke. This recalls the analysis of Arturo Escobar in the previous chapter on the swell of diverse voices ‘from below’ with a discernible level of ideological convergence. The Panthers, however, were revolutionary socialists from an earlier era and rather different from the emergent ideologies to which Escobar refers. The use of these earlier figures somewhat complicates the argument of Quintero who, in the broad body of her work, focuses on total inclusion, acceptance of

diversity and equality, and support for multiracial, multiethnic collaborative activism for social and political justice. This apparent paradox is returned to below in the discussion of the hip-hop gangsta.

Whilst Espe is making these first, tentative steps towards greater awareness and knowledge, she is continually drawn back towards the easier option of life in the gang, even as she begins to believe that it may be the wrong choice. This theme of internal conflict and contradiction is another strand central to the novel, since anyone wishing to escape the overdetermined prospects of a life in a poor urban neighbourhood, and wanting to build a self-determined future, must confront and overcome the determining factors. Quintero herself is a voice from below, someone who has learned to recognise the negative influences, imagine a different future, and struggle to follow the path to become, over time, a role model for others to follow. In the novel, Espe faces these daily dilemmas, constantly under pressure to return to the crew whilst struggling to follow a different path. There are moments of inspiration, strength and resolve, when she responds to encouragement from her mentors, yet there are other times of weakness and relapse, when she longs to regain her status in the crew. Sometimes compromise seems possible, but is short-lived, as when Jesus seems interested in her education, and taking a book she offers him to read while he waits, but she “glanced over her shoulder in time to catch Jesus flipping through Maite's book and then tossing it on the back seat” (Quintero 2005, p.282); or when he wants a new life with Espe in California, but the fear is not a legitimate one; or when he takes her to see her mother in jail, but late and reluctantly. His underlying aim is simply to regain emotional control over her, and she often falters, clinging to an ever weakening belief that this is love, in the face of much evidence to the contrary, whilst the message from hooks slowly gestates.

In contrast with the amoral and manipulative Jesus, Espe does show that she has an innate sense of right and wrong, revealed in two key moments in the narrative. When failing to pay attention to one uninspiring teacher, whose “deadpan tone made clear that no one else in the room could give less of a fuck than he did” (Quintero 2005, p.51), she is humiliated by him in an unprofessional manner in front of the class. He reads out loud from a private letter open on her desk and discloses that she had been in prison. Before storming out, she rages at him - “[h]ow dare you put me on a blast like that...[and]... it's not my fault that this boring shit that you can't teach is not relevant to my fuckin' life!” (ibid., p.89). On another occasion she is fired from her job after attacking an abusive customer who had assaulted a colleague. In both

cases her reactions may be excessive and reflect her life experiences of seeing conflict dealt with by confrontation or violence, but she is acting for the right reasons, responding to what she understands as unacceptable behaviour. These examples may be the swift reaction of the young, but they echo the more deliberate, righteous resistance of mature adults following their conscience on important issues. This is what her mentors see in her, a young and forceful person with a moral compass who wants to learn, and therefore has the potential to move beyond the influence of the amoral, static environment of indiscriminate, purposeless anger and violence, a place of seemingly insurmountable internalised and external oppression from all sides. They see someone who may learn to channel that anger and frustration towards broader, critical, ethical and social issues. Quintero uses the figure of Tupac as an allegory throughout the narrative to explore the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in this journey, and this requires some further commentary.

The title of the novel is taken from a Tupac rap of the same name, in which he boasts of his success: “[p]icture me rollin in my 500 Benz” (Shakur et al. 1996). He is, however, the embodiment of the contradictions within hip-hop culture, on the one hand the self-aggrandising, egotistical rapper, rising above the ghetto life to become rich and famous, posturing as a gangsta, and hero of the poor and disadvantaged; but on the other hand, as Isoke says earlier, he came from a family of Black Panthers, and had a well-developed social and political awareness of the nature, causes and effects of oppression, and a keen knowledge of black history and resistance. He was, therefore, to some a thug, to others a revolutionary. Darius Prier, in *Culturally Relevant Teaching: Hip-Hop Pedagogy in Urban Schools* (2012), recognises Tupac as someone at once trying to navigate the commercial and the socially conscious faces of hip-hop, even as he faces accusations of hypocrisy. He is depicted as representing different strands of hip-hop culture simultaneously, the gangsta raging against white hegemony whilst in the same moment seeing the mechanics of that oppression, the underfunded community in poverty, the racial bias of the criminal justice system, police brutality, and inadequate public school education. In the rap 'Trapped' (Shakur 1991, online) Tupac describes this environment as a segregated place, a “prison of seclusion” where he “couldn't find a trace of equality”, a place of constant police harassment where “they never talk peace”. In his poem 'The Rose That Grew From Concrete', however, which he marked as autobiographical, he likens himself to the rose triumphing over its environment:

Proving nature's laws wrong it learned 2 walk

without having feet  
Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams  
it learned 2 breathe fresh air

(Shakur 1999, p.3)

Critics debate the enigma of Tupac and the extent to which he was in the lineage of black resistance. Certainly his legacy is limited to the resistance expressed in his music and poetry, since the national profiles and activism of the Panthers and other civil rights groups were receding as Tupac grew up. However, Prier considers him “a crucial link and axis between the Civil Rights Generation, the Black Panther Movement, and the hip-hop generation” (2012, p.53). This statement is important for understanding Quintero, who employs Tupac in a similar way to the seminal feminist texts, that is, to situate the oppressed people of the hip-hop generation within their historical context, reconnect them with their heritage of struggle for liberation, and inspire them to rejoin, refresh and take the struggle forward. Using Tupac enables her to interrogate the personae of the thug and the revolutionary, and their use of violence. She compares the egotistical, gratuitous violence of the gangsta, devoid of principle (like gang warfare, and the personal attacks by Jesus, Xavier, and Dulce), with violence used in the name of political resistance on behalf of the disadvantaged, and with the notion of justified violence used for self-defence from unjustified attack by oppressive forces (espoused by Malcolm X and the Panthers, and used by Brenda in the novel).

In her journey towards self-awareness and knowledge, Espe gravitates from initial infatuation with, and blind adulation of Tupac, to recognising his inconsistency, questioning his integrity, and finally to accepting the wisdom of Isoke, that a gangsta is not a revolutionary. For example, at the beginning she ponders the words of hooks that in a patriarchal society women are not equals with men, that “*men of power can do whatever they want...it's this freedom that makes them men*” (Quintero italics) (2001, p.38), and that the privileged male can even lie and get away with it. In an imaginary conversation with Tupac, Espe therefore questions his contradictory stance towards women, sometimes respectful, sometimes misogynistic, and in her fantasy he acknowledges that she is right, and all is forgiven. Later, though, her friend Tenille angrily attacks the duplicity of Tupac, saying “how you gonna rap about 'girl, keep ya head up' and then sodomize some girl in a nightclub?” (Quintero 2005, p.170) and directly challenges Espe that he “was a hypocrite...talking about all this political stuff here and living the thug life over there”. Ultimately, after listening to Jesus blame his violence against

women on the pressure of being gang leader, she is unable to listen to Tupac when, “[f]or the first time ever, she found herself put off by the harsh language” (ibid., p.231) and later she dreams of being physically attacked until “all the male voices faded...[and]... all she heard was Tupac's boyish laugh” (ibid., p.232). In her dream she has recognised the immaturity of Tupac's standpoint, and now looks at his poster and wonders, “[w]as that a look of betrayal? Concern? Understanding?” (ibid., p.277).

Espe has witnessed the destructive nature of violence and its effects on both the victim and the perpetrator, and her position recalls the key ideological debate about principled resistance and internecine gangsta violence, which took place between east and west coast hip-hop artists in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and was heavily referenced in the 1989 Spike Lee film *Do the Right Thing*, against the insistent soundtrack of 'Fight the Power' by Public Enemy. In the same year KRS-One and others formed The Stop the Violence Movement, producing the rap 'Self-Destruction' with the lines:

It's one or two suckas, ignorant brothers  
Trying to rob and steal from one another  
You get caught in the mid  
So to crush the stereotype here's what we did  
We got ourselves together  
So that you could unite and fight for what's right  
(1989, online)

Aside from her burgeoning understanding of gratuitous violence and justified resistance, Espe has grown over the course of the narrative in a number of ways, and is beginning to see the world in a new light. She has come to understand that the creed of the crew is worthless and amoral, after sacrificing her freedom to protect them but never receiving her promised share of the ill-gotten proceeds. Marred by a life of disrespect and abuse from Jesus, she finds it difficult to trust other men, such as Chago, her sister's boyfriend, in spite of his honesty about his former marriage and his obvious caring nature. Even after he discovers the violent past of Dulce, he eventually comes to terms with it and their relationship blossoms. This finally enables Espe to recognise his goodness and find the strength to trust again. At the same time she is reading Maite's words about the meaning of love, and that "*the abusive man does not love himself, let alone his woman. If he truly loved her, he would let her go*" (her italics)

(Quintero 2005, p.228). Seriously doubting Jesus now, Maite helps her to finally see that Jesus does not love her, otherwise he would want her to feel safe, happy, and supported. Then, near the end of the novel, after she soothes an old scar from a violent assault by Jesus, the words of Lorde from *Sister Outsider* (1984) finally convince her she has to end the relationship – “[y]our silence will not protect you” (Quintero italics) (ibid., p.273). Dulce, too, is continuing to learn about trust and love, and she is inspired by Maite's book chapter on Truth to tell Chago of her violent past, which ultimately deepens their relationship.

There are other instances of Espe maturing as she distances herself from the gang. Initially taken aback by the sexuality of Lorde, she soon recognises that diverse voices are equally valid, so “Black, lesbian, poet, whatever, this Audre had things to say which Esperanza needed to know” (Quintero 2005, p.272). She has also grown to love herself, and understand that real beauty comes from within. In the preparations for the final escape she puts on make-up to please (and deceive) Jesus, remembering how she couldn't feel beautiful without it before, but now “she looked at herself and felt like a clown. This mask made her ugly, hiding who she really was....[n]ot the woman that Maite and Ioke and her own sister believed she could be” (ibid., p.280). Then, selflessly, she takes the trouble to find that the girl violently beaten by Dulce has forgiven her attacker and acknowledged that they were two young girls damaged by their dysfunctional neighbourhood lives at the time. This not only relieves Dulce of her shame and guilt, but also enables Espe to appreciate the noxious effects of gang culture and the contrasting sense of self-worth and empowerment which comes from forgiveness. Now Espe can see with clarity the psychological damage behind the physical abuse of Priscilla, her rival for the affections of Jesus. Her empathy enables her to overcome her prejudice towards the younger girl, as she intervenes to stop a physical attack by Jesus and then gives her emotional support when she confides that she is pregnant. In these moments Espe recognises in Priscilla the fear she herself used to feel amongst the volatile gang members, and how easy it had been to assume this was normality, and thereby become trapped within it. Conscious of the support she has received to try and escape this environment, she becomes a mentor to Priscilla, introducing her to the name bell hooks... Espe has now grown to become other-centred, and at the same time has a more developed sense of who she is and what she might become, and a more balanced and nuanced understanding of others. At a neighbourhood party paid for by Jesus, gang member Feli wonders at the local people consuming food and drink which they must know is financed

from drug trading, to which Espe responds: “[p]eople are complicated... That don't make 'em bad” (Quintero 2005, p.173).

Towards the end of the novel Espe is strong enough to make the critical decision which will change her life forever. She decides to enter one last drug deal, take the money, and escape. In these last scenes she is inspired by the spirit of Lorde and the words of Maite to take control of her own destiny and not to falter:

*And he is no warrior,  
And he is no king,  
You gave him his power,  
Now take it back from him.*  
...  
*I am a warrior,  
I am a queen,  
I own my own destiny,  
I own my own dream* (her italics) (ibid., p.276)

A line from Maite's book on the last fateful day in New York gives her the strength to love herself and the courage to face the future, for “[s]he loves and demands her freedom even as she faces the barriers in front of her” (ibid., p.281). The final, melodramatic scenes are pure, sensationalist, street lit, but Quintero ensures that, amidst the mayhem, Espe has the presence of mind to share the proceeds with Dulce and Priscilla, before escaping to Cuba. Loose narrative ends are rather crudely tied up in a short epilogue but, importantly, Espe is shown as firmly on the road to a better future. She is reading the seminal work *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983) featuring the key feminist figures of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga; she has passed her GED exams; and she has hopes for a future return to the US. The clear inference from her reading is that her journey is continuing, for she has moved on to the radical work of Anzaldúa and her diverse associates, espoused by Walter Mignolo and discussed in Chapter 1. These voices express a wider consciousness, imagine a world of inclusion and equality, a world which embraces voices from the margins, and rejects hierarchies of being. There is hope, at the end, that Espe will grow to fulfil the potential seen by her mentors and ultimately engage in activism for social, political and economic justice for the poor and disadvantaged.

In summary, *Picture Me Rollin'* is a form of 'edutainment', which aims to show its target readership of teenage and young adult females in poor urban environments that abusive relationships and gratuitous violence are morally wrong, and that it is possible and realistic to escape such abuse, with the support of caring family members and adults, and using the knowledge and experiences of oppressed women before them, who have relevant and critical life lessons to impart. To achieve this aim, Quintero introduces classic feminist texts by women of colour intertwined with mentor characters who provide a moral, social and political critique of the urban environment, the status of women within it, and the conduct of its key institutions. She wants more people of the hip-hop generation, “across ages, race and gender” (Quintero 2005, p.306), to be aware of these feminist texts and their exposure of the sources, nature and tools of the oppression of women, and for oppressed readers to be inspired by these writers to reclaim their self-esteem, to demand their right to equality, and to determine their own future. The story of Espe is one of personal growth away from oppression towards self-determination, and on the journey she learns the value of support, for herself and others.

Other narrative strands, conveyed through the characters of Isoke, Maite and Brenda, sow the seeds for the emergence of a moral, social and political consciousness, the building block for a future of engaged, communal activism on behalf of the oppressed. These characters deliver a critique of the criminal justice system, and Quintero urges debate on “the huge discrepancies between its stated objectives and the way it actually operates” (Quintero 2005, p.306); and the pointed references to the deficiencies of the public school education system are expanded upon in the next chapter. The unravelling of the contradictions within hip-hop in terms of the gangsta and the revolutionary is somewhat less clear, but Quintero openly states that she wants more debate in this area. She is nothing less than honest, admitting that she herself, in the process of writing, was working through the conflicting messages emanating from hip-hop, alongside the notions of self-love and real love. As she says, “*Picture Me Rollin'* is about - among other things - transcending one's contradictions” (ibid., p.306). References to Tupac and Brenda imply that violence is justified for self-defence in extreme circumstances, if under unprovoked attack, but discussion goes no further in terms of the use of force during political protest, for example. Furthermore, although Quintero disapproves of gratuitous violence, she clearly depicts the self-destructive patterns in the projects as fuelled by the dire living conditions and the poverty of existence in this

underfunded environment, even presenting Jesus as a product of this dysfunction, initially turning to drug dealing in order to support his single mother.

*Picture Me Rollin'* is but one of a number of books she has written for specific groups and two others in the same area are worthy of mention. *Divas Don't Yield* (2006) is aimed at college age women and features four diverse female characters on a road trip, who confront each other on multiple levels, dealing with issues of class, race, sexism and sexuality, and emerge from the experience more aware, accepting and mature. Quintero explains that the characters start out struggling with some part of themselves, which is exposed and explored in the narrative, and that each learns that, "in order to have satisfying relationships with others... she first has to learn to accept herself" (cited in Bussel 2006, online) and that, through the process of exploration, "her relationships improve (although not without some adjustment first, and certainly without more work to be done in the future because that would be simplistic and unrealistic)" (ibid., online). Tellingly, these characters are student activists on behalf of women's rights, and Quintero reveals that she receives messages "all the time from women who have read the novel and say that it inspires them to get more involved in their communities" (ibid., online). Then *Efrain's Secret* (2011) is another young adult novel, written in a more sophisticated style than *Picture Me Rollin'*, with less melodrama and sensationalism, but dealing with a young man facing essentially the same dilemmas as Espe. It has a similar theme of internalised conflict between street life and education, in which Efrain leads a double life, secretly doing the wrong thing, selling drugs, for the right reason, so that he can pay for his college education as a means of escape from the world of drug-dealing and gangs.

Critics, however, have often overlooked the work of Quintero and others like her. Grassian identifies (admittedly black) hip-hop generation writers whom he believes suitable for inclusion in the contemporary canon for study at college and graduate school level, selecting those he considers 'gifted', such as Senna. He dismisses street literature *en bloc*, as he believes that its exponents "tend to lack the intellectual depth I perceive in the work of writers explored in this book" (2009, p.14). Within this dismissal he includes Sister Souljah, despite her important influence upon socially and politically conscious hip-hop writers (both black and Latino/a) as noted earlier. By excluding those writers who consciously target readers from less 'literate' backgrounds he inadvertently omits those within this category who have serious and important things to say about racial, ethnic, and class discrimination, about

social and political justice and its intersection with the meaning of democracy, about equality and diversity, and about public school education, and more besides. The application of traditional, canonical, literary standards is but one method of assessing authors, and does not take into account the consciously purposive works of those like Quintero. Yvonne Bynoe, in *Stand and Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership, and Hip Hop Culture* (2004), searched in vain for political leaders emerging from the hip-hop generation, finding no significant political movements with a vision, a strategy, an infrastructure and a plan, and noting the paucity of national organisations dedicated to tackling major issues such as education reform, the prison-industrial complex, and police brutality. She found herself looking backwards to seminal civil rights figures like Ella Baker as a role model for contemporary activists seeking to identify, mentor and promote young people with the potential for community, and wider leadership. She did, however, acknowledge the socially and politically conscious rappers prominent in the 1980s, whose important cultural messages she found to be isolated and unsupported by any significant political movement. Clearly her focus was on leadership and national movements, and she was not primarily concerned with the more dispersed and diverse activism at the micro-political level. However, the present day socially and politically conscious hip-hop writers like Quintero and others, both black and Latino/a, who were inspired by the earlier rappers, have taken their message further, combining their writing with other forms of activism, such as educational reform, criminal justice, AIDS/HIV, community funding, and other major issues. In today's more complex demographic, these are the ones who represent the best and most realistic hope for the future; they are the most likely to inspire young people to engage in social and political justice activism on behalf of the disadvantaged across all minority groups; they may even inspire some to become future leaders. These issues are discussed further in the next two chapters.

Before concluding this section on Quintero it is important, in terms of this thesis, to take a more detailed look at where she sits within the current feminist discourse. As discussed, her work introduces respected feminist texts and integrates them into her own feminist position and, in so doing, she is a critical link between feminists of the civil rights era and the hip-hop generation. In recent decades the continuity of the feminist discourse has been disrupted by generational differences, conflicts, and misunderstanding. Quintero may offer hope for reconciliation.

## **Quintero and Hip-Hop Feminism: Meet Them Where They Are**

The empowering impulse of Quintero with regard to poor and disadvantaged young women not only raises issues within the contemporary feminist discourse, but also has a significant correlation with the notions of inclusion and equality addressed in this thesis. For example, her feminist stance addresses the established areas of the debate, such as gender stereotyping, patriarchy and sexuality, together with their consequential inequalities, but she does so, importantly, by direct and unadulterated engagement with the worst manifestations of these inequities, including misogyny, homophobia and violence. Crucially, moreover, she situates her work in the world of the oppressed, the poor, and the excluded, principally but not exclusively from racial and ethnic minority groups. Indeed, her feminist position is both influenced by, and inflected with, the effects of racial, ethnic and class discrimination and exclusion. There is accordingly a direct correspondence between her work and the integral pluralist tenets of the acceptance of diversity and the equality of existence; and her feminist position within the wider discourse therefore merits a more detailed analysis in order to assess its relevance and importance within the terms of this thesis.

The feminist discourse has always been a broad church with a range of contrasting opinions and internal tensions, complicated over time by issues of race, ethnicity and class, and further problematised in recent decades by the seemingly self-centred, individualistic hip-hop generation. Contemporary debate therefore continues to display conflicting perspectives on the strategies for empowering and inspiring young women today, and none more so than in respect of the poor and disadvantaged, of whatever race or ethnicity. It is possible, however, to discern three broad sets of responses which encapsulate the current debate. The first perspective tends to come from older feminists, from every ethnic or racial group, who lived through the so-called second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Since that time they have witnessed the unbridled growth of commercial hip-hop and watched its practitioners flaunt their wealth and reinforce the stereotypes of the hypersexualised, misogynistic and homophobic male prone to crime and violence, and the sexualised and objectified female. Although these perceptions are not new or unique to hip-hop, the ubiquitous and constant barrage of images generated by the profit-driven media has dominated and adversely affected their perceptions, creating a “preoccupation with hip-hop’s misogyny at the expense of exploring its potential” (Peoples 2008, p.39). Even bell hooks, describing a hip-hop panel with famous young black entertainers, during a discussion on religious fundamentalists who

espouse racism and patriarchy, states that both groups are “fiercely homophobic” (2013, p.176), without qualification. Although she acknowledges the place of pulp fiction and wants to see more black writers in this field, she really wants to see more writers actively engaging with serious issues such as racism and sexism, citing names such as James Baldwin, Audre Lorde and Essex Hemphill, but making no reference to any such work amongst young, contemporary hip-hop authors. Indeed, Whitney Peoples notes the “seemingly narrow and static conception of feminist identities emerging out of second-wave theorizing and activism” (2008, p.39). One might label this a ‘purist’ perspective. For example, the agendas of seminal figures such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga or Lorde may be progressive and inclusive, accepting of diverse race, ethnicity, class and sexuality, and welcoming of men, but this very radicalism is a long way from the lived experiences of less well-off young women, and so potentially an “ineffectual strateg[y] for outreach to and empowerment of young black women and girls” (Peoples 2008, p.39), or those from other minorities for that matter. After all, Espe underwent considerable personal development, supported by mentors, before she was able to truly appreciate the importance of the 'Bridge' book at the end of the novel. This disconnect, whether due to levels of education, communication issues between generations, or to disparity between theory and reality, creates a need and a space for another form of feminist engagement, explored further below. A final criticism made by second wave feminists about their hip-hop counterparts is their “focus on the personal at the expense of an explicitly traditional feminist political agenda” (ibid., p.43), which suggests a lack of a communal ethic, but is nonetheless an unusual criticism from a generation driven by the premise that ‘the personal is political’. Quintero, insofar as this chapter on her hip-hop writing is concerned, does indeed focus on personal growth and empowerment, but this is achieved through the use of messages from seminal feminist texts, and supported by mentor characters who are politically conscious activists working for the rights of disadvantaged women. Elements of the broader, more diverse and communal agenda of Quintero, referred to above, are discussed in the later chapters on education and social justice activism.

A second perspective on contemporary hip-hop feminism comes from younger commentators who debate the motivation and agency of female hip-hop artists who seek to stretch the boundaries prescribed for them by their dominant male counterparts. Discussing female street literature, Eve Dunbar looks at the popular writer Nikki Turner, who uses sex and violence in her stories not to reinforce stereotypes, she claims, but to warn of the dangers of drugs and using sex as a tool for control. Though claiming to write morality tales, her work is vilified

by many critics who consider that her stories merely “reinscribe the narratives about black women in hip hop music” (2013, p.107). Dunbar acknowledges that such writing does not conform with any established feminist position, but does suggest that, for women in such an oppressive environment, the act of writing and telling their stories may be the only way for them to find a space and an opportunity to express themselves, albeit within the framework of male-dominated hip-hop culture. This practice, she says, is a form of agency, and asserts that such work should not be dismissed out of hand but looked at for possible worth in terms of shifting the established gender relations within the culture. Certainly, a writer who is published and sells well will gain self-esteem and perhaps independence, but this form of agency will only approach a feminist position and engage with gender politics if, within the text itself, there is internalised character development in the form of self-awareness and a wider consciousness of the status of women. Inserting a prologue and epilogue to guide the reader on the moral message is not enough, as discussed earlier.

Other contemporary critics have explored the work of the pioneering, transgressive female rappers Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown, who challenge the male-dominated culture and foreground their own sexual needs and desires. Critical perspectives vary, to put it mildly. Professor Greg Thomas created a whole module on Lil' Kim at Syracuse University in 2004, entitled 'Hip-Hop Eshu: Queen Bitch 101 - The Life and Times of Lil' Kim.' He considered her lyrics “art with the most profound sexual politics I've ever seen anywhere” (ABC News 2004, online), which “radically redistributes power, pleasure and privilege...embracing sexuality on her kind of terms” (Discover the Networks 2005, online). However powerful the agency here, though, the lyrics and videos perpetuate the stereotype of the sexualised black female in exactly the same way that some male rappers perpetuate the image of the black misogynist. Indeed, far from being the 'profound sexual politics' Thomas sees, Ayana Byrd asserts that “[t]hrough the constant barrage of hypersexualised images, the young, black female has ceased to be an anomaly in the marketplace and is now back in the slave era position of anonymous chattel” (2004, p.8). She is implying that rappers such as Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown have fallen into the trap of being complicit in their own exploitation by the male-dominated corporate music industry. One can also say, therefore, that any 'radical redistribution' of power envisaged by Thomas is limited to the commercial battle zone between these sexual stereotypes and, as in the literary examples above, unless there is growth of self-awareness and consciousness, the agency of these female rappers will not address wider issues of equality and independence for women in any feminist sense.

The final perspective on hip-hop feminism also comes from younger commentators who have learned from older feminists, but who cannot follow their uncompromising agenda, arguing that their strategies “need to be updated... to capture the attention of contemporary black women and girls” (Peoples 2008, p.42). They recognise that they must enter the unsettling and volatile world of misogyny, homophobia and violence where these young, imperfect, and conflicted women exist in order to be able to connect with them. As Imelda Whelehan says in the Foreword to *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, “for feminism to be popular...[it]..means engaging with some pretty thorny ambiguities” (2007, p. xviii). However, they find themselves criticised by the purists for going into these spaces, and this “charge of alleged inauthenticity led...[them]...not only to challenge the second-wave black feminist approach to hip-hop, but also the very definition of feminism it abides by” (Peoples 2008, p.40). This situation has therefore opened up a new space, both literally and theoretically, within the current feminist discourse. Quintero, Miranda, Jennifer Calderón and other 'literary' hip-hop authors use the same environment, themes and storylines as street lit writers like Turner but they significantly go beyond the crude, sensationalist narrative by gradually introducing inner processes and character development, as discussed. They create the conditions for personal growth within their characters, offer them a deeper understanding of their world and the world beyond, and present them with opportunities for redemption, liberation and true agency, paving the way for joining together with diverse others on the journey, and ultimately becoming mentors themselves. Referring to the perceived threat of rap lyrics in the minds of some educators, but it applies equally to students of feminism, Peoples says that “the objectionable elements of hip-hop are part of what make it valuable to feminism because they provide the opportunity for students to analyse and hone their skills of critical analysis” (2008, p.21). This is exactly the position of the hip-hop feminist writers. They occupy the space in between crude street literature and purist feminist writing but, crucially, they are activists, seeking to build bridges across the gap between raw hip-hop culture and pure feminism, and to refresh the contemporary feminist agenda accordingly.

This is a critical moment in the argument of this thesis. Firstly, it is important because the work of people like Quintero deals with personal growth through self-awareness, encourages self-determination and promotes the acceptance of others on the same journey. These qualities are central to understanding inclusion and equality, and lay the foundations for eventual communal action to address shared forms of oppression, a theme which is developed

in the next chapters. Secondly, the work of the hip-hop feminists is not only an important example of positive action against one form of discrimination, but it is also a model for addressing all other forms of oppression, including racism and classism, and the social, economic and political effects of these, as described in Chapter 1. Finally, these feminists deal with the world as it is at ground level, and they are not content with debating and developing theoretical positions which are not based on a tangible connection with lived experience. After all, they recognise that the early years of second wave feminism did not take into account the lives of vast numbers of poor and minority group women, whose voices only became heard through their own efforts. Indeed, a central concern of this thesis, as outlined in the Introduction, is to evaluate responses to visions of inclusion and equality not just from a theoretical standpoint, but taking into account the realities of everyday life.

Before concluding, a brief example of the relevance of the feminist debate to other forms of oppression can be seen when misogyny is replaced by homophobia. Tim'm T. West (2005) says that the multiethnic, multiracial, gay hip-hop community creates tensions amongst the heteronormative majority, and that gays lie at the bottom of the 'difference' pile, disrespected by male and female rappers alike. He muses on the irony that, whilst hip-hop pan-Africanists and black nationalists resent people from 'the margins' being let in (that is, white people, other ethnicities, gays and anyone else considered different), Eminem gained acceptance within hip-hop culture by being poor and homophobic; and that hip-hop itself originated from multicultural sources and was developed by black and Latino/a youth.

In summary, hip-hop feminism is grassroots activism embedded in daily life, yet always looking to move forward and beyond, but at the same time realistic about visions disconnected from present reality. It contrasts with Afrofuturism, discussed in Chapter 1, which creates through fantasy a valuable critical thinking space but defines no pathway to the imagined future. That is theory without practice. Hip-hop feminism is, one might say, not unlike the strategic essentialism of Gayatri Spivak, also referred to earlier, in the way that it suspends its moral judgements in order to enter a space it may find immoral, to enable it to present its position and offer hope for liberation from oppression. As Quintero says above, "meet them where they are" (National Book Foundation 2010, online). It should not be forgotten, though, that the writers mentioned here are but one strand of hip-hop feminism, and that there are other contemporary hip-hop writers and performers who present their own perspectives and challenges to enduring racist and sexist stereotypes. Playwright Suzan-Lori

Parks, in *In the Blood* (*Red Letter Plays*, 2001), gives us Hester, the complete sex object 'welfare queen' stereotype, underprivileged, uneducated, illiterate, and serially sexually abused by multiple, transient partners, government officials and others meant to help her. This is a wide-ranging critique of the 'welfare to work' programme and the poverty trap, along with the controlling societal behaviours which deny choice and enforce complicity. Like Parks, Kia Corthron's plays unflinchingly address harsh realities for underprivileged women, including DIY abortions in underfunded communities and female gang members caught in a cycle of violence learned from abusive parents. In the music field, Queen Latifah raps against the objectification of women and admires the work of seminal figures like Sojourner Truth, Angela Davis, (the young) Winnie Mandela and Harriet Tubman. Certainly, as Peoples says, "[r]appers like Queen Latifah and MC Lyte are quite a departure from traditionally defined black feminist icons such as bell hooks or Audre Lorde" (2008, p.42).

### **Comparative Evaluation**

The evaluation of Senna and Quintero looks at their work in terms of the relevant criteria set out in the Introduction, incorporating both their individual and community-focused perspectives, and their stance towards the acceptance of diversity and the equality of existence. The assessment also reflects upon their stated views on, and practical responses to, the oppression and injustice faced by the underprivileged and disadvantaged in society. Senna, firstly, explores the constructed nature of race and ethnicity, and their arbitrary and sometimes shifting boundaries, and how this exposes the performative nature of identity. Seeking to move beyond these imagined determinants, she appears to be moving towards what Paul Gilroy describes in *Darker Than Blue* as "an alternative, postracial identity based not on some pre-given sameness, but on will, inclination, mood, and affinity" (2010, p.91). The difference is that Gilroy is dealing in realpolitik, talking about people from diverse cultures with a diasporic consciousness coming together to resist and protest against injustice and exploitation arising from capitalist and national self-interests, whereas Senna is perhaps closer to the position of Tajamika Paxton, discussed in Chapter 1, who imagines a world where diverse people live together in harmony, a position which Gilroy dismissed as individualistic, apolitical and of little use to the poor and disadvantaged.

Both Paxton and Senna, though, are quite aware of the plight of the underprivileged urban poor, and recognise that the environments in which they live severely limit the opportunities and choices open to them. Senna acknowledges that class, education, and wealth are all determining factors in the formation of identity and in social mobility, asserting that “[r]acial fluidity...comes with privilege. Take away Tiger Woods' money, his 'white' sports affiliation (put him on a basketball court in Harlem)...his Stanford education, and let's see how fluid his racial identity is” (cited in Milian Arias 2002, pp.449). Expressing concern for the future for the less well off, and considering the 'literacy line' as the problem of the 21st century, she says that “[w]e need to focus on educating the lower-income bracket of our communities..and...we need to teach our children the basic tools necessary for survival: reading, writing, arithmetic, and especially the language of power” (ibid., p.452). She does not expand on what she means by the language of power, but the implication is that better education at the most basic level will offer more opportunities, better employment and career prospects, and social mobility. This may well be true, if the education system were able to engage with and motivate the poor and disadvantaged, in particular from minority groups, but this is very often not the case, as explored in Chapter 3. The view of Senna is in stark contrast with the more radical ideas of hooks, for example, in *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* (2013), who berates the education system for its binary thinking and narrow view of cultural history, calling for an acknowledgement of the legacy of slavery and racism, an embrace of diversity, and a culturally inclusive learning experience, asserting that “[t]he burden of learning new points of view should not have been placed solely on the shoulders of people of color” (p.7). This idea converges with the innovative and inclusive educational initiative for the urban poor explored in the next chapter. Ultimately, in spite of her awareness of and concern for the future of the poor, Senna is neither radical, dissident, nor activist in her outlook.

In *Caucasia* and *Symptomatic* the narrators are shown experiencing variants of racial oppression in different moments of recent history, the first in the turbulent racial climate of the 1970s and the latter in the more recent, colourblind, multicultural period where race (and ethnicity) issues have, relatively speaking, faded from public view, but where a mixed society masks underlying and persistent racism. The social mobility enabled by the successes of the civil rights era, alongside the rapid rise in the Latino/a population, and the increasing proportion of those identifying as mixed race, have together produced a variety of new voices from the educated middle class across the racial and ethnic spectrum. These voices still speak

of oppression, but in a different register from the urban poor. The racism depicted in *Symptomatic*, however traumatising it may be, is being expressed by a privileged, educated middle-class narrator in an environment of relative material comfort. Racism in these surroundings may be more circumspect and indirect, less overt, more of an unspoken mutual standpoint, revealed when the mask of gentility is removed by misrecognition, as in the case of Andrew and his friends, or by a psychotic character (Greta). For the minority group urban poor, the experience of racism is more open and direct, verbal and physical, sometimes deliberately brutal, and displayed by all sides in an endemic ritual. Opportunities to literally escape may be very limited where support networks are ineffective, whether that be family, friends, schools, social services or health professionals. For the narrator in *Symptomatic* the escape is not so much a physical one, more a psychological one, but an important one nonetheless, given the harmful effects of the racism experienced. Senna's characters are fundamentally searching for a place beyond race and ethnicity, and in this sense she taps into the postracial discourse. It is a personal quest enabled, to an extent, by privilege of birth or circumstance, and its backdrop is the erosion of community and the rise of individualism, which one might say is a 'symptom' of contemporary society, as explored in Chapter 1.

Writing soon after the publication of *Symptomatic*, Senna posed the rhetorical question “why is it so important for many mixed people not to be defined as black?” (2005, p.86). There is no mention of who these people might be, but this is a rather surprising question to ask, given the awareness of racism Senna displays. Class is again relevant here, as there are mixed race people in all communities. The middle class who are to greater or lesser extent assimilated or living in a predominantly white or broad mixed community may well choose not to identify as black as a coping strategy, however unpalatable, to avoid presumptions or discrimination, to fit in, be accepted and feel part of the neighbourhood. Passing as white has a long history in America as a way of making life easier for those of mixed race; in a similar way to passing as heterosexual or Christian, it may remove unwanted assumptions and prejudices, and limit discriminatory practices. Such dissimulation has its psychological cost, to which many literary works attest. In her play *The Shipment* (2008) Korean American Young Jean Lee depicts middle-class people passing for white as dysfunctional individuals who are pretentious, disingenuous, and prejudiced, echoing the intraracial tensions noted in Chapter 1. In spite of their passing, Lee shows them to be lonely and friendless beneath a veneer of belonging. The motivation for choosing not to identify as black may apply in the same way in a working-class environment, but where there are minority group tensions and inter-group

racism, many will avoid the stigma of blackness in order to escape the oppressive reality this may entail. Indeed, in poor and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, passing as something other than black may be a real physical escape from brutal reality, quite different from the racism experienced by the better off.

In summary, Senna has something important to say about the experiences of mixed race people in the contemporary US, and issues a valuable warning against complacency in matters of race, whilst at the same time exploring a new way of being, beyond racial and ethnic constructs. Considering her work in terms of this thesis, one can say that the focus of her principal characters is essentially a personal search for this new form of existence, and in this regard her work falls into the first category of the literature review summarised in the Introduction, that of the individualist immersed in identity politics. As discussed though, there are inferences and direct references to community, which are used to frame the critique of identity and of community formation based on racial and ethnic essentialism, but there is no proposal for any form of proactive, communal politics. It is clear that she understands and sees beyond the constructed nature of race and ethnicity and is open to the acceptance of diversity, and her concerns about education and the future suggest she wants equality of opportunity for all. What she does not elaborate upon are matters of class and her position on social justice activism on behalf of the urban poor and disadvantaged of all races and ethnicities, who share the range of problems and disadvantages expounded in Chapter 1.

Turning to Quintero, in *Picture Me Rollin'* one can also see a clear focus on the individual, but it is from quite a different perspective. This work is other-centred, outward-facing, and concerned with the personal growth of others through self-reflection and knowledge, towards empowerment and self-determination. Espe represents every young woman caught up in a dysfunctional relationship, or ensnared in gang culture, weighed down by peer pressure, or trapped in a fractured and flawed community, dissatisfied and in need of support, and wanting to escape the violence and crime of the oppressive environment and the bleak prospects that it represents. The novel shows that it is possible, with the right support, to create a different future, one of personal achievement and fulfilling relationships, by understanding and moving beyond the impact of environment and by appreciating the worth of others on the journey (such as Espe learning to understand Chago and Priscilla). However, the narrative goes further, introducing references to organised political resistance, radical feminist texts and a critique of the justice and education systems. This, taken together with her other work,

places Quintero firmly in the second category summarised in the Introduction, that of the socially and politically conscious communitarian, working on behalf of the marginalised and oppressed, and creating the conditions for the embrace of multiracial, multiethnic collaborative action.

The cultural activism of Quintero, prefigured in the headline quotation to this chapter, is evidenced in her various projects and is ever-present in her writing. A simple comparison of her with Everett, referred to above, provides a telling example of the sentiments expressed in those opening remarks. She shares the concerns of Everett about the narrow and reductive classification of black literature. Referring to street lit, she says “my biggest problem lies not with the genre itself or its authors. It’s with the publishing industry that’s saturating the market with...[it]...at the expense of other types of Black literature” (cited in Bussel 2006, online). She recognises the commercial impulse to maximise sales, but bemoans the accompanying profit-driven urge to minimise costs by reducing the range of marketing strategies. This produces a limited and homogenised range of texts, and effectively controls the public perception of black literary production. Referring to the black erotica author Zane, Quintero says “Zane’s sales doesn’t [*sic*] render Toni Morrison irrelevant... so to publish every erotica writer...while making a proven literary author beg for a book deal is akin to determining only a certain type of Black representation is authentic” (ibid., online). The difference between Everett and Quintero comes from how they respond to this situation. Everett's *Erasure* was a clear attack on the publishing industry, with a sideswipe at the street lit phenomenon, whereas Quintero grasps the opportunity to consciously adopt and adapt the highly popular street lit style in order to reach those who may never consider reading Everett. As she says in the epigraph, she wants to “raise awareness and inspire action...and broaden the political conversation beyond intellectual elites” (cited in Bussel 2006, online).

Quintero is a pragmatist who, in her writing, engages with the practical, lived experiences of her readership. In *Picture Me Rollin'* her use of both real and fictional mentor characters and role models emphasises the connection between reality and possibility, planting the notion that there is a practical way forward from the reality of the present to a different reality in the future. For her, theory and practice are inextricably linked. Also, from the material examined and from her own statements, it is evident that she is sensitive to matters of class. She believes that public school education of the urban poor, of all races and ethnicities, is as important as any other sphere of learning (this area is developed in Chapter 3). Her writing

for teenagers and young adults, aiming to develop awareness, critical understanding and empowerment, is therefore just as relevant as the literary works studied in higher education, used in a similar way to develop critical analysis. As ever, Quintero is direct and honest, saying that “[a]s capable as I am, I have no desire to write literary fiction... I want both the Latina studying at Barnard College and her favorite cousin who works the cash register at K-mart to be able to read and enjoy my stories” (cited in Bussel 2006, online). Therefore, aside from the sisters and Maite in *Picture Me Rollin'*, the characterisation is predominantly and consciously one-dimensional in order to match the street lit style and connect with the target readership, whilst still putting across the explicit message of personal growth. Grassian, referring to the suggestion that the hip-hop generation is less interested in academia, says “I submit that if this is correct, it is because the material assigned in college courses is not speaking to them and their passions” (2009, p.183). He makes his own suggestions for what hip-hop material should be included to rekindle interest, but summarily dismisses street lit as unworthy of study at college level. I submit that writers like Quintero should be in high schools *and* colleges. Whilst the high school relevance is easy to see, the range of issues she addresses could equally fit into the college level humanities disciplines of feminism and gender studies, ethnic literature, and parts of the social sciences.

Quintero, like Senna, also engages with the notion of going beyond the constructions of race and ethnicity, enabling individuals to recognise and accept the experiences of those who are different as equally valid. At the same time, however, the individuals accept and respect the difference whilst retaining pride in their own heritage, such as the fictional Isoke and Maite in the novel, but it is equally true of the feminists Lorde, Anzaldúa, Moraga and their associates. This position represents the acceptance of diversity and the equality of existence, the core tenets of pluralism. The contrast between Quintero and Senna is in their response to this worldview. The communitarian Quintero addresses this head on, spreading the word to the most vulnerable people in the most sexist, racist, and homophobic places.

In conclusion, there are clear similarities and equally clear differences between Senna and Quintero, and though their contrasting lived experiences may be reflected in their writing, their work cannot be assessed simply by a poor versus privileged measure. The principal characters of Senna tend to be inward-looking and individualistic, searching for a new form of being beyond restrictive racial and ethnic constructions, but reaching no definitive conclusions. However, she is concerned for the future of all people, rich or poor, who are of

mixed race (or of any race or ethnicity) who have to struggle with oppression, discrimination and injustice generated by these constructions. At the same time, she is equally well aware of the additional detrimental effects of a deprived environment and a poor quality of education upon the less well-off. In the end, though, whilst she embraces diversity and wants equality of opportunity for all, she does not convey her position on communal action for social and political justice on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged.

In contrast, Quintero has a clear vision of the way forward, seeking to develop self-awareness and ultimately self-determination even amongst those in the most difficult of environments. She deals in the active and the practical, in movement and change, and her other-centred work strives to build bridges and bring people together across divides, whether that be uniting diverse people across imagined barriers or seeking to stimulate debate and reconciliation in the divided feminist discourse. In *Picture Me Rollin'* she emphasises the historical context, weaving in cultures of resistance, whether feminist, political, or for social justice, in order to educate, inspire and motivate the young into active engagement. She is sowing the seeds for the potential growth of an ethical, social and political consciousness, and hers is the subaltern voice envisaged by Walter Dignolo, discussed in Chapter 1. Not only does she recognise outsider voices as equals, but she seeks to empower them to engage with important social and political issues and confront societal institutions which marginalise them, recalling the sentiments of Luis Rodríguez, also noted earlier. In this chapter, her concern is disadvantaged young women, but in the wider body of her work she addresses all young people. The following chapters will have cause to reference her in this broader context, both in a collaborative educational initiative and in social and political justice activism on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged. Chapter 3 moves into the critical field of education and extends the enquiry through and beyond the foundational tenets of diversity and equality, and into the broader realm of community, shared forms of oppression, and collaborative activism for social and political justice.

### Chapter 3    **Keepin' It Real? Hip-Hop in Contemporary Education**

*The colonization of knowledge and of being worked from top down and that is the way it is still working today... On the other hand, the creative work on knowledge and subjectivity comes from...the institutionally and economically dis-enfranchised... In that sense, the grammar of de-coloniality is working, has to work, from bottom up.*

*Walter Mignolo*

*Rap is the CNN for young people all over the world.      Chuck D*

This chapter will present a comparative critique of specific contemporary initiatives within the education sector in terms of their response to versions of inclusive community and society in present day America, as discussed in Chapter 1. The chosen material for comparison is taken from two important educational settings, the college and graduate school environment and the inner-city public school. After some contextual background, an extended analysis and evaluation of each initiative leads to a summary comparison in the conclusion. The evaluation follows the criteria set out in the Introduction, initially considering how the initiatives engage with the core tenets of pluralism, the acceptance of diversity and equality of existence, and how they engage with the notion of a diverse, egalitarian community. Then, moving from theory towards practice, there will be an assessment of the extent to which the initiatives promote the idea of multiethnic, multiracial collective action to address shared forms of oppression, in a quest to bring about social, political, and economic justice across the demographic spectrum. Firstly, then, some context is in order.

In 1983 Judit Moschkovich declared that “*it is not the duty of the oppressed to educate the oppressor*” (her italics) (p.79), accusing the American education system of failing all minority groups through its “cultural isolationism” (ibid., p.80), yet bell hooks makes the very same points 30 years later in *Writing Beyond Race* (2013), as she bemoans the continuing lack of diversity amongst higher education staff. In the intervening years America has been experiencing something of an identity crisis as a result of rapid demographic change. The so-called culture wars, marked by anxiety and heated debate between liberals and conservatives on the response to these changes, have permeated many areas of American society, not least the sphere of educational curricula. Diane Ravitch, for example, mourns the loss of traditional history and classic literature teaching, replaced by what she terms the “numbing nihilism”

(2002, online) of heavily censored, politically correct, hypersensitive curricula insulating students from the harsh realities of life and making high school the “Empire of Boredom” (ibid., online). She sees a void created by lack of student inspiration and engagement being filled outside school by exciting (and she suggests inferior) popular culture. Then, in the academy, battles have raged over the relative merits of a range of minority culture texts as suitable or even relevant for inclusion in syllabi. A variety of other perspectives on either side of the debate show that, whatever the perceived best interests of America, the education system is universally understood as a crucial, foundational vehicle in preparing the young for the future. For this reason, education is also a vital component of this thesis, since its ability to adapt and respond to new perspectives arising from these fundamental demographic changes will determine its effectiveness in preparing students for a future in an increasingly multicultural society.

Even as the culture wars debate has proceeded, another critical, intersecting discourse has been running, this time on the decline, over recent decades, of traditional community groups and activities, along with the civic sensibilities they cultivated. This perceived deterioration has also been attributed in part to demographic change, in part to a range of social and economic policies, and often to other societal changes, not least rapid technological developments and the rise of globalisation (Clay 1979; Keating, Krumholdz, Star 1996; Putnam 2000; Castles 2002). New concepts of community emerging from the cultural discourse naturally converge with this debate. With each of these overarching discourses in mind, therefore, the context surrounding the material chosen for comparison is now required.

The selected initiatives each engage with hip-hop culture, continuing a trend which has been developing from small beginnings in the 1980s. In the academy hip-hop scholarship takes several forms, and in the urban public school environment the employment of hip-hop cultural production in teaching is known as hip-hop based education (HHBE). As is well known, hip-hop culture is plagued by apparent contradictions and awash with misunderstanding, preconception and intransigent standpoints, fuelled in part by generational differences and often by a fixation on associations with crime, violence, addiction, misogyny and homophobia. It is therefore essential to start the chapter with a reminder of the origins and development of hip-hop, of its many faces in the contemporary world, and what its potential may be, before a detailed analysis and comparative critique of HHBE and hip-hop scholarship, with supporting material examples, can be carried out.

The most often acknowledged inspiration behind the development of hip-hop was Jamaican American Kool Herc, an innovative DJ who mixed American funk and soul with Caribbean and Latin rhythms in the 1970s South Bronx, enthusing seminal figures like Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa, the latter a founding member of The Universal Zulu Nation, an organisation which encapsulated and defined the hip-hop genre. Against a backdrop of job losses through deindustrialisation, declining investment in public services, including education, health and housing, and finding themselves living alongside urban renewal 'regentrification' programmes, disadvantaged black and Latino/a youth in the projects had to make their own cultural entertainment, in block parties and on the streets and basketball courts. In her lecture to the Brown University Club of Boston in 2010, Tricia Rose situates the origins of hip-hop within the long Afro-diasporic oral tradition and its history of improvisation and creation of new cultural forms (Rose, online). Importantly for this thesis, hip-hop culture is at its heart a communal ethic where the 'cypher' is the creative core, a circle of freestyling, inventive clappers, dancers and rappers taking turns to perform, echoing the tradition of the ring shout from the slave era. This is the hip-hop 'show and prove' principle, and different 'crews' engaged in aesthetic 'battles' with one another where “participants from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds...desire to better the culture as they show the unique skills that they have” (Emdin 2013a, p.94). From adversity, the diverse South Bronx youth invented new forms of visual art (graffiti/aerosol art) and dance (b-boying/b-girling), and new styles of essentially postmodern music, using developing technology to deconstruct and mix existing musical forms (turntablism/DJing). Both male and female rappers (MCs) created multifaceted stories, some celebratory, some despairing but, crucially, some with a social and political critique of the living conditions, injustices and inequalities they experienced in the projects. This latter strand of expression became known as ‘conscious’ hip-hop, and was situated squarely in the lineage of resistance and protest carried on from the civil rights era.

In the 1980s, however, hip-hop culture reached the point of mass appeal and drew the attention of the cash-rich corporate music industry. The lure of big money significantly shifted the energies of hip-hop “away from critical expressions of struggle, protest, and resistance towards messages of materialism, greed, and individualism” (Porfilio, Roychoudhury & Gardner 2014, p.vii), where hip-hop stars flaunted their wealth, and the communal sensibilities of the culture were increasingly ignored. In the 1990s Rose asserts that the “commercial juggernaut” (2010, online) of the big corporations owned the majority

of radio and video output, through which they promoted their artists, selling stereotypes of self-centred, irresponsible rappers and the antihero icons of the ‘gangsta’ strand - the violent male, the pimp and the ‘ho’, versions of identity which offer “no possibilities of redemptive change or healing” (hooks 2012, p.78). Indeed, this process of ‘rapsloitation’ set back the progress of the genre, further sidelining the strand of resistance and critique, and surreptitiously implied that the black and ethnic poor were to blame for creating their own problems. This in turn only served to reinforce racist stereotypes and prejudices in the minds of the mainstream population, thus maintaining the status quo and retaining power in the hands of the dominant white corporations. Rose is not surprised, for this “racist-inspired hyper-masculinity for which commercial hip-hop has become known...[makes]... profound sense given the alchemy of race, class, and gender in U.S. society” (2008, p.29).

Today, commercial hip-hop has become a worldwide, multicultural phenomenon amongst youth and young adults. However, critically for this thesis, conscious hip-hop has not been extinguished by commodification and lives on as a counternarrative to the mainstream, as rapper Chuck D explains - “[e]verytime we checked for ourselves on the news they were locking us up anyway, so the interpretation coming from Rap was a lot clearer. That’s why I call Rap the Black CNN” (Ridenhour 1997, p.256). In his 1997 book *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* his black perspective was already being extended as he encountered hip-hop sensibilities amongst different races and ethnicities beyond the African diaspora and outside the US, and he declared conscious rap as the “unofficial network” (ibid.,p.256) of youth everywhere, as he states at the head of this chapter (ibid., p.256). Indeed, instant knowledge exchange through social networking has provided an open discursive space for disadvantaged young people of all races and ethnicities to publicise forms of oppression everywhere, such that “there currently exists a socially transgressive Hip-Hop counterculture that spans the globe...marked by...dissent work of Hip-Hop intellectuals bent on establishing a social order on the ideals of democracy, freedom, and justice” (Porfilio, Roychoudhury & Gardner 2013, p.89). Lao-Montes cites just one example:

exchanges between Afro-Cuban and Afro-North American politicized hip-hop artists...challenged in theory and praxis commodified versions of rap while advancing a radical aesthetics of hip-hop culture as an expression of the African diaspora in the domain of transnational youth cultures (2010, p.181)

It would be remiss before concluding this résumé of hip-hop culture not to acknowledge the conflicting views of the genre surrounding its seeming contradictions and tensions. Felicia Pride, discussing the misogyny, homophobia, crime and violence associated with commercial hip-hop, is clear that:

[t]here's a misinformed argument that hip-hop, a form of creative expression that has transformed into a lifestyle, is to blame. Hip-hop's issues don't play out in us. Our issues play out in hip-hop. There's nothing inherently bad in hip-hop. Hip-hop doesn't call women b\*itches, individuals do (2007, p.xxvi)

Rose agrees, asserting that taking the violence expressed in hip-hop lyrics out of context “creates the illusion that violent street culture is itself a black cultural thing” (2008, p.54), without taking into consideration the severity of the environment which spawns them alongside the daily struggle for survival, thus ignoring the effects of discriminatory social policies, cultural oppression and institutional racism, and also failing to acknowledge that some unconscionable rappers choose to extol violence simply because it sells. She deplores well-known black figures like Bill Cosby who believe that ghetto dysfunction is in part self-created and due to weak individuals. As for demeaning women, she asserts that hip-hop reflects black and ethnic patriarchal attitudes in wider society, emphasising the need for an empowering feminist response as a counterpoint to seemingly empowered artists like Lil’ Kim, whose erotic videos she claims merely pander to male sexism and exploitation. Rose implores people not to defend hip-hop if its messages are wrong, which recalls the contradictory figure of Tupac Shakur and the learning experiences of Espe in Sofia Quintero's *Picture Me Rollin'*, discussed in the previous chapter. Marcella Runell Hall perhaps best sums up the dilemma of commercial hip-hop:

while Jay-Z has specifically done work on water rights in developing countries and created a powerful scholarship which offers funding to youth that are ‘average’...and...[to]...formerly incarcerated students..., is that enough given that he has glorified criminal activities, violence, misogyny and homophobia? (2011, p.61)

Many commentators have considered, and many still do consider, that hip-hop culture is a largely untapped source with great potential for communal, social, and political critique and transformation. However, they wrestle with the complex demographic of the hip-hop generation, its racial and ethnic mix, its different classes with their contrasting needs, affiliations and dependence upon public policy, and they deliberate on its potential for engagement with politics at micro and macro levels. In 2004 Holly Bass said that hip-hop has “tremendous potential for political protest” (p.65) but in the same year Mark Anthony Neal was far more circumspect:

many have invested in the idea of hip-hop as the likely incubator for a cross-racial progressive political movement and though the willingness of young whites to embrace the music of contemporary ‘conscious’ rappers such as Mos Def, Rha Goddess, Talib Kweli, Mr. Lif and others represents an important component of such a movement, very little of that exchange has ever translated into concrete political action (online)

Yvonne Bynoe, in *Stand and Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership, and Hip Hop Culture* (2004), acknowledges community activism and some important political initiatives but, like Neal, sees no national political leaders or visionaries emerging from the hip-hop generation. Given the shifting demographic profile in recent decades it seems that, at this moment, the impulse for radical change is dispersed at the micro-political level where, as Felicia Pride says, "many of us are mobilising grassroots organizations to effect change in our communities" (2007, pp.38-39). The following chapter addresses these distributed examples of social and political justice activism. This chapter now turns to explore radical initiatives in the education sector which engage with hip-hop culture and employ a form of hip-hop pedagogy, and to assess how they respond to versions of diverse, egalitarian community and how they seek to create conditions under which multiethnic, multiracial collective action can arise and develop now and in the future.

### ***Hip-Hop Based Education in the urban public school environment (grades K-12)***

HHBE is not the only initiative emerging from grassroots teaching in this sector of education, but it is an important one in terms of its aims, which correspond closely with the central argument in this thesis, as this chapter will demonstrate. It should be acknowledged at the outset that this initiative is still comparatively new and relatively marginal within urban public schools overall, yet it has been increasing both in scale, presence and significance for a number of years now. HHBE developed from the enthusiasm of individual teachers who initially sought to engage their students in literacy work by utilising the popularity of rap lyrics, but over time this was refined into an analysis of conscious rap, bringing in the dimension of social and political critique. Now, almost 30 years on, the initiative has extended into many subject areas, including the sciences, and makes use of all the elements of the culture, addressing meanings of identity, community and politics, and building critical analysis and other transferable skills. Indeed, recent years have witnessed the gradual emergence of a theoretical framework to support HHBE pedagogy and praxis for its growing presence in urban schools. HHBE aligns itself with Critical Race Theory (CRT), outlined in Chapter 1, in the way that it promotes epistemologies which recognise that all students, of whatever race, ethnicity, or class, have valid experiences and knowledge to impart, the potential for creativity, and therefore a valuable part to play in society.

The principal underlying aim of HHBE is to use hip-hop culture and production in the classroom to develop students' social and political consciousness and, in so doing, to resist the perceived corrosion of youth by consumerism and commodification, and to restore the primacy of community in an era of individualism, as hooks pleaded for in Chapter 1. It is therefore inextricably bound up with issues of social justice and firmly based on the conscious strand of hip-hop, the voice of resistance and protest, and thus it intersects with the notions of diversity and equality central to this thesis. Accordingly, HHBE sets out to stimulate student engagement, to provide opportunities for personal growth and empowerment, and to develop awareness of and involvement in wider community issues. At the same time it recognises that young people of the hip-hop era experience the world differently and may conceive of and gain knowledge and understanding in ways which traditional educational methods of delivery and assessment will not satisfy. These young people are accustomed to rapid change and technological advances, and they experience life in a far less static, ordered and prescribed

way than earlier generations. They absorb and share information from multiple sources around the world, as Chuck D explained above, acquiring and processing knowledge, and making connections between disparate domains and cultures. Indeed, although hip-hop culture is usually described in terms of its observed elements, one could say disciplines, in reality these elements interweave with and complement each other in its creative, organic and multidisciplinary expressions. HHBE therefore advocates cross-disciplinary working, embraces the communal heart of the culture and the sharing of knowledge and skills, and adopts a more flexible, intuitive and experiential approach, encouraging interpersonal and dynamic exchanges between students in the classroom and with the teacher, in an environment of joint learning. Each of these aspects will be evidenced within the analysis of lesson plans below.

What makes HHBE different from other progressive teaching methods, which may also strive to create dynamic classroom conditions and interactive learning, is not merely the use of hip-hop material for study, nor even its integration with traditional material or its interdisciplinary nature, but the employment of hip-hop ways of learning, expanded upon below, together with a sharp focus on developing social and political consciousness, and on aspiring to imagine and build new forms of democratic, diverse, multiracial and multiethnic communities which strive for social, political and economic justice for the poor and disadvantaged across the demographic. HHBE therefore at once proposes a radical critique of capitalist democracy and, through its intersection with the aims of CRT, a challenge to individual and institutional racism as the underlying source of oppression, discrimination and marginalisation, matters at the core of this thesis.

Significantly, however, the development of HHBE ‘from below’ has proceeded against the backdrop of a major mainstream discourse about reform of US public school education, also concerned with the discrepancies in standards being attained amongst different ethnic and racial groups, social classes and school settings. The national debate resulted in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the first major reauthorisation of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Intending to address the variations in standards, NCLB introduced a system of accountability, requiring states to set clear and measurable achievement levels, carry out annual state-wide standardised tests, and report results. Failure to achieve annual improvement in results attracted prescribed, incremental stages of intervention. Following the implementation of NCLB the so-called Common Core standards

initiative was developed to promote consistency across the whole country, with all but a few states signing up to comply. However, despite some increased levels of performance, the Act endured a short and turbulent history, with widespread criticism of costs attached to meeting its strict requirements, levels of funding in some poor areas, the weight placed upon standardised testing to assess school progress, and teacher evaluation methods. NCLB set high targets which turned out to be extremely difficult to achieve and the Obama administration, from 2011, issued state waivers for some targets, leading eventually to more than half of the states being in possession of one, effectively putting the Act into an untenable position. In December 2015 NCLB was replaced by the next reauthorisation of ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA includes a reduction in federal intervention and returns responsibilities to states, subject to federal parameters. Whilst the Act retains federal testing requirements, key changes include states having the authority to develop their own accountability systems, including standards (which do not have to be Common Core), and to devise their own additional student assessment measures (which may be multiple and flexible, such as higher-order thinking skills and understanding), as well as their own teacher evaluation methods. Whilst it is far too early to assess the effectiveness of the new Act, concerns remain amongst some civil rights groups, including the NAACP (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights 2015, online) that reduced federal oversight may result in states failing to adequately address disparities in funding and resources, to the detriment of schools with a high proportion of minority group students.

With an outline of HHBE in mind alongside the mainstream discourse on public school education, an analysis of two key, inter-related texts will now expand upon the aims of HHBE and enable a detailed evaluation of the initiative in terms of its engagement with and promotion of the diverse, egalitarian community, actively engaged in social and political justice issues. The evaluation will also consider the practical effectiveness of HHBE within the present education system requirements, as well as its future potential. In 2007 Martha Diaz and Marcella Runell Hall produced the seminal *Hip-Hop Education Guidebook: Volume 1* (Guidebook) and in the following year activist Latina writers and educators, including Quintero and Hall, produced *Conscious Women Rock the Page: Using Hip-Hop Fiction to Incite Social Change* (CWRP). These publications contain a collection of Common Core standards-referenced lesson plans for grades 5-12, with contributions from the authors and editors themselves, together with a diverse mixture of like-minded teachers, youth workers and activists. CWRP actually uses three hip-hop novels by the creative writers behind the

publication as material for analysis in the lessons – these are *Picture Me Rollin'* by Quintero (writing as Black Artemis), *That White Girl* by Jennifer Calderón (writing as J-Love) and *The Sista Hood: On the Mic* by Elisha Miranda (writing as E-Fierce). Although this thesis focuses on the application of HHBE in urban public schools, the authors of the Guidebook and CWRP envisage their potential use in other contexts, too, such as for youth education in prison, for boy and girl youth groups, and as useful material in the social work field.

HHBE is founded upon what Bambaataa called the fifth element of hip-hop, knowledge of the self and the community, which posits that “none of the other elements matter unless there is a socio-political analysis and purpose to life in connection with community” (Hall 2011, online, p.2). The practical application of HHBE is an alternative, holistic learning process where content and form of delivery are integrated. The content is selected from hip-hop culture and many examples reflect the fifth element, thereby producing lessons addressing identity, self-reflection and agency, critical analysis, social and political consciousness, diverse community, and global perspectives. Of equal importance, the form of delivery mirrors the kinetic learning experiences embedded in hip-hop culture, embracing the freestyling improvisation of the cypher, the creativity of the sampling and mixing techniques, and the aesthetic battles between crews, resulting in lessons featuring small student-group debates, student-to-student feedback, student-led teaching, and multidisciplinary connections. Analysis of selected lessons will demonstrate this.

Addressing educators, Hall reinforces the different approach to learning within hip-hop culture, which requires “that you merge your knowledge as a teacher with the knowledge of the students thereby creating a learning environment that is mutually beneficial” (2008, p.12). This recalls the character of Maite from *Picture Me Rollin'*, discussed in Chapter 2, and reflects the theories of Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire. Giroux asserted that radical educators must acquire “a critical understanding of the language, modes of experience, and cultural forms of the students” (1981, p.30). Indeed, Freire viewed an education system formulated by a dominant group as inherently oppressive for minority group students (what Antonio Gramsci (1992) might call ‘cultural hegemony’) and his notion of a libertarian education would remove “the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (his italics) (2005, p.72). Whilst Hall recognises the potential vulnerability for teachers in such an environment, she interprets this as a radical, yet positive approach which “ensures that traditional hierarchical

paradigms are being disrupted and replaced with genuine human connections” (2011, p.164). Certainly this radical and interactive approach is supported by the current neuropsychological research on learning, alluded to in Chapter 1, which provides “concrete recommendations on how teachers can intentionally pursue and affect long-term changes in the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours of their students” (Barwegen 2008, p.9). Clearly, therefore, the very praxis of HHBE is “a complex cyclical activity involving theory, application, evaluation, reflection and further theory” (Porfilio, Roychoudhury & Gardner 2013, p.92), presenting a fluid and organic process somewhat in tension with the relative fixity of ESEA requirements.

The programme of lessons builds incrementally and is marked by key moments of development and transformation. Early lessons address knowledge of the self and the self in community, exploring the history, mechanics and effects of oppression. From this point the lessons present opportunities for personal growth, through reclaiming self-esteem and developing self-determination, leading to engagement with, and acceptance of, the personal journeys of others. This prepares the ground for building a diverse group mentality in which shared problems and goals are identified, before moving into politics and encountering multiethnic, multiracial, communal activism for economic, social and political justice. The programme culminates in promoting involvement with politics at both micro and macro levels, and in encouraging a wider consciousness of inequality and oppression everywhere, echoing the underlying aim of education for Freire - to strive for “the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (his italics) (2005, p.81).

Turning to the lessons themselves, an early example, 'Mining the Self: Reflecting on Identity' by Piper Anderson in CWRP, explores the differentiation between the personal and the social self, posing the question “[h]ow do the social labels that are given to us impact our personal identities?” (2008a, p.34) The students respond to a range of common assumptions, such as “[b]lack males are more likely to go to prison than college” (ibid., p.33), as a way of understanding how the impact of these external influences can result in personal inner conflict. ‘Self-Hate: Implications Towards Assimilation’, an interdisciplinary Guidebook lesson by Charan Morris, develops this, showing how external influences can become internalised, accepted, automatic, both in our attitudes, values and behaviours. Confronted with historical Jim Crow caricatures, students are asked “[i]f these were the only images of...your race that you ever saw, what would you begin to think about yourself?” (2007, pp.94-95). Then, contemporary messages reveal that racial and ethnic bias persists. In the rap

‘Good Nigga’, Goodie Mob sings “it’s never been education/[s]till workin’ for the white man” (cited in Morris 2007, p.97), while Mos Def underlines the sharply divided perspectives which can result, in his description of Assata Shakur, official terrorist but minority hero:

Cubans see Assata as...a woman...persecuted for her political beliefs.  
For many of us in the Black community, she was and remains, to use  
her own words, an ‘escaped slave’, a heroine, not unlike Harriet  
Tubman (cited in Morris 2007, p.101).

Students are thus exposed to the long, and continuing history of racial hierarchy as a tool of oppression and the source of self-hate, the internalised inferiority complex. This process recalls the raw sentiments of Junot Díaz- “[y]ou don’t know how many times I saw a person escape institutional discrimination only to knock themselves down with self-hate and self-doubt. Together these pressures are a lethal combination” (Céspedes & Torres-Saillant 2000, p.893). As in many lessons, HHBE encourages intuitive, experiential learning, and here students must consider how self-hate may influence a desire to assimilate, and whether that is voluntary or involuntary, a free choice or “can human suffering propel a person...to assimilate?” (Morris 2007, p.95). At its worst, assimilation may mean living a lie, in a state of constant, damaging self-denial.

Alexander Fruchter turns to the poor environment where the students live, feeling trapped and limited by persistent mainstream stereotyping, assumptions and low expectations of them, damaging their self-esteem. In the Guidebook lesson ‘You can quote me on that! Using Hip-Hop Lyrics for Critical Thinking’ Fruchter employs the Talib Kweli song ‘Drugs, Basketball, and Rap’ to expose these traps:

Niggaz getting caught in the trap  
For the cash, it’s the drugs basketball or the rap  
There’s more to us than that  
(cited in Fruchter 2007, p.160)

This lesson marks the first, small engagement with critical thinking, the core skill required to conceive of moving beyond the trap. Students must learn to recognise how some voices in hip-hop contribute to and reinforce these stereotypes, whereas others deconstruct and

challenge them. To aid them, they use a 'Stereotype Log' to record instances across the media of portrayals which have potentially negative effects on young people. CWRP lessons then widen the perspective to explore the context and motives surrounding these media portrayals in order to develop deeper critical awareness, recalling the advice of James Baldwin to his nephew, to look for “the reality which lies behind the words” (1964, p.16). Accordingly, these lessons expose the history and mechanics of oppression and the motivation behind the notions of race, gender, and in some ways class, in Western civilisation. These notions are revealed as the creations of the ‘civilised’, white male, imperialist, hegemonic narrative, whose binary reasoning required hierarchical mechanisms for subjugating those considered inferior, in order to retain power and the control of societal institutions, including the media. The lessons demonstrate how mainstream messages can generate prejudice at individual level and discrimination at institutional level, leading back to the internalisation of inferiority and low self-esteem amongst the oppressed.

In ‘Hip-Hop and Identity: Unpacking Race’, by Sarah Montgomery-Glinski, students reflect upon the privilege or oppression inherent in hierarchical racial constructs and consider if they themselves feel limited by these constructs and if they have developed coping strategies (like assimilation above). She is blunt about contemporary complacency towards enduring racial and ethnic discrimination, saying that “[c]olorblindness will not end racism. Pretending race doesn’t exist is not the same as creating equality.... we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that advantage some groups” (2008a, p.67.) This view resonates with the core tenet of CRT and prefigures the notion of social justice resistance, to come in later lessons. From a similar critical perspective, there are intersecting lessons on class and gender constructions, and sexuality. In the latter, Andrew Landers presents the ‘Heterosexual Questionnaire’, an exposé through parody, in 24 questions, of the chronic levels of homophobic assumption and oppression. Question 4, for example, asks “[i]s it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?” (2008a, p.82). The constant burden placed upon non-heteronormative people to either conceal, justify or defend their sexuality is laid bare in the uncomfortable reading of this questionnaire.

Here the personal journey of the students really gathers pace as they engage in critical *self*-analysis, during lessons which increasingly relate to their own lives. They reflect upon their sense of self by identifying, analysing and reconsidering the influences upon them and the validity of their core beliefs and values. Two key lessons seek to develop this skill, with the

aim of making the students feel more secure and confident within themselves, restoring self-worth, the platform and catalyst for imagining a different future, and the key to aspiration and agency. 'The Game of Life', in the Guidebook, uses the Dead Prez rap 'Score' ("Life is like a game of basketball/They just want niggas to run jump and shoot", cited in Landers 2007, p.178) and *Hoops* by Walter Dean Meyers, which both address moving beyond the oppressive, self-fulfilling prophecies of low expectation, limited opportunity and overdetermined future by taking control, building goals, and fulfilling potential. After analysis and discussion students write their own version of 'Score', developing their own self-reflective voice. Then Anderson's CWRP lessons 'Hip-Hop Affirmations : Reflecting on Self Love' and 'Charting My Path: Reflecting on My Life Path' take the students further, requiring them to use "meta cognitive skills to focus on their critical life incidents" (2008b, p.37). During critical analysis of novels, students are encouraged to dynamically transfer their reflections upon the perspectives and actions of the fictional characters into real-life situations. Firstly, they learn to recognise occasions when fictional characters had harmed themselves or others by their choices and actions, demonstrating their understanding by writing a letter to the novel character about the identified fictional instances and offering advice on how to deal with them differently in the future and, by making the right choices, to bolster their feeling of self-love and self-esteem. This experiential learning develops as the students, working in pairs, create and write fictional scenes between a central character and one of their mentors, such as Isoke or Maite in the case of Espe in *Picture Me Rollin'*, in order to embed their understanding of how critical influences, moments and choices in life, both the fictional character's and their own, can result in better outcomes. These lessons strengthen a belief within the students that they have the power to determine their own future, and this sense of agency and self-determination is the foundation upon which wider social and political consciousness can be built.

At this point there is a profound shift in the students' personal journey. In the lineage of the multiethnic and multiracial origins of hip-hop, lessons progress from knowledge of the self to knowledge of the Other, of whatever hue, affiliation or orientation. It is crucial to note at this point that the inclusiveness is total, a point made from the outset in CWRP - "there cannot be an effective movement for racial justice that has no role for White allies" (2008, p.9). Indeed, this learning applies equally to all racial and ethnic groups, including whites. The latter need to understand their privilege and the unseen range of advantages this bestows upon them, as highlighted by Shakil Choudhury in Chapter 1; and the minority group students must learn to

understand how others, including whites, experience the world. As prefigured in the lessons on race, class, gender and sexuality, students are now presented with the two central tenets of pluralism at the heart of this thesis, the acceptance of diversity and the equality of existence, and face the reality that many different groups in society experience prejudice and discrimination, and that their circumstances, perspectives and personal journeys are equally valid. This prepares the way for acknowledging shared forms of oppression between diverse groups of people, in turn laying the foundation for working together to address such problems. The integrated form and content of HHBE is most useful and evident in these lessons. 'How Can I Be Down: Building Solidarity in the Face of Difference' by Joy Osborne, in CWRP, confronts students with the different worldview of others in order to dispel assumption and prejudgement, and offers opportunities to recognise common interests and difficulties. She instructs teachers to "[p]lace together students who don't speak to each other often/potentially have discomfort with each other" (2008, p.92) to create small groups which may be mixed ethnically, racially, or by gang or neighbourhood affiliation. These students are challenged to identify similarities in "aspects of their personalities, interests and appearances" (ibid., p.92) and consider if these could be the basis for a friendship or connection, using the example of Espe in Chapter 2, who overcomes her dislike of Priscilla through recognising their shared experiences of abuse, becoming a mentor to the younger girl. All students are therefore encouraged to suspend and challenge their preconceptions in seeking common ground with diverse others, calling to mind *The Way Home* (1998), a Shakti Butler film of women from many cultures sharing experiences of racism, and its accompanying 'Conversation Guide' imploring people to "look at their most deeply embedded assumptions....to reveal and examine the ideas and fears that keep us apart" (World Trust 1998, online). In challenging themselves in this way the students recognise the potential for common interests and concerns with those from different cultures.

This small connection with someone who is different is a transformative moment in the programme, as students recognise shared forms of oppression and are introduced to the reality of contemporary groups with diverse membership acting for economic, social and political justice within their own communities. The Montgomery-Glinski lesson 'Ally Building for Agenda Building: Getting Together to Create Community Change' (CWRP) uses *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* by hooks as a key text, and the students "lay the groundwork for a community project by becoming familiar with each other's biases, identities, and concerns for the greater community" (2008b, p.120), cultivating

skills of relationship management and negotiating conflict and difference. In her following lesson, ‘On a Mission: Creating a Mission Statement to Work By’, students take the next step by identifying a group project and building a mission statement, using local community organisations as an expert resource. In order to reinforce and extend the scope of the learning on community activism, Lavie Raven, in the Guidebook, engages students with historical cultures of resistance and creativity outside the mainstream amongst ex-slave communities in the Western hemisphere, including the Nat Turner rebellion. Then, he uses the film *The Matrix* as an allegory of contemporary conscious hip-hop resistance from the margins. The rebels in the film resist simulated reality and human enslavement, just as conscious hip-hop resists constructed realities oppressive to minorities, in an “artistic rebellion against particular societal restraints endemic to the U.S.” (2007, p.224).

From this platform of nascent social consciousness the lessons move into the political arena. The Guidebook set of lessons by Mark Gonzales entitled ‘Who Runs the Streets in Your Neighborhood? Introducing Democracy, the Electoral Process and Government’ moves the students directly into politics at both micro and macro levels. These lessons epitomise the organic and holistic nature of HHBE, where content and form of delivery are seamlessly and inextricably linked, and the learning is built up in substantive stages. Firstly, a definition of government is gradually developed from the students’ individual perspectives by debate in small groups, culminating in a vote to reach a majority view and a further vote to elect a group spokesperson. In this way the students experience the democratic process in action to elect a representative. These groups are the cypher, in a circle, where individuals take personal responsibility to express and defend opinions (the show and prove principle) and then invest their trust in a group (crew) leader, who takes collective responsibility to represent them. A larger group or whole class debate follows, again in a circle, to undertake a Socratic debate, where leaders represent their crews and face questions and challenges from the other crews. This is the battle, the deconstruction and evaluation of another’s skills, where some ideas (just like moves, raps, beatboxing) are eliminated, refined or accepted as debate moves forward. The whole class then votes to create a majority definition of government at the macro level. It should be noted here that the hip-hop idea of the aesthetic battle is competitive, but not antagonistic (the poetry slam is an example), and it is the communal way in which new knowledge and skills are kinetically exchanged and creatively developed. Since HHBE is founded upon socially and politically conscious hip-hop, which embraces the fifth element, knowledge of the self and community, it is quite distinct from other forms of

commercial hip-hop where individualism is often paramount and the battles may be personal and literally physical. Finally, the students identify local community problems and debate which may or may not be resolved by voting in state or federal elections, and are then directed to other ways of political engagement in society, reconnecting them with the idea and purpose of socially and politically conscious community activism, and thereby with political engagement at district and city levels. This community level focus resonates with the pluralist theory of the distribution of power throughout a society, as discussed in Chapter 1.

The transferable analysis and evaluation skills developed so far, together with the HHBE alignment with CRT noted earlier, now enable students to critically assess more complex issues. Firstly, Landers' CWRP lesson 'Hip-Hopcrisy: Meaning What We Say' exposes students to instances of contradiction within the lyrics of artists such as Genuwine, Nas and R. Kelly, the latter having both gospel and misogynist songs on the same album. Conceiving of hip-hop as a mirror to the hypocrisy in the wider world, the lesson then addresses the inner conflict aroused by these contradictions, using Espe in *Picture Me Rollin'*, who wants to do the right thing but is plagued by conflicting messages and choices. The lesson progresses to a critical essay on the dilemma of following one's conscience in the face of opposition, based upon the statement by Martin Luther King, Jr. that someone who "breaks the law that conscience tells him is unjust and ...accepts the penalty...to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is...expressing the very highest respect for the law" (cited in Landers 2008b, p.44). The second, more challenging, example of critical thinking is presented in 'Thug or Revolutionary Politics: Broadened Perspectives on Political Conflict and Solutions for Social Change', by Unique Fraser, also in CWRP. She uses the contradictory and controversial messages of Tupac, explored in Chapter 2, alongside perspectives from the Puerto Rican Young Lords and the (largely) black Crips gang network in Los Angeles to present students with the ethical and socio-political dimensions of violent conflict and injustice. For example, students select a political or social conflict from a novel and are empowered to find an alternative solution to that presented by the author, and are then asked to reflect upon how the different perceptions of a 'thug' and a 'revolutionary' arise, by considering the moral and political legitimacy of forms of resistance within the context of inequality and injustice.

Whilst the examples above mostly consider the ethics and politics of choices at individual and community level, the Gonzales lessons on democracy now use a range of key texts to

interrogate major issues for government, presenting contrasting perspectives to stimulate student debate and expose contradictions, such as ‘The Declaration of Independence’, which asserted that all men are created equal and have the right to liberty, alongside the address ‘What to the Slave is your 4th July?’ by Frederick Douglass. Once again, this set of lessons embodies the way knowledge and understanding is acquired from a variety of sources within hip-hop culture. Here, as in many of the lessons, HHBE is not exclusive in its use of hip-hop teaching material, but embraces the inclusive, multidisciplinary, integrated ethos of hip-hop by utilising conscious hip-hop production as comparative material alongside 'traditional', 'revered' texts to show that hip-hop has many of the same concerns, albeit expressed in a different style. This not only legitimises the study of conscious hip-hop culture but also emphasises its focus on important societal issues, such as social and political justice. The juxtaposition of perceived high- and low-brow texts dissolves the distinction for the students and at the same time responds to their way of learning, employing critical thinking across disciplines and imagined boundaries in a kind of postmodern mash-up. For example, in this group of lessons students debate and compare the 2004 Eminem video ‘Mosh’ with the 1964 Malcolm X speech ‘The Ballot or the Bullet’. In the former, political choices are encapsulated in the alternative endings of the anti-war, anti-Bush video, released at the time of the 2004 Presidential Election. One ending, released before the vote, shows a crowd bursting into a voter registration site; the other, released after the result, shows the crowd bursting in to interrupt President Bush's ‘State of the Union’ Address and pressing their demands directly to Congress. In the Malcom X speech, which to a degree mirrors the dilemma of the video, he urges blacks to vote tactically, but at the same time recognises that the failure of government to enforce civil rights laws therefore gives black people the right to use violence as a legitimate form of self-defence. These examples enable students not only to enter the wider world of moral and political debate on issues of equality, justice and forms of protest, but also, crucially, to see how contemporary conscious hip-hop artists are following in the lineage of resistance which has run throughout US history amongst the disadvantaged, the poor and oppressed minority groups.

At this point in the HHBE programme, then, the students have been progressively and incrementally exposed to material introducing them to the critical fifth element of hip-hop, knowledge of the self and the community. In the course of this process they have encountered the concept and actuality of the acceptance of diversity and the equality of existence, and have been presented with issues of inequality and injustice common to diverse groups of

disadvantaged people. Finally, as Freire advocated, the lessons encourage the emergence of a social and political consciousness, and informed engagement in multiracial, multiethnic social and political activism at all levels.

The social and political justice focus of the lessons thus far discussed engages with a number of humanities and social science disciplines, yet HHBE extends its reach beyond these subject areas across a large part of the curriculum. The two books examined here present lesson plans which cross-refer to 22 core subject areas, and the Guidebook provides the specific Common Core individual standards within each subject area covered in each lesson. There are some important skills and attributes developed in a number of other areas which have a strong correlation with or complement those abilities cultivated in the lessons discussed so far. For example, in Fraser's Guidebook lesson 'The Story I RIGHT: Hip-Hop & Personal Narrative Writing', students are introduced to new and creative ways of talking about themselves critically in preparation for their personal statement on the college entrance application. By tapping into the storytelling ingrained in hip-hop culture, the students are encouraged to communicate "their ideas, feelings, politics - *their stories* - in their own words, on their own terms" (her italics) (2007, p.80). In the lesson, the students critically analyse the political meaning of 'The Message', a seminal 1982 song performed by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five:

My son said, Daddy, I don't wanna go to school  
Cause the teacher's a jerk, he must think I'm a fool  
And all the kids smoke reefer, I think it'd be cheaper  
If I just got a job, learned to be a street sweeper

(excerpt from 'The Message')

The counter-story in this rap presents a stark contrast with the mainstream media imagery of American life, and Fraser asserts that, by telling their own stories, the students "ultimately begin to re-write or RIGHT the stories that have been created for them" (2007, p.80). This resonates with the counter-storytelling element in CRT, expressed by Adrienne Dixson and Celia Rousseau in *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's Children Got a Song* (2006), through which the sharing of lived experiences creates a meaningful and engaging education for minority group students, as well as fostering an understanding of the diverse histories and

cultures of others. This lesson therefore reinforces and intersects with those outlined above which seek to build self-esteem, encourage self-determination, and support the acceptance of diversity.

Then, in ‘The Rap Cypher, the Battle, and Reality Pedagogy: Developing Communication and Argumentation in Urban Science Education’ (2013a), Chris Emdin explains how, in a small cypher of teacher and students, with eye-contact possible between them all, they take turns in giving opinions on the physical classroom layout and learning styles of delivery, part of which involves student-led teaching, where students undertake prior research on a particular aspect of scientific knowledge and present to the whole class. This is a prime example of the radical student-teacher relationship, student empowerment and the acceptance of communal learning within HHBE, as well as an acknowledgement of the importance of how the physical space is configured for learning in a hip-hop way. Further, Emdin likens the hip-hop battle to the augmentation of knowledge in science, saying “[t]he replacing of older views by newer ones when a convincing or agreed-upon argument is made is part of science and also part of hip-hop” (2013b, p.14), and this entails classroom debate on scientific issues requiring a mastery of understanding and the ability to compare different scientists (like hip-hop sampling and mixing) and to handle complex exchanges in defence of one’s position. These are transferable, analytical and creative skills which would be of benefit within any activist social justice group engaging in debate with official, political organisations.

In visual art, too, Emery Petchauer acknowledges the communal inclusiveness of graffiti crews where new members experience “distinct processes of mentoring, collaboration, citizenship, and apprenticeship” (2013, p.30), all attributes useful for working in any form of diverse organisation or alliance. Yuxi Liu sees the positive developmental and emotional impact such communal activity can have:

hip hop breeds a healthy environment for group activities which are influential in the identity formation of adolescents. Particularly for adolescents who have suffered separation, neglect, and domestic violence, they can find a solid sense of belonging and empowerment in the hip hop community, a positive substitute to gangs and crimes (2013, p.35)

Cultural studies and geography lessons also utilise the global presence of hip-hop as a teaching tool, introducing students to a variety of different cultures around the world where hip-hop has become popular amongst young people. Much more than that, though, students learn that conscious hip-hop has spoken to disadvantaged people in many parts of the world, people who recognise and experience common forms of oppression, inspiring them to adopt and adapt the aesthetic to express their own resistance. As Lao-Montes noted earlier, this global interconnectedness creates the potential for worldwide networks for social and political justice. Lastly, although of little relevance to social justice, HHBE also extends into subjects such as mathematics (using hip-hop recording contracts as tools for numeracy teaching), health, biology and physical education (using breakdancing moves to learn about the muscular system).

Finally, before undertaking a critique of HHBE in terms of its response to versions of diverse community and society, a look at two specific HHBE-inspired initiatives will add some substance to the analysis above. The first example is The School for Social Justice (SOJO), formed in 2005 in a densely populated Chicago neighbourhood, with a 30% black/70% Latino/a mix, following a 19 day hunger strike by 14 parents and grandparents to urge politicians to fulfil promises to build a high school. Its values reflect its origins, whereby both parents and students are empowered to contribute to the design of the curriculum, which therefore incorporates issues of social justice and the environment, and respects and values cultural diversity. David Stovall delivered a course there entitled 'Education, Youth, and Justice' within which the unit 'Hip-Hop, Urban Renewal, and Gentrification' drew direct comparisons with the 1970s South Bronx where hip-hop began and present day Chicago, similarly undergoing urban renewal and regentrification, with its inevitable casualties. This enabled the students to understand the formation of hip-hop within its cultural and socio-political context, namely disadvantaged people left behind with very poor facilities alongside affluent new communities, and make the connection with their own world today. The aims of the unit were therefore to provide the students with opportunities to "interrogate the contexts that mediate their world, such as mass media and popular culture, whilst identifying personal and community connections to the contexts in question" (Stovall 2013, p.158) and then, building upon this reflection, to "identify other sites of resistance that they could possibly engage, as part of the process of changing their condition" (ibid., p.158).

The second example is the High School for Recording Arts (HSRA), situated in a turbulent neighbourhood in St. Paul, Minnesota, which specifically caters for severely disadvantaged students who need more attention than they would receive in the mainstream public schools. The 2012-13 annual report indicated that 21% of the students had special needs, 92% were eligible for free or reduced cost lunch and 50% had been homeless for some part of the year (HSRA 2013, online). Completion of assignments in the core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science and Social studies earns the students time in the studio, and the school proudly states that “[o]f the students who have enrolled...about 400 or 72.5 percent have graduated. Over the last four years, 100% of our graduates have been accepted into college” (HSRA 2015, online).

An evaluation of the aims and objectives of HHBE in terms of its intersections with the ideology of diversity and equality, using the criteria set out in the Introduction, is not a difficult task from a purely theoretical standpoint. However, a central aspect of this thesis, also set out in the Introduction, is the extent to which the selected texts and initiatives promote the conditions for working towards multiethnic, multiracial collective action in both theory and practice, concept and reality. Whilst this may complicate the evaluation process, it will produce a more balanced and meaningful conclusion. Some say theory *is* practice. Indeed, many radical writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and her associates have said as much, and Quintero refers to her writing as cultural activism. However, this is not the place for a semantic discussion. It must be kept in mind that HHBE began as a disparate practice in a real life grassroots setting and has only gradually become an entity to be encapsulated within a theoretical framework, and even then the practice is a continually shifting, organic process which will keep on refining that theory. It therefore seems counterintuitive to simply compare the theoretical aims of HHBE with visions of inclusive, egalitarian community and society. More than that, it is essential to consider the current practical barriers and limitations it faces, as well as the strategies it is developing to try and overcome those restricting forces. This will produce a conclusion, founded upon both practical and theoretical considerations, on the extent to which the initiative is creating conditions for multiethnic, multiracial collective action for social and political justice.

The practice of HHBE has faced significant challenges, not least its conflict with the requirements of a standardised, results-driven system. Critics, and not just those involved with HHBE, have argued that such a system encourages teachers to focus on a narrow subset

of skills most likely to increase test performance, and in the process limits student engagement with the overall curriculum. These critics prefer other or additional measures, such as teacher assessments, class participation, and assignments, believing that schools labelled as failing due to poor test results could in fact be seen as successful if more meaningful measures were applied. Liu holds this opinion and points to the irony of NCLB being designed to raise student performance across the racial, ethnic and class spectrum, but which fails to address the needs of many in minority groups or nurture their individual talent and, “[a]s a result, students with disadvantaged and traumatic background perform poorly in schools because standardized tests bear little relevance to their harsh lives and thus low motivation for them to commit to academics” (2013, p.6). Darius Prier, in *Culturally Relevant Teaching: Hip-Hop Pedagogy in Urban Schools* (2012), questions the underlying motivation behind a results-driven system infused with the language of the corporations, the world of objectives, standards, measures and outcomes. He argues that such a system is designed to produce academically efficient students, suitable material for entry into the corporate world, by inference legitimising that knowledge and marginalising or excluding other knowledges. He contends that public education should have a focus on the ideals of democracy, such as citizenship, equality of opportunity and social justice, and therefore take into account other histories, cultures and knowledges, and different ways of learning. In addition to these critical viewpoints, a key issue for school leaders has been the NCLB stipulation that federally funded programmes and practices must be grounded in scientifically based research (SBR), as defined in Title 1X Section 9101 (37) of the Act (US Department of Education 2001, online). Ongoing debate has surrounded the precise boundaries of the definition of SBR, with proponents of HHBE concerned that school leaders may not approve its teaching programme, considering it to fall outside the definition. Advocates of HHBE, and others, have argued that educational research should be open to the diversity of culture and tradition, which may be interpreted as qualitative and non-scientific research. This, and some of the other concerns expressed above, appear to be addressed to some degree by the Every Student Succeeds Act, which strikes the SBR paragraph, introducing less stringent evidence-based requirements for learning programmes, and which includes more flexible and meaningful student and teacher assessment methods, as outlined earlier. These changes may yet bring hope for initiatives such as HHBE.

The second, related obstacle for HHBE is the attitude of local school management, such that “teachers’ willingness and ability to employ HHBE in their classrooms may be influenced by

the larger missions of the schools and the competing notions of teaching and learning operating within them” (Irby, Hall & Hill 2013, p.14 ). Indeed, Travis Gosa and Tristan Fields note that, in some schools, teachers have faced suspension for introducing moderately controversial hip-hop material, so it will be even more difficult to develop a curriculum which addresses “diverse understandings of sexuality, or engages non-centrist politics” (2012, p.17). Luis Rodríguez, in *Hearts and Hands: Creating Community in Violent Times* (2001), bemoans zero tolerance policies used by institutions such as schools to maintain control over young people, even advising teachers to keep a professional distance from students who are in gangs. Exasperated, he asks “how are children and teens to know what a healthy personal relationship with adults looks and feels like?” (2001, p.69) when many of them do not experience this even at home.

Then there are the teachers themselves, mostly white, and often ill-informed, sceptical and judgemental regarding hip-hop, who express concerns over “critical issues of language, violence, misogyny, age-appropriateness, institutional constraints, race, class, and gender” (Irby, Hall & Hill 2013, p.14). With echoes of Mignolo, who doubts the ability of oppressors to recognise, let alone overcome, their internalised assumptions and prejudices in order to engage with and learn from the oppressed (discussed in Chapter 1), Lisa Mazzei recognises the inability of many white teachers to connect with their students, stating that they:

had little or no experience of themselves as having a 'racial position',  
and that their experience of having lived in a world of white privilege  
severely limited their ability to see or express themselves as 'Other'.  
This lack of awareness...[was]...reflected in the pedagogical and  
curricular decisions made by those teachers (2013, p.97)

In addition to these obstacles, the relative infancy of HHBE means that it has yet to cohere into a fully-fledged, clearly defined entity and there are several notable lacunae raised by different critics. For example, Gosa and Fields say “there is a lack of consensus on the meaning, purpose, or efficacy of hip hop as education” (2012, p.1) and assert that “[a]pplying the hip hop identity onto students can homogenize the diversity of ideas, aspirations, and worldviews that they feel comfortable expressing” (ibid., p.15). Whilst Raphael Travis Jr. and Alexis Maston acknowledge that HHBE is still under development in terms of measurement tools, for example, they themselves are instrumental in trialling a form of mixed

measurement, as will be outlined below. Then Irby, Hall and Hill note the lack of research into the use of HHBE beyond the poor, urban, and largely non-white schools, which “problematizes critical issues of power and pedagogy as they pertain to HHBE’s *appropriateness*, let alone effectiveness, in various instructional contexts” (their italics) (2013, p.9). The sheer range of these reservations may give the impression that the present state of HHBE is rather chaotic, but this is not necessarily the case, and the following section will address all of the concerns outlined above.

In the face of these not inconsiderable odds, therefore, HHBE proponents are actively defending their positions, addressing the problems they face, and working towards a coherent and comprehensive pedagogical framework. The two main texts analysed above, CWRP and the Guidebook, link the lesson plans to academic standards, as well as including both hip-hop and non-hip-hop material for study, in an attempt to integrate the teaching into the mainstream programmes and measurement systems. More recently Travis and Maston have noted that “[c]urrent research on Hip Hop integrated pedagogy is beginning to elaborate upon the complexities inherent in its use” (2014, p.25) and they themselves have contributed to developing this pedagogical integration. Over the course of a semester with undergraduate students they utilised HHBE, including the fifth element, and measured outcomes with what they term the Individual and Community Empowerment Framework. This framework is “a mixed measurement strategy of evaluating student outcomes that complements academic grades” (ibid., p.3) and which incorporates five developmental aspects: esteem, resilience, growth, community and change. “[R]esults suggest that the course helped strengthen students’ perceived self-esteem, resilience, growth, sense of community and intent to engage in positive community change” (ibid., p.4), with discussions covering a range of topics including diasporic heritage, spirituality and sexuality, prompting them to declare that “[t]his rich array of manifestations of belonging highlights the essential value of community in the lives of individuals” (ibid., p.20). They conclude that HHBE can be used within an existing curriculum to simultaneously develop both required academic abilities as well as other developmental competencies, and note that this aligns with the current discourse in the educational sector on promoting social and emotional learning. In this regard the example of SOJO outlined earlier would seem to support this mixed learning environment, as do the lesson plans themselves, with the strong focus on personal and social skill development alongside academic Common Core standards.

In 2011 Martha Diaz presented 'Re-imagining Teaching and Learning: A Snapshot of Hip-Hop Education', the first national survey of HHBE programmes and initiatives, produced against a background of continuing high drop-out rates from High School and lower achievement levels amongst poor and disadvantaged minorities - some 10 years after NCLB was introduced. There were nearly three hundred initiatives indexed, including programmes in high schools, after-school clubs, higher education, correctional facilities, and not-for-profit organisations, covering a range of subjects and skills. These initiatives were spread across 55 cities, with the majority of respondents in New York, where HHBE has its origins, in Chicago and on the west coast. Encouragingly, 76% of programmes incorporated the fifth element (knowledge of the self and community), 73% reported that students were involved in developing the programmes, and 18% of the programmes had started in the previous year, indicating an upward curve in growth. Recommendations from the survey included the need for more research, increased integration across the curriculum and the development of good practice (2011, online).

In contrast with the negative comments about levels of research on aspects of HHBE, Brad Porfilio, Debangshu Roychoudhury and Lauren Gardner take a very positive view of the present state of HHBE:

an impressive body of research shows HHBE has engendered democratic relationships between educators and students, has sparked youths' critical consciousness and positioned them as problem solvers in their schools, community, and the wider world, as well as has enhanced students' understanding of traditional and non-traditional academic texts and improved their academic performance (2014, p.viii)

Similarly, Irby, Hall and Hill, running a series of HHBE workshops for teachers, found that:

[b]y the final workshop, participants engaged through call-and-response activities, small group break-outs, and role playing that guided them through content and pedagogy...[where] ...the style in which the workshop was delivered, as well as the instructor himself, became texts for participants to examine and learn from (2013, p.11)

In spite of their reservations about the present state of HHBE expressed earlier, they do foresee a brighter future, concluding that the generational shift in the teaching workforce is bringing in educators who are familiar and comfortable with hip-hop culture, and no doubt many who will be conscious of its heritage and the values it espouses behind the commercial façade, and who will therefore be more able and willing to employ HHBE. They also believe that multicultural education will provide the necessary knowledge, skills and attributes for all students, of whatever race or ethnicity, to function effectively in an increasingly diverse society. This contrasts with the speculative assertion above by Gosa and Fields that HHBE in some way 'applies' a hip-hop identity onto students and can produce homogeneity and suppress free expression. Analysis of the lesson plans above suggests the reverse, namely that all students are encouraged to express themselves and to listen to, respect and respond to the expressions of others in a climate of diversity, not homogeneity.

It is clear that the momentum of HHBE is being maintained and that HHBE apologists and educators are working hard to overcome the real, practical barriers and limitations outlined above. If they are successful, then they will usher in an educational initiative whose aims have a strong correlation with the theories discussed in Chapter 1, in terms of the equality of existence and the acceptance of diversity, the development of individual and community socio-political consciousness, and the consequent critical activism to challenge all forms of oppression. Looking specifically at the evaluation criteria set out in the Introduction, HHBE addresses each of them in the set of lessons discussed above, progressing from understanding the self through to multiethnic, multiracial community activism for social and political justice, and to wider political engagement at all levels.

One could say that HHBE is striving to 'keep it real'. The 'keepin' it real' reference in the chapter title is an often used hip-hop phrase understood in different ways. For some it means being open and honest about the crime, violence, and drug culture, as well as the misogyny and homophobia; and for others in the gangsta strand it means glorifying these realities as 'cool'. Tim'm T. West, discussing gay hip-hop, describes the heteronormative majority within commercial hip-hop who cry 'keep it real' as "hip-hop's national guard" (2005, p.171) who resent any form of difference from their 'norm'. He notes the irony of hip-hop having its own internal hegemony even as it vents its anger at white domination. For others, 'keepin' it real' means disavowing the trend of materialism and conspicuous consumption, admittedly laudable, yet for others still it means resisting cultural commodification and staying true to

the spirit and communal roots of hip-hop, its storytelling, creativity, and social and political critique. HHBE embraces the last of these interpretations and is striving to keep alive the lineage of resistance and struggle on behalf of all disadvantaged people. While the broad hip-hop community may be a microcosm of society at large, ‘real’ hip-hop operates “at the intersections of urban artistic expression, social justice, critical consciousness, Black feminism, therapy, and spirituality” (Porfilio, Roychoudhury & Gardner 2014, p.ix).

The focus in this thesis is on HHBE practised in harsh urban environments where students are poor, disadvantaged and largely from ethnic and racial minorities. As some critics have noted, it remains to be seen if it has a role to play in a wider, as yet untested context, for example in suburban, small town or largely white schools, where teaching staff and leaders may be less accommodating. Hip-hop does have a broad appeal, though, and HHBE in one form or another may yet find a place in other settings since, after all, its aim to restore the social and political consciousness of students and its underlying messages of equality, diversity, and justice are valid everywhere. The increasing presence of hip-hop generation teachers may also help to spread its ideas and style of delivery, but there is a long road ahead. In the present moment there is a compelling need for a coherent policy framework which promotes consistency of application, and a need to develop a continuous improvement process by disseminating and updating good practice, which in turn adjusts policy. Moreover, these developments must continue to integrate with mainstream education systems in terms of ‘acceptable’ measurement and success criteria in order to persuade school leaders and education departments to consider HHBE as a viable choice. At the same time HHBE needs a co-ordinated push to create a wider dialogue, by engaging with major civil rights organisations, which have education agenda, and some of which have concerns about ESSA; by making alliances with smaller activist education groups with common aims like Youth Speaks, and radical teacher bodies like NYCORE (both discussed in Chapter 4); and by promoting itself with education departments at local and State levels to publicise its work and seek to influence policy. The Hip-Hop Education Center, discussed later in this chapter, has a pivotal role here, and is working to promote HHBE in both public education and community organisations. Travis and Maston note that the US has spent \$1 billion annually since 2002 on complementary education programmes in areas such as music, the arts, positive youth development and violence prevention, and with broader networking HHBE has the potential to attract a greater share of this investment. In the end, HHBE seeks to engage and develop young people, both as individuals and as members of a community, by employing the

positive, communal aspects of hip-hop, and at the same time strives towards a more inclusive democratic landscape through the creation of a proactive social and political consciousness amongst the young across the demographic spectrum.

### ***Hip-Hop Scholarship in the Academy (College and Graduate School)***

Hip-hop scholarship in the academy began in the mid 1990s and is present today in different forms in a large number of higher education institutions. These forms of scholarship vary widely in scope and scale from institution to institution and often change from year to year.

For example, there are numerous individual modules, ranging from 1-5 credits, which engage with the elements of hip-hop in various disciplines, and a number which address the fifth element, in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Others engage with public education and CRT, intersecting with ways of learning in different cultures and cross-referring to hip-hop. At the time of writing there are 2 minor degree programmes which incorporate hip-hop modules, but no majors. Beyond this there are regular hip-hop conferences, archives of material, and hip-hop elements found within ethnic studies programmes, including occasional examples of hip-hop literature. Within the terms of this thesis the examples selected for analysis will be amongst those most closely associated with the hip-hop counternarrative for social justice. Evaluation of the chosen examples will then be made in terms of their promotion, in both theory and practice, of the conditions for working towards multiethnic, multiracial collective action. The chapter will then close with a high level consideration of the comparative worth of HHBE and academy scholarship.

The examples selected include a hip-hop archive, research and community projects, specific modules, and a hip-hop minor programme. Firstly, the Harvard Hiphop Archive and Research Institute was established in 2002 as part of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. The institute mission statement recognises that hip-hop “has become an uncompromising prism for critique, social and political analysis and representation of marginalized and underrepresented communities throughout the world” (Harvard Hiphop Archive 2015, online) and its aim is “to facilitate and encourage the pursuit of knowledge, art, culture and responsible leadership through Hiphop” (ibid., online). As such it undertakes research and community projects, and events sponsorship, some of which directly address social and political justice goals for disadvantaged and diverse groups and communities, and

in this respect it coincides with the core tenets of pluralism. Events sponsored include a programme on women in hip-hop and the first hip-hop feminist film festival in 2015; and research projects vary widely, with one entitled ‘Voices of Diversity’ considering “whether there are forms of de facto segregation or discrimination and discouragement” (Harvard: Hutchins Center 2014, online) for minority group students in predominantly white higher education settings, with the aim of developing “a picture of how stereotype threat and microaggressions affect the target groups” (ibid., online). This point will be considered within the evaluation section below. In terms of community work, the ‘Community Development Project’ sent students to assess the needs of, and develop proposals for, the community and economic revitalisation of the Baptist Town neighbourhood of Greenwood, Mississippi, by liaison with a range of local people, organisations and institutions (Harvard: Hutchins Center 2013, online). The mostly African American neighbourhood suffers from high unemployment and school drop-out rates, and has problems with drug abuse and gang violence, in stark contrast with the affluent, mainly white areas of town. The overriding aim of the project was to instil in the local population a belief that change is possible, an aim consistent with the pluralist notion that power is distributed throughout society and therefore actions at a local level can make a difference.

At Yale, community-based learning falls within The Ethnicity, Race, and Migration Program. Just as the senior high school students engaged with local groups under the HHBE initiative, so do the college students, albeit at a more involved, practical level, and two examples in New Haven will demonstrate this. Firstly, the Junta for Progressive Action, Inc. aims to “improve the social, political and economic conditions of the Latino community...while nurturing and promoting its cultural traditions as it builds bridges with other communities” (Yale: Ethnicity, Race, and Migration Program 2015a, online) and specifically to “improve access to health care; expand levels of literacy and access to higher education, and develop grassroots leadership around issues of concern to our communities” (ibid., online). Students analyse data and compile fact sheets used to assess community needs and for local fundraising, and details are published on the website and used for petitioning state funding. Then Hispanos Unidos, Inc. deals with Latino/as with HIV/AIDS, mental health and substance abuse problems, where students attend support groups, interview participants under supervision and contribute to the tailored programme of education, prevention, and care (Yale: Ethnicity, Race, and Migration Program 2015b, online). Grassroots social justice organisations like these are essential in under-resourced neighbourhoods with poor and

disadvantaged people, and are examples of just those kinds of activist community groups envisaged within HHBE.

Turning now to graduate school education departments, both Harvard and Stanford have a number of modules which intersect in several ways with the principles and concerns of HHBE. The Harvard module ‘Systemic Reform in Urban School Districts and Schools’ (Spring 2015, 4 credits) refers to the “unprecedented political dissension about the best ways to bring about improvement in public education” (Harvard Graduate School of Education 2015a, online) where “an attempted massive restructuring...is under retreat as the complexities of bringing about improvement in resilient bureaucracies and political and cultural systems reassert themselves against structural reforms” (ibid., online). This recalls the dissenting voices outlined above in the evaluation of HHBE yet also hints at the concerns within CRT of institutional resistance to change. Other modules, too, focus on aspects of public school education which are also of concern within HHBE, such as the ‘Ethnic Studies Learning Community’ (Spring 2015, 4 credits), which addresses the need for minority groups to see their own cultures and histories reflected in diverse curricula. Then ‘Power in Urban Classrooms’ (Summer 2014, 4 credits) explores the politics of the classroom and how teachers, consciously or otherwise, influence students in positive or negative ways; and ‘Critical Race Theory in Education’ (Fall 2014, 4 credits) looks at student experiences, teacher education and learning processes (Harvard Graduate School of Education 2015b, online). The latter two modules resonate with the awareness within HHBE that the teacher-student relationship is critical and that this must take into account different ways of acquiring knowledge and understanding. At Stanford, ‘The 5<sup>th</sup> Element : Hip Hop Knowledge, Pedagogy, and Social Justice’ (Spring 2014, 1-5 credits) explored the cultural origins and meaning of the fifth element and how it intersects with community and social justice; ‘Race, Ethnicity, and Linguistic Diversity in Classrooms: Sociocultural Theory and Practices’ (Spring 2015, 3-5 credits) considers the development of teachers with understanding, dispositions and skills to teach diverse student groups (not unlike the Harvard modules above); and ‘Leading Change in Public Education’ (Spring 2015, 2 credits) requires students to consider different strategies and systems for addressing the continuing crisis in public education (Stanford Graduate School of Education 2015, online). Although none of these modules make direct reference to HHBE, it is clear that there are universal concerns over the evident difficulties in engaging students from racial and ethnic minorities in urban public

schools, and in preparing teachers to work in such schools. These points will be revisited in the evaluation section below.

The first minor degree with a conscious focus on hip-hop was created in the African Studies department of the University of Arizona in 2012. The minor requires 18 credits, made up of 6 modules, 3 of which directly engage with hip-hop – ‘Rap, Culture, and God’, ‘Hip-Hop Cinema’, and ‘US & Francophone Hip-Hop Cultures’. The website announcement of the launch is encouraging:

The Minor introduces students to the main themes represented in hip-hop cultures: appropriation and defense of spaces, mixing of different cultures, migrations, multilingualism, race, class, gender, religions, sexuality, nationality, politics and the economy, and, the search for identity

(2012a, online)

The programme is said to have a very broad reach, across the “academic disciplines such as music, dance, language, religion, gender, culture, history, politics, marketing, fashion, management as well as film, radio, TV and performance studies” (ibid., online). Even more encouragingly, in 2014 the Africana Studies department invited applications for small grants to support the creation of undergraduate courses which featured hip-hop or HHBE (online). Once again, this initiative will feature in the evaluation to follow. In conclusion to this section, and as indicated above, there are a number of other instances of hip-hop being used in different colleges and graduate schools, some of which engage directly with issues of community and social justice, and appear very similar to the examples outlined here, but many more utilise one of the four aesthetic aspects of hip-hop in isolation or within a larger programme and therefore have limited integration with the fifth element of knowledge of the self and the self in community.

The evaluation of the chosen academy material above will, as for HHBE, take into account both in theory and practice its intersections with visions of inclusive, egalitarian communities and society, and its impulse to support multiethnic, multiracial action for social justice. Moreover, there is some correlation between the academy and HHBE in the obstacles and barriers they face, so these must also be addressed in order to achieve a balanced view, and

one which will therefore allow a valid comparison to be made between the two educational sectors in the overall conclusion to the chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the academy was embroiled in the culture wars for well over twenty years, and this is reflected in some of the problems it faces with regard to the acceptance of diversity, which the opening comments in this chapter by Moschkovich and hooks bear out. The Harvard research project ‘Voices of Diversity’, referred to above, addressed the existence and impact of institutional discrimination, and there is no shortage of research material to be found which declares that it not only exists, but also has a very detrimental impact on minority group students. As is the case for urban public school teachers, the academy is (outside the HBCUs) largely white. Daniel Solorzano and Tara Yosso, in their article ‘Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counter-Storytelling’, reveal graduate school experiences of Chicano/a students, using data from focus groups and individual interviews with undergraduates, graduates, faculty staff and researchers, plus other texts on the subject, and their own experiences. From the data they create two composite characters, a graduate student and a professor, who share data-driven discussions on issues arising from racism and discrimination, including “self-doubt, survivor guilt, impostor syndrome, and invisibility” (2001, p.471). The messages from the characters challenge the claims that these educational institutions are objective towards, and offer equal opportunities to, people of all races and ethnicities, and suggest that this masks the true self-interest and intent to retain the status quo of privilege and power. The graduate student character Esperanza Gonzalez says “academia has yet to recognize that there are other shades of experience between and beyond Black and White” (ibid., p.478) and the professor concurs, saying “racism raises its ugly head in communities of varying skin tones, accents, cultures, and immigration status” (ibid., p.479). Travis and Maston state that, for minority groups seeking to graduate in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), “research highlights how they face unique barriers to persistence and completion in comparison to other groups..[and that]...[h]igher education obstacles prevalent in S.T.E.M. are consistent with the larger narrative about minority success in higher education” (2014, p.10).

A second, related obstacle is resistance from the academy to diverse texts. For Bharati Mukherjee, “the academy has not yet developed the grid and the grammar to explore American works that are not quite ‘American’ in the canonical sense” (2011, p.695) and urges scholars to listen to and absorb these new perspectives from diverse and different American

voices. Ramón Saldívar sees a new stage in the history of the novel emerging from some of these contemporary writers, who are creating a different literary form and bring with them different views of history (2011). Interestingly, both Mukherjee and Saldívar cite Junot Díaz as a prime example of this new aesthetic. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2009), Díaz reflects upon the interconnected histories of the US and Dominican Republic (DR) dating back to Columbus and the birth of the modern world, the source of the 'fukú americanus', the curse on the DR (and indeed, one could read into this other Latin American contexts). Through the interplay of fantasy and realism, he exposes the gulf between the official version of recent DR history and the horrific realities for many, again implicating the US as a tacit supporter of a brutal dictatorship. Stylistically, like a number of other Latino/a writers, Díaz uses cultural and linguistic code-switching, discussed in Chapter 1, to present the complexities of history and heritage alongside the journey of transforming into some new form of American, with multiple senses of identity and belonging. For Lourdes Torres, “code-switching in literature is not only metaphorical, but represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and languages; literary language actualizes the discourse of the border and bilingual/bicultural communities” (2007, p.76). The US itself is being affected, influenced and changed by its shifting demography and these new voices, yet in 2006 Lingyan Yang argued that the academy maintained “exclusive paradigms of knowledge that have marginalized both the 'subjugated knowledges' and the subjects...of all Other peoples, races, ethnicities, interdisciplinary fields, and communities” (p.8). Here she refers to Michel Foucault, who imagined “an insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (1980, p.82) rising up to challenge “the tyranny of globalising discourses” (ibid., p.83). More recent statements here seem to suggest, however, that the knowledges and worldviews of these new ethnic voices are still in the margins, and these perceptions will be explored below, together with the factors which may lead to such views.

One final, and critical, point to make in terms of accepting diverse texts is that the primary focus for these critics does not seem to extend to the significant growth of street and hip-hop literature in the last 15 years, and therefore they may overlook key voices such as Quintero, whose presence, even in ethnic studies programmes, is rare. They and the academy may judge what is 'good literature' and suitable to be included in the revered canon based on long-standing, 'traditional' criteria, and fail to realign those criteria in response to some of these new voices, who may have a different audience but who, like Quintero and like the hip-hop voices used in HHBE, have crucial roles to play, and address important issues just as much as

those 'respected', 'gifted' writers and artists. Indeed, just as CRT scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw calls for “a revision of the academic orientation” (2011, p.1350), so Petchauer recognises the tensions between the academy and hip-hop in *Hip-Hop Culture in College Students' Lives: Elements, Embodiment, and Higher Edutainment* (2012), noting that hip-hop apologists accuse scholars of misunderstanding the aspects of hip-hop culture and of sharing the ill-informed views of many urban public school teachers regarding the suitability of hip-hop material for study.

With the above tensions in mind, it is important now to consider in some detail the impulse and motivation behind hip-hop scholarship in the academy, before assessing it specifically within the terms of this thesis. The questions are - does scholarship promote the acceptance of diversity and equality of existence, the central tenets of pluralism, and does it promote the conditions for multiethnic, multiracial collective action for social justice? There are a number of critics who are sceptical, to say the least, about hip-hop scholarship, and who question the motives behind the study, given the unwelcoming attitudes towards minority group students and the resistance to diverse texts noted above. George Yúdice traces the history of minority culture scholarship in the academy and asserts that the current focus is “oriented to enhancing competitiveness in the global economy” (2006, p.228), so minorities are welcomed if their diversity has some form of marketable value, for example if their cultural knowledge gives an edge to the US in the global market. The aforementioned hip-hop minor at the University of Arizona seems very positive on the face of it, but on closer inspection the underlying capitalist purpose seems to chime with the statement of Yúdice. The programme announcement states that hip-hop is a “cultural force which severely impacted many elements of mainstream American culture to the extent that corporations have embraced hip-hop music and artists as a means of marketing goods to everyone” (2012a, online), which is a clear focus on commercial hip-hop. Christopher Tinson and Carlos McBride, in the journal *Radical Teacher*, take a similar view, asserting that hip-hop scholarship is “mired in the trap of taking its cues from the mainstream profit-driven world of entertainment” (2013, p.3). The small grants offer for HHBE courses, also made by the University of Arizona, is even more explicit on this point:

Hip-hop culture is a billion dollar industry that generates exceptionally large revenues and jobs in a wide array of markets worldwide...There are marketing and textiles experts who sell and promote products to a

hip-hop clientele...computer engineers who build samplers, lawyers who defend and negotiate contracts for artists and local entrepreneurs, social workers who mentor youth groups...psychologists who use art therapy, to only name a few of the professions connected to hip-hop. Consequently, there is no doubt that university students combining a major in Management, Marketing, Finance, Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Computer Engineering...with the UA's minor in Africana Studies with concentration in hip-hop cultures will be extremely knowledgeable and marketable in these specific industries  
(2014, online)

This heavy focus on mainstream, commercial hip-hop is a long way from issues of social justice, and there are questions over how much emphasis is put on radical voices and theories such as CRT. The somewhat dispassionate declaration that “the point of studying culture is not to judge it, but to understand what it tells us about history and society” (University of Arizona 2012b, online) is an objective and reasonable enough statement, but hardly seems to suggest engaged social and political debate about society today and its path to the future. The academy is undoubtedly forward-looking in many subject areas, though, for there is a strong focus on producing future leaders and entrepreneurs, especially in the Ivy League institutions. The Stanford module ‘Entrepreneurial Approaches to Education Reform’ (Fall 2014, 2 credits) intended to investigate how entrepreneurs “could transform K-12 public schooling in the United States, a \$650 billion dollar industry that has a direct and long-term effect on the nation's economy, democracy and culture” (Stanford Graduate School of Education 2015, online) and was deemed “suitable for students aspiring to be entrepreneurs, leaders in entrepreneurial organizations, leaders in educational organizations, donors or investors” (ibid., online). The dollar sign is never far away.

As suggested by critics earlier, the growth of ethnic studies programmes over recent decades does not guarantee equal status. Yúdice believes that the focus on STEM subjects, both in high schools and the academy, reduces resources for the humanities in general and therefore has the effect of marginalising them. In his brief historical review of minority culture scholarship he states that it was “[i]nitially a means to 'empower' excluded or marginalized minorities...[but]...soon became a quick rhetorical fix of symbolic inclusion and very little material gain” (2006, p.221). He suggests that the US tendency towards conformity and

homogeneity has a reductive effect on cultural studies, a point made in Chapter 1 in the discussion of Mignolo's *The Idea of Latin America*. This has the effect of fostering a more consensual epistemology, bringing some Latino/a scholars into conflict with their more radical Latino/a and Latin American counterparts, as Yúdice points out. One might consider this a form of commodification of subaltern and postcolonial studies, which therefore begs the question - is the academy ready to embrace the diversity of Latino/a voices, or for that matter voices 'from below', such as conscious hip-hop? On the first point, Mignolo believes that the borderlands epistemology of Anzaldúa, a philosophy of inclusion and acceptance of diversity, and the antithesis of monoglossic, nationalist and imperialist knowledge theory "is perhaps equivalent to what Descartes produced with his *Discours de la Méthode*, written in... Amsterdam...at a time when realignment of imperial forces transformed it into the centre of world trade" (1998, p.55). This rather unusual comparison shows the importance he places upon the seminal Anzaldúa, and Yúdice imagines the academy being troubled by "the prospect that a Chicana would serve as the broker for ushering in a new epistemological framework for construing and understanding American realities" (2006, p.222). As for other voices from the margins, one might say something similar about hip-hop scholarship and the extent to which the academy engages with those less audible, conscious voices for social justice in comparison with the strident commercial mainstream of the culture. The Harvard Archive encouragingly refers to hip-hop as an "exciting and growing intellectual movement" (2015, online) and commits to research and community projects, but Tinson and McBride are not yet convinced by universities introducing hip-hop into their curricula, saying that "it remains to be seen if these resources can be used to advance increased opportunities for local communities" (2013, p.4). They are suspicious of a controlling instinct in those universities which are preserving and cataloguing hip-hop social and cultural histories, saying that "the creation of repositories of Hip Hop knowledge represents yet another form of strategic institutionalization" (ibid., p.5), and although they acknowledge that such archives may be legitimate, they "should not go unquestioned and without close scrutiny" (ibid, p.5).

Certainly, the University of Arizona minor seems to limit its engagement with conscious hip-hop:

while it took the world by storm as political expression in the tradition of 'The Message' and bands like Public Enemy, that vein of hip-hop has mostly dried up in the United States, replaced by a multi-billion-dollar

industry of music and images often criticized as glorifying drugs, money, misogyny and a caste system built on wanton self-interest (2012b, online)

The assumption that conscious hip-hop has all but disappeared is based on rap music from the 1980s and overlooks the emergence of conscious hip-hop literature in the last 15 years, discussed in Chapter 2 and below, which returns to the lineage of protest and resistance espoused by those rap artists. Also, the small grants offer made by the Africana Studies department for supporting undergraduate courses featuring hip-hop or HHBE, noted above, mentions only minor examples of the scientific applications of HHBE, citing Emdin that “spray cans and graffiti can be used to teach about solutes and solvents in chemistry, and microphones and speakers can be used to teach about sound waves in physics (2013, 21)” (2014, online). This ignores the broader argument he is making about the ways of acquiring knowledge within hip-hop culture and their embodiment in HHBE, discussed earlier.

In addition to the capitalist impulse and the tendency to commodify and marginalise diverse voices, the matter of class is never far from the surface of any debate about the driving forces within the academy, and neither should it be. Yúdice is blunt in the extreme on this point:

students are routed by class (highly correlated with race) into elite and research universities for entry into executive employment or the lucrative production of intellectual property; public colleges and second-tier private institutions to qualify for middle management; community colleges and private diploma mills for vocational training in the service sector; or into workfare, chronic unemployment, and prison  
(2006, p.229)

The focus on conscious hip-hop in this thesis is bound up with social justice for the less well-off and disadvantaged from the ‘lower’ class. Any serious engagement by the academy with these voices in hop-hop can only sharpen the focus on the plight of these oppressed people, and generate wide-ranging debate on societal values and priorities, on how the US will face a future with an increasingly diverse population, in all likelihood still faced with a sizeable percentage of those far less well-off, and on what the political, economic and social ramifications might be. In the midst of economic globalisation and technological revolution this debate has implications for the US in relation to the rest of the world, and for oppressed

peoples everywhere. There is, therefore, a significant and as yet unrealised potential for critique on a number of levels, including how the educational system itself engages with these changes and in the process whether or not it confronts its own conflicts of interest and dismantles the perceived class bias outlined here.

Faced with this litany of accusations - institutional racism, classism, resistance to diversity, and underlying capitalist and commodifying impulses - it is imperative to be clear on what the positives are within hip-hop scholarship. While some of the criticisms are backed up by research and strong evidence, as indicated above, others are more opinionated and open to interpretation. Yes, there is evidence of resistance to diversity in some institutions, bringing problems for minority groups and those less well-off, but things are gradually changing, and it is important to recognise these developments. There are a number of institutions, for example, offering very broad ethnic studies curricula, such as the University of Washington, the University of California - San Diego, and Georgetown University. In terms of hip-hop material being utilised in courses, this is an increasingly common occurrence but more often than not the engagement is with a particular aspect of the culture, such as dance or visual art, and does not involve the critical fifth element. A good example of this is the second minor currently available which makes reference to hip-hop – ‘Dance in Popular Culture: Hip Hop, Urban, and Social Dances’ at the USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance (2015, online).

At the level of the individual modules and projects described above, however, one can find clear evidence of engagement in both theory and practice with issues and activities consistent with the acceptance of diversity and equality, and which correlate with the notion of knowledge of community, encapsulated in the fifth element of hip-hop. The hands-on ‘Community Development Project’ at Harvard is a prime example of seeking to unite and empower a small community to overcome its social problems through collaborative strategies and actions. The Yale modules connect just as directly with the social justice ethos by engaging the students with local, grassroots, social justice organisations. Then, in the education department modules, while there may be no mention of HHBE, Stanford has a strong focus of the fifth element, social justice issues and the challenges and changes facing public school education in multiethnic, multiracial settings. Harvard, too, has a number of modules addressing the continuing crisis in public school education, recognising that minority groups need to see their history and culture as part of the American story, and acknowledging that teaching styles need to adjust to the cultural mix of the students. Taken

together, these examples must temper the statements of Yúdice above; and Tinson and McBride, though sceptical about the motives and effects of hip-hop scholarship, do admit the possibility that “Hip Hop courses that open up spaces for broad community participation may be a critical factor in the development of this field” (2013, p.4), that is, the promotion by universities of support to the wider community.

New York University (NYU) has been a pivotal site in the development of hip-hop education in the community. Martha Diaz founded the Hip-Hop Education Center (HHEC) in 2010, affiliated with NYU, with its mission statement to be:

a catalyst for the hip-hop and education field through the operation of a communiversity, whereby the community and university come together to develop an alternative educational space utilizing hip-hop culture as an interdisciplinary teaching tool of essential life skills, all of which support the emotional, physical, creative, cognitive, and civic development of young people in an effort to transform their lives and communities  
(2015, online)

HHEC aims to inspire and prepare scholars, teachers, cultural workers, activists, and social entrepreneurs to use hip-hop culture to engage and motivate young people both in public education and in community organisations. A key strategy for HHEC is to collaborate with other institutions “in order to professionalize the field of Hip-Hop education and contribute best practices to the education reform movement at-large” (NYU - Seinhardt 2012, online). HHEC therefore works with the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Columbia University and the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and one of the main goals is “to develop a teaching certificate for teaching artists, in-service teachers, and students of education using Hip-Hop in the classroom and extended-day programs” (ibid., online). The three institutions run conferences to showcase a variety of hip-hop educational initiatives and to debate and develop key objectives and strategies.

Finally, there are other voices calling for hip-hop generation writers to be included in the academic canon and in his book *Writing the Future of Black America: Literature of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2009) Daniel Grassian puts forward several whom he thinks are the best representatives, amongst them Danzy Senna, Paul Beatty and Suzan-Lori Parks. He believes

that this “is an important intersection between academics and street life as well as literature and sociology” (p.182), and suggests that the promotion of hip-hop generation writers could engage young people and resurrect the alleged decline in reading books. Indeed, he does acknowledge the rapid rise in street literature, and considers Sister Souljah and Nikki Turner as examples. However, although he sees some merit in their work in terms of moral judgement, he effectively dismisses them, and seemingly by implication other street writers, asserting that their characters are self-centred, with no sense of community, only interested in getting rich, and experience no empowerment or redemption. He clearly views these writers as shallow in comparison with his choices, whom he believes have more depth, cover broader issues, and whose “socially and racially charged writings directly...and comprehensively address the crucial questions...[of] the current and future state of the African American community” (p.16). Assigning these attributes - depth and breadth, focus on community and the future - solely to his choice of writers has been challenged and explored in the previous chapter concerning Quintero and Senna. The street writers he dismisses should at the very least be given credit for improving reading skills amongst young people, many of whom would not be attracted to the content or style of the choices he makes. The street life he sees in some of his choices is overstated, as the comparative discussion in the previous chapter reveals. In fairness, he is only looking at black writers, so he would not be considering authors such as Junot Díaz, Ernesto Quiñonez or Victor Martinez, nor those predominantly Latino/a hip-hop writers inspired by Sister Souljah. In the end, Grassian is thinking of the canon in the same way as Mukherjee and Saldívar, referred to earlier, and overlooks those important voices 'from below'.

Unlike HHBE, one cannot say that hip-hop scholarship in the academy is striving to ‘keep it real’ in the sense of the active promotion of resistance and struggle for social, political and indeed educational justice on behalf of all disadvantaged people. Firstly, education at the higher level may have different priorities, some of which do not sit easily alongside the ethos of inclusion and equality, such as the impulse to retain status and competitiveness in the global economy, with its attendant risk of exploitative working practices amongst poorer communities. Also, there are levels of criticism, both informed opinion and research underpinned by CRT, which suggest the existence of institutional racism and resistance to diversity in what material is studied. Finally, there are enduring tensions between the hip-hop community and the academy about the nature and focus of the scholarship, and its potential commodification, institutionalisation and marginalisation. In spite of these doubts and

concerns, there are various examples of learning described above which do correspond with diverse, egalitarian concepts, and involve students in activist organisations for the poor or disadvantaged in minority groups.

### ***Conclusion***

Conscious hip-hop and HHBE engage with the fifth element of hip-hop culture and in so doing work towards the conditions necessary for socially and politically conscious engagement at all levels. They connect with the core tenets of pluralism espoused by Mignolo and Anzaldúa, and with the visions of Chela Sandoval and Luis Rodríguez, expressed in Chapter 1, accepting as equals those with all forms of perceived difference, including race, class, gender and sexuality. HHBE comes 'from below', and although its conscious voices may not be respected intellectuals or academics, they *are* addressing some of the same issues as the theorists. For example, not unlike postcolonial and subaltern scholarship, HHBE acknowledges the voices of the oppressed and the disenfranchised trying to get themselves heard and their knowledge accepted, and it imagines new possibilities of existence, where diverse community coalitions reclaim social, economic and political justice from the dominant societal institutions. HHBE is therefore, to reference Mignolo, a decolonial initiative. Indeed, as Mignolo says at the head of this chapter, “the grammar of de-coloniality is working, has to work, from bottom up” (2010a, p.346), that is, from the disenfranchised, for “[w]ho are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?” (Freire 2005, p.45). Like Rodríguez, Solorzano and Yosso believe that the counternarratives of the oppressed can:

build community among those at the margins of society...[and]...  
challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center...by showing  
the possibilities beyond the ones they live...[and]...by combining  
elements from both....can construct another world that is richer than either  
(2001, p.475)

As noted earlier, Mignolo questioned the present ability, let alone the readiness, of the dominant culture to see the possibilities emanating from these new voices and conceive of a world beyond their traditional understanding. Even as the US becomes increasingly infused

with myriad new voices, and an ever more mixed and diverse ethnic and racial presence seeps in to every level of society, it seems that the mainstream is continuing its long history of absorbing, assimilating and (imperceptibly) adjusting, without shifting its foundational ethos. As Toni Morrison says, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, “[t]he master narrative could make any number of adjustments to keep itself intact” (1992, p.51). This therefore leaves a continuing and critical need for social and political activism on behalf of the marginalised and disadvantaged, supported by initiatives such as HHBE.

At a practical level, HHBE has emerged from lived experience, dealing with the world as it is. A pedagogical framework and theory is developing, but the organic praxis of HHBE ensures that the theory does not remain in stasis. Conferences, one of which was mentioned earlier, continually seek out good practices which in turn influence the theoretical framework. Thus HHBE stays rooted in practice, a dynamic, progressive, organic rebuilding of personhood and community, not dogmatic, cerebral, or idealistic, but embedded within the complexities, contradictions and conflicts of everyday life, existing in a practice-theory continuum. Hip-hop feminism, discussed in Chapter 2, is a prime example of this ground level activism, always looking to move beyond, to a better place, but at the same time realistic about imagined ideals distant from present reality.

It must be borne in mind that HHBE is a work in progress, developing against a background of dilatory response and sometimes leaden resistance, at individual and institutional level, to the embrace of diversity and equality. It must therefore continue to challenge the education system and strive to overcome the practical barriers and questions it faces from within, working to find a space within the post-NCLB educational landscape. In a similar vein, Tinson and McBride, discussing HHEC, say that “[t]hough promising, it remains to be seen how successful their efforts will be in influencing social and educational policy throughout the New York City public school system” (2013, p.5). The broad misunderstandings about hip-hop discussed earlier make the message from HHBE harder to get across. Reviewing Jeff Chang’s *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005) Alex Abramovich sees “a generation whose only unifying characteristic may be its opposition to any definitions an outsider might impose” (2005, online) and, reflecting on an image in the book of a multicultural crowd raising their fists into the air at the 2000 Democratic Convention, states:

it makes you wonder what today's young people are supposed to be organizing for, or dissenting against. Is it the World Trade Organization? Police brutality? The military-industrial complex? Fox News? The New York Times? (ibid., online)

Though unhelpful even in 2005, these statements are to an extent answered by the substantive political shift which swept in the first Obama administration in 2008 and then re-elected him in 2012, and by the overlooked grassroots activist organisations working beneath, addressing such issues as the prison-industrial complex, police brutality and prisoner disenfranchisement. One such example is Critical Resistance, co-founded by social activist Angela Davis, a volunteer grassroots organisation with the mission to eliminate the prison-industrial complex (2015, online). Indeed, the next chapter will enter the arena of grassroots activist organisations, where selected examples will be compared and evaluated within the terms of the thesis.

In contemplating the way forward, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw says that the “[k]ey to building a coherent counter-narrative...is gathering up and integrating energies that are locked behind disciplinary walls and colorblind traditions” (2011, p.1349), an aim HHBE is clearly seeking to achieve. Then Tricia Rose, referring to African Americans, but the message applies equally to other minority groups, urges the hip-hop generation to reconnect with its origins and seek to change from below by making the aesthetic a “socially and politically progressive vision of creativity and black public thought, action, and reaction” (2008, p.27). She is frustrated by the immature way the problems in poor, urban neighbourhoods are decontextualized and effectively viewed in isolation, thus failing to consider the significant weight of the contributing factors stressed in this thesis. “We must cultivate enabling behaviours and attitudes but tether them to impassioned removal of structural racism and discrimination” (ibid., p.93). HHBE, for all its incompleteness, obstacles and difficulties, is an initiative aiming to develop just these enabling behaviours amongst the young and predominantly poor, disadvantaged, minority group students in the contemporary urban public school environment.

Hip-hop scholarship in the academy, in spite of its sometimes rather different focus from HHBE, does in fact share some of the same obstacles, for example the predominance of whiteness and the enduring resistance, at both individual and management levels, to minority

group voices; and somewhat less transparently, the capitalist impulse. The connections between the academy and preparing students for positions within the global economy may be clear enough, but equally Prier, as outlined earlier, contends that the present public education system is also politically biased towards corporate capitalism at the expense of other versions of knowledge.

The obstacles and conflicts of interest for the academy in actively promoting the conditions for multiracial and multiethnic groups for social justice are wider and deeper than they are for HHBE. Parts of the academy stand accused of institutional racism and being unwelcoming to minority group students; of resistance to diversity in the form of new epistemologies, so preserving the status quo; of keeping diverse new voices in the margins to protect the literary canon; and, critically, of ignoring voices 'from below' and thus limiting real engagement with street life. In *Writing Beyond Race* hooks claims that many academic black writers are not dissidents, having been educated in the white-dominated high schools and academy, which preserve white domination and reward blacks well, so that they lose their political edge. "Let's be clear: black capitalism is not black self-determination", she tells us (2013, p.167). This recalls the assimilated Latino/a scholars in tension with their Latin American counterparts, noted above by Yúdice.

In the end, the major impetus to engage in multiethnic, multiracial groups has to come from the grassroots level. Hip-hop activists cannot "rely solely on institutional support, the conference format, the publishing industrial complex, or the college panel and honorarium as substitutes for genuine movement building" (Travis and Maston 2014, p.6), for "[l]egitimizing Hip Hop Studies in the academy, though necessary, cannot replace actual social movement" (Tinson and McBride 2013, p.7). The vision for the future would be initiatives such as HHBE developing the consciousness of young people and inspiring them to join diverse collectives fighting for social and political justice, and hip-hop scholarship no longer in the margins, but integrated with and supportive of public school educational programmes such as HHBE. In the meantime, the thesis now takes the next step forward, from the educational initiatives here and the literary perspectives of the previous chapter, discussed in terms of their responses to diversity, equality, and community, and into the arena of activism envisaged by these perspectives and initiatives. Chapter 4 will therefore examine, evaluate, and compare selected activist groups and alliances, as prefigured in the Introduction.

## Chapter 4 Another World is Possible. Another System is Necessary

### From Theory into Practice

*We are all racist and sexist; we are all horny, tender, playful and violent; it's human nature; we are all implicated in this madness. Let's figure it out together. Let's cross each other's borders and see what happens*  
Guillermo Gómez-Peña

*The problems of communities of color still overlap and we must reach back into the substance of multiple oppression politics, invest greater efforts in clarifying common interests, and advocating coalitional consciousness, and directly engage with power institutions*

Sue Sohng & Melissa Chun

This chapter moves from theory into practice and presents the final domain of the thesis, that of present day activism. Activist organisations will be examined, evaluated and compared in terms of the extent to which they adhere to visions of diverse community and engage in multiethnic, multiracial action to challenge racial and ethnic oppression and inequality. Michelle Kondo says that such groups require community members to have a “critical consciousness, or an understanding of how their individual and collective problems stem from lack of power” (2008, p.6). In recognising that their shared forms of oppression cross perceived racial and ethnic boundaries, Sohng and Chun, in the epigraph, envision them developing a 'coalitional consciousness' and joining together for strength in numbers. These views echo the thrust of hip-hop based education (HHBE) discussed in the previous chapter.

The contextual background against which activist groups have operated in recent decades was explored in detail in Chapter 1. This covered the perceived breakdown of community, the rise of individualism, rapid demographic and technological change, deindustrialisation, and an enduring and significant proportion of the population less well-off or in poverty, not least amongst disadvantaged, oppressed minority groups. Politically centrist or right-leaning capitalist democracy has continued to absorb demographic change without materially shifting its dominant narrative, even as the white majority diminishes. In an immanent divide and rule process, the continuing assimilation of minority group citizens has created a burgeoning middle class across the demographic spectrum, and a consequential class divide, each with differing experiences and needs.

In spite of the ever-present activism of groups pursuing civil and human rights, and striving

for social justice, there have been no landmark, federal, legislative changes in the last 40 years directly addressing racial or ethnic issues. Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from this stalling of progress, and foregrounded widespread embedded racism, yet there has been no co-ordinated attempt to tackle the root causes within systems and institutions. It is abundantly clear that personal and institutional racism, prejudice and inequalities persist, sometimes quietly, indirectly, unspoken, but often directly, visibly and brutally. The profile and national media coverage of civil rights has diminished in recent decades and no coherent mass movement has emerged, recalling the vain search by Yvonne Bynoe for a visionary leader (in Chapter 2). It is therefore vital, at this point in history, to pose certain questions as to why this is the case.

This situation cannot be satisfactorily or easily explained away by societal and demographic change, by the breakdown of community and the rise of individualism, or by the political landscape alone. There are other factors at play which must be taken into account. In this chapter, therefore, the activist groups examined will be assessed not just from their embrace of diversity, but also in terms of their profile and visibility, their scale and impact, their strategies, and their appeal to the present generation. In the last three years, the Black Lives Matter movement has burst onto the scene, capturing the imagination of contemporary young people, mobilising them into action, and drawing the attention of the international media. The freshness, energy and momentum of this movement, as new as it is, demands consideration alongside the other civil rights and social justice organisations and the government-sanctioned initiatives, as this chapter seeks the answers to the questions posed here.

The major civil rights organisations in the US are but few. The long-standing Rainbow PUSH Coalition (RPC), whose public face is its founder the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., pursues a familiar set of core issues - equality in the criminal justice system, the alleviation of poverty, the provision of affordable housing, and an end to gun violence. Also, mass voter registration, fair employment and career possibilities for minority group citizens, and equitable use by corporations of minority group companies as sub-contractors. The strategies adopted include peaceful protest in rallies and marches, voter registration drives, and advocacy to government, business, educational and religious leaders, in order to bring parties together for arbitration. Then there is the National Action Network (NAN), founded and fronted by the Reverend Al Sharpton, which follows a similarly broad range of aims, including equal rights for women and LGBT citizens, fair treatment of minority group

employees in the public and private sector, equitable voting rights, public education reform, and a gun violence campaign. Again, similarly to RPC, NAN advocates non-violent direct action through civil disobedience, and has a strong focus on mass advocacy for a variety of legislative change, maintaining the Washington Bureau as a statement of its access to federal public policymakers.

In the course of their history these organisations have achieved some notable victories and had a positive impact through their campaigns, as recorded on their websites. In recent years NAN has been more visible than RPC, with Sharpton the chosen consultant of President Obama on minority group issues (see Chapter 1). In this regard it can claim some influence on federal public policy. Its website assumes credit for a number of successes, such as linking its campaign against voter suppression and voter ID laws with the high black turnout in the 2012 Presidential election. It also associates itself with improved diversity in workforce recruitment and retention, and notes its success, along with the NAACP, in bringing more diversity to national TV which “result[ed] in four Black and Latino television stations” (2016a, online). Today, however, there are serious questions about the appeal of these major groups to the present generation, and concerns about their political positioning and the effectiveness of their strategies, given the persistent levels of inequality and discrimination they seek to eliminate. A closer look at their contemporary responses will provide some insight as to why these questions arise.

The rhetoric of RPC is infused with Christian values, in the spirit of Dr. King, with words like faith, hope, redemption. Citing the Good Samaritan parable, Jackson calls for all people to love, not hate, and stop the violence. Speaking of police brutality, he says “[p]eople should be angry... To be silent is to give consent. But it should be focused anger and disciplined anger. There must be mass marches around the nation, mass voter registration, a mass response” (2016a, online). Again, after the death of black man Alton Sterling, he says “[w]e must choose reconciliation over retaliation and revenge... We must not cede the moral high ground for violence” (2016b, online). Words like love, morality, and reconciliation carry no meaning for disaffected, angry youth in the face of police brutality, nor for the poorest, trapped in underfunded, dangerous neighbourhoods, and there must be grave doubts that, in a diverse landscape of multiple belief systems and secularism, the declarations of Jackson, claiming the moral high ground in the name of Christianity, can have a broad appeal to young people today.

The NAN public pronouncements are less overtly Christian, notwithstanding the predominance of religious figures on the board, but nevertheless sound very similar, when Sharpton says, perhaps in an allusion to some of the activities in the name of Black Lives Matter, that “[t]here cannot be a violent or revenge-type movement and achieve justice” (2016b, online). He calls for unity “for the betterment of the nation” (ibid., online), asking “[a]re we going to...increase polarization, or are we going to look in the mirror and be part of the solution?” (ibid., online). For so many in the projects, for example, there is no need to 'look in the mirror' for the problem, when they experience daily inequality and discrimination embedded in the fabric of societal institutions around them, emanating silently. For many grassroots activists, unity with mainstream civil rights groups is unthinkable if these root causes are not being tackled, and they ask just how these groups are making the nation a better place.

A closer look at the NAN website will justify these doubts. NAN claims credit for perceived changes in racial profiling for 'stop and frisk' action and the potential for ensuing brutality, which were “standard practice in many communities just 20 years ago. NAN has successfully changed that paradigm by ensuring that those who violate the law are brought to justice” (2016a, online). Certainly NAN has influenced policy on anti-racial profiling, but there is a difference between policy and *practice*, and between being brought to justice and *justice being done*, if the justice system itself is flawed. This 'success' is misleading if the root cause of the problem persists. Indeed, NAN finds itself calling for “[i]nvestigations...[to]...be taken out of the hands of local authorities” (2016c, online), and for transparency of the process (a demand also made by Black Lives Matter), which is a de facto admission that justice is not necessarily being done. Furthermore, many argue that racial profiling and police brutality are as rife as ever, and speaking two years after the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Sharpton yet again finds himself a witness to that fact, saying “[t]alk is simply not enough, we must implement legislation and reform that results in a shift in the way our nation polices and treats its citizens” (ibid., online). The present generation can be heard asking when this oft-repeated mantra will bring results, and just when this effective legislation will appear, especially when Sharpton says “[m]ovements don't happen overnight” (ibid., online) - not a message for the energy and impatience of youth.

Despite the laudable NAN Youth Move initiative to involve young people in the community, many do not believe that these exhortations or the strategies of the groups have any effect, because the discrimination and brutality goes on. Critically, therefore, one is left wondering just how much these large organisations are in touch with, or in tune with, contemporary grassroots activism, and whether they truly appeal to the 'ordinary citizen', the young, the working class, the poor. The radical, progressive, and leftist politics, policies, and strategies of many grassroots groups are absent in these major groups, which appear 'respectable' by comparison, and closer to government, as their leaders repeat the same old messages of arbitration, negotiation, and reform, again and again. As long ago as 2005, Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Danny Glover imagined a 21<sup>st</sup> century update of the 1980s diverse coalition model in 'Visualizing a Neo-Rainbow'. They presented a macro-political vision of inclusion and alignment with the Democratic Party *and* the left, setting out the strategic needs of such an organisation, such as diverse membership and leadership, a unified policy embracing racial, gender, and economic justice, and a democratic foreign policy. Critically, though, the model conceives of operating both with and independently of the Democratic Party, running candidates for office whilst remaining aligned with grassroots social justice movements, building policy and strategy from the ground up. Anchored in local issues, the organisation would support local groups, analyse community power systems, and select potential candidates for office who represent real local issues. This vision therefore involves the often isolated left and progressive grassroots movements, and gives them the chance to take a share of political power. This is a vision which chimes with pluralism, whereby macro politics is interconnected with grassroots activism, something the authors claim the original Rainbow model failed to achieve, through "its inability to build a democratic organization that was sufficiently rooted in social movements and independent of one personality" (2005, online). Twelve years on, this still applies to RPC and NAN.

The other notable organisation, the NAACP, can claim significant successes in its long history, but in recent years has suffered internal leadership, membership, and financial problems, as noted in Chapter 1. Its renowned Legal Defense and Educational Fund has underpinned a number of individual successes, and its Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO) program for high school youth is praiseworthy, but in the end it faces the same questions. Doubts remain about the effectiveness of its (similar) strategies, its appeal across the class spectrum, its message to youth, and its connection with grassroots or radical agendas.

Beyond these well-known organisations there are others active in the civil rights and social justice field, large and small, sometimes long-established operations, with aims which resonate with the acceptance of diversity and equality, the central tenets of pluralism. So-called 'umbrella' associations bring together direct action groups large and small in order to support, link up and develop social justice activism. Walter Mignolo, discussed in Chapter 1, cites the World Social Forum (WSF) as an example of one such group working towards the ideals of inclusion and equality (2010a). The US Social Forum (USSF), a branch of the WSF, brings together well-known organisations alongside grassroots activists from all ethnicities, races, and classes, together with artists, scholars, and others. For example, on the National Planning Committee in 2015 there were some high profile names (Amnesty International USA and Occupy Theory), large labour groups (the National Day Laborers Organizing Network, and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations), plus a range of other interests, including a leftist and anti-capitalist presence, and religious, environmental, and feminist groups.

These organisations provide valuable and practical services, acting as gateways to the sharing of knowledge, expertise and legal advocacy, publicising causes and agendas, fostering collaborations, and seeking and distributing funding. For the USSF there is an overarching theme of re-imagining the world in a new way, with different priorities and values, in line with the voices explored in Chapter 1. The title of this chapter is taken from the 2015 forum which “demands another world and another system that transforms the racialized, gendered, and class violence, militarism, and destruction of today’s global capitalism into a cooperative, just, democratic, sustainable, and egalitarian society” (US Social Forum 2015, online). Adrienne Maree Brown, a national co-ordinator for the 2010 forum, calls for not just practical community support but also for “emotional activism” to bring about this new vision for the future, saying:

let go of the way this world is, let go of thinking about power in the way that people who want you to be powerless have taught you to think about power...and start to think about... a new awakening... where you hold power within your community

(Southern Shift TV 2010, online)

This echoes the pluralist idea of power distributed across communities, where the 'new awakening' is an epiphany, a conversion, which opens up a worldview transcending imagined divisions of race, class, and gender to claim that power, so forming the foundation for the ultimate transformation of society into an ideal democracy of inclusion and equality. Thus a key supporter of USSF is the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, whose groups “support each other's local struggles and collaborate with international allies who share our vision and commitment to building a transformative social justice movement beyond borders” (2016, online). The emphasis here is upon erasing boundaries of perceived difference and creating links between groups and causes. These are the sentiments behind the interdisciplinary, cross-cultural work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, cited at the head of this chapter saying “[l]et's figure it out together. Let's cross each other's borders” (2005, p.83), and akin to the seminal work of Gloria Anzaldúa, still regularly debated at the conferences of *El Mundo Zurdo* (the left-handed world). These are the transformative moments of personal growth envisioned in the HHBE programme, and those championed by the cultural activism of writers such as Sofia Quintero.

In spite of the practical support and valuable networking features of the USSF, however, it is not a direct action organisation but, as the statements and examples above indicate, rather a vehicle for exploring a new vision, a different worldview, and for developing a theory of transition to this ideal. For example, after the 2015 forum the website appealed for feedback and contributions towards this transition to a different future, from political, social, economic and environmental perspectives, envisioning an 'Assembly of Assemblies' in 2016 to draw this together as an official strategy. At the time of writing, in early 2017, there is no indication that this is about to occur. Until that happens the USSF remains very much on the margins of the social and political justice discourse. Moreover, as important as its function is, it is a long way from the workplace, and the infrequency of its forums (in 2007, 2010, and 2015) does not allow for the urgency called for in responding to current issues of oppression. Organisations such as this provide stimulating debate, but essentially remain as supportive, inspiring, theoretical frameworks somewhat removed from the front line.

There are, however, examples of regional umbrella groups which have achieved practical successes. Two examples are the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ) and the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON).

SNEEJ brought together diverse groups sharing common problems in local areas, creating a larger, more effective operation. The Latino/a Alliance of Lead Better joined with the black Waverly Baptist Church and forced the relocation of a lead smelting company in West Dallas after tests proved pollutants were causing health problems and contaminating properties (Cordova et al. 2000). Then MIWON was the first multiethnic network of immigrant workers, comprised of five different, low-wage ethnic groups in Los Angeles committed to the struggle for justice and the human and legal rights of immigrant workers (MIWON 2016, online). Groups such as these, however, are usually modest in scale, have specific agendas and often a limited lifespan, and as such exert no influence or impact beyond the communities involved.

Indeed, across the US there are vast numbers of local community or regional social justice groups and other activist initiatives, with single or multiple issue agendas, short-lived or longer-lasting, often operating in isolation, but sometimes collaborating with other groups, many inclusive of diverse membership to varying degrees, but almost all small and under the national radar, just like the regional umbrella groups above. Some were selected as examples for the thesis, but turned out to be defunct in 2016 when detailed analysis was embarked upon. Some had experienced earlier successes, but seem to have lost momentum, as visible signs of progress were few and far between. Though not surprising, it does not necessarily mean that activism has ceased in these areas, since other initiatives are frequently being formed. This is a critical point to keep in mind, that there will always be a turnover of such groups, a shifting undercurrent which exists below the national consciousness. John Garcia, in Chapter 1, noted the continued existence of local activism amongst diverse Latino/a groups, and this was corroborated by Felicia Pride in respect of diverse community groups, in Chapter 3.

Many of these groups have only limited or localised effects, if they have any success at all. There are others, however, which have a greater impact. Some of these have achieved successes at state and federal level, many embrace diversity and equality and, importantly, some have the potential for more involvement in a broader movement, through alliances with other activist groups which seek to energise and mobilise the present generation. The first example is the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), led by public interest lawyer Bryan Stevenson, which acts on behalf of poor defendants and prisoners being denied equitable treatment by the justice system. The EJI website records a number of successful cases on excessive and unfair sentencing, miscarriages of justice, and the “reversal, relief or release for over 115

wrongly condemned prisoners on death row” (2016a, online). There have been further successes before the Supreme Court, including a “recently won...historic ruling that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for all children 17 or younger are unconstitutional” (ibid., online). “In the American criminal justice system, wealth - not culpability - shapes outcomes” asserts the website, noting that it is the poor who cannot post bail, who spend a long time in prison awaiting a lawyer, and who face jail for not being able to pay fines or costs. Further, only 24 states have public defence systems (2016b, online), so the poor in other states can find themselves literally defenceless. Racial profiling, bias, and presumption of guilt result in unsafe and often excessive sentences, calling to mind the discussion of the war on drugs in Chapter 1, and the underlying institutional racism highlighted by CRT. EJI also works to combat suspect practices by the prosecution, biased jury selection, prisoners abused by guards, and the denial of constitutional rights. On the latter point, a current lawsuit has been filed against an Alabama felony disenfranchisement law which bars former prisoners convicted of felony from voting. The grounds for the challenge are that such law is “racially discriminatory, unconstitutional, and violates the Voting Rights Act” (2016c, online).

In terms of this thesis, one can say that EJI is aligned with the CRT stance against institutional racism and racial profiling, and has a strong focus on the core tenets of pluralism. It represents those without a voice who are poor and disadvantaged, and has a multiethnic, multiracial board and staff, who take on cases across race and ethnicity, including white clients. Its diversity extends to religious affiliations, standing against the anti-Muslim trend since 9/11, which shows marked evidence of race-based oppression by racist individuals and public authorities (2016d, online). However commendable the radical aims and the successes of EJI at state and federal level, it nonetheless operates independently, as do other groups with overlapping agendas, and therefore the body of research, knowledge, and expertise across these groups is dispersed and uncoordinated. The Prison Policy Initiative (PPI), for instance, is one of several groups working independently on prison reform. PPI carries out in-depth research on prison population statistics by state, exposing a variety of inequitable conditions, regulations, and excessive sentencing. These statistics are used to both support and lead advocacy campaigns, which have resulted in a series of successes recorded on the website. One example concerns the many prisons replacing traditional visiting rooms with poor quality video facilities, at prohibitive cost to already poor families and without consultation. PPI has

won cases in two states on this matter and is campaigning for national policy and regulation to protect the rights of prisoners and visitors (2016, online). Where organisations such as PPI, EJI and others share some common aims and issues, but continue to work separately, then the potential impact of co-ordinated efforts will be lost.

On a more collaborative note, the Advancement Project, a more recently-formed advocacy group, believes that “structural racism...[can]...begin to be dismantled by multi-racial grassroots organizing focused on changing public policies and supported by lawyers and communications strategies” (2016a, online). The group practise this collaborative, targeted approach which they claim, with some justification, is a more effective way of overturning inequitable law and policy than activism which operates in isolation or without high level legal analysis from expert and experienced lawyers. For example, the website reports a number of successes in overturning restrictive voter registration at state level, in their pursuance of equity in democracy, protecting voter rights, challenging state practices and unfair district boundaries. In the education field, the project campaigns for equitable funding for disadvantaged communities and challenges the 'schoolhouse to jailhouse' track, exacerbated by police presence in schools and the zero tolerance policies denounced as counterproductive by Luis Rodríguez in Chapter 3. Another strand of activity is equity for immigrants, whose plight is inextricably bound up with racial justice, as large numbers face the stark reality of racial profiling, exposed in Chapter 1, “reckless deportation policies” (2016b, online), and many other obstacles in the pathway to citizenship.

In evaluating this project, one can say that its scale and visibility is increasing, and it benefits from well-known and influential personalities on its board, including the entertainer and social activist Harry Belafonte and the labour movement activist Joe Alvarez, a former director of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. In terms of diversity, it has a multiethnic, multiracial board, staff, and agenda, and in its relatively short history has achieved successful outcomes at state level in challenging and changing restrictive voter registration practices across 11 states in the last 10 years. The project provides an essential function within activism at both local, state and federal levels, seeking to extend its impact and engage with radical activist groups. It has worked with large civil rights organisations such as the NAACP, and its name will crop up in connection with

other activist organisations examined below, following its inclination to play an even wider role.

There are numerous other advocacy groups with different operating styles, such as the Trusted Advocate model, described by Michelle Kondo (2008). Whilst the Advancement Project may be more suited to supporting existing groups with a certain level of confidence, togetherness and focus, the Trusted Advocate model may be more appropriate for fragile, small communities with inter-cultural mistrust and inexperience in dealing with public authorities. The essence of this approach, used successfully in Seattle, is that the advocates themselves are respected members of their particular racial or ethnic local community, and can communicate equally with local citizens and public authorities. They acknowledge the different cultural protocols and first language of the community members and gain trust by giving basic, practical support and advice on everyday issues, such as preparing for job interviews, completing government forms, and dealing with institutions, for example schools, where members may have concerns about cultural differences in religion, diet, uniform, and so on. In forums the advocates use ethnic or racial sub-groups, with a common first language, to draw out their concerns, and these are discussed in the plenary session, with translators if required. With the recognition of common needs across different groups, advocates employ multiracial, multiethnic focus groups for specific issues, in order to build group consciousness, seek consensus on priorities, and develop a critical understanding of oppression politics (in a similar way to the progression within HHBE, discussed in Chapter 3). The advocates encourage political engagement, including putting forward candidates in local elections, like the model group envisaged by Fletcher and Glover discussed earlier. The vision is that, in time, the group will understand “the invaluable lesson that dialogue alone cannot reconcile structural differences” (Sohng & Chun 2005, p.40) and enter into joint activism, alliances and collaborations with others, all the time developing wider social and political consciousness. Laudable as this advocacy model is, however, it is but another small, isolated example and, as for so many groups, remains localised and with no impact beyond the community.

In summary, beyond the major civil rights groups, a picture emerges of a mass of local and regional radical activism, largely working independently, unseen and unheard of, occasionally achieving small successes, but having no national impact. Some of these groups may be

associated with umbrella organisations and some may benefit from advocacy support, but even then any successes remain invisible at a national level. However, some of these advocacy groups existing below the national consciousness have had a bigger impact and have developed a broad base of knowledge and skills and, critically, some actively seek to extend their influence by collaborating with and supporting broader direct action movements. The Advancement Project, for example, has allied itself with the Black Lives Matter phenomenon, and this movement has also directly energised and mobilised a range of hitherto invisible direct action groups to act in its name and broaden its impact, as discussed later in this chapter. Before that, the chapter now turns to some contrasting, alternative, ‘top-down’ initiatives which have also sought to address some of the problems of the poor and disadvantaged, largely minority group citizens.

### ***Government-Inspired Initiatives***

Much has been written in the thesis about voices from the margins rising up to make themselves heard, to express their worldviews or their politics, or to highlight their circumstances, and often to expose their oppression and their needs. This chapter has focused on a number of social justice organisations which seek to represent the marginalised and disadvantaged, and to bring about changes in government strategy, policy, and law at every level, yet they have achieved limited success in the face of ongoing, systemic problems and cultural resistance. However, neither the government, of whatever hue, nor various philanthropic foundations, nor even businesses, are ignorant of the plight of the disadvantaged or the forms of oppression they face. Philanthropy has a long history, and large numbers of foundations and businesses give vital support to individuals, groups and projects across a range of areas, including the demographic segment under consideration in this thesis. Indeed, this often represents an important source of funding for groups such as those discussed in this chapter.

This section now therefore looks at government-inspired initiatives launched in recent decades which seek to address some of the social and economic factors marginalising and trapping many in the poor and dysfunctional communities described in Chapter 1. These initiatives have, to varying degrees, sought to listen to the needs of the disadvantaged and respond to their problems, and will be evaluated in terms of their success in this regard. There are two broad bands of projects, and these will be considered in turn.

Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs) began in the late 1980s and are intended to be enterprises which respond to needs at local community level. Run mainly by national or international foundations, CCIs aim to improve the lives of children, young people and families in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, by creating resident engagement and by building community links with a range of public and private agencies, in order to enhance the provision of public facilities. As the name suggests, CCIs were involved in continuous and detailed interactions with multiple individuals and agencies at the same time, which proved very difficult to manage, often resulting in very limited progress. In 1997 Matthew Stagner and Angela Duran found it impossible to properly evaluate the initiative partly for this reason, but also because there was inadequate supporting theory of change with specific success criteria, and there was significant variation in the aims, priorities, and operating methods of the various projects. They had to conclude that “[d]ata about the effectiveness of comprehensive initiatives are scarce. The evidence that is available indicates that many past efforts have achieved only modest successes” (1997, p.139). Then, almost 10 years later, Karen Fulbright-Anderson finds that “[l]essons about the longer-term outcomes and effectiveness of these initiatives are limited” (2006, p.10).

Efforts have been made to prescribe an evaluation model. The University of Kansas produced a CCI evaluation model, in its Community Toolbox (CTB), which is detailed, long-winded, and theoretical, feeling a long way from frontline practice (CTB 2016, online). Finally, in 2010, Kubisch et al., for the Aspen Institute, concluded that most CCIs “have not produced the degree of community transformation envisioned by their designers...[and]...few, if any, were able to demonstrate widespread changes in child and family well-being or reductions in the neighborhood poverty rate” (p.10). Two sections of its report were titled “Progress Requires Better Alignment of Mission, Action, Capacity, Collaboration and Learning” and “Clarity about Mission, Desired Outcomes, and Operating Principles” (ibid., p.11), which covers just about every aspect, and reflects the lack of success which the report reveals. The report ends: “it is critical to identify lessons as we go along and incorporate them into the next round of work” (ibid., p.12). Such a damning report underlines the inefficacy of the whole project and begs for a complete re-think.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are autonomous, not-for-profit organisations originating some 50 years ago in response to the dire conditions in many inner city areas,

often endured by disadvantaged minority group citizens. In contrast with major federal development programmes, CDCs focus on the regeneration of specific local neighbourhoods, mainly in cities, but also in rural areas, by working with local government, private enterprise, and the local community groups and citizens. Their aim is to engage with and bring together local government and the community in identifying needs, and source business interests to deliver projects which will improve the conditions and the public services in these areas. Funding comes from government, supplemented by foundations, businesses, and sometimes religious institutions. In effect, CDCs are a way in which private enterprise can be supported in bringing development into low income areas. Over the years there have been many thousands of them, some large and long-lasting, but the great majority modest in scale, with a small staff. Historically, CDCs have focused heavily on construction, mainly affordable housing development, with a small percentage developing shopping centres, industrial and office buildings, and public facilities, such as day care, medical, and community centres (Steinbach 2003; Walker 2002).

In many neighbourhoods there have been clear benefits and improvements in living conditions and community facilities, which has in some cases stimulated private inward investment, with consequential employment opportunities. Improved environments also contribute towards reducing crime levels and increasing safety. Carol Steinbach says that “[m]any community development organizations march behind the CDC banner” (2003, p.7), and claims that CDCs underpinned “newfound community development activism by faith based organizations in the 1990s...reminiscent of church participation in the civil rights movement” (ibid., p.10). Flaminio Squazzoni (2009) cites a community mobilised into action to resist an unpopular planned development in an area transport system. In this example the community proposed and achieved, via a CDC, an alternative plan for the site, including a health clinic, a child development centre, a public library, and housing for senior citizens and families. 700 new jobs were created in a total inward investment of \$150 million.

Behind the success stories, however, there remain a number of concerns about the true impact of CDCs. Their heavy focus on physical and economic development, very largely housing, leaves “little time or energy to promote citizen involvement in political or governmental issues” (Steinbach 2003, p.5), that is, of bringing the local community into regular dialogue with local government agencies. In a way, this is convenient for CDCs, who are wary of

“alienating the powerful businesses and governmental interests with whom they partner” (ibid., p.5). Christopher Walker agrees, saying that “CDCs sometimes resist appeals for a more confrontational posture toward local elected and administrative officials” (2002 p.10). Funders have priorities which may differ from those of the CDC and, as a result, CDCs are accused of allowing the power of money in the form of government support and private company profits to dominate their agenda. Accordingly, they are depicted as being token government support for poor communities, not challenging local political policy and overlooking the underlying social and economic causes of poverty. In her study, Valerie Hunt found that “CDC directors, both those surveyed and interviewed, unanimously believe that funding priorities are based on short-term, easily-visible project outcomes almost to the exclusion of the process involved” (2007, p.7). Such short-termism and lack of engagement between communities and local government undermines the basic premise of CDCs and precludes any long-term, meaningful progress.

Walker states that there is insufficient investment by local government and enterprises, so that CDCs “are cash-strapped, and compared to some private sector developers, they often lack capacity to bring projects on line efficiently, at low cost” (2002, p10). Since projects must be financially viable, it becomes difficult to lure developers into the poorest areas and those most in need. As a result, Steinbach points out that in many cases the CDCs are helping working-class families to become somewhat better off and move into the lower middle class, rather than helping the poorest. Furthermore, in this tight financial position, any attempt by the CDC to address this problem will leave it financially vulnerable, especially if there is over-reliance on one or two funders, threatening the very existence of the CDC and its projects (Bratt & Rohe 2007). In the end, CDCs have not reached the scale required to reduce poverty levels after decades of underinvestment, and “have not reversed the market forces and economic restructuring which caused poverty to increase until the mid-1990s” (Steinbach 2003, p.19), and indeed poverty remains a major issue today, as outlined in Chapter 1.

In spite of their shortcomings, the theory behind CDCs is on the face of it alluring. They are, after all, “uniquely positioned within the political economy to provide both tangible products and services” (Bratt & Rohe 2007, p.75) and Hunt noted that the long-term goal of the CDCs in her study remained “to increase citizen access to, and interaction within, the political process and arena” (Hunt 2007, p.8). Squazzoni considers the best case scenario,

where CDCs “can benefit from being socially embedded...[and from]... their capacity of producing social capital and collective mobilization, their cultural roots in communities, their capacity of combining social and economic objectives” (2009 p.510). The characteristics of this ideal resonate with the aims of community-based activist groups in this thesis and with the notion of claiming power through mobilisation in numbers to confront agencies and demand change. One is drawn to imagine that, with more resources, an agenda truly representing the priorities of local people, and with a commitment to engage with underlying social justice issues and challenge the political priorities and budgets of local government, CDCs might have a truly worthwhile role. The evidence to date, though, is that CDCs suffer from fraught relationships and conflicts of interest between local people, community activist groups, local government, and business partners, and often engage in limited, short-term projects which do not address the underlying social, political and economic issues. As it stands, therefore, they fall short, leaving the social justice activist movement to carry the fight for improving the lot of the poorest.

### ***Breeding Grounds for Youth and Working Class Activism***

With the top-down initiatives failing to live up to their billing, the argument now returns to some relatively new, but positive and developing ‘bottom-up’ initiatives which act as a breeding ground for engagement in social justice activism. Through the education of their respective target populations in oppression politics and systems of power, these groups aim to develop their critical consciousness, awaken their potential to influence change, and inspire them to challenge injustices and inequalities in their communities and beyond. The first of these organisations is Youth Speaks (YS). Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, YS is at this point a relatively small initiative, but with continually expanding national programmes and global aims. As its name suggests, it is directly aimed at present day youth, with a focus on the spoken word, and it organises poetry slams, delivers writing and MC performance workshops, a range of school programmes from visits to residencies (including after school and weekend events), and theatre productions. Although the aims of YS are educational and developmental, it goes beyond initiatives like HHBE in that its target audience is broader, including young adults beyond school age, and it has a wider agenda with a consciously leftist political edge, evidenced below, running over 70 national programmes addressing key forms of oppression. The board and staff of YS are from diverse cultures and backgrounds,

and include some successful business people as well as well-known cultural commentators like Jeff Chang and Roberta Uno.

Youth Speaks is aligned with the central tenets of pluralism (the acceptance of difference and the equality of existence) and with the storytelling element of Critical Race Theory (CRT), both discussed in Chapter 1, in believing that every voice is valid and that “the life of the students serves as the primary text” (2016a, online). It is closely linked with the oral tradition and its contemporary expression in hip-hop culture, asserting that “oral poetry is helping to define the new American Voice” (2016b, online). The core beliefs and pedagogy of YS aim to nurture and inspire this new voice towards critical awareness and community activism for social and political justice. For YS, individuals gain self-worth by being actively listened to, and self-confidence by telling their own stories. They are empowered to express and defend their voice (on stage), and some may discover an inner strength for mentoring and helping others (the journey Espe made in *Picture Me Rollin'* in Chapter 2), and perhaps eventually realise a potential for leadership. The school programmes seek to build critical consciousness by 'meeting them where they are', as Quintero would say, working to “draw out the stories of the students” (2016a, online) before suggesting tailored, individual programmes of reading, equipping them to “draw enriching parallels between their personal narratives and those of Ernest Hemingway, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison” and others (ibid., online). Just as Dulce, Maite and Isoke did for Espe. In some programmes, such as *Queeriosity*, diversity is celebrated, incorporating the social and political texts of writers such as James Baldwin, Octavia Butler, and Gloria Anzaldúa; and the use of political hip-hop material helps to solidify the idea of students “apply[ing] their voices as creators of societal change” through community activism (2016c, online).

The national YS programmes address key issues of deprivation and oppression, in projects such as 'Raise Up', which explores the continuing drop-out rate in public schools, and 'I Want to Live', where young men share their experiences of racial profiling and police brutality. In the latter programme, for example, there are numerous testimonies to 'stop and frisk' incidents marked by racism from white police officers, with comments such as “[w]hat are you doin' out here, boy? Blacks are not allowed in this part of town” and “I can't find nothing on you now, but one day I will” to Kyndall Kirkwood and De Angelo Mitchell respectively (2016d,

online). Other examples are collaborations, such as ‘The Bigger Picture’, working with the University of California - San Francisco Center for Vulnerable Populations with a mission to end Type 2 diabetes in young people, by working to change the social and environmental factors causing the problem; and the 'Off/Page Project' with the Center for Investigative Reporting, revealing and publicising the solitary confinement, sometimes for months, of young offenders. Finally, 'Brave New Voices' is working to build a global network of like-minded organisations, with to date over 120 groups across 40 states seeking to heighten awareness of deprivation and social justice issues through performance of poetry, song and dance.

Although YS is not a direct action and protest organisation as such, just as the Advancement Project discussed earlier, its aims, projects, and practical activities are central to the development of young people in understanding and addressing the key issues of oppression at the heart of this thesis. The starting point is the challenge to passive, negative, or unaware youth locked into a cycle of apathy and unrealised potential, as YS aims to combat “illiteracy, isolation, alienation, and silence” (2016c, online). Although not recent figures, the demography of youth served by YS in San Francisco, for example, is very diverse in terms of ethnicity and race, and 81% of school age students are eligible for free school lunch, so it is reaching into the 'voices from below' in poorer urban schools, and promoting the notion of an inclusive, egalitarian future. The 2015 statistics from the New York operation, now known as Urban Word, indicate a similar mix (2016, online).

Groups like YS fill the void left by the perceived or actual decline of traditional youth organisations, and seek to restore a sense of community and, like the traditional groups, act as a stepping stone in the transition from high school to independent young adulthood. It provides a safe place where young people can speak their minds and find space for reflection, and prepares them for practical activity in the community and beyond. By embracing hip-hop culture YS draws in interested youth and uses hip-hop ways of acquiring knowledge and understanding, like HHBE, creating an organic, incremental process of connecting the spoken word with an affirmation and maturation of the self and the self in community, and preparing youth with a critical consciousness capable of “deconstruct[ing] dominant narratives” (2016e, online) and engaging in social and political justice activism. This is a personal, emotional

journey, the 'new awakening' of USSF, and stands in stark contrast with the top-down initiatives discussed above, which are rational, prescribed, procedural, and bureaucratic.

In some ways the aims of YS dovetail with those of the Hip Hop Caucus, an organisation which strives for a culture and practice of voting as part of a civic lifestyle, working on issues of oppression, and seeking to empower volunteers and develop potential leaders. Then, in *Culturally Relevant Teaching: Hip-Hop Pedagogy in Urban Schools* (2012), Darius Prier discusses a venture in an unnamed city neighbourhood, giving it the pseudonym 'Open Mic Empowerment Center' (OMEC), which also has some similarities with YS. OMEC is an after-school club which uses all the hip-hop elements to promote physical fitness, a healthy lifestyle and, crucially, to develop skill sets for making good life choices and becoming empowered, and potentially a leader. It seeks to achieve this through critical introspection and reflection, and counsels against the commercial hip-hop values of narcissism, misogyny, homophobia and greed, advising that young artists “rap about fictitious money, cars, women they don't have as a cover up in avoiding more life pressing issues” (p.162). Students are encouraged to express their own feelings, fears, and uncertainties, to talk and work through real and difficult situations they are in, and reflect upon ways forward and the path to self-determination (again, the journey Espe makes). Like YS, OMEC is a bridge between high school and young adulthood with the ultimate aim of nurturing critical consciousness.

These youth-centred groups have a clear, radical agenda to develop the adults of tomorrow into socially and politically aware citizens who actively engage in politics within their communities and beyond. The second organisation promoting social justice activism, Class Action (CA), intersects significantly with YS both in its aims and activities. One of the central threads running through this thesis is the matter of class, which intersects with every other theme and merits consideration in its own right, not unlike the discussion on feminism in Chapter 2. In earlier chapters, bell hooks mused on the fracturing of community and the class divide, Mignolo and Luis Rodríguez contemplated creative voices for societal change emanating from the poor and oppressed, and Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire deliberated upon the cultural hegemony which perpetuates a disadvantaged minority group underclass, subjugated and alienated by systemic and institutional racism. CA recognises that class is on a par with race and gender as a label which can create such tensions, conflicts, inequalities and oppression:

Historically, ignoring the role of class has weakened movements for social and economic justice. Successful efforts at creating a fairer and more sustainable society must be broad-based and include people of every race, age, gender, and geographic area – and class. Class segregation remains one of the most persistent, widespread, and under-recognized factors in society today

(Class Action 2016a, online)

Class Action was incorporated in 2004 after some years of cross-class dialogue on social and economic justice. Its mission is to enable individuals, businesses, and institutions to understand the existence and effects of class barriers and privilege and then, by seeing through a class lens, to build bridges across the class divide in order to promote equality, and economic and social justice. It also has a key focus on the intersections of class with race, as well as gender and religious affiliation. In order to achieve its aims it develops and runs workshops, provides online programmes, educational modules, and consultancy services, and supplies multi-media materials, all supported by a significant library of written and visual material about class.

The Class Action education programme works with over 50 higher education institutions (including HBCUs, community colleges, and so-called elites, such as the Harvard Graduate School of Education); with more than 20 high schools (public and private); with area education departments; and with progressive teaching groups (including the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCORE), and Teachers 4 Social Justice). The higher education programme explores how classist policies, conscious or otherwise, deter or prevent working class and poor students from applying to an institution. The discussions in Chapter 3 on racial and ethnic institutional discrimination, and the efforts within HHBE to prepare poor minority group students for college, have significant similarities with class discrimination, as George Yúdice (previously cited) noted that “students are routed by class (highly correlated with race)” (2006, p.229). Class Action aims to create a “national model for inclusive and responsive higher education” (2016b, online) and is planning regional versions, as a way to make sustained change at institutional level. It also runs workshops for first-generation college students to tell their stories. These aims strongly resemble those of CRT.

The high school education programme, also used in after-school projects, resonates in several ways with the aims, and the delivery methods, of HHBE. For example, in the experiential module 'Created Equal' teachers explore class differences amongst the students, where some may be more privileged or better off (potentially raising feelings of embarrassment or guilt) and some from poorer backgrounds (with feelings of shame or anger). The prime focus is on civil exchanges, discussing the relationship between wealth and happiness, what is of real value and what brings fulfilment, in order to develop self-awareness and self-reflection amongst the students, leading to an ultimate dialogue about social and economic justice. As one of the module authors says, “[w]e are literally trying to create communities in classrooms and schools where we *are* all in this together, we all deserve respect, and it is not easy for anyone” (CA italics) (2016c, online).

Class Action brings the intersection of race and class into all of its education products and services. The publication *The Color of Wealth* (Lui et al. 2006) presents what it calls the cycle of socialisation and the cycle of liberation. The former identifies the variety of influences from birth to adulthood which can lead to internalised prejudice and assumption, passed on from generation to generation. The latter identifies, challenges, and unravels these values and beliefs, and presents a way to form new worldviews with like-minded others and work to bring about change. Again, this reflects the progression within HHBE. Workshops such as the 'Color of Class' and 'Race and Class Intersections' utilise this material. At the time of writing Class Action is exploring other approaches to providing anti-racism education to working class communities.

Race and class share the common thread of segregation, presenting a double barrier, literal and cultural, to cross-racial, cross-class collaboration. The emergence of the minority group middle class has brought with it the intraethnic, intraracial, status-based conflicts of interest highlighted by Houston Baker in Chapter 1. John Betancur and Douglas Gills, in *The Collaborative City: Opportunities and Struggles for Blacks and Latinos in U.S. Cities* (2000), note that elite members of local racial or ethnic groups, who may be consulted in plans for development, often find themselves forced to comply with the overall plan even if it disadvantages poorer members from their group. In effect, the divide and rule principle is in operation, where the self-interest of the elite deprives the masses of “an effective institutional

voice in governance” (p.33), the result being an “apparent...network of political and economic elites across racial and nationality lines formed to dominate poor and working class people” (p.11). An example of this is the urban regentrification programme, which stretches public budgets and reduces investment in poorer neighbourhoods, bringing to mind the Ernesto Quiñonez novel *Bodega Dreams* (2000). Anti-hero Willie Bodega, a former Young Lord who used to keep clean and protect his local Spanish Harlem neighbourhood, now works towards his vision of regenerating run-down local properties, of being a responsible landlord, offering affordable tenancies, helping the poorest, and funding the education of young people. By improving the area, he hopes to attract further inward investment from local, ethnic middle-class business people. In other words, exactly the sort of development which should be led by equitable and responsible local authorities. In this case, however, Bodega's money is from drug dealing operations, which he sees as no different from the corruption amongst and between the powerful politicians and business interests running the city. Bodega symbolises community consciousness and his death represents its erasure by those seduced by money, power, and self-interest, by the politics of government agencies, intertwined with and influenced by business interests, and by the self-satisfied middle classes. These people and institutions are those which allow hidden processes to disadvantage the less well-off, and to thwart and frustrate local activist groups.

The Class Action social change programme works with over 40 social justice organisations, including the Midwest Social Forum (a regional branch of the USSF), the Advancement Project, Race Forward, and Black Lives Matter, all discussed in this chapter, plus other groups encompassing a range of social issues, such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Institute For Policy Studies, and other groups concerned with diversity, ecology and the environment. Through the 'Activist Class Cultures Project' Class Action provides 7 workshop modules tailored to the needs of the social justice groups, including the critical skills of recruitment, class inclusiveness, public persuasion, activating inactive members, and resolving internal conflict.

It is clear that Class Action is a responsive and actively developing organisation which has close alignment with the themes central to this thesis, such as equality and diversity, the storytelling and systemic discrimination aspects in CRT, and the aims of HHBE and activist social justice groups. That said, there are some opportunities which could extend its impact. Firstly, it would benefit from greater direct engagement with working-class, mixed

community, urban, public high schools in order to show that its work supports the following statement: “[w]hy have we seen so few cross-class, multiracial movements in the United States? Class culture differences are one answer... A successful cross-class movement must have working-class cultural strengths in its bones” (2016d, online). Whilst it is important to bring understanding about class into *every* school environment, greater involvement in lower-class schools would give it credibility and support its aim, like HHBE, to educate the poorer students about class, race, and oppression politics, to arouse their critical consciousness, develop their sense of self-determination and empowerment, and encourage them to participate in social justice activism. Of the 21 schools on the Class Action list, 18 are private and expensive, albeit with a proportion of students on financial aid. Some of these 18 are either very small, part boarding, boys only, faith based or Quaker, and most are in prosperous, mainly white areas. Of the 3 public school areas, two are in the largely white, affluent towns of Hadley, MA. (Hopkins Academy) and Amherst, MA. (Regional High and Middle Schools), where white students constitute up to 83%, blacks no more than 8%, and Latino/as peak at 14% (Great Schools 2016, online). The only urban area entry is Robbinsdale, a district of Minneapolis, MN., and even this has a 76% white population (US Census Bureau 2010, online). The main public schools, however, do not reflect the district-wide racial and ethnic demographics. Though not in a deprived area, the racial and ethnic mix is pronounced, as indicated in this table, showing two of the five schools having black students as the main group, and a high proportion of subsidised lunches in three of the schools.

Name	Students	Website Rating (out of 10)	White	Black	Latino/a	Subsidised Lunch
Robbinsdale Middle	1341	2	31%	37%	16%	69%
Fair School Crystal Middle	533	3	46%	43%	5%	44%
Lakeview Elementary	394	1	35%	27%	15%	65%
Armstrong Senior High	2019	5	60%	20%	9%	35%
Cooper Senior High	1750	4	36%	37%	11%	60%

Source of Data: [greatschools.org](http://greatschools.org)

Given its agenda, there is much scope, and a real need, for CA to press its case with state and local education departments to be more involved in K-12 urban public schools.

Secondly, Class Action could extend its involvement with youth and socially conscious hip-

hop groups (such as YS), which would not only dovetail into its educational and social justice work, but would link these groups with the Foundations supporting its philanthropic aims to fund appropriate causes. Many of these socially and politically conscious groups in urban areas serve the poor and working class, and Jesse Cottrell highlights their struggles, often swamped beneath omnipresent commercial hip-hop, which is “worse than apolitical - it has become a tool to oppress and distract an entire generation of youth, especially youth of color” (2003, online), with its emphasis on egoism and materialism (issues discussed in Chapter 3). The ‘worthy’ causes of conscious hip-hop voices on the margins are therefore invisible to philanthropists, who are “cut off from the underground world of hip-hop” (ibid., online) yet, ironically, want to fund grassroots social change movements. Funding is a key consideration for all groups, yet “youth organizers have to do their work with little to no financial support” (ibid., online).

The marginalised young, the poor and working class, are key elements of any credible, broad-based social justice movement, as hooks, Mignolo, Rodríguez, and others have asserted. Indeed, they are the very people most often directly affected by systemic forms of oppression and those most unconvinced by the major civil rights groups discussed above. Youth Speaks, OMEC, the Hip Hop Caucus, and Class Action (the latter to a lesser extent at present, as indicated), together with initiatives such as HHBE, speak directly to the present generation and sow the seeds for social justice activism. The arrival of the last group considered in this chapter has grabbed the attention of these people, inspired them with its messages and strategies, offered them a chance to make themselves heard, and energised them into action, alongside many thousands of others.

### ***The Story of the Moment: Black Lives Matter***

The final group is the one gaining nearly all the publicity at the present moment, Black Lives Matter (BLM). Founders Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza, outraged by the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, formed BLM in 2013, inspired by the high-profile, people-driven Arab Spring rebellions and the Occupy Movement, as well as by lesser known US black activist groups. The very name caught the imagination of multiple leftist and radical groups, along with its connotation of the *Black Liberation Movement*, which BLM aspires to rebuild. In just four years the BLM network has

grown to 39 local chapters. More importantly, dozens of other black groups already in existence, but under the national radar, began to act in the name of BLM in respect of multiple issues relating to black oppression across the nation, encouraged by the BLM focus on local organising in preference to national leadership. This tactic speaks directly to all those groups discussed above, the grassroots activists, disenchanting youth, working class and 'ordinary' people, all disillusioned with the established, national, centralised groups, frustrated with their strategies, and angry at the lack of progress. To date the BLM network and its decentralised confederation of groups have energised and mobilised activists and other people from all backgrounds into action in large numbers, carrying out over 1500 demonstrations, rallies, marches and disruptions, representing the greatest surge in black activism for 45 years. The national and international media coverage has brought the names of some of these associated groups into the public consciousness, such as the Dream Defenders, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), Campaign Zero, and others.

Clearly, BLM is a fresh, dynamic movement which has struck a chord with a multitude of people, and is very different in a number of ways from the established civil rights groups. To begin with, its focus on grassroots activism and local community needs gives it a sense of a movement owned *by* the people, not merely an organisation working *for* them. This very much reflects the pluralist idea of power distributed, and exercised, throughout society, which lies at the heart of this thesis. For Chelsea Fuller of the Advancement Project, and a signatory of the Movement for Black Lives platform discussed below, local organizing is a powerful way to address real needs, such as housing, jobs, community policing, and other issues. She says “we can’t affect national legislation that comes down and affects local people if local people don’t push back and take a stand about what’s happening in local communities” (cited in Miller 2016, online). Tricia Rose agrees that the “best way to approach ghetto problems is to make community activist change” (2008, p.60) because problems such as crime and violence are often looked at from the outside and out of context, creating an “irresponsible and...immature understanding” (ibid., p.60) that community dysfunction is self-created when in fact “it is a vicious cycle of oppression and self-destruction” (ibid., p.60), as discussed at length in Chapter 1. BLM co-founder Garza therefore wants to “bring the margins of Black communities to the center of our strategy” (cited in Fletcher 2015, online) by championing and foregrounding local voices and local leaders, and not just in these disadvantaged

communities, but wherever there is oppression. This decentralised strategy belies the idea of a new movement leader that Yvonne Bynoe was vainly searching for from the hip-hop generation (discussed in Chapter 2), and sharply differs from the integrated, central planning of the established civil rights groups, led by often long-serving, black male figureheads. Local BLM leaders, by contrast, can act independently under the broad BLM platform, drawing in support using the power and immediacy of social networking to generate rapid responses to situations as they evolve. One only has to see the bystander videos posted in recent high profile deaths of black men such as Eric Garner in New York and Walter Scott in South Carolina to feel that power, and that outrage.

Though the concerns of BLM mirror those of other groups discussed in this chapter, their approach to these issues represents another key difference from the major organisations. For example, the most visible concern so far in the short history of BLM is police brutality and, critically, the focus is on the institutional, systemic racism at the root of this problem, in stark contrast with the appeasing, pacifying, and rational approach of the major civil rights groups, epitomised by Sharpton urging black people to 'look in the mirror'. BLM recognises that most violent crime is intraracial, white-on-white, or black-on-black, and acknowledges that many communities have crime problems. However, black people are disproportionately worse off, more often living in deprived areas and attending poor quality schools, and more likely to be targeted by police – this is the oppressive vicious cycle Rose noted above. Since black people are no more predisposed to violence or crime than anyone else, a significant part of the problem for the levels of brutality and shootings must be caused by racism within the law enforcement agencies. BLM goes further than NAN in their common call for transparent investigations of police shootings, demanding that government routinely publish statistics with a racial breakdown, to expose any underlying systemic racism. In the period January 2015 to July 2016, black people were 2.5 times more likely than white people to be fatally shot, and almost twice as likely to be unarmed (Washington Post 2016, online). Claims that higher crime rates in black neighbourhoods explain these figures are unproven, and “police reform advocates and researchers as well as The Post’s own analysis has [*sic*] consistently concluded that there is no correlation between violent crime and who is killed by police officers” (ibid., online). The connections between crime, violence, and the dire conditions endured in the poorest neighbourhoods were explored earlier.

At its heart BLM is expressing discontent with liberalism, and rejecting the respectability of the main civil rights groups, which follow the integrationist philosophy advocated by Dr. King. For Christopher Lebron, “[r]espectability politics is...a survival strategy...[and one which]...leaves the flow of power undisturbed” (2017, p.137). BLM believes that the present day organisations give the wrong message of self-help, the notion that blacks should take responsibility for their situation and clean up their own communities (a view expressed by a number of prominent black people such as Bill Cosby). This standpoint ignores the critical and historical systemic oppression at the root of the problem, as highlighted by CRT. “For nearly 140 years now,” says Brittney Cooper, “we have repeated this mantra of 'self-help,' stopping only in limited instances to question whether in fact it is we who are the problem” (2014, online). She directly points the finger at the major groups. “Al Sharpton...does not have the ear of this generation, and it is not his leadership that any of us...really needs” (ibid., online). She accuses him of not representing the people of Ferguson after the death of Michael Brown, but of being closer to the placating voice of Obama, whom BLM co-founder Cullors says affirmed that black lives matter “but didn’t follow up with substantive ways to ensure they do” (2016, online). Obama acknowledged discrimination and inequalities, but suggested that the persistent lower achievement of less well-off black people had created a “legacy of defeat” (Kendi 2017, online), thereby implicitly ignoring those very factors of oppression preventing progress. Like Sharpton, like Cosby, Obama encouraged African Americans to fight discrimination, take responsibility for their situation, be better parents, and end this so-called defeatist legacy. “Obama did not offer any childrearing or psychological lessons for the presumably parentally and psychologically superior white Americans” (ibid., online). The liberalism and lack of action from the government and the main civil rights groups is a driving force behind the emergence of BLM.

Politically, BLM is more closely aligned with the later civil rights era, the more radical period of Black Power and the Black Panthers, emerging as the façade of a broad, unified movement, associated with the passive resistance philosophy of Dr. King, crumbled. In the early civil rights era whites joined protests and were involved, albeit in modest numbers, both in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and local groups, and in much larger numbers in the 1963 march in Washington (Washington Post 2013, online). The mood shifted as the decade progressed, from the 1965 Watts riots through to the 1967 expulsion of whites from the SNCC (now no longer 'nonviolent'), as anger rose at the brutal resistance to change, and frustration grew with the limited scope of the major campaign.

Certainly the political position of BLM is very different from the larger mainstream groups. Though the focus is on local organising, the national aim is to “push the Democratic Party to acknowledge the concerns of Black people” (Garza cited in Fletcher 2015, online), and the website imagines a world where “Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise” (BLM 2016a, online). Besides police brutality, the BLM website addresses issues of concern for some of the more radical groups discussed above, such as public education as a virtual school-to-prison pipeline (a key concern for the Advancement Project and Youth Speaks), and affordable housing and gentrification (significant for Class Action). In 2016, M4BL published a detailed list of policy demands, setting out the underlying problems and the costed strategies to resolve them. This platform is the result of extended consultation with over 50 grassroots activist groups, and propels the BLM movement into the heart of the current civil rights discourse. It is a set of radical, leftist demands to address the key problems outlined in Chapter 1, and other issues discussed in this chapter. To fund these changes, the platform requires major reduction in national justice budgets, including enforcement and prison construction, and in military and defence spending, both on the home front and within foreign policy contracts, and demands the transfer of these funds into education, health, community improvement, and other needs (M4BL 2016a, online). The leftist stance is clear. Politically, the document calls for publicly funded elections, universal voter registration, and needs-based government budgeting. Economically, the demand is for funded job programmes, a guaranteed minimum wage, workers' rights protection, and a renegotiation of trade agreements to remove exploitation and protect local economies. Then there are calls for both universal, equitable health care, and properly funded public higher education. Critically, in accordance with the ethos of the movement, the platform puts local communities at the centre of the major policy changes it demands, seeing them consulted and involved in local policy and practice, such as local education policy (requiring the abandonment of zero-tolerance practices and the creation of culturally diverse and relevant education, as argued in Chapter 3). It is a vision of a functioning pluralist democracy.

BLM is at pains to embrace difference, does not tolerate sexism, misogyny, or homophobia, welcomes people of all ages, classes, and religious beliefs; and its LGBT presence releases it from dominant heteronormative thinking and male-centredness. In these respects, as Marcia

Chatelain says, it is “consciously resisting the mistakes of previous movements” (cited in Asoka 2015, online). The BLM website acknowledges this, welcoming “Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum...[who]...have been marginalized within Black liberation movements” (2016b, online). This is, however, *black* diversity, and the movement is unapologetically black. That is not to say that BLM values black lives above others, as local organizer Clyde McLemore points out, stating that “[w]hen we say 'black lives matter,' we know all lives matter, but we're the ones hurting in a controlled environment” (cited in Chicago Tribune 2016, online). Indeed, BLM sees itself as part of a wider movement against subjection and control, and therefore “in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined” (2016b, online). A fundamental belief of the movement is that the black struggle has historically played “a critical role...in inspiring and anchoring, through practice and theory, social movements for the liberation of all people” (ibid., online), asserting that “[w]hen Black people get free, everybody gets free” (ibid., online). This ultimate goal imagines a societal transformation whereby diversity is normalised, representing the end of white supremacist thinking, and the end of oppression politics. For example, at the 2016 conference of Race Forward, an organisation which researches systemic racism, is closely aligned with CRT, and espouses diversity and equality, the opening plenary session 'Multiracial Movements for Black Lives' featured Garza as a speaker, and moderator Michelle Alexander writes:

While centering black communities and resistance, #BlackLivesMatter galvanized not only black organizers, it challenged people of all races to consider, 'Whose side are you on?' Despite reactionary claims of divisiveness, communities of many races replied, 'We're on the FREEDOM side!' (Race Forward 2016, online)

The conference featured a diverse array of representatives from different cultural backgrounds, including Asian, Latino/a, Native American, and Jewish, and from groups inspired by BLM, such as #AsiansforBlackLives (2016, online). However, while BLM engages with, and in part inspires, the wider social justice movement, its core focus remains black-centred, and it stands by its statement that it is “appropriate and necessary to have strategy and action centered around Blackness without other non-Black communities of color,

or White folks...needing to find a place and a way to center themselves within it” (ibid., online). Unconditional support from non-blacks is welcome, where this backing remains de-centred, unquestioning, and uninvolved in matters of policy or practice. As activist James Washington says, he is proud to see white allies standing alongside blacks but “don't expect to understand racism as we do, white people. It's absolutely impossible. You have to be born in it to understand it” (cited in Chicago Tribune 2016, online). Indeed, people of all races and ethnicities do support it and join its actions, and a 2016 poll of 18-30 year olds revealed 85% black support, 67% Asian, 62% Latino/a, and 51% white. Most white people, though, consider the rhetoric of BLM encourages violence against the police, a view very largely not shared by black people (Associated Press 2016, online).

BLM is also not without high profile support, including tennis player Serena Williams who, as guest editor of *Wired* online magazine, wrote of self-affirmation and bringing equality and diversity into all areas of society (2015, online), and Beyoncé, whose video album *Lemonade* featured images of the mothers of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and Eric Garner holding pictures of their sons (Independent Journal Review 2016, online). Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, whose workforce is 94% white, rebuked employees who crossed out Black Lives Matter phrases on company walls and wrote All Lives Matter. His memo said "Black Lives Matter doesn't mean other lives don't – it's simply asking that the black community also achieves the justice they deserve" (cited in Nunez 2016, online), adding “crossing out something means silencing speech, or that one person's speech is more important than another's” (ibid., online). Some months later a large BLM sign was displayed at its HQ.

There is no doubt that BLM has already had an impact, both in the US and globally. Its focus on equality and individual rights at community level, whilst championing oppressed voices and engaging with their real needs, speaks to disadvantaged communities everywhere, not unlike conscious hip-hop discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, BLM sees itself as part of the global black family and is “aware of the different ways we are impacted or privileged as Black folk who exist in different parts of the world” (BLM 2016c, online). In the US, regular appearances in the national media have forced it into the popular consciousness and, in the countdown to the 2016 Presidential election, BLM activists confronted Democrats (including Hillary Clinton), forcing them to acknowledge its presence and respond with proposals.

It already has a number of successes, such as pressurising the federal government to investigate the deaths of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray (Stephen 2015, online), and being involved in the removal of police superintendent Garry McCarthy in Chicago, amidst apparent misrepresentation of events surrounding the fatal shooting of Laquan McDonald (Altman 2015, online). Tellingly, the anger and frustration driving community activism have brought change at both local and state levels, in Baton Rouge and South Carolina, where the deaths of Alton Sterling and Walter Scott resulted in compulsory use of police body cameras, something the main civil rights groups have not achieved in their campaigns (Ross & Lowery 2017, online). Again, the people power of BLM in Memphis and Atlanta raised \$33,000 to release black mothers unable to pay bail (Yan 2017, online), in contrast with the casework basis of the Equal Justice Initiative, discussed earlier. Actions have spread to college campuses, too. At the University of Missouri protesters forced the resignation of the president and the chancellor for failing to address allegations of racism on campus, and a co-ordinated wave of protests and sit-ins in over 70 colleges brought a range of results, such as an agreement to increase students of colour at Brandeis College, MA, and new courses on race relations plus tenured positions for black professors at Towson College, MD (Workneh 2015, online). At the University of California black students prompted the institution to pull out of a planned \$30 million investment in private prisons (ibid., online). From a global perspective, black activists around the world have taken inspiration today from BLM, harnessing technology to organise, disrupt, and confront in large numbers (Ruffin 2015, online). For example, not long after the Baltimore protests in the US, Ethiopians in Israel came out in force to demand an end to racist police brutality, after an Ethiopian member of the Israeli army was attacked by Israeli police while in full uniform (Khan 2015, online). There are further examples in Brazil, South Africa, Canada, Australia and several European countries (Armitage 2016, online; Essif 2015, online).

Unsurprisingly, criticism of BLM abounds, sometimes extreme. For James Kirchick in the *LA Times*, the BLM disruptions of a Toronto gay rights parade, in order to highlight an anti-black culture and secure a future ban on police floats, were inexplicable, as was its withdrawal from a similar event in San Francisco, due to high levels of police security. Depicting BLM as 'bullying', 'objectionable', and 'contemptible' he refutes the notion that law enforcement is inherently racist or homophobic, citing the levels of gay and black police, and drawing

comparisons with repressive regimes like Russia, thereby misreading both the tactics and underlying ethos of BLM (2016, online). At the extreme, Daniel Greenfield posts an article entitled 'Bring the Funders of Black Lives Matter Violence to Justice' (2016, online) calling BLM a “racist hate group”, whose activists are “puppets dancing to the tune” of leftist billionaire funders, who dictate the agenda. Also, BLM finds itself amidst inevitable controversy over its stand on Israel, “an apartheid state with over 50 laws on the books that sanction discrimination against the Palestinian people” (M4BL 2016b, online), accusing the US of being “complicit in the genocide taking place against the Palestinian people” (ibid., online). This position may be taken to imply that American Jews are also complicit, though they have mainly supported BLM (Cantz 2016, online) and were themselves a historically oppressed minority in America. This raises the spectre of antisemitism and of equating Jews with white privilege, and is a high-risk strategy in the name of intersectionality. This term, coined by feminist and CRT scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 (online) to indicate that different forms of oppression are interconnected, has migrated from the feminist discourse and come into popular use in social justice debates, in this case reflecting the convergence of BLM with pro-Palestinian groups over the last two years (Isaacs 2016, online). This concept is not new and is evidenced throughout this chapter, in the cross-cultural work of USSF, the confluence of different causes in the Advancement Project, the 'bridging' work of Youth Speaks and Class Action, and amongst the theorists and educationalists discussed in earlier chapters.

In the end, though, the BLM movement is fresh and energetic, has momentum, taps into the anger and frustration of the present generation, and has the potential to develop into something more significant both at home and abroad. Nonetheless, there are questions about certain aspects of its political stance and the coherence of its core beliefs, outlined above, which require more analysis. Firstly, BLM positions itself in the lineage of Assata Shakur, who featured in HHBE (Chapter 3) and in the analysis of Tupac Shakur (Chapter 2); and the BLM website cites Black Panthers Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Garza is, however, aware that “we’re in a moment that is different from ones in the past. It is informed by them, but it is not the same” (cited in Fletcher 2015, online). The new politics of BLM leaves behind patriarchy and sexism, and seeks to resurrect people-driven, community-led, radical activism. The reference back to the Panthers does therefore make ideological sense in that their grassroots presence aimed to protect black people from police brutality and support local

communities, just as the Young Lords did for Latino/a neighbourhoods, represented by fictional characters Willie Bodega above, and Isoke and Maite in *Picture Me Rollin'* (Chapter 2). The local organising of the Panthers provided free school breakfasts and health clinics, and they started their own so-called 'liberation schools' to counter the mainstream historical and cultural narrative delivered in the educational system. In Chicago, Fred Hampton persuaded rival gangs to stop fighting against each other, seeking to form a multiracial, multiethnic alliance of disadvantaged youth.

On the national stage the Panthers were revolutionary socialists and internationalists, different from both integrationist and separatist groups, in part echoing the later views of Malcolm X advocating racial and ethnic inclusion. They supported international working-class unity and joint action with white radical groups, interpreting racism as rooted in the exploitative capitalist system and therefore requiring the overthrow of the existing power structure; and as their full title implies, they condoned the use of violence in self-defence. Inevitably, white resistance and the urge to maintain control came from the highest levels, and the Panthers were hounded by the police and the FBI, resulting in a number of fatal confrontations. Soon Seale and Newton were to renounce violence as a legitimate political strategy, but extreme and violent factions continued into the 1970s. In comparing the Panthers' 10 point programme with the M4BL platform, there are both marked similarities and differences. Though they share a number of high level concerns, the M4BL document is far more detailed, and is rooted “in the current political climate” (2016a, online), with proposed incremental ways forward at federal, state and local levels. Although the platform ultimately envisions “a complete transformation of the current systems” (ibid., online), it does so with clear proposals, without reference to socialism, and in a less confrontational way. To that extent it resonates with the notion in this thesis of gradual transformation towards a new world. It is nevertheless a very long way from mainstream conservative capitalism, with its natural impulse to resist high levels of public spending, seemingly set to continue under the Trump administration and strong federal Republican presence. Looking back to the civil rights era, the landmark legislative changes were mainly in the early period, and the Panthers arrived against a contextual background of growing mainstream resistance to change, which quickly became polarised against them and the subsequent more militant groups. Soon the Panthers became isolated and invisible on the far left, and civil rights progress was stalling, foreshadowing the emergence of CRT. In the contemporary political landscape BLM must adapt to avoid history repeating itself, and their statements thus far indicate an awareness of learning from the past.

This point will be returned to in the thesis conclusion, in contemplating the future for social justice activism.

A second political point is a caveat regarding the choice of allies, in America and globally. In the ideal scenario, inspiration from the BLM movement would generate activism in the way Chuck D saw in the global spread of the conscious hip-hop narrative, adopted by local communities, but adapted to their particular cultures and conditions of oppression (Chapter 3). Within this process, Porfilio, Roychoudhury & Gardner recognised the natural and organic development of alliances where the common aim was for a social order based on democracy, freedom and justice (2013). There is a risk, however, of oversimplification in the assessment of the oppressed versus the oppressor. Though a hallmark of many a foreign policy, potential ambiguities and contradictions in the choice of ally may result, where cultures have very different politics, values and beliefs, for example. In his article ‘Making Solidarity Uneasy: Cautions on a Keyword from Black Lives Matter to the Past’, David Roediger recognises the importance of alliances but is conscious that they need to be cohesively argued, and asks if solidarity “is the logic of things or if for long periods it may be a treasured exception” (2016, p.224). He cites the example of black activist groups being thwarted in seeking trade union support for victims of police violence, when police officers themselves may be union members. Thus far, the actions inspired by BLM outside the US are very largely to do with racist police and justice systems and do not fully engage with the broader BLM agenda. The European dimension incorporates immigrants from Africa and the Middle East, with contrasting heritage and worldviews. In France, for example, the Party of Indigenous People of the Republic, which predates BLM, seeks to build a political agenda for *all* non-white displaced and immigrant people, which is capable of challenging the national political parties and dismantling institutionalised discrimination and marginalization. Its agenda is anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, and against white domination of the European Union (2017, online). This is but one illustration where the provenance and aims of an organization must be thought through in the formation of alliances.

In terms of its core beliefs, BLM claims that the historical black struggle acted as a catalyst for many other social justice movements, asserting that the women’s movement, queer movements, and many more were inspired by it and “adopted the strategies, tactics and theory of the Black liberation movement” (2016b, online). Certainly the black struggle can be seen as inspirational, as noted earlier, but beyond that, this reading of history is questionable.

Take the women's movement, for example. Yes, black women were oppressed within their own black communities, and sidelined by the mainstream, largely white middle-class feminist movement in the 1960s, but they fought back against these barriers, not just for themselves but for, *and alongside*, all women of colour. They worked together cross-racially, and not separately as black women, anticipating that other ethnicities would be motivated to blaze their own trails as a result of this black activism. Influential black figures like Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith and June Jordan worked alongside Chicanas like Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and many others with different heritage, embracing these cultural differences and their different forms of oppression; and other key black feminists like bell hooks called for an embrace of diversity. Seminal texts resulted, like the 'Bridge' books referred to in earlier chapters, whose very titles indicate crossing borders and building diverse collaborations (*This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983) and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002)). Present day black feminists like Whitney Peoples and Rebecca Walker (daughter of Alice), alongside Latinas like Quintero, follow in their footsteps. Walker, for example, champions inclusive, pluralist, feminism, which welcomes male support, and works “alongside those who previously may have been seen only as Other”(2004, p.xx). BLM is therefore disingenuous in its casual presumption that other movements, however much inspired, necessarily followed its race- or ethnicity-focused theory and practice.

BLM also views US black history as uniquely oppressive, after centuries of ingrained and continuing white supremacy in the American psyche, with a legacy of erasing black lives and contributions. Even though BLM recognises that white domination was later “adapted to control, murder, and profit off of [*sic*] other communities of color and immigrant communities” (2016b, online), it understands black oppression as the primal trauma and the black struggle as the primary force for change. For BLM, sharing this struggle with oppressed non-blacks risks homogenising the oppression and perpetuating black marginalisation and erasure. It refers to this as a “worn out and sloppy practice of drawing lazy parallels of unity between peoples with vastly different experiences and histories” (ibid., online), accusing progressive movements of making mistakes in pushing for “unity at the expense of really understanding the concrete differences in context, experience and oppression” (ibid., online).

This presents something of a conundrum. As discussed at length in Chapter 1, immigration has completely transformed the demographic landscape since the civil rights era, from which BLM takes its inspiration. Racial and ethnic boundaries and classifications are ever more blurred; the proportion of those identifying as mixed race is consistently on the increase; and the significant growth of the minority group middle class has changed the racial and ethnic dynamic. Whilst it is self-evident that the cultural heritage of minority, immigrant groups is different, even ‘vastly different’ from black traditions, as is the context and experience of their historical oppression, once in the US the oppressive experiences of the poor and disadvantaged minority groups may not be so very different between black and non-black. They cannot be solidified into insurmountable, impenetrable ‘concrete differences’ which are incapable of being understood at least at some intellectual level, if not psychologically and emotionally, across perceived racial and ethnic boundaries. Even as BLM acknowledges the oppression of non-blacks, it claims they simultaneously benefit from anti-black racism. This point is not clearly explained, but implies that black people are disproportionately oppressed vis-à-vis other minorities, and reside at the bottom of the racial and ethnic hierarchy, alongside Native Americans (seen as fellow displaced people). The inference is that mixed race, Latino/as, and other immigrant minorities therefore have some real advantages over black people, as opposed to merely a prejudiced and assumed sense of superiority within the spurious hierarchy (noted in Chapter 1). The range of statistics discussed in Chapter 1, however, on employment, living conditions, health, poverty, and institutional oppression, together with the sense of alienation and erasure, alongside intraracial, intraethnic class division and tension, all suggest that differences between poor and disadvantaged black and non-black groups are relatively small. Hip-hop emerged from the projects occupied by black, Latino/a, and other groups, and here there was no discernible benefit from anti-black racism. Indeed, Sohng and Chun noted these “exclusionary and anti-coalitional” tendencies (2005, p.41) of groups which justify their position by “references to a hierarchy of oppression...or the denial that there is any compelling shared interest among racial groups” (ibid., p.41). It is fair to say that BLM recognises the latter point in terms of their statements on solidarity with other oppressed groups, and appear to welcome white support, though it is doubtful it would support the cross-racial standpoint that "there cannot be an effective movement for racial justice that has no role for White allies" (Hall 2008, p.9; previously cited in Chapter 3 in respect of HHBE).

The major civil rights groups call for the embrace of diversity and multi-ethnic, multiracial, collective activism, as do many black feminists, past and present, black writers like Randall Kenan, influential black scholars like Tricia Rose and Henry Louis Gates Jr., and others discussed in Chapter 1, yet BLM cannot make this psychological step into integrated, diverse groups. For many, the centuries of cultural trauma, the fear of marginalization and erasure, of hearing others speaking for them, are too strongly embedded into the black psyche. BLM therefore remains somewhat different from the multiracial, multiethnic group explored in this thesis, described by Quintero in her book chapter ‘‘Isms’ and AIDS: Transforming Multicultural Coalitions into Radical Alliances’ (2001), as having a higher vision of universal oppression, accepting and welcoming of difference, and collectively committed to a transformative future for all - sentiments expressed, amongst others, by USSF and the Trusted Advocate model described earlier. This key difference is highlighted below and discussed further in the overall thesis conclusion.

### ***Conclusion***

In the course of this chapter many different groups and organisations have been seen to embrace equality, diversity, and multiethnic, multiracial working but, for a number of different reasons, have failed to have a significant impact at national level in recent decades. As shown above, some have become static, with demonstrably ineffective strategies, and failed to address underlying problems or engage with radical ideas, resulting in a lack of appeal across the demographic spectrum. Many small, activist operations are localised and invisible, lack funding, and lose momentum; and many organisations work independently on issues common to other groups but without sharing or coordinating efforts or strategies. Still others have positive ideas and aims which are thwarted through failure to find opportunities to realise their potential; or are frustrated by conflicts of interest and different needs, sometimes class-based; or find their agendas diluted by compromise through divide and rule mechanisms. Yet more have ideas and agendas not properly thought through, planned, or executed. Faced with this litany of negatives, it is tempting to use some positives from the groups and propose a theory for an ideal group, for example imagining the intended modus operandi of the CDC working with a local Trusted Advocate group, but in all probability this would also fail for some of the reasons stated here. Nevertheless, these problems should not

obscure the numerous local achievements and the occasionally successful outcomes at state and federal levels, described earlier.

BLM, however, has changed the story and grabbed the attention of the present generation. The key is in its encouragement of local groups and local leaders, harnessing their energy, mobilising and uniting them in multiple actions, so bringing the movement into the national consciousness and maintaining its momentum. This is the “socially and politically progressive...black public thought, action, and reaction” Rose was calling for (2008, p.27; previously cited in Chapter 3). The movement has already had an impact, scored successes, and inspired others at home and abroad. In a number of ways BLM matches the ideals of the groups explored in this thesis. For example, it listens to local needs, supports grassroots activism, and seeks to empower local communities, in accordance with the pluralist belief in the distribution of power in all levels of society. It is therefore developing organically from the bottom up, challenging the systemic root causes of oppression, and there is broad support for its cause and for its acceptance of diversity and equality in respect of age, class, gender and sexuality. It is, however, black-focused, as discussed, and not an inclusive movement working on a jointly formulated agenda across race and ethnicity. Despite this, it has encouraged the development and activism of other racial and ethnic groups, with very similar aims, working in parallel and in solidarity with it. The chapter therefore ends with two fundamental, open questions. Firstly, can the BLM movement lead to changes in government policy and practice at the highest levels, without compromise, in the foreseeable future, as the first step towards its vision of a society which treats races equally? Secondly, can a truly integrated, multiracial, multiethnic, radical movement arise and achieve these changes in the journey towards an inclusive, egalitarian democracy where racial and ethnic divisions are erased? The thesis conclusion will return to these questions.

## Conclusion

*Know the past, learn from the past, but don't be a slave to it: Keep moving forward*

*Randall Kenan*

This thesis has considered a range of contemporary responses, across disciplines, to diversity, equality, and multiracial, multiethnic social and political justice activism. Evaluation of the texts and initiatives has focused, at a theoretical level, on individual growth, understanding oppression at personal and societal levels, accepting diversity and equality, and developing social and political consciousness. At a practical level, social justice activism in communities and in broader contexts has been assessed in terms of its embrace of diversity and equality, along with its visibility, appeal, impact, strategies to overcome barriers and limitations, and future potential, within the given political context. The Conclusion now presents a summary of the findings before returning to the two critical questions, posed at the end of the final chapter, concerning the hopes and fears for equality and justice in the immediate and longer-term future of America.

### Summary of Findings

The first key point to note, as prefigured in the Introduction and explored in Chapter 1, is the majority of African American voices whose fundamental focus is on blackness. By and large they wrestle with black identity in the contemporary world, amidst the ever more complex demographic of mixed race, mixed ethnicity, and the blurring of perceived racial and ethnic boundaries. Some of these, such as author Paul Beatty, conceptual artist Kara Walker, and commentator Touré, are called post-black, since they reject the label 'black', even as they interrogate the variety of black identities. Others, like scholar Bernard Bell (Chapter 2), resist this aesthetic and extol the virtues of distinct, traditional, black cultural production. This identity politics has been played out alongside a broader discourse, where white America is also having to question its sense of identity as a result of the demographic changes. These

exchanges are carried on at both the personal, individualistic level and in institutions like the education system, where they have been part of the wider, so-called 'culture wars' debate. Other black-centric genres are linked with the pan-Africanist tradition, such as the Black Arts Movement and, more recently, Afrofuturism. Exponents of Afrofuturism, such as speculative fiction writer Octavia Butler, musician Erykah Badu, and artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, imagined new possibilities for global black communities in the future.

In recent decades, black-centric social and political justice activism has been largely under the national radar, in part reflecting the era of individualism and the sense of lost community felt across the demographic, discussed in Chapter 1. As noted, some scholars, such as Mark Christian and Stephen Small, have called for black activism, and in the last four years the call has been answered by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM has conspicuously, powerfully, and irrefutably demonstrated the breadth and depth of black anger and frustration amongst the present generation, across the class spectrum. It has re-energised and united many of those local black activist groups which had been invisible on the national stage, awakening a sleeping giant, and bringing hope for a resurgence of the black liberation struggle. The focus is on the oppression of black people, on a global scale, even as BLM accepts diversity and expresses solidarity with other oppressed racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, the momentum has generated new non-black activist groups in support of BLM, as noted in Chapter 4, and these groups publicise their own cases in the process. In the present moment this is the dominant force in social justice activism, and is discussed further below, in terms of its future potential.

The second key finding is the presence of other black voices who welcome diversity, some of whom go further to advocate and practise multiethnic and multiracial collaborations, the core subject of this research. Author Randall Kenan, in *The Fire This Time*, a reference to his inspiration from James Baldwin, welcomes the increasing acceptance of diversity and inclusion arising in recent decades. The epigraph (2008, p.22) reflects this sentiment, fuelled by his experience as a black gay man in rural North Carolina. Though proud of his heritage he accepts that the old binary of black and white is irrelevant in a world which is now a “polychromatic, polyglot, polyethnic stew” (ibid., p.29). This recalls mixed race author Danzy Senna, discussed in Chapter 2, whose deconstruction of the notion of race, and any affiliation based on it, is expressed through the experiences of her troubled mixed race characters. In Chapter 1, Tricia Rose and contemporary black feminists Rebecca Walker and

Whitney Peoples echo the messages of their forebears Audre Lorde and June Jordan, by welcoming difference whilst honouring their black heritage, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. goes beyond black-centric thinking to endorse multiracial, multiethnic cooperation. From Chapter 4, the major civil rights groups, networking associations like the US Social Forum (USSF), and radical groups like the Equal Justice Initiative and the Advancement Project, all welcome diverse collaborations.

These black voices show that race is not hard-wired into the psyche, as Shakil Choudhury teaches in *Deep Diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them* (2015), noted in Chapter 1. Choudhury believes the way forward for life in a diverse society is to understand internalised prejudice at the emotional level, beyond rationalism and cognitive practice, in order to truly begin to eradicate it. This is not unlike the emotional activism envisaged by Adrienne Maree Brown of the USSF. Certainly, a fundamental aim of hip-hop based education (HHBE), explored in Chapter 3, is to prepare young people for living in a diverse world, to equip them with the insight to understand diversity and equality, to foster self-determination and a social consciousness, and to encourage them to challenge societal oppression. As noted earlier, such objectives share much with the revolutionary educationalist Paulo Freire. Choudhury goes beyond HHBE, however, to explore the notion of 'personal power', a psychological and emotional strength beyond given or presumed authority or status from social or political rank, fame or fortune. This personal power propels some to become great leaders who dedicate their lives to their beliefs. Such people are rare, great figures like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. In the end, though, the leading black figures cited above are educated, often academic, reflective people who have achieved success or privileged positions, but who are not seduced by their status or class, nor distracted by self-interest, and they retain a core sense of social justice for all citizens. However compelling and inspiring they may be, they are in the minority, and their experiences are, in the main, in a different register from the less well-off, the poor and disadvantaged, who face overt, sometimes brutal, forms of oppression. This raises the matter of class, which will be considered further below.

Latino/a voices, by contrast, represent most of the key theorists referenced throughout this thesis in terms of their visions of inclusive and egalitarian forms of society, as explored earlier, and in practice Latino/as feature in many examples of the multiethnic, multiracial, activist collaborations examined. John Garcia, in Chapter 1, provides evidence of contemporary groups formed between Latino/a 'ethnic sub-groups' and between Latino/as and

other ethnicities and races, where they live side by side in local communities. These groups challenge shared problems, regardless of their cultural differences. The Trusted Advocate model, for example, was a collaboration of Latino/as with a variety of others with African, Asian, and East European origins; and the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network joined Latino/as with Filipino/as (Chapter 4). Indeed, Latino/a activism has been evident at least from the later civil rights era, when the Chicano movement made political demands for better education, equitable voting rights and better workers' rights. In the intervening decades, however, activism has been less visible nationally, as for African Americans above.

Indeed, cultural consciousness and diversity is a strong theme in Latino/a literary output, from Esmeralda Santiago (born in Puerto Rico), Chicana Sandra Cisneros, Ernesto Quiñonez (from Ecuador), to Dominican American Junot Díaz. A key Latina figure throughout this thesis is Sofia Quintero (of Dominican and Puerto Rican parents) who, as author, educator, feminist, and social justice activist from working class origins, champions diversity, equality, and multiethnic, multiracial activism. She features alongside the radical teachers and scholars from many different ethnic and racial backgrounds and cultures who developed the public school hip-hop education initiative. These are the exemplars of the vision at the heart of this thesis, of a more inclusive and egalitarian society, surpassing ethnic and racial boundaries, and yet they remain on the periphery of the imagination for most Americans. Against a backdrop of colourblindness and complacency about race and ethnicity issues, radical voices like Quintero have barely featured as a source of serious consideration in higher education; the exponents of HHBE are still battling in the margins; and genuinely diverse activism, however vibrant, remains localised and below the national radar. With these findings in mind, it is once more time to look to the future, as in Chapter 1, from a more informed viewpoint, though not a more optimistic one.

### **Contemplating the Future**

Returning to the critical questions posed at the end of the final chapter, it is important to consider them from both short- and longer-term perspectives in order to provide a broader outlook. The first question is: can the BLM movement lead to changes in government policy and practice at the highest levels, without compromise, in the foreseeable future, as the first

step towards its vision of a society which treats races equally? At federal level, the immediate outlook is bleak. A strong Republican government, even if it restrains some of the more extreme notions of the president, will always be disinclined to increase public spending and, historically, has tended to loosen federal government controls over state and business matters. Social justice issues, which often have public spending implications, will therefore be well down any federal agenda. BLM has, at this time, no conduit through which it can engage with central government and none is likely to be forthcoming from the present administration, and if it is, it is not likely to deliver what the movement wants. The national aspects of the movement's agenda, including budget reallocation demands in favour of public education, public health, employment, and elections, will be thwarted. The radical agenda is far beyond the present mainstream political parameters and will remain so in the foreseeable future. A future Democratic administration with a majority in Congress could well be sympathetic to several ideas within some of the movement's state and federal proposals, for example in the areas of public education funding, the minimum wage, and taxation. More radical proposals, like needs-based budgeting and community control, may remain off limits. In any event, direct engagement with government, together with a preparedness to compromise, would certainly be required before any legislation could ever be considered.

At local and state levels the outlook is brighter, as the focus on community-based activism has already had positive results, bringing change 'from below', a central theme in this thesis and one championed by Tricia Rose and Chelsea Fuller (Chapter 4). People power pressing for investigations, and for systemic and policy change has registered in some instances at state and federal levels, noted in Chapter 4, and some policy change, such as police body cameras, has real potential to become a national standard (Judge 2017, online). There are also early signs of more public, prompt action against police in fatal shootings of black people, with recent dismissals, indictments, and compensation payouts (Yan 2017, online). However, whilst the broad racial, ethnic, and mixed-class support for BLM shares its outrage at injustices and discrimination, the depth of that support for the politically radical aspects of the Movement for Black Lives platform (Chapter 4) is as yet untested. In another recent development, though, there is evidence of BLM adapting to the Trump administration, supporting other anti-Trump groups, adjusting tactics, shifting towards a focus on policy, and moving towards working within the system to gain electoral power. Activist DeRay Mckesson acknowledges that BLM needs “a variety of strategies if we are going to achieve substantive change” (cited in Ross & Lowery 2017, online). The desire to rebuild a credible

black liberation movement depends upon such adaptability and on strategies with mass appeal, if the magic ingredient of momentum is to be sustained.

The second question is: can a truly integrated, multiracial, multiethnic, radical movement arise and achieve these changes in the journey towards an inclusive, egalitarian democracy where racial and ethnic divisions are erased? This is the ideal explored within this research. As discussed earlier, the major civil rights groups embrace diversity but their strategies and messages are failing to appeal to many of the present generation, whilst local and regional activist groups with diverse membership are in the margins, and invisible on the national stage. Some initiatives, such as the Equal Justice Initiative, have individual successes at state and federal levels, but are independent organisations not coordinated in networks.

Throughout the thesis, Latino/as have been shown to be open to diversity and diverse alliances. They frequently have, as individuals and in community, multiethnic cultural heritage, and they engage in pan-ethnic *and* multiracial collaborations. There are, though, sometimes tensions with black people, more often amongst the less well-off, as explored in Chapter 1. Afro-Latino Jonathan Jayes-Green recognises that “anti-blackness has played a role in the mainstream immigrant rights movement” (Latina 2016, online), as he strives for unity across this perceived divide. The majority, however, do support BLM (Chapter 4) and recognise the similar issues facing black and Latino/a communities (Chapter 1) so, as activist Máximo Anguiano says, “we need to stand in solidarity with each other” (cited in Univision 2016, online). After all, Latino/as have also been fatally shot by police but, like female black victims, are not nationally publicised to the same extent as the well-known black male victims (PBS Newshour 2016; Newsone 2016). Tellingly, a surprising 24% of Latino/as identify as Afro-Latino/a (Pew Research Center 2016, online) and they are, as Afro-Panamanian activist Jamila Aisha Brown states, an “overlooked bridge” for collaborations between black and Latino/a (cited in Univision 2016, online).

In contrast, the emotional appeal of BLM has reaffirmed the continuing existence of a large black presence working for black people first and foremost, and retaining the fear of marginalisation or erasure. In the critique of the movement in Chapter 4, the need to adapt, learn from the past, and develop new strategies is acknowledged by BLM, but appears to have its limits, begging the question - is BLM, as Kenan might say, still ‘a slave to its past’? Whilst there is solidarity with non-blacks on common issues, to date there is no collaborative

working on a joint agenda. Equally, BLM is not engaging in debate concerning the meaning and perceived boundaries of race and ethnicity, given the massive demographic change, the long history of ethnic and racial mixing, and the rising numbers identifying as mixed race, starkly in evidence in the Afro-Latino/a group. From a practical perspective, the divisions look set to continue, since segregation, planned as well as unplanned, remains significant in many areas, and perpetuates cultural barriers, as discussed in Chapter 1. This separation is further complicated by class division within racial and ethnic groups, commented upon below. Urban planner Leonie Sandercock, whose interest is in community planning and multiculturalism, notes that "[e]nduring change takes generations" (1998, p.157).

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses, the demographic changes may affect the perceptions of future generations and result in more inclusive thinking, and the influence of initiatives like HHBE (Chapter 3) may increasingly break down perceived barriers and allow diverse, integrated activism to flourish. The process will be very gradual, as Sandercock surmises. After all, America has traditionally resisted diversion from its dominant white narrative, resulting in 100 years passing between emancipation and the Voting Rights Act, and yet to this day civil rights groups still challenge voting inconsistencies and barriers, a further 50 years on. The slow progress to diversify education and the enduring problems with the justice system are just two further examples of the ongoing presence of systemic discrimination. Thus, when Choudhury calls for emotional intelligence to dismantle prejudice, it is the oppressor, white America, who faces the biggest challenge, and yet is the most unaware, as Mignolo says in Chapter 1. This is reinforced by Lisa Mazzei, in Chapter 3, who sees white teachers oblivious to their privileged status and unaware that they, too, have a racial position. Colourblind complacency reveals ignorance, or worse, unspoken racism, conscious or otherwise. However, it is clear that racial and ethnic groups have prejudices between themselves, which have to be addressed in order to overcome any perceived hierarchy, if truly inclusive cooperation is to be achieved on a larger scale.

Additionally, throughout the thesis the matter of class has been a recurring and critical theme. Where there is class difference there will be different experiences, aspirations and needs, and the noted tendency amongst the middle class towards materialism and individualism, recorded in the discussion of community in Chapter 1, can engender a less radical form of politics, or dilute political engagement. The growth of the class line within minority groups over the last 50 years has created a form of segregation by social status, marked by

gentrification on the one hand and underfunded public services on the other. This, overlaid upon the persisting race line, has magnified divisions and presented a significant complicating factor and a new challenge for social justice activism seeking widespread support across these boundaries. If white America is not going to change, then for Ibram Kendi, it is in “the intelligent self-interest” (2017, online) of middle-class black people to challenge racism affecting the black poor, since the better-off will not be free of the more subtle 'new racism' described by David Leonard and others in Chapter 1, which “is slowing their socio-economic rise” (Kendi 2017, online). Once again, however, this black-centric stance must also apply to all minority groups.

Homi Kharas (2017, online) has studied the emergence of the social phenomenon known as the global middle class, present in established and developing economies, which poses similar questions on a much wider scale for radical activism with global aspirations. Though the growth of the middle class is forecast to be minor in advanced economies like the US, the working class and poor citizens discussed in this thesis are in danger of becoming ever more marginalised by this wealth gap. Groups like Class Action (Chapter 4) have a mountain to climb.

Finally, at the time of writing, tensions continue to run high, as the Trump effect is being felt. United Nations investigators are concerned that the right to peacefully protest is under threat, as 19 states have proposed laws which will penalise demonstrators who block traffic (Erickson 2017, online), while the Department of Justice has dropped legal action against Texas, which demands forms of ID for voting which many young minority citizens do not possess (Walker 2017 online). In this atmosphere activism will not go away, but so long as BLM asserts that the contemporary black struggle is unique, that it is the primary force for change and the catalyst for others, then it falls short of the truly egalitarian, diverse movement described in this thesis. Reason says that BLM could go beyond expressing solidarity, to enter jointly planned collective action with Latino/as and others, but the psychological and emotional weight of history persuades otherwise. Thus far, truly diverse groups have not created any large-scale movement or registered any sustained, significant progress. Mutual solidarity between groups with common problems is one thing, but unified diverse groups is quite another. Kendi boldly states that eradicating American racism “must involve Americans committed to anti-racist policies seizing and maintaining power over institutions, neighbourhoods, counties, states” (2017, online). His focus is, however, on black

people. These Americans must not, cannot just be black, or even black across class, to eradicate racism. They must be citizens from *all* oppressed minorities, across class, working together with a unified, radical agenda, united at community level and beyond, with the mass collective strength to force change from below, to exert significant electoral impact, to effectively challenge the policies which allow systemic discrimination to continue, and to resist the maladjusted distribution of power which perpetuates inequality. In the end, despite positive changes since *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1983, there are still many bridges left to cross and borders to erase in order to realise this dream, and at this moment in time America does not, as Kenan urges, seem to be moving forward in its espousal of diversity and equality.

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## Appendix

### Copy of Request for Ethical Approval (July 2016)

#### Request for ethical approval for research undertaken by staff and post-graduate research students

Please submit your completed form to the chair of your college research ethics committee (CREC)

<b>Your Name</b>	<b>Stuart Hancock</b>	
<b>College</b>	<b>Law, Humanities and Social Sciences</b>	
<b>College Research Ethics Committee</b>	<b>L, H &amp; SS CREC</b>	
<b>Staff ID</b>	<b>STF2019</b>	
<b>Student ID</b>	<b>100140383</b>	
<b>Unimail address</b>	<b>S.Hancock1@unimail.derby.ac.uk</b>	
<b>Programme name / code</b>	<b>Master of Philosophy</b>	
<b>Name of supervisor(s)</b>	<b>Professor Neil Campbell</b>	
<b>Title of proposed research study</b>		
<b>Emerging Visions of Pluralism in American Contemporary Responses in Literature, Education and Practice.</b>		
<b>Background information</b>		
Has this research been funded by an external organisation (e.g. a research council or public sector body) or internally? If yes, please provide details.	No	
Have you submitted previous requests for ethical approval to the Committee that relate to this research project? If yes please provide details.	No	
Are other research partners involved in the proposed research? If yes please provide details.	No	

<b>Signatures</b>	
The information supplied is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I clearly understand my obligations and the rights of the participants. I agree to act at all times in accordance with University of Derby Policy and Code of Practice on Research Ethics.	
Signature of applicant	
Date of submission by applicant	7 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
Signature of supervisor (if applicable)	
Date of signature by supervisor (if applicable)	7 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
For Committee Use    Reference Number (Subject area initials/year/ID number) .....	
Date received .....	Date
considered .....	
Committee decision .....	
Signed .....	

<p><b>1. What is the aim of your study? What are the objectives for your study?</b></p> <p><i>Aim</i> The aim of this research is to explore how contemporary texts and initiatives in America are responding to versions of pluralism emerging from the Global South.</p> <p><i>Research question</i> How do contemporary texts and initiatives promote the conditions for working towards multiethnic, multiracial collaborative action?</p> <p><i>Objectives</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To contextualise the discourses of pluralism and the pluralist community within the changing demographic of contemporary America (Chapter 1).</li> <li>2. To assess the extent to which selected texts and initiatives promote the conditions for working towards pluralist collaborative action as a strategy in challenging continuing racial and ethnic oppression and inequality (Chapters 2-4).</li> </ol>
<p><b>2. Explain the rationale for this study (refer to relevant research literature in your response).</b></p> <p><i>Rationale</i> The postcolonial discourse over last 50 years or more seeks to resist the residual effects of the colonial era and the globalisation-Westernisation matrix, and to find a space for suppressed</p>

cultures. Versions of pluralism inspired by postcolonial theory are emerging from the Global South, where decolonising voices posit a worldview distinct from Western philosophy and politics, and imagine a future of global interconnectedness inclusive of multiple voices, with new concepts of community, new epistemologies, and new configurations of social, economic and political power. In the rapidly changing demographic of 21st century America, pluralist voices are being increasingly heard, and the tenets of their philosophy, initially in small ways perhaps, will influence theories concerned with societal structures and the potential for social transformation. This thesis looks at one small area in contemporary America where the key tenets of pluralism - acceptance of diversity and equality of existence – may have such an influence, namely, in the concept and reality of diverse, multiethnic, multiracial collaborations and alliances acting to address shared problems of social, economic and political oppression or injustice.

**3. Provide an outline of study design and methods.**

***Methodology***

This qualitative research will be undertaken using the comparative case study method, considered to be the most suitable for the interpretation of complex social phenomena, in this case in a contemporary setting, where in-depth analysis and evaluation of multiple and interdisciplinary sources of evidence are used to support the argument in the thesis.

The pluralist theories underpinning the thesis have steered the choice of material for comparison, as well as the development of criteria by which to evaluate it. The chosen texts and initiatives are drawn from three different but influential domains (popular fiction, education, and practical activism) and provide contrasting responses to the pluralist ideals.

**4. If appropriate, please provide a detailed description of the study sample, covering selection, sample profile, recruitment and inclusion and exclusion criteria.**

N/A

**5. Are payments or rewards/incentives going to be made to the participants? Yes**

No

If so, please give details.

N/A

**6. Please indicate how you intend to address each of the following ethical considerations in your study. If you consider that they do not relate to your study please say so.**

**Guidance to completing this section of the form is provided at the end of the document.**

- a. Consent                    N/A
- b. Deception                N/A
- c. Debriefing                N/A
- d. Withdrawal from the investigation    N/A
- e. Confidentiality        N/A
- f. Protection of participants    N/A
- g. Observation research    N/A

- h. Giving advice N/A
- i. Research undertaken in public places N/A
- j. Data protection N/A
- k. Animal Rights N/A
- l. Environmental protection N/A

**Are there other ethical implications that are additional to this list?** No, This thesis is Basic Research, which will comply with the UoD “Policy and Code of Practice on Research Ethics” with particular regard to (a) legal and procedural obligations under para. 2,2 (Computer Misuse Act specifically), and (b) academic integrity under para. 2.20

**7. Have / do you intend to request ethical approval from any other body/organisation?** No  
**If ‘Yes’ – please give details**

**8. Do you intend to publish your research?** Yes  No .  
**If ‘Yes’, what are your publication plans?** **Not yet known**

**9. Have you secured access and permissions to use any resources that you may require? (e.g. psychometric scales, equipment, software, laboratory space).**  
**If Yes, please provide details.** **N/A**

**10. Have the activities associated with this research project been risk-assessed?** Yes

Risk Factors

*Qualitative research is especially prone to subjectivity.*

1. Researcher bias (e.g. political views, social and cultural prejudice and assumption)
2. Failure to appreciate the meaning of texts (discourse) (e.g. awareness of context for material from other cultures)
3. Failure to appreciate cultural signifiers and codes within the text (semiotics) (e.g. awareness of nuances and common cultural devices)
4. Failure to communicate effectively

Risk Mitigation

1. To minimise subjectivity and bias:
  - (a) several strong examples should be provided for each point in the argument so that wider assertions then have some foundation and credibility;
  - (b) engagement should be made with relevant studies in other subjects (e.g. social science, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, feminism).
- 2/3. To appreciate the discursive and semiotic meanings:
  - (a) be attentive to the cultural, political, economic and technological climate in which texts are produced;
  - (b) be aware of the variables of class, education, race/ethnic, sexuality and gender politics represented in the text;
  - (c) pay attention to signs, symbols, gestures, appearance and language;
  - (d) be aware of and learn from the experience of other researchers in the field.
4. To communicate effectively:
  - (a) always confirm mutual understanding in oral exchanges with supervisor/examiners;
  - (b) always confirm that the meaning of written material is understood as intended by supervisor/examiners.

**Which of the following have you appended to this application?**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus group questions                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychometric scales                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-completion questionnaire               | <input type="checkbox"/> Interview questions                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other debriefing material                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Covering letter for participants        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information sheet about your research study | <input type="checkbox"/> Informed consent forms for participants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Location consent form                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe)                 |

## Copy of Confirmation of Ethical Approval (October 2016)

*Copy of Email*

FW: Ethics Approval  
Stuart Wain  
Wed 26/10/2016, 14:31

### Action Items

Dear Stuart,

Please see the below email from Robert Hudson, confirming your ethics application has been approved.

Kind regards,

Stuart Wain  
Research Student Office  
University of Derby  
Kedleston Road  
Derby  
DE22 1GB

Tel: +44 (1332) 594283

**From:** Robert Hudson  
**Sent:** 26 October 2016 13:53  
**To:** Stuart Wain <S.Wain@Derby.ac.uk>; Neil Campbell <N.Campbell@derby.ac.uk>  
**Subject:** Ethics Approval

Dear Stuart,

As Chairman of the College Research Ethics Committee I am writing to confirm that the proposed research study on 'Emerging Visions of Pluralism in American Contemporary Responses in Literature, Education and Practice' has been approved by Chair's Action and I wish you well in your research project.

With all best wishes,

Robert

Professor Robert Hudson PhD, M.Phil., BA Hons, PGCE, FRSA  
Senior Fellow - Higher Education Academy  
College of Law, Humanities and Social Sciences  
University of Derby  
Kedleston Road  
Derby  
DE22 1GB