

CHAPTER THREE

Restaging the War on Terror and Nationhood: Political Rap's Sonic Resistance

The cover art for *Sonic Jihad*, the post-9/11 album by the American rapper Paris, shows a low-flying airplane heading for the White House (see figure 3.1). Should the viewer fail to grasp the incendiary message, a casual sampling of a few tracks from the album (Guerrilla Funk, 2003 and 2009) would reinforce the counter-hegemonic intention: the album contains neither tributes to heroic 9/11 rescue workers nor elegies for the dead, as many post-9/11 cultural objects often do. Rather, it is a war declaration. Written and performed by Paris, the album appropriates the lexicon of military insurgency and resistance movements and provides what the artist claims is “revolutionary music.” Targeting the American corporate elite, the mainstream media, the former Bush administration, nationalism, and the war on terror, Paris’s biting lyrics and menacing soundscape have returned political rap – intentionally and nostalgically – to its historical roots as a form of oppositional culture. As such, the album dovetails both the subjects of protest music and post-9/11 aesthetics of politics. It articulates, to appropriate Rancière’s phrasing, a politics of aesthetics that utilizes music fully for the project of resistance and denunciation, and moreover, this political-artistic project directly targets the aesthetics of post-9/11 politics.

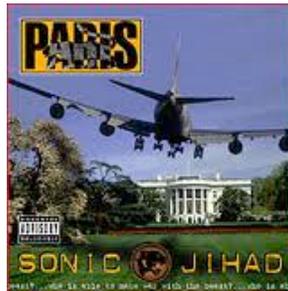


Figure 3.1. Cover art of album *Sonic Jihad* by Paris, produced by Guerrilla Funk Recordings, 2003 and 2009. Image and reprint permission courtesy of Guerrilla Funk.

Continuing my exploration of the previous chapter, post-catastrophe politics is envisaged through Rancière’s aesthetic lens as a struggle over perceptible and sensible materials, particularly as applied to the realm of audibility, or what can be heard. I examine aesthetic borders that separate the audible from the inaudible, arguing that the ordering of a sensible world – in particular the audible and the visible (the latter will be addressed in chapters four and five) – is part of the manifestation of political domination and power. As Rancière stresses in an

interview: “The police define the configuration of the visible, the thinkable, and the possible through a systematic production of the given, not through spectacular strategies of control and repression” (Carnevale and Kelsey 6). Resistance, as expressed by *Sonic Jihad*, is allied with a struggle for the sphere of appearance by contesting the given dominant boundaries of the audible and the perceptible, which in the post-9/11 context are drawn and policed to enclose discourses of mourning, American exceptionalism and nationalism, while excluding other contestatory narratives. One illustration of these post-9/11 auditory borders is the odd incident involving the Texas-based media group, Clear Channel Communications, which had circulated an eclectic list of 150 songs that it had asked its radio stations, about 1,170 of them, to avoid playing following the attacks.⁵⁵

It is also indicative that no official music videos were made for any of the tracks on *Sonic Jihad*, in all probability due to its controversial content, which, if translated into music videos, would not likely have been picked up by music television channels.⁵⁶ As an excluded object, the album attacks the dominant regime of audibility, as I will soon demonstrate, by introducing different modes of sense perception and forms of meanings to 9/11 and the war on terror. This chapter traces that sonic resistance by first looking at the relations between rap music and 9/11, and the fiercely militant and self-referential Paris himself, an artist whose tracks are dedicated to depicting the reality of racial oppression but also his own efforts to proclaim freedom, provocation, and “upliftin.” My analysis continues with a closer look at the album’s liner notes to identify Paris’s political views and orientations. The next section focuses solely on the album’s musical elements and other sound effects and explores specifically how Paris creates a different sense perception of the war on terror by relocating the war elsewhere and by re-inscribing new meanings to the sounds of terror. This tactic of re-signification is extended in the ensuing segment which demonstrates how Paris redefines post-9/11 key terms such as freedom, jihad, police, and the figure of the soldier. I then consider how Paris, in view of the post-9/11 effusion of patriotism, reframes the concept of nationhood and restages national belonging

⁵⁵ For details on the incident, see *The New York Times* report at www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/arts/the-pop-life-after-the-horror-radio-stations-pull-some-songs.html, accessed November 21, 2012. Some of those songs include The Gap Band’s “You Dropped a Bomb on Me,” Soundgarden’s “Blow Up the Outside World,” and “Ticket to Ride” by The Beatles.

⁵⁶ That would not be the first time that the rapper was shunned by a music station; the video for the title track of his debut album *The Devil Made Me Do It* (Tommy Boy Records, 1990) was banned by MTV, according to a biography of Paris on the music channel’s website at http://www.mtv.com/music/artist/paris_rap_/artist.jhtml, accessed on November 28, 2012. As several years have now passed since 9/11, MTV is playing the video for “Don’t Stop the Movement” from Paris’s more recent album *Acid Reflex* (Guerrilla Funk, 2008).

through a return to the history of black struggles and the Black Diaspora. My analysis here also considers the virtual community of amateur YouTube video makers who are utilizing Paris's music for their own political projects. While this informal YouTube approach goes beyond the album's composition and recorded performance to examine the music's interactions with its listeners, this is not meant to be a comprehensive exploration of audience reception. It aims to assess how Paris's music impacts its audience socially and politically as they form a virtual hip hop community. Finally, my examination ends with a discussion of some of the blind spots of Paris's politicized music which he has conceptualized through pedagogy and enlightenment. I do so by returning to Rancière's writings on several interlinked subjects: intellectual equality, aesthetic dissensus and art's efficacy, all of which find new resonance in Paris's music.

The methodology for *Sonic Jihad* is slightly different from my approach to other objects in the dissertation, as I place extra emphasis on the artist himself. Given that many rappers whose fame, inflated personality, and ability to generate controversy rival those of major movie celebrities, the extra emphasis I place on Paris is inspired by Richard Dyer's concept of the "star image." In his book *Stars*, Dyer argues that a star image is created through the interaction of multiple media texts, such as promotion, films, critical reception, and other commentaries, leading to wide-ranging meanings (60-62). For some stars these various elements of signification reinforce one another, and yet for others, they are in contradiction (63-64). With this in mind, I also explore official promotional material, fragments of interviews and reviews to understand Paris's image and iconography as a polemical and belligerent rap artist. This extra dimension helps to move my examination beyond mere textual analysis on the protest lyrics' social commentaries, whose meanings are often context-bound and multiple (Balliger 426). While lyrics still serve as an important site of meanings, their consideration can be deepened with multiple lines of inquiry into the album's oppositional practices through sounds, guest stars, and style, as well as its impact on social relations (Balliger 424 and 429). This would underscore rap music as a more complex cultural object whose meanings, politics, and resistance are produced through multiple interactions and contexts.

Rhymed Anger with a Beat: Political Rap and Paris

That hip hop would again function as cultural resistance against the dominant order is unsurprising, given that during its history it has often served as a declared form of opposition

against what bell hooks has called a “white supremacist capitalist” America.⁵⁷ This association of hip hop with dissidence is well established, as all of its prominent features have been theorized and deemed as resistance.⁵⁸ In terms of musical elements, its initial functional disruption/transformation of a turntable from a playback unit into an instrument of production succinctly illustrates Michel de Certeau’s idea of oppositional practices (Forman 389; de Certeau 3-4). At the same time, its earlier practice of sampling unabashedly challenged the music industry’s copyright laws (Forman 390). Through hip hop lyrics, be they political or not, resistance is mounted through the genre’s own unique linguistics (Alim 69-108), while the practice of self-ethnography gives a voice to the black underclass through their own depictions of ghetto oppression and exploitation (Light 143-144). Its resistance can also be attributed to the way live music performances create a temporary autonomous zone, or TAZ (Balliger 429). As my exploration of Paris will soon demonstrate, political rap often claims to disseminate counter-narratives to dominant or official accounts of public events by serving as an alternative media source. Despite its current commercialization and globalization, hip hop, in particular the category of political rap to which Paris belongs, still does retain some of this original oppositional spirit.

This antagonism is clearly seen in political hip hop’s controversial reactions and relations to the 9/11 catastrophe. One prominent incident revolves around comments by rapper KRS-One in 2004 when he responded to media questions on why the hip hop community was not engaged with 9/11 by saying: “9/11 happened to them ... 9/11 affected them down the block; the rich, the powerful those that are oppressing us as a culture.” But what angered many more was his comment that “we cheered when 9/11 happened in New York and say that proudly here.” He qualified his statement by explaining that in the pre-9/11 days, blacks were summarily prevented from entering the World Trade Center and hustled down to the train station because of their appearance and deportment. Precisely because of such past encounters, when the planes struck, it

⁵⁷ Bell hooks uses this description frequently, see for example, *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁵⁸ Hip hop as a form of resistance has been well documented. For some overviews, see Theresa A. Martinez’s “Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance,” *Sociological Perspectives* 40.2 (1997): 265-86; Brian Cross’s *It’s Not About a Salary: Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1993); Part 5 of *That’s the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004); chapter four of Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), and Charise Cheney’s “In Search of The ‘Revolutionary Generation’: (En)gendering the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism,” *Journal of African American History* 90.3 (2005): 278-298. For rap as a form of linguistic resistance, see chapters one, two, and four of Samy H. Alim’s *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

felt like the actualization of justice.⁵⁹ The 2004 single “Bin Laden” by Immortal Technique, which features Jadakiss rapping the line “Bush knocked down the towers,” is also reflective of a community that would rather denounce the US government than partake in popular displays of patriotism and national unity, and one that would rather condemn police brutality than venerate the NYPD as 9/11 heroes. For these African-American artists, their attachment to the nation-state is marred or non-existent due to a long history of civic terrorism and racism they themselves have experienced, or are identifying with their black communities.⁶⁰

Paris, too, does not pledge any form of post-9/11 loyalty to America. If anything, judging from the album’s cover art, he sides with the enemy. Much like Changez in the last chapter, he hampers Bush’s facile attempts to distinguish between friends and foes, citizens and foreigners, patriots and terrorists. The post-9/11 process to solidify an “us” is as much in disarray as the process of enemification to engender a “them.” Paris first gained national exposure in America two decades ago with his hit single and first album *The Devil Made Me Do It* (Tommy Boy Records, 1990). This entrance into the hip hop scene put him in the company of other artists like the seminal and iconic political group Public Enemy, KRS-One, and X-Clan, who all incorporated black nationalist rhetoric into their music during a period described as the “Golden Age of Rap Nationalism” (Cheney 278). Every bit as belligerent and militant as Public Enemy, which went on to gain great popularity and renown, Paris has neither achieved as high a profile nor garnered the same academic curiosity, despite his virtuosity as an artist who flows at a furious speed in his signature baritone. He holds an economics degree from the University of California at Davis and has worked as a stockbroker. His real name is Oscar Jackson, Jr., but he chose the name Paris as a way to transform a Euro-centric word into something that is Afro-centric, he once explained in an interview with Germany’s BACKSPIN TV.⁶¹ Shorn of his hardcore militant persona, Paris is a 45-year-old man with a family living in a wealthy suburb of

⁵⁹ KRS-One’s full statement can be accessed at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KRS-One, accessed November 28, 2012.

⁶⁰ Another famous incident that reveals the complex realities of African-Americans’ relations to the country centers around writer Amiri Baraka’s controversial poem “Somebody Blew Up America,” which focuses on how black Americans have suffered from domestic terrorism since the era of slavery. Another prominent theme of the poem is the history and evils of imperialism. For Baraka’s defense of his poem, see his article in *CounterPunch*, “The ADL Smear Campaign Against Me. I Will Not Resign, I Will Not Apologize,” at <http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/10/07/the-adl-smear-campaign-against-me/>, accessed November 28, 2012. For a detailed examination of the controversy, see Mathilde Roza’s “‘America under Attack’: Unity and Division after 9/11” in *Multiculturalism after 9/11: Transatlantic Perspectives*, ed. Derek Rubin and Jaap Verheul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

⁶¹ To access that interview, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVm5tTH2F0E>, accessed December 1, 2012.

Oakland and San Francisco, according to a news report.⁶² In view of this, his strong commitment to and identification with the black underclass in his lyrics are noteworthy given that his own background suggests neither powerlessness nor oppression.



Figure 3.2. American rapper Paris. Credits unavailable. Reprint permission granted by the artist.

His fifth album *Sonic Jihad* serves as an interesting case study not only because it marked the bold return of the artist after a hiatus, but the album was also the launching pad for his new independent label Guerrilla Funk Recordings, which he created as an antidote to what he views as the post-9/11 “intolerant climate” of suppression of free speech and artistic expression. This independent production is also a form of resistance against what he sees as the “corporate homogenization” of hip hop and R&B. First released in 2003, just two years following the 9/11 catastrophe, the album was relaunched in 2009 in a deluxe edition with one extra remix. Depicting himself as “Hard Truth Soldier,” Paris’s overall performance is marshaled to serve his oppositional politics. If the loaded word “jihad” in the album’s title⁶³ and its aforementioned cover art of a plane targeting the White House are inadequate harbingers of the political lyrics to be heard on the CD, other graphic elements and images on the album jacket and in the liner notes clearly characterize Paris’s revolutionary commitments. Disregarding post-9/11 national rhetoric and sentiments of patriotism and mourning, Paris calls for the overthrow of the then president George W. Bush and charges that 9/11 was an inside job. He also tackles other familiar themes covered in his previous albums, such as police brutality and racial oppression.

Hailing from the San Francisco Bay Area, Paris exhibits certain West Coast rap sensibilities, including the G-funk style which is characterized by the use of live instrumentation – often heavy on bass and keyboards – with minimal or no sampling (Krimms 74). In *Sonic Jihad*, Paris deploys the repeated backdrop musical loops of menacing-sounding keyboard and bass lines, as well as percussion, such as hand-clapping accents, to reinforce his rhymes. The most

⁶² For an interesting look at the man behind the rapper, see the article by Peter Byrne in *SF Weekly* on December 3, 2003, at <http://www.sfweekly.com/2003-12-03/news/capital-rap/>, accessed on November 28, 2012.

⁶³ The significance of the word jihad will be discussed later in the chapter.

common feature of his rhyming style is the consistent and disciplined usage of the couplet; when two successive lines are linked by simple and catchy end rhymes – for example, pain/rain, game/fame, itch/bitch – which are always stressed with a beat. Alliteration is also used. There are no breaks between the tracks, as one simply flows into the next. This is very evocative of the structure favored by Public Enemy. In an old interview, Chuck D, the lead rapper, comments that the group's records are formatted like radio shows in which there is "something happening every second, from beginning to end." This continuity is meant to limit any dead air that might prematurely prompt listeners to turn off the music, an act he views as a rejection of the music (Dery 413). It is quite fitting that Public Enemy made a guest appearance on *Sonic Jihad*.

A salient feature of the album is also Paris's self-referentiality and his own sense of exceptionalism as a political rap artist, as the album's title, his nickname P-Dog, and his record label's website Guerrillafunk.com are all often cited in the lyrics. No doubt, the album is about police brutality and black oppression, but it is equally about how Paris and his "Hard Truth" soldiers are battling for emancipation and expressing violent and masculinist black power. In other words, besides the required themes of racial terror and oppression, *Sonic Jihad* is also a self-glorifying portrait of and fierce performance by Paris as an old-school, authentic, "raw," ultra-committed, and militant rapper, in contradistinction to other mainstream hip hop artists who lack radical political pedigree.

Paris's main political and ideological affinity remains affixed to the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and specifically the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was founded in Oakland. His logo is actually that of a black panther superimposed onto the word Paris. The politics and ideologies of those black radical activities are simply too complex and varied to be detailed here; while Marxism was a major influence, black radicalism had its own vitality and inspirations also in the context of racial oppression. When asked about the influence of the Black Panther Party on his music, Paris pointed to the party's emphasis on self-sufficiency and the care for one's local community. Its former force as a revolutionary vanguard is somewhat obscured when Paris describes it generically as being "all about a fight for liberation, a fight for social justice, a fight for the betterment of everybody."⁶⁴ The lyrics of *Sonic Jihad* and Paris's other albums, however, reflect more fully the impact of the party's militancy, rhetoric, and revolutionary agenda on his music. Paris's politics is further informed by the Nation of

⁶⁴ For this interview of Paris with Germany's BACKSPIN TV, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVm5tTH2F0E>, accessed November 30, 2012.

Islam, being a former member of the group which has enjoyed tremendous influence in African-American communities, as well as hip hop culture.⁶⁵ In general, the targets of Paris's resistance are mostly Althusser's repressive state apparatus (government, police, and the prison system) and ideological state apparatus (religion, schools, and the media) (Althusser 207-208). Moreover, Paris seems to view various social, political, and economic events through a conspiratorial interpretive framework. Given that these ideological elements are reflected in the liner notes and they reinforce the main themes of the tracks, a closer analysis of the album's insert is warranted.

Contesting 9/11: A Prelude

The outside jacket of the CD shows the twin towers of the World Trade Center engulfed in flames; looming over them is the head and upper body of former president Bush, with the numbers 666 – the Biblical and popular reference to the devil – triangulated and placed adjacent to his face.⁶⁶ His head is also encircled by the presidential seal, half of which is on fire (see figure 3.3). This association of Bush with the devil is, no doubt, inspired by Paris's Nation of Islam roots and the movement's iconic leader Malcolm X, whose famous phrase, "the devil white man," is a perennial reference in political hip hop.



Figure 3.3. An image of Bush as appearing in the CD insert and jacket of Paris's *Sonic Jihad*, produced by Guerrilla Funk Recordings, 2003 and 2009. Reprint permission granted by Guerrilla Funk.

Rising over both Bush and the twin towers is Paris's face, with only his watchful eyes being illuminated to create the stock veiled face and head of a guerrilla fighter. This portrayal of Bush-as-the devil and the destruction of the twin towers underscore one of Paris's major claims

⁶⁵ For Nation of Islam references in Paris's song "The Devil Made Me Do It," see Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994): 102-103. For a detailed study of hip hop's engagement with Islam, see chapter two of Alim's *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁶⁶ The jacket and liner notes I am examining here are from the 2009 deluxe edition of *Sonic Jihad*.

in the album: 9/11 was an inside job. That Paris is hovering in the background with his familiar scowl and gazing directly at the viewer emphasizes a tripartite engagement between artist, audience, and political events. In this sense he implicates the listeners, calling on them to contemplate and act, in particular on the catastrophe itself, as well as its wide-reaching political consequences. This can be seen more clearly in the insert where a statement, presumably penned by Paris, informs readers that the war on terror amounts to “violence visited on people of color.” Indeed, the country is at war, but not against the enemies commonly identified by the government. “Who are the bigger terrorists,” Paris asks. “Bush, Cheney, Powell, Blair, Rice, Ashcroft and Ridge etc. – those who murder and sanction vicious violence against innocents for control and profit in the name of protecting Americans against a non-existent menace, or Bin Laden and Saddam & Co?”. Paris continues and exhorts the reader to “think” and “don’t be a sheep.” As this condemnation nears an end, he offers this final warning: “Don’t be fooled. We are at war. Know your real enemy.”

Not only does Paris inveigh against the former US administration, he also directs his venom at the conservative media and various entertainment consortia which have, according to him, colluded to exclude voices of resistance from mainstream culture in the wake of 9/11. Paris’s various claims about 9/11 can be seen as a form of counter-hegemonic initiative to compete, if not overturn, rival authority explanations about the disaster offered by the government and disseminated by the media. He seems to believe that “official” and dominant texts – government accounts and news reports – always serve other hidden power interests; they serve the purpose of “mass deception” to benefit the rich elite. In response, he presents “facts” and “hard truths” in a struggle for the sonic realm. By denouncing ideology and articulating counter-hegemonic claims, Paris relies on a self-proclaimed legitimacy, which presupposes that his own inversion of official 9/11 accounts is somehow non-ideological. And yet by designating his ideas and beliefs as “truth,” this reflects the very form and logic of ideology.

He repeatedly parodies and denounces the media to alert listeners to its power to control their perceptions of the world. Much like Public Enemy, Paris sees his music as a kind of alternative media source. His condemnation of the mainstream media can be seen on the adjacent page which shows a headshot of a riled-up Paris, with his mouth duct-taped, towering over a freeze frame of a television newscast with two anchors whose heads have been replaced by cartoon faces. Once again the triangulated 666 design appears, but this time it is used as a station identification logo, along with the headline “AMERIKKKA’S WAR ON TERROR,” and a ticker

conspiracy bent can also be seen in his lyrics which contain several references to secret societies, such as the Illuminati and Freemasonry. As virulent as they are, both the album's jacket and the insert are but a prelude to the assault by the music itself. These political views will be translated into rhyming verses and ferocious sounds in an aural resistance that confronts the war on terror and post-9/11 politics of nationalism.

Reframing Sounds of Terror and War

Approaching the politics of 9/11 through the sensible, particularly in this chapter on audibility, means listening closely to the literal sounds of catastrophe, terror, and war. These sounds – vocal, natural or manipulated, as in *Sonic Jihad* – shape one's perceptual experience of 9/11, elucidate their corresponding visual images, and ultimately help to condition the legibility and meaning of the event itself. The 9/11 soundscape includes not only the poignant human voices heard in farewell telephone calls from victims trapped inside the twin towers and the hijacked planes, but also the overwhelming roars of jetliners, collapsing towers, screams, cries, voices of panic, and piercing sounds of police cars and fire truck sirens. The war on terror, too, generates its terrifying sounds of violence through detonations of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the roars and thunders of US military jet engines, whether they are heard on the nightly newscasts as natural sounds, or as artificial sounds created by special effects in terrorism movies. Confused shouted orders on the battlefields, bursts of automatic weapons, booming of rocket propellers, and revving of engines from Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs) and Strykers are just some of the auditory coordinates of American “shock and awe” military campaigns. Even sounds of the whirling blades of low-flying helicopters had gained startling signifying power. At a 2004 press briefing, an Iraqi journalist told US army Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt that the sound of American helicopters, which were flying low to the ground, was terrifying young children, especially at night. He asked, “Why do you insist on flying so low and scaring the Iraqi people?” Kimmitt, who was both the deputy director for operations and the chief military spokesman for coalition forces in Iraq, responded: “What we would tell the children of Iraq is that the noise they hear is the sound of freedom” (qtd. in Creekmur 83). How might these sounds, which make up the post-9/11 auditory fabric, be disrupted to create new conceptualizations of war and terror and enlarge the fields of the thinkable and the possible for the discussion of 9/11?

Similar sounds of violence, terror, and war permeate Paris's *Sonic Jihad*. But the war on

terror undergoes a drastic reconfiguration and re-signification as the war zones, terror, perpetrators of violence, and victims are all relocated to somewhere else and substituted with other actors, inventing an alternative sensory experience in which established meanings are modified. For Paris, the battlefield is the streets of the inner city ghetto, and terror is the domestic and racial terror endured historically by African-Americans. The perpetrators of such terrors are neither al-Qaeda nor other Islamist extremists, but the police and the US government. The victims are the black poor, who lead lives that are oppressed and often destroyed by criminality. The resistance battle that Paris declares on the US's war on terror is that of sonic warfare. Consistent with the hip hop aesthetics of cutting and remixing samples, Paris's resistance tactic consists of appropriating existing sound elements and recombining them in a new context as a way to reframe and reconfigure existing definitions, meanings, and sensory experiences. Consequently, this redefinition also displays both the contingency and fragility of the original context and elements.

This resistant aural reconfiguration and re-signification begins with the album's opening track "Ave Bushani," which swiftly establishes 9/11 and war on terror references and context. The number is a parodic imitation of the theme song "Ave Satani" of the classic film *The Omen*. Bush, unsurprisingly, is alluded to once more as the Beast through a reference of the number 666. The song introduces a riotous post-9/11 soundscape made up of a fast-paced collage of existing news broadcast fragments communicating post-catastrophe rising tensions: Americans' freedom from fear, the public's calls for military response and the rise of the terrorism threat advisory to color orange (high risk). These sounds are then layered with voices of panicking and frightened women, and chants from anti-war demonstrations. Also hovering in the background are sung voices in the choral style of the original song.

These actual sounds and references to 9/11, fear, and panic, however, take on a dramatic twist in the next number "Field Nigga Boogie" and for the rest of the album, which relocates the catastrophe and the war on terror to Paris's parallel violent reality of the American inner city. That soundscape of violence and warfare, associated with America's war on terror military campaigns abroad, finds a near mimesis in the album as aural special effects are achieved with a pandemonic collage of sputtering Uzis, gun bursts, suggestive sounds of guns reloading, the sharp pings of bullet casings dropping on the ground, wailing police sirens, bomb explosions, shattered glass, and low-flying helicopter noises that are far from the sound of freedom. Screams of women, confused shouting, sounds of car tires screeching against the pavement, and

fragments of police radio dispatches all coalesce to suggest troubled and perilous lives in the ghetto. These special sound effects are the standard aural markers of the political rap genre, but when placed within an album that specifically targets the war on terror, they redefine the concepts of terror and terrorism.

Not only are artificial sounds used to achieve a reconfiguration, Bush's own voice is also exploited to shift the meaning and scope of 9/11 terror to domestic terror. The song "What Would You Do?" begins with a fragment of a public address spoken in what is clearly Bush's voice, but his words are digitally remixed to announce a "war against the American people." In the tradition of *détournement*, this faux Bush speech continues to outline the government's sustained campaign to locate and apprehend, presumably terrorist suspects in Bush's original speech, but now the target of the post-9/11 manhunt has been altered to "every American." Thus, while Bush still speaks in his own voice, his sentences have been twisted and recombined to create a new meaning. This way, Paris sets Bush up to announce and confirm violations of civil liberties, and in the process, makes Bush expose his own culpability through his own (albeit digitally manipulated by Paris) utterances. In "Agents of Repression," Paris appropriates the rousing promotional style of 24-hour cable news channels and uses the familiar intonation of a broadcaster to announce: "All day on the nation's only all-terror network, all terror, all the time, Fox, MSNBC and CNN." Through this parody, he articulates a triple critique: first, the fear-inducing discourse of post-9/11 terrorism; second, the media's capitalization of that discourse; and finally, the propensity of these media to hype the news.

What the listener hears are often the same sonic and sensorial elements: sounds of violence, combat, and war; sounds of Bush's familiar southern-accented voice and the familiar and authoritative intonation of network television identification announcements, but these elements are adapted and re-contextualized, generating new and multiple reference points. What this yields is also the possibility of parallel discourses in the same soundscape, as the original now signifies something different or it is ruptured and remixed to mingle with the new. Sounds of American violence abroad are also sounds of inner city violence; Bush's speech to apprehend terrorists, and thus to protect Americans, is now also a promise to harm them. By re-inscribing different meanings to these sounds, Paris is able to reconfigure the war on terror, which can now be signified and perceived differently. Hearing the war on terror means simultaneously hearing American urban and racial violence, and reversely, hearing ghetto violence is also to acknowledge American military aggression abroad. Not only is the discourse of the war on terror

reframed by that of racial violence but also vice versa; anti-racism is fused with anti-imperialism.

In this sense, Paris is trying to bring America's foreign wars closer to home, but the raging sounds of war and violence are not contrasted with scenes of complacent and peaceful American lives but an equally violent and precarious existence of African-Americans. Rather than the contradiction of war abroad and peace at home, there is instead a co-presence of realities and meanings that serves a critical function.⁶⁷ The US administration's war on terror and racial terror are not separate realities but are linked by what Paris sees as an axis of white power, capital, and violence. Rather than treating the events of 9/11 as a rupture in American history, Paris chooses to identify the connections between these two terrors. After all, the myriad of woes against which Paris had directed his critique before 9/11 in his previous albums – racist violence, discrimination, police brutality, exploitation – all have found similar expressions after 9/11. Police brutality and racial profiling, topics that rappers have been thundering against unremittingly for decades, are now being targeted at Muslims; the post-9/11 curtailing of civil liberties and the intensification of surveillance were already familiar aspects of ghetto life. Thus, the post-catastrophe sense of physical vulnerability felt by traumatized Americans is but a lesser and temporary ordeal compared to the historical and daily experience of racial terrorism encountered by African-Americans.

A system of domination, oppression, and exploitation is suggested in the track "Evil" in which Paris imagines and traces a lengthy history of evil that includes slavery, economic exploitation, social and psychological oppression and degradation of blacks, imperialism, the corrupted financial market, 9/11 conspiracy, censorship, and post-9/11 restricted civil liberties. As Paris's lyrics contend, racial hierarchies, oppression, physical terror, and economic exploitation, which started with slavery, still find their present-day legacies in social, political, and economic institutions, like prisons, schools, and the job market. American blacks are still confronting oppressive conditions, enslaved by poverty and encountering physical violence through police brutality. And much like the global anti-war protests at the time, Paris calls attention to the ulterior motives – economic interests – behind the post-9/11 military interventions. Seen through these prisms of evil and capital, America's "new round of capital

⁶⁷ Readers familiar with Rancière's discussion of the four forms of contemporary art might immediately think of this co-presence through either the category of play or mystery. While there are similarities, there are also differences. In Paris's reconfiguration there is no element of undecidedness. Paris is, however, emphasizing the connection between heterogeneous elements that are testifying to a world in common. But this is not used to address the loss of a social bond. For Rancière's discussion on those four forms see "Problems and Transformations of Critical Art" in *AD*, pages 53-59.

accumulation,” to appropriate Retort’s words (7), is but a continuation of the long-established economic exploitation of and physical assault on colored people domestically and globally, as Paris argues.

In attacking the post-9/11 auditory realm, Paris creates an alternative sonic experience. Appropriated sounds relocated or remixed engender a permutation of meanings. If mourning, remembrance and patriotism became some of the dominant ways of both sensing and making sense of 9/11, Paris turns to racial terror to make sense of the catastrophe and the war on terror – oppositionally. What is conceivable about 9/11 is expanded and might even lead to other possibilities of re-conceptualization.

Redefining 9/11 Key Terms

Besides the re-signification of artificial sounds and voices, numerous post-9/11 key concepts and words, such as freedom, jihad, and police, plus the crucial figure of the soldier, are all redefined through Paris’s lyrics. The album actually contains a track called “Freedom”, an important term which appeared frequently in post-9/11 rhetoric. The word had served as the motivation behind the terrorist attacks, which were interpreted as an assault on quintessential American values like economic progress and prosperity, freedom, religious pluralism, and universal suffrage: “They [terrorists] hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other,” so said Bush in his famous address to Congress on September 20, 2001.⁶⁸ Alternatively, the word had been enlisted in the rhetoric of American exceptionalism that extols the country’s goal to assist Afghanistan and Iraq by bringing freedom. Freedom for Paris, however, means an ardent militant fight against government lies, America’s “capital wars” abroad, black poverty, police brutality, and other woes, which are all opposed through the ideals of black nationalism (which I will address in the next section) and fueled with the refrain of “power to the people.” The sounds of freedom are not low-flying US military helicopters in Iraq, but sounds of Paris’s own voice and his lyrics on black emancipation. Paris raps in “Freedom”:

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom
This is how we ride and roll – Soldiers for life fo’ sho
We come back to the days of – grenades up

⁶⁸ For the complete speech, see the archived White House website of the Bush presidency at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>, accessed December 3, 2012.

Black fist raised up – we stay tough

...

Still put a fist in – the system

Still kill a killa cop, we still win

Still be the one to expose the beast [when it's]

Still un-American to be for peace [yeah] (3-6, 13-16)

Along with the word freedom, the term police, too, takes on a different meaning and imagery for Paris. In a 9/11 context, two specific associations to this word are possible: one refers to officers of the New York Police Department (NYPD), who along with the city's firefighters have been hailed as the heroes of 9/11, and the other, less positive, is the development of post-9/11 international politics in which the US has adopted the "world police" posture in its war on terror. In Paris's political rap imaginary, the word police is synonymous with police brutality, as his lyrics never fail to remind listeners of officers who are "servin' us with sticks and shots." He raps in "Tear Shit Up": "But who protects us from these murderous cops / Whose heroes, you could keep your flags I'm out, I'll / Wrap a chain around the precinct and burn shit down" (5-8). As mentioned earlier, this loathing of the police is always expressed through the police-pig equation. Besides the photo of the pig in the insert and the word itself in the lyrics, the album is also filled with squeaking and oinking sounds of pigs.

The figure of the soldier, which has proliferated in popular-culture representations as a result of intense post-9/11 militarization, is appropriated for Paris's own army of "Hard Truth Soldiers."⁶⁹ The violent nature of the soldier's life is not contested here but magnified, for Paris demonstrates a parallel, if not more intense, militant and masculinist aggression that has characterized his resistance and revolutionary fervor. Often, it is the glorification of his masculinist and militant style of defiance – gun prowess and expletives – that dominates the lyrics. In his anti-war song "AWOL" (absent without leave), Paris adopts the persona of "a true soldier for America" who is deployed to the Middle East for a peacekeeping mission. This young soldier, however, is stripped of any form of heroism, military competence, and courage when confronted with a violent, gory, and confused battle scene. Moreover, the lyrics describe what Paris sees as a deceitful military recruitment campaign.

⁶⁹ For a detailed discussion on the image of the soldier and Rancière's thoughts on aesthetics, see Sudeep Dasgupta's "The Spare Image in an Unsparing World: Framing the Soldier in an Indeterminate War" in *Transformations* 19 (2011): 1-18.

Paris, though, is a self-proclaimed soldier who does not claim to bring democracy to foreign countries but to fight against black servility and degradation. His oppositional black and soldier identity is further bolstered by media interviews and reviews of *Sonic Jihad*. The adjective “militant” is a common description of Paris by journalists, as his star image is constructed exactly as a rebel and as an antithesis to mainstream hip hop stars who have mostly abandoned political issues.⁷⁰ In “You Know My Name,” Paris stresses his identity by repeating the final line four times: “It’s plain to see, you can’t change me, cause I’m a soldier for life” (63). Contra the image of the American soldier, Paris is a different kind of soldier fighting, as I have suggested, a different kind of war; a sonic jihad against the war on terror. Although Paris is no longer a member of the Nation of Islam, he has nevertheless used the word jihad in his album title. Much like the word fundamentalist, the word jihad has also gained tremendous potency in post-9/11 public discourses. Resembling author Hamid’s attempt to reframe the word fundamentalist in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which I addressed in previous chapter, Paris is also reappropriating the term jihad.

A key concept in Islam, the word jihad has often been reductively interpreted when it actually possesses a long history and multiple meanings (Cook 1). As David Cook explains, the word’s literal meaning in Arabic is “striving” or “exerting oneself,” with the implication, and based on its usage in the Quran, towards one’s religion (1). Wary of the word’s negative connotations, such as violence and conquest, some Muslims maintain that the word’s significance is solely spiritual (2). But Cook has also called attention to the word’s primary meaning, which points to “warfare with spiritual significance” (2). In view of the histories of black American Muslim movements and their impact on hip hop culture, H. Samy Alim has related the term jihad specifically to hip hop music, describing “a jihad of the tongue, or *jihad bil lisaan*, which also includes *jihad bil qalam*, or jihad of the pen” (35). Turning to Hadith, the record of the sayings of Prophet Mohammad, Alim discusses one specific hadith, which suggests that jihad can operate on many levels: “The Prophet is reported to have said: ‘He amongst you who sees something evil should change it with his hand; and if he is unable he should change it with his tongue, and if he is unable to do that he should at least hate it in his heart, and that is the

⁷⁰ These media texts include Bradley Miller’s review for urbent.com at www.urbnet.com/review.asp?CDID=1205, in which Miller describes Paris as “the Black Panther of rap”; Ken Capobianco’s review for *The Boston Globe*, dated January 16, 2004, accessible at www.boston.com/ae/music/cd_reviews/articles/2004/01/16/paris_sonic_jihad/; or Seandra Sim’s interview with Paris for AllHipHop.com on October 14, 2003 at www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc2901a.html, accessed December 3, 2012.

weakest form of faith” (Alim 35).⁷¹ Alim has called hip hop artists, in particular those who are active in what he defines as the transglobal hip hop umma, as “verbal mujahidin” (21). Although Paris did not specify his usage of jihad in the liner notes, the sonic battle that he is mounting can also be seen in this context. Warring against what he sees and defines as evil is exactly his struggle. He is launching a “jihad of words,” already modeled by Malcolm X decades earlier, in a discursive and auditory war. Instead of being armed with a Molotov cocktail, he is hurling a “Malcolm X cocktail, ready to burn the street up” (“Freedom,” 27). Musical arrangements, words and phrases, and sounds – found and appropriated, instrumental and artificial – are his weapons of destruction. Paris raps in “How We Do”:

Who could match when we spit bricks
See em scatter when I call blitz
Nigga scratch em out the mix
No matter what you been through
We still comin’ with that
Bomb bomb biddy in the city when we bring truth

...

See I’mma blast the Devil, the rhythm is the rebel. (22-27, 31)

As the pronoun “we” in the lyrics testifies, this sonic war is fought collectively by a network of like-minded rap artists and fans who establish their own community of “revolutionaries.” Alim has also described hip hop culture, which is globally circulated, through the term “Global Hip Hop Nation,” a form of nationhood instituted along the lines of “cultural, ideological, and imaginary means” (21). *Sonic Jihad*, too, deliberates on this theme of nationhood and its related components of nationalism and national belonging. It does so, however, once again in opposition to the post-9/11 rise of American patriotism and the protection of the homeland. Through lyrics, formal elements, guest rappers, and even the music’s reception, the album redefines and re-enacts the concept of an alternative nationhood through the competing historical discourse of Black nationalism.

⁷¹ Alim is quoting Sahih Muslim Book 01, Hadith No. 79. For a detailed study of the meanings of jihad and its relation to hip hop, see chapter two of his *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Post-9/11 United *Streets of America*

One of the immediate consequences of the terrorist attacks was the emergence of a collective national identity and the ubiquity of American flags in public spaces. Americans were urged by Bush, as well as public officials, television commentators, reporters, and survivors alike, to remember and rekindle their national ideals – freedom of religion, speech, and democracy itself, as mentioned earlier – in the face of such a tragedy. A revived sense of nationalism, expressed in devotion and loyalty to America and its virtues and values, therefore, became the balm that could heal the terror-stricken nation. As Bush claimed in a speech on October 12, 2001: “As Americans, we’ve mourned together ... it seems like we’re putting first things first. In my inaugural address, I said that some Americans feel like they share a continent, but not a country. Today, that feeling is gone. We know we are a single nation, each a part of one another.”⁷²

Rudolph Giuliani, the New York mayor at the time of the attacks, said it succinctly: “All that matters is that you embrace America and understand its ideals and what it’s all about. Abraham Lincoln used to say that the test of your Americanism was how much you believed in America. Because we’re like a religion really. A secular religion” (qtd. in Croucher 181). Americans in the post-9/11 years were not asked to be global citizens, instead they were urged to turn inward (Croucher 186). Official discourse aside, more informal nationalistic impulses were also visible and widespread in the placement of “United We Stand” bumper stickers on vehicles, patriotic tattoos, and the unabashed display of patriotism and unity at national sporting events and in public spaces.⁷³

Interrogating this intensification of nationalism and patriotism, Paris articulates his resistance through the ideals of Black nationalism by re-conceptualizing national devotion and homeland. The Nation of Islam’s well-known shout “Do you know what time it is? It’s nation time!” thus becomes an appropriate rallying cry again, validating not the post-9/11 American nationalism but sustaining Paris’s resistance against it through the history of black struggles. *Sonic Jihad*’s many themes, icons, and images can be traced back to the Black Power and nationalist movement prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s. The album can also be seen in the

⁷² That speech was given during the March of Dimes Volunteer Leadership Conference on October 12, 2001. During the speech Bush also asked American children to help Afghan children. See the archived White House website of the Bush presidency at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/>, accessed December 3, 2012.

⁷³ See chapter three of Jaap Kooijman’s *Fabricating the Absolute Fake* for examples of the public display of American military power and patriotism at Super Bowl events (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

context of the rise of political rap in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which fused the ideology of Black Power with hip hop music.

The phrase “Black Power” encapsulated many of the aspiring and contradictory aspects of the movement itself. Some interpreted it as a call for violence, others envisioned the economic empowerment of blacks, and still many urged African-Americans to affirm and celebrate their own culture (Glaude 4). But what circulated, galvanized by the phrase Black Power, was a collective mood that “a new black man and woman had been born and that their subordination would be, if necessary, violently resisted,” explains Eddie Glaude Jr (4). The various political organizations that emerged at this time, including the Black Panther Party which had influenced Paris, envisaged diverse ambitions: from the complete separation from the US and the formation of an independent nation-state, to black-owned and black-operated businesses, to cultural retrieval and preservation of an African identity (Glaude 4). As Glaude argues: “‘Blackness’ became a determining category in how African Americans understood themselves as agents, *and* the articulation of ‘blackness’ as a positive value became a means to defiantly challenge the state” (6, italics in original).⁷⁴ But what distinguished the movement was also an expression of rage, what Jeffrey Stout describes as its “rhetoric of excess and the fantasy of vengeance” (qtd. in Glaude 8). This would later be appropriated by “raptivists,” including Paris, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as they revived that same rhetorical and political styling of the Black Panther Party and the Black Power movement (Cheney 278). As Charise Cheney explains:

Black nationalist theory is founded upon the conviction that black people in the Diaspora – by virtue of African ancestry, a common historical experience of slavery, as well as a legacy of racial oppression in the forms of political disfranchisement, economic exploitation, social discrimination, and cultural degradation – share a cultural identity and therefore constitute a nationality, or nation, separate and distinct from other (read: white) Americans. (281, parenthesis in original)

⁷⁴ In this specific context concerning black identity and resistance, it is also helpful to turn briefly to African-American writer bell hooks, who has explicitly linked the act of resistance to one’s racial identity by propagating the act of “loving blackness as political resistance.” In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks, writing in the early 1990s, argues that the hegemonic mode of seeing and thinking is perpetuated through negative media images and representations of blackness that not only support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and domination of blacks, but also create internalized racism and self-hatred among blacks themselves. Therefore, loving one’s own blackness becomes an act of resistance (9-20).

It is this conceptualization of nationality that Paris seems to champion. His lyrics stress black people's shared history of slavery, present dangers of self-destruction through criminality and black-on-black violence, and the ever elusive hope of collective betterment. In this sense, his nationalism is very much "a cultural nation," as succinctly articulated by Maulana Karenga, the founder of the cultural nationalist US Organization, back in 1967. "The cultural nation is a people with a common past, a common present and, hopefully, a common future," he said (qtd. in Cheney 281).

Where acts of mourning, patriotism, and public commemoration all helped to create a sense of post-catastrophe national belonging and participation, Paris introduces other scenes of being together and ways of communal participation and partaking. Rejecting the restrictive bonds of national identification, he raps mockingly in "What Would You Do": "Now even niggas wavin' flags like they lost they mind" (27). Elsewhere in the album, rapper stic.man of dead prez promotes, instead, the red-black-green colors of the Pan-African flag. Amidst the post-9/11 clamor of being an American, what Paris and his guest rappers take pride in is being black. "Being" black here does not imply an essentialist approach to blackness, as the album does reveal how blackness itself is rent by gender, class, generations, and political consciousness.⁷⁵

Relatedly, what distinguishes Paris's sonic and cultural nation from the various narrowly conceived post-9/11 expressions of nationalism are explicitly its global and outer-national referents of blackness. As Paul Gilroy and other scholars have already pointed out, hip hop music itself is not a purely American creation, having been influenced by Caribbean characteristics and having undergone cross-border and cross-cultural processes in its development (*Black* 85). One prominent indication of this transnational and transcultural connectedness can be seen in the appearance of various black guest rappers in the album with their different timbres and voices: from Capleton, a Jamaican reggae and dancehall artist, to the

⁷⁵ This internal antagonism can be seen in the title of the first song "Field Nigga Boogie," in which Paris announces his own return to rap and states his intentions: to bring listeners back to the days when rap served the purposes of black empowerment. He is a "field" nigga, no doubt, a real nigga. The distinction between a "field" Negro and a "house" Negro is one that was often invoked by Malcolm X to distinguish two types of blacks during the slavery era: a slave who worked and lived in the field and abhorred his white master and one who lived in the house, close to the master, and who obeyed him. In Malcolm's time, this field-slave/house-slave dichotomy found its correlatives in the distinction between the black middle class and the masses, highlighting class and intra-racial politics among blacks, see Robin D.G. Kelley's "House Negroes on the Loose: Malcolm X and the Black Bourgeoisie," *Callaloo* 21.2 (1998): 419-435. In Paris's case, "Field Nigga Boogie" speaks of Paris's own fearless and violent opposition against the police instead of any form of acquiescence. Elsewhere in the album, this black internal division is also evident in Paris's critique of contemporary hip hop's betrayal of the original spirit and aims of political rap of an earlier generation. Paris has reserved some of his fiercest condemnation for black rappers who have "made the game corrupt."

LA rapper Kam; from New York's Public Enemy and the duo dead prez to the Afro-Peruvian rapper Felipe Andres Coronel, better-known as Immortal Technique. The album has even been hailed as "historic" and "monumental" by a reviewer from the *San Francisco Bay View* given that so many black revolutionary rappers are being heard on the same album.⁷⁶ These voices, drastically divergent in terms of tempo, rhyming pattern, and vocal range, create a boisterous soundscape as each joins the communal "capha" in a running dialogue with Paris, rapping lines of their own, substantiating the main themes by performing the chorus, or firing off the response to Paris's call. The antiphony (call-and-response) generates more than a just a polyphonic atmosphere but also what Gilroy has termed a "democratic, communitarian moment" which underscores and anticipates, but does not guarantee, equal social relationships. "Lines between self and others are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others," says Gilroy (*Black* 79). Commonality, group experience, individual and collective outlook are all emphasized here as the guests' presence is needed to complete the song. Although Paris's formulation of collective belonging deviates from Bush's post-9/11 America, it does still share many of the same sentiments that cement solidarity: hatred, outrage, and revenge. Moreover, gender equality is not validated as female vocal voices do appear in the album but are relegated to the chorus and to the background.⁷⁷

The album's communal atmosphere is also achieved through assemblages of recycled sounds: television news/radio broadcasts, as mentioned earlier, segments from galvanizing public speeches by black leaders, a voice fragment from a female black anti-war demonstrator, rallying cries from anti-war protests, and a brief narrative about growing up in a ghetto by a young boy. These fragments from diverse sources are linked in a sonic reunification to contest Bush's singular voice and to contrast the post-9/11 narratives of grief and of national unity, pride and values, which permeated the public sphere. In this sonic and cultural nation, Paris not only addresses the bleak lives in American inner cities, he also alludes to the lives of those outside US borders, signaling a shift from the nation-state to a global frame of reference. As discussed earlier, domestic anti-racism is associated with anti-imperialism, with the album's liner notes, its lyrics, and sound fragments identifying exploitation and suffering at geographic locations such as

⁷⁶ For a reprint of the review, go to <http://www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc3179a.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

⁷⁷ For an in-depth look at the gender politics of the Black Power and hip hop movements, see Charise Cheney's "In Search of the 'Revolutionary Generation': (En)gendering the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism," *Journal of African American History* 90.3 (2005): 278-298.

the Middle East and Africa. The so-called conflict diamonds of Sierra Leone, too, appear in the lyrics. Dead prez also denounce the Bush administration's treatment of Haitian refugees in Miami. In terms of revolutionary zeal, a transnational identification is also expressed through lyrical references to Che Guevara.

Additionally, Paris's oppositional nationhood also takes on a virtual dimension as the camaraderie made audible in the album itself is extended to the reception and usage of that music. As mentioned earlier, no official music videos were made for *Sonic Jihad* but one does find a small collection of amateur videos on YouTube that are inspired by tracks from the album. In terms of YouTube genres, these are a hybrid of music and activism/outreach videos.⁷⁸ Applying a similar assemblage technique as used by Paris, these video remixes edit and weave together existing visual material from multiple media sources. These collages consist of still images that include press and amateur photographs, clip art images, graphics, newspaper clippings, and also simply slides of written texts by the video maker clarifying the political message of the lyrics. Some of the videos also have moving images, which include newscast footage, archive television footage, and fragments of official music videos or movies.

In all these videos there is no editing or manipulation of the music, which means Paris's tracks are always played in their original state. They all follow the same formula and show images, whether still or moving, paced to the rhythm of the song and sequenced to match the lyrics. Overall, these audio-visual compositions crystallize Paris's original political message and thus, bolster his various political claims. For example, consider the 37-year-old American identified as Bee, who uploaded a video for the song "Evil." His comment that "The liberation of Black People around the world is what I want to see and fighting for it" could have just as easily been uttered by Paris himself.⁷⁹ This rap-artist/video maker camaraderie is further extended with the addition of video viewers. Like most videos on YouTube, these *Sonic Jihad* videos also attract a mix of stock reactions from viewers. Many of the responses praise Paris for his rapping artistry and express their appreciation for his "real talk." Some reactions piggyback on Paris's

⁷⁸ While these video makers are usually not identified, the channel pages of users who uploaded and likely made the videos offer at least some demographic details. No doubt, the profiles on these channel pages cannot be verified, but these users disclosed their sex as male and are aged between 22 and 58; they reside in the US and Canada. At the time of writing, the number of subscribers to their channels ranged from 23 to 2,537 and the number of viewers is estimated at between 1,700 and 116,000 per video, but mostly in the tens of thousands. According to YouTube statistics, these *Sonic Jihad* videos are popular among males between 25 and 44 years old and are mostly watched by viewers registered in the US. Statistics are not available for every video, but this set of numbers applies to the video "Evil" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4JLI0XiMGQ>, accessed on December 31, 2010.

⁷⁹ This video can be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4JLI0XiMGQ&feature=related>; the link to Bee's channel is <http://www.youtube.com/user/niggaoffdaclair>, accessed May 6, 2013.

political message and call for resistance against the New World Order, the government and the media. Much like Paris himself, these fans resort to that familiar masculinist and militant protest posture: “This Song Gets Me Pumped Up I Could Kill A Whole Block With This Song,” writes one viewer.⁸⁰

What *Sonic Jihad*'s presence on YouTube indicates is that Paris's music generally attracts like-minded political hip hop fans, conspiracy theorists from the 9/11 Truth and anti-New World Order movements, raptivists and self-proclaimed revolutionaries, who are all addressing and resisting similar social and political issues. While the spirit of YouTube is that of a “video-sharing community,” these fans share more than just videos but also political convictions. These videos reflect a mutual affirmation and assistance: YouTube users visually recreate and disseminate Paris's political message while Paris energizes their individual political protest, as they utilize his music for their personal political interests. His music enables moments of identification and solidarity, connects diverse groups of fellow protesters, and forges them into an aural and visual hip hop cultural nation without traditional nation-state borders and distinctions, which deviates considerably from the post-9/11 imaginary of nationhood through its intense preoccupation with borders, boundaries, and national security.

In this sense, *Sonic Jihad* is very much a project of national reconstruction of sorts, in that it re-conceptualizes the idea of the post-9/11 nation through black struggles for emancipation. This nation is not perfect by any means as internal antagonisms are also evident, but nevertheless, nationalistic values, affection, and affiliation are all reconsidered as Paris offers his own version of America. It is an auditory protest that relocates American nationhood to the ‘hood’ and renames the United States of America to what rap fans often claim as their United Streets of America.

Truth and Knowledge: Paris's Politics and Rancière's Critique

My analysis of *Sonic Jihad* has up to now examined several of Paris's tactics of resistance and how they relate to the struggle for contesting the auditory borders that delimit what can or cannot be heard following 9/11. He does so by forcing listeners to hear sounds of the war on terror domestically and to translate some key terms and concepts differently. His oppositional practices also operate through an enactment of “national” affinities and the creation of (virtual) social

⁸⁰ These comments can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaCPUIfr8PY, www.youtube.com/watch?v=03emv95Lf_o, and www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2f7VW9_YOM, accessed November 28, 2012.

relations. This final section investigates his revolutionary politics by looking at the wider relationship between art and politics. Paris's mingling of music and politics raises several fundamental issues about politicized creative expressions, which are the broader concerns of this dissertation as 9/11 is being explored through my four creative cultural objects. While Rancière's conceptualization of politics through aesthetic borders has already become evident in this chapter with 9/11 politics being discussed through the sonic realm, his writings become even more pertinent here as they can help pinpoint some blind spots in Paris's sonic resistance project. Rancière's thoughts on several related subjects, such as intellectual equality, art's function and operations, the spectator's responsibility, and art's efficacy, all find resonances in Paris's music.

What rages through *Sonic Jihad* is Paris's unwavering political commitment; his music is uncompromisingly engaged with a broader context of political action and revolutionary passion. In fact, he is so adamant about the purpose of rap for the political project of "uplift," that he cannot tolerate any other forms of hip hop. As Paris himself laments in "Ain't No Love": "Fore blingin' we was singin' what it mean to be black / Now these bitchy bitchy boy bands causin' a fuss" (45-46). Whether it is articulated through his star image, liner notes, sounds, lyrics, or website, his music functions to expose, enlighten, activate, and mobilize. His music often addresses the social inequality encountered by blacks in America, but his primary intent to expose the lies of government and mainstream media and to provide knowledge and truth implicitly raises the issue of intellectual equality and suggests a hierarchy between the rap artist and his listeners.

The equality of intelligence actually has great implications for Rancière's general analysis on politics and art, and in particular, for the artist-spectator relationship. This theme surfaced initially in Rancière's much earlier book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in which he recounts the unorthodox teaching methods of the nineteenth-century pedagogical theorist, Joseph Jacotot. Jacotot's pedagogical paradigm, which Rancière never seems tired of telling, advances the claim that teaching is not primarily the transfer of knowledge by knowing teachers to their ignorant students, as in traditional explicatory pedagogical practices. This would presume an inequality of intelligence. "To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself," says Rancière (*TIS* 6). Jacotot's students, on the other hand, were able to learn without the aid of explication, for the teacher himself was unable to explain anything to them: they did not speak his French and he did not speak their Flemish. But their learning experience underscores the possibility that one can learn not by receiving and adopting the

teacher's knowledge but by exerting one's own intelligence through exploration and contemplation on the material. Rather than a relationship of inequality, one in which informed teachers would guide students from ignorance to knowledge, Jacotot's radical thoughts are anchored in a presupposition of intellectual equality, the position whence one must begin. Using Jacotot as an illustrative case and supporting his view, Rancière argues, "Equality was not an end to attain, but a point of departure, a *supposition* to maintain in every circumstance" (*TIS* 138, italics in original).

This notion of intellectual equality and equality in general as a point of departure rather than a destination or the end result of processes (such as reforms, protests and education) can also travel beyond pedagogy and into the aesthetic by thinking about the artist-spectator relationship through Jacotot's teacher-student equality. Artistic expressions, most often critical and politically-engaged projects, that aim and claim to transmit knowledge, truths, and awareness already start with a gesture of hierarchy and a certain assumption of the audience's ignorance by fixing them as receptive figures and forcing them to the receiving end. Rancière warns in an interview:

... emancipation can't be expected from forms of art that presuppose the imbecility of the viewer while anticipating their precise effect on that viewer ...
An art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message, the target audience, and the univocal mode of explicating the world, when, in other words, it stops wanting to emancipate us. (Carnevale and Kelsey 2)

That such an imposed message could be transmitted unproblematically to the audience and generate consequences for their behavior – thus assuming a direct link between artistic presentation, spectators' interpretation and their (assumed) ignited and ensuing desire to act politically – is a cause-effect logic Rancière has already rejected. As my earlier discussion of Rancière's argument for the aesthetic regime of art has already stated, what sets the aesthetic regime apart from others (the ethical and the representative) is an aesthetic dissensus that consists of a rupture between the art object and its specific social function (*DS* 138). The object no longer serves a specific purpose, whether that is religious, civic, moralistic or something else, thus disrupting its signification. This dissensus is a conflict between sense and sense, namely that disjunction between a sensory experience (of the art) and ways of making sense of it (by the spectator) (*DS* 139). What this means is that the underlying assumption of the efficacy of

subversive artistic practices – one which joins revelation (by art objects) to awareness and mobilization (in the audience) – must be reconsidered, given artistic forms are uncoupled from their purpose and effects.

Rather than dissensus, Paris insists on a cause-effect logic. A key component of his revolutionary politics is the weight he places on knowledge and truth. Attacking what he sees as the government's and the media's manipulation of public discourse in a project of mass deception, Paris claims his music provides "knowledge and truth" to his listeners, therefore fashioning himself as a purveyor of truth. His sonic war is fought in part to combat ignorance and ignite knowledge and political awareness. Consequently, this motivation grants his music the added dimension of education rather than entertainment, although Paris himself has insisted that he does not want to play the role of a schoolteacher.⁸¹ Nevertheless, his commentaries on contemporary issues have a didactic edge in the sense that they alert listeners who presumably are unaware of "hard truths" or are passively trusting the mainstream media sources.

The website for his independent label Guerrilla Funk Recordings reflects this educative purpose, as it works in tandem with his records to inform and educate. The website offers an eclectic must-read booklist, with suggestions ranging from autobiographies of black heroes, such as Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela, to self-empowerment books such as *The Millionaire Next Door*. Interestingly, the website also contains a page on financial empowerment called the Guerrilla Funk Wealth Builder, which is a primer on various subjects including investing, debt management, retirement and college planning – all aimed at helping fans to achieve wealth. Putting his economics degree and investment savvy to use, Paris writes: "It's important that you understand and adapt to the (financial) system if we want to bring about change. Use it for your benefit to enact change. Remember, change and revolution are one and the same – economic depression is *oppression*" (italics in original).⁸²

Throughout the album, Paris repeatedly emphasizes his responsibility and commitment to his listeners: "I rush truth to the youth – and shine the light / Take the red pill, open ya eyes to life" ("Field Nigga Boogie" 9-10). Lyrics from the track "Evil" also suggest this theme of exposure: "Some close they eyes but mine can see, all the evil surroundin' me / So what I'm 'posed ta do, when I can see right through? / Expose the lies and snatch the sheets, fight the evil

⁸¹ See Paris's interview with the alternative weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian* which has been posted on his website at <http://www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc3060a.html>, accessed on November 5, 2012.

⁸² This article, entitled "Money Matters," is available at <http://www.guerrillafunk.com/thoughts/doc4023a.html>, accessed on December 13, 2010.

surroundin' me" (46-48). In this way, resistance for Paris often becomes an aggressive unmasking of these lies and ills of the dominant order, as well as the mechanism of ideological power itself. The premise, though, is that the public is ignorant of such falsehood, that people are willing dupes and passive consumers of news fodder. In short, they are docile citizens, while Paris is the informed and enlightened artist.

In an interview with the *San Francisco Bay View*, which is reprinted and made available on Paris's website, Paris comments on what he sees as his own community's lack of knowledge and awareness.

We're all in this together. It's just that most of us aren't up on the way things really are. We're not up on why conditions exist the way they do in our communities – we just deal with it ... We have to stop treating knowledge like it's a disease. Somewhere along the line, it became cool to be dumb – especially among the youth.⁸³

The earnestness with which Paris stresses this improvement of the mind and the quest for knowledge surely has its roots, once again, in the Black Power movement and in Malcolm X. As stated earlier, many new Black organizations were established during that era, calling for various political interventions. But what united these different efforts is what Glaude has called a "politics of transvaluation." What he is referring to is a "fundamental psychological and cultural conversion from their socialization as a subordinate people to a self-determining nation" (Glaude 4). This conversion requires a "revolution of the mind," which was seen as a prerequisite for the success of the material revolution. This emphasis on thinking differently, as well as the pressing call for independent thought, were also central to the message of Malcolm X. As he once urged: "One of the first things I think young people, especially nowadays, should learn is how to see for yourself and listen for yourself and think for yourself ... The most important thing that we can learn to do today is think for ourselves" (qtd. in Glaude 1). Given that Malcolm X is the undisputed hero and idol of politically conscious hip hop stars, this theme of independent thought and its link to revolution has survived through the years and serves as an anchor for Paris.

Moreover, as the refrain from "What Would You Do" best exemplifies, knowledge and political awareness are linked to the possibilities of future action. This refrain, rather than rapped by Paris, is sung and repeated three times by imploring female voices:

⁸³ For the interview, go to www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc3179a.html, accessed November 21, 2012

What would you do if you
Knew all the things we know
Would you stand up for truth
Or would you turn away too?
And then what if you saw
All the things that's wrong
Would you stand tall and strong?
Or would you turn and walk away. (17-24)

Paris is searching for contemplative listeners who will respond and act. It is knowledge and the practice of thinking, initiated by Paris's music, that would pave the way for action. He first assumes an intellectual inequality, that of between the ignorance of the listener and the knowledge of the artist, and second, the power of his music to lead them out of that ignorance, which would further engender political action. I think Rancière would dismiss outright Paris's political import of artistic practice, for he has argued adamantly, via his discussion of the aesthetic regime, for the "aesthetic cut" that separates (artistic) intentions and (spectator) consequences (*TES* 82).

Furthermore, when artists like Paris frame their works in terms of revolution and mobilization, they also bring to the fore the issue of spectatorship, and in particular artist-audience relationality and responsibility. But as the title of Rancière's book *The Emancipated Spectator* suggests, the spectator is not under any obligation; s/he is capable of resisting the operations of the artist and is not compelled by the latter's ethical program or the political consequences that are intended.⁸⁴ This Rancièrian skepticism collides directly with Paris's assumptions of musical power and political efficacy; however, in Paris's case, both propositions are defensible. YouTube videos of *Sonic Jihad* and viewers' reactions have validated both potentialities of the album's operations. Paris and the video makers are allied through a virtual political rap community, as already pointed out, but the content of the videos also demonstrates another form of relationality. What the literal illustration of Paris's songs in those YouTube videos suggests is the video makers' eagerness to adopt his views and conform to the narrative framework he has given them. What these listeners experience is similar to what Paris intended for them to experience, given they faithfully translate his denunciatory politics into concurring images. When they hear the songs, they are ushered into the corresponding semantic and visual

⁸⁴ Says Rancière during a lecture on September 22, 2010 at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

spaces that Paris has delineated for them: ghetto decay, government mind-control, and violent imperialism. Put more directly, these listeners “accurately” interpret the political lyrics, and are affected – enlightened perhaps – or even enraged by them that they are stirred to action by making videos that reaffirm and proliferate the original political message, thus protesting in their own ways through a different medium and at a different site.

The relationship between the sensory presentation of the music and the way of making sense of it by the listener is one of consensus and not dissensus. To a certain extent, political art’s assumption of a connection between art objects, and their effects on spectators and their subsequent behavior seems at work, despite Rancière’s doubts. Of course, protest songs that have spawned a handful of YouTube videos that are now being watched by a minority calling for resistance, cannot be so quickly and unproblematically viewed as political mobilization, much less a “revolution.” But the point is that these videos demonstrate a direct link between artist performance and the listeners’ sensory reception, their awareness, and their subsequent behavior and mobilization.

At the same time, how Paris’s songs can veer from their original purpose and escape his will can be seen in one YouTube video which features a blindfolded man named Baxter who gyrates and hula hoops to the hypnotizing rhythm of Paris’s song “Split Milk.”⁸⁵ The lyrics actually showcase Paris, unabashedly self-referential, rapping about himself as an authentic and militant rapper who is fiercely committed to providing “raw shit” for the struggle of racial “upliftin.” What captivates Baxter, however, seems to be the mesmerizing rhythm that propels his spinning upper body and his shuffling feet to keep his hula hoop in motion. Despite Paris’s claims of his music’s edifying operations, surely their function as the backdrop sound of a sweaty hula hoop session is beyond his vision. Baxter is not in need of Paris’s emancipation, he is already one of Rancière’s emancipated spectators, or listener in this case.

Conclusion

Encountering the sound world of *Sonic Jihad* is to enter into an alternative sphere where 9/11 is redefined. The cause of the catastrophe, as well as its political, military, social, and sensorial legacies all find new meanings in Paris’s vocal and musical fury. The war on terror, American freedom, courageous police officers, al-Qaeda’s jihad, peace-keeping soldiers, and US

⁸⁵ Baxter’s video can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Odw_H90C-6c, accessed on November 26, 2012.

nationalism take on modified and counter-hegemonic envisioning to contest their established legitimacy. Paris attacks this sonic realm through an appropriation of auditory materials and established key terms that are then re-introduced in a changed context or recombined to fashion new definitions. In doing so, Paris gives a different aural account of America as a country and as a global power after 9/11 through parallel discourses of its history on slavery, domestic terror, and Black nationalism, and via his own visions and sounds of belonging and national togetherness.

In this sense, Paris's music is very much achieving what might be seen as the interventional value of creative practices in relation to 9/11, deploying artistic endeavors for politics in terms of their critical, dissenting, contemplative, and enlightening potential. It is Rancière, however, who has warned against any facile and calculable passage from art to politics, specifically the purported straight path from the critical art object to political awareness, and finally to political action. Rancière is not against political art per se, but his emphasis on the aesthetic regime does mean the dismissal of any determinate relationship between artworks and its audience, or between its sensible presence and a natural effect.

Paris undoubtedly continues to view his music through the political virtue of resistance and revolution, presuming its capacity to expose corrupted power and domination, enlighten (and enrage) listeners, and initiate change, as shown by his 2008 album *Acid Reflex* (Guerrilla Funk). Embittered and infuriated by the history, past and present, of racism, social injustice, economic inequalities, the war on terror, and somewhat incongruously, mainstream hip hop betrayal, he intentionally and resolutely uses music for the service of direct political opposition. No political efficacy should be assumed here, as a great deal of Rancièrian skepticism is warranted. Additionally, for Paris, the rigorous political message always takes precedence over formal creativity, complexity, and nuance. His politics also implicitly constructs and perpetuates a form of intellectual inequality. Nevertheless, there exists a force in Paris's impassioned music that must be acknowledged. His uncompromising social commentary and his attempt to restage the war on terror and US nationalism – assisted by expletives and violent language – enrages and provokes. And even when that oppositional message fails to transmit as in Baxter's case, there is still a source of musical energy that propels Baxter corporeally. Politically effective or not, misguided or not, formally significant or not, Paris's music still offers an emotive and sensorial engagement that must be recognized for its potency.

Representing different media and pursuing varied themes, both *The Reluctant*

Fundamentalist and *Sonic Jihad* rearticulate post-9/11 politics through the sensible by considering the issue of audibility, or what can be heard. This emphasis on audibility underscores 9/11 as a catastrophe whose impact is not just limited to the visual imagery of the colliding towers, but also in bequeathing an aural legacy of overwhelming sounds of chaos and destruction at Ground Zero. While these sounds amplify the overall 9/11 event that has been annexed for nationalistic and patriotic purposes – to sustain public mourning and to bolster the rationale for the war on terror – they also give rise to artistic interventions. From the sound of Changez’s asserted monologic voice to Paris’s fiery soundscape, sensorial and perceptual disruptions remediate 9/11 so that catastrophe-induced sensations, sentiments, and affects can be reformulated and experienced anew. The politics of 9/11 is raised at this level of aesthetic delimitation, with the aim to disturb it by inserting disparate conceptualizations of the catastrophe and its aftermath. As a result, the perceptual field is starting to broaden. Heightening this attention on the sensible, the following two case studies will transition into the realm of the visual, which in the 9/11 context has come to define one’s encounter with the disaster by conditioning what can be seen and the ways of seeing.