

Native American Indian Hip Hop

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ABSTRACT

Notes on Identity and Politics in the Native American Indian Hip Hop Community

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This article raises several questions for analysis regarding identity and politics in indigenous hip hop in the United States. Asking how community, home, land, patriarchy and colonialism affect expressed indigenous hip hop identities, and how pedagogy, affirmation and play are exhibited in Native lyrical content, primarily positive examples are examined.

Forged in the creative imagination of identities in resistance to imposed defeat, loss of land and culture, and stereotypes that enable oppression, Native American Indian rappers are today making a positive impact in indigenous communities across the country. Using the most modern musical techniques and sounds, they carry forward elements of the wisdom of the past.

Gabriel Yaiva, Diné hip hop artist and activist from Arizona, who listens for wisdom in the “sounds of the ancients,” wonders on “Many Ways to Grow Corn,” “Who’s planning for the Seventh Generation?” (*Summer Solstice*, 2009) At the same time that he ponders the future, Yaiva pronounces that “there was a time when we had to wait in line to be heard.” That time has passed, and indigenous activists are speaking out, telling their stories and working together in coalitions – with natives and non-natives alike – to take control of their lives, culture and environment. An amazing array of young indigenous people is utilizing hip hop and rap as a vehicle to organize for justice and well-being and to express their Native identities. To cite only one example, the State of Washington, in conjunction with Indian Health Services, offers “The Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations” in Spokane where hip hop “can dramatically impact the recovery of youth from drug and alcohol addiction.” (McNeel, 2011)

Nonetheless, there continues to be a great deal of controversy surrounding rap and hip hop in the USA today. For some it is the soundtrack of daily life in the Twenty-first century, with all the contradictions that this implies, good and bad. For others rap remains a debased popular music genre and the center of a “rape culture” that dominates our country from films to sports (Frost, 2011). In reality there is a great deal of overlap between these two descriptions today; but, noting this does not necessarily help us understand the very real positive elements in parts of hip hop culture, especially among Native American Indians.

In order to help analyze Native American Indian hip hop today we will utilize three concepts regarding hip hop in general developed by Paul Gilroy, a Guyanese born professor at the London School of Economics: pedagogy, affirmation and play. (1993, p. 85) As applied in this article, pedagogy implies truth-telling and exposing lies, providing a positive identity, and fighting negative stereotypes, especially of Native women. Affirmation refers to Native pride as expressed in respect for roots, history and tradition, traditions that do not include violence toward women in any form. And play is expressed in diverse ways within the indigenous hip hop community, with complex (and some not so complex) attitudes about relaxation and having a good time.

We supplement these concepts with a powerful analysis of hip hop put forward by the late Manning Marable, a professor at Columbia University and a board member of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network until his recent death. Marable explains the contradictions in hip hop quite succinctly: “There has always been a fundamental struggle for the ‘soul’ of hip hop culture; politically-conscious and ‘positivity’ rap artists versus the powerful and reactionary impulses toward misogyny, homophobia, corporate greed and crude commodification.” (2002) Native rap exhibits both sides of this contradiction.

This article focuses mainly on indigenous rappers who are representative of the “positive” pole of the struggle for the soul of hip hop identified by Marable. Though the demarcation between positive indigenous rappers and negative ones is not always clear cut, with some artists combining both elements in their work, and even in the same song, we emphasize the positive in this article in order to narrow the field of study.

Predecessors

The stories and music of current indigenous American hip hop draw on an important legacy bequeathed to them by certain pioneers of contemporary Native American music, even if they do not specifically reference them. In the not too distant past artists such as Buffy

Sainte-Marie (1987), Joy Harjo, John Trudell (1999), Russell Means (1993) and Wayquay broke new ground with their fusion of lyrical and musical expressions of poetry, sounds of an earlier generation, and struggles against colonial oppression. Then, in the late 1980s, Litefoot and Shadowyze in the Midwest and on the east coast made conscious Native rap with positive messages, boldly challenging indigenous marginalization. It wasn't long before Robbie Bee (1992, 1993), WithOut Rezervation (WOR) (1994) and Btaka (1995) followed, so that self-consciously Native hip hop establishing anti-colonial themes, began to flourish in the early and mid 1990s (Ullestad, 1999).

Over the next decade and a half dozens of indigenous artists have emerged, including: Rollin' Fox, RedCloud, Buggin' Malone, and women rappers such as Eekwol and Indigo (2007). Now we see Queen Yonasda from Phoenix, El Vuh (2007) in Los Angeles; Gabriel Yaiva ((2006), Dem Warriors and 17-year old Lil' Dre in Arizona; Shock B, Memoree; Ras K' Dee in San Francisco (2005), RezHogs, AnyBodyKilla; NightShield (2005, 2008) in Sioux Falls, Quese IMC (2005) from Oklahoma City, War Party from Vancouver, Los Nativos (2003, 2004) and Wahwahtay Benais from Minneapolis and Samian in Montreal. Today, many more hip hop artists are emerging from North American Indian communities and deserve serious attention, including such Mexican artists as Akil Ammar, Olmeca and Tolteka (also included on *Summer Solstice*), who are not within our scope here.

The sounds and lyrics these diverse musicians explore range widely -- from acoustic Spanish guitar to pounding electric bass, from social criticism and identity politics, to the "party spirit." Both contemporary and traditional issues arise. And, the complex relations between women and men are also addressed -- with different degrees of enlightenment.

According to Robert Allen Warrior (Osage), Director of American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois (Champaign/Urbana), issues of identity, gender, pedagogy and play can only be understood in the context of community and relations to the land.

“Traditionalism, religious ecology, political resistance, and the integrity of communities coexist in a crucible of experience in which none can be forgotten.” (1995, p.84) Native feminists such as Bonita Lawrence (Mi’Kmaq) and M. Annette Jaimes*Guerrero (Yaqui/Juaneño) go further in their demands for self-determination and reciprocity in gender relations by holding to principles forcefully declared by Andrea Smith (Cherokee) that “The issues of colonial, race and gender oppression cannot be separated.”(2003). In *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, Warrior goes on to cite Vine Deloria, Jr. and others as inspiration for the exploration of traditional conceptions of identity, community, homeland and sovereignty (1995, p.85) Warrior’s intent is to work toward justice, reciprocity and independence in all relations, including self-determination in both personal and sovereign matters. And, since “the connection between the colonization of Native bodies and Native lands is not simply metaphorical but is rooted in material realities,” (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, p.67) indigenous women and their concerns are central to any process of self-determination and sovereignty.

Employing the concept of “patriarchal colonialism” to analyze *existing* gender, class, ethnic, economic and political conditions for indigenous women, M. Annette Jaimes*Guerrero, at San Francisco State University, has explained that indigenous feminism challenges “the prevailing colonialist and patriarchal denigrations of women and nature,” (2003, p. 67) not simply in the past, but now in this supposedly enlightened present. Colonial and patriarchal structures, relations and practices are reflected daily in the lives of indigenous people. Since the evidence of this reality cannot be ignored, we’ve seen that Andrea Smith and many others emphasize the fact that issues of colonial, racial, ethnic and gender relations cannot be addressed alone and apart from each other, especially when it comes to the prevalence of violence against indigenous women and children.

Similar to society as a whole, there are relations within indigenous communities that reflect the dominant hegemonic interactions of imperialist patriarchy as exhibited in sexism, homophobia and verbal and physical violence against Native women. Not all Native rappers are enlightened in their gender relations – and don't necessarily display an allegiance to the values in hip hop's "prophetic roots" -- and do not emphasize values that Cornel West, African-American Union Theological Seminary scholar and activist, described to Gail Mitchell at *Billboard* magazine in 2007, as those values "about truth telling, exposing lies, and having fun." (Mitchell, G., 2007). Unfortunately, some Native American rappers who are otherwise quite progressive in their anti-colonial attitudes, fall into sexist stereotypes and use words such as "b*tch" and "ho" to denigrate those whom they consider "haters." The words "f*ck" and "sh*t" are at times injected in a stream of consciousness rant, but these are "normal" in 2012. Though even the critically acclaimed Litefoot expresses his disdain for haters with phrases such as "suck my d*ck" and "pussies." (2008)

Indeed, such negative currents in indigenous hip hop are reflective of the assessment of Manning Marable cited earlier regarding the hip hop community as a whole, not just its Native variants. Other characteristics of the "negative" side of hip hop that cannot be ignored are obsessions with both personal satisfaction and individual commercial success, each a significant part of mainstream Pop, Rock and Country.

For Tony Mitchell, the New Zealander who's *Global Noise: Rap and hip hop outside the USA* collects wide-ranging scholarship on indigenous hip hop around the globe, "hip hop and rap...have become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world." (Mitchell, T., 2001, pp. 1-2) Mitchell's claim is that "the form can be adopted and adapted to express the concerns" of youth "everywhere." (Mitchell, T., 2003) As such, we find that the conflicts within indigenous hip hop in the US are actually openly discussed lyrically by the artists themselves. Litefoot, in less caustic terms, articulates

the actual hating he faces, and illustrates what does go on within the indigenous hip hop scene. RedCloud wonders aloud why his label dropped him after years of support. And Buggin' Malone not only addresses "haters", but also assertively struggles to promote reciprocal gender relations (see below).

Since it certainly surprises many that hip hop could be an important vehicle for Native American Indians to explore indigenous values and identities, it is important to note that there are authors such as Tony Mitchell who've explored indigenous hip hop as a worldwide phenomenon, recognizing that hip hop "both perpetuates old traditions and develops new ones, simultaneously looking to the past and the future." (Dooley, 2007) As Tricia Rose, professor of Africana studies at Brown University, has explained, "The initial spirit of rap and hip hop was as an experimental and collaborative space where contemporary issues and ancestral forces are worked through simultaneously." (1994, p. 59) For many Native artists, contemporary issues and ancestral forces – the "voices of the ancients" according to Yaiva – are at the forefront of their concerns and hip hop is an excellent experimental space within which to explore their intersection with indigenous identity.

"Voices of the Ancients" Shape Hip Hop Identity Today

Natives are created in words; their sacred names are derived in nature,
and their presence is forever related in stories.

Wordarrows -- Gerald Vizenor (1978, p. i)

Declaring that Native identity is rooted in tens of thousands of years inhabiting the land of the Western Hemisphere, Kiowa poet and artist N. Scott Momaday makes the bold claim in his essay "A First American Views His Land" that "We are what we imagine ourselves to be." (1997, p. 39) For Momaday, indigenous Americans imagine themselves in "peculiarly Native" ways, with songs, motions, sounds and meanings that are of Mother Earth. Indians today work to maintain their physical and spiritual connection to the land,

continuing to distinctively draw life from the Earth. Emphasizing that distinctiveness for Native youth, Cherokee rapper Litefoot chants for a new generation: "We are different people." (2008) And according to Inez Hernandez-Avil (Nez Perce/Tejana) at the University of California (Davis), the most significant difference indigenous people pursue is their relationship to "home" and the land. Even when Native people do not reside on their "ancestral land bases...they continue to defend the tribal sovereignty of their own communities as well as communities of other indigenous people." (Hernandez-Avil, 1995) As Bonita Lawrence at York University in Toronto has explained, "For Native people, individual identity is always being negotiated *in relation to* collective identity, and *in the face of* an external, colonizing society." (2003, p. 4) (Emphasis in original)

Though individual identities are imagined similarly throughout society, indigenous identities are distinct from both the "colonial" white world and also from each other in tribal communities. As opposed to an assimilated identity, Native identity is simultaneously both tribally centered, and also a part of a vaguely defined, and most often positively attributed Pan-Indian identity. (Smith, P. C., and Warrior, R. A. 1996, p. 279) Woven indelibly into our national culture is an "assimilated" American Indian identity that is somehow both within and without the great American Nation. This includes the myth of everyone's equality of opportunity. As it is, Natives are identified as a part of a generic "Indian" community much more often than as members of one of the hundreds of specific nations that still manage to survive in North America.

Focusing primarily on Native identity rather than the tribally specific identity in much of Momaday's work, Louis Owens (Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish) has claimed that what Momaday actually does is to craft "an Indian identity through language." (1992, p. 5) As we read above from *Wordarrows*, Chippewa author Gerald Vizenor affirms that indigenous people are "created in words." (1978, p. i) People are imagined in language, both individually

and as communities. And Native American Indian imaginations and language are carried forward in stories that affirm, create and transform indigenous identity within those tribal communities. Owens, himself goes on to state that Momaday helps illustrate a "process of becoming", illuminating the development of adaptive "self-articulation" (1992, p. 25) in the expansion of the Indian language of identity. As Craig Womack (Creek-Cherokee), at Emory University has written, self-articulation in this instance with "liberated imaginations" (2008, p. 374) creates identities that go beyond what is, to anticipate what can be.

The strength of the agency implied in these elements of identity is powerfully visible throughout Native America today. That agency is articulated by Momaday, Owens, Warrior, Womack and the indigenous feminists Smith, Jaime*Guerrero and Lawrence here with a basic approach to identity, community, home and imagination that reflects certain materialist philosophical ideas. This is similar to the approach expressed by the Jamaican born, British sociologist and cultural critic Stuart Hall, who agrees that "identities are a matter of becoming." (1996, p. 4) While emphasizing that identity is much more than "who we are" or "where we are from"; for Hall the most important question is also central to Native people as well, that of "what we might become." (1996, p. 4) For the Native theorists this can only be understood in the context of community, land, self-determination and the struggle against patriarchal colonialism.

But while people do make their own identities, they do so in circumstances "not of their own choosing." (Gilroy, 1997, p. 341) Rather, identities are created from "resources they inherit." (Gilroy, 1997, p. 341) That is, resources "given and transmitted from the past." (Marx, 1852) As Momaday himself flatly states forty pages further along in his volume *The Man Made of Words*, "the Indian has been compelled to make his way under an imposed identity of defeat." (1997, p. 80) Or, again, as Litefoot chants: "Down by birth/to a struggle I didn't want/I inherited the Pain/Like a tat' I can't get off." (2008) While Buggin' Malone,

rapper of Oneida, Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk heritage from Milwaukee puts it quite bluntly when he denounces the use of the term "prairie niggah" on his 2009 CD *Sacrifice*. The "noble savage" stereotype, though often predominant, is never really completely detached from the "drunken Indian" stereotype. And so, as Dustin Tahmahkera (Numunuu) has concluded, "If misinforming and dehumanizing representations of Native peoples...are not interrogated and resisted, they continue undisturbed in the normalization of the maintenance of the status quo." (2008)

Clearly the imposition of pain, defeat and verbal and physical abuse does not stand for most indigenous people today, especially Native rappers, literary nationalists and indigenous feminists. Owens exclaims that Natives are not "imagining ourselves as victims - pawns of chance -- instead [as]...creators of order from chaos in the tradition of storytellers." (1992, p. 234) Vizenor too explains that since "Native American Indian identities are created in stories, and names are essential to a distinctive personal nature," it is the "memories, visions, and the shadows of heard stories [that] are the paramount verities of a tribal presence." (1994, p. 56) As we have seen, Native hip hop stories, too, can tell important truths, articulating Native agency, identity and the presence of tribal community.

And so, since the contradiction between individual agency and social determination raised here in relation to Native identity is one we all experience every day, for Momaday it is a part of "the ordinary motion of life" (1997, p. 47). Ordinary perhaps, but not accepted fact. The "ordinary motion" can be, and is actively contested, resisted. In the unity of a Native community comes strength to overcome certain imposed identities and create and nurture productive ones.

Whether that community is a small locale, or a nation unto itself, it may be most effective to describe it on a human scale in the words of Harvard Assistant Professor Lisa Brooks (Abenaki) in her 2006 essay "At the Gathering Place". Brooks describes a nation as

"the multifaceted, lived experience of families who gather in particular places." (2006, p. 244) A nation is not simply an issue of land with natural and un-natural boundaries. A nation is thought. Imagined. Even while conflicts over possession and use of the earth rage, while borders are contested and inclusion or exclusion tear people apart; a nation contains individuals who know and believe "that they exist as a part of the community." (Anderson, 1983, p. 22) Brooks cites Acoma Pueblo poet and author at Arizona State University, Simon Ortiz, to say that "the process of 'story-making' and the process of nation-gathering may be one and the same." (2006, p. 231)

As Ortiz himself explains, it is "because of the insistence to keep telling and creating the stories, Indian life continues, and it is this resistance against loss that has made life possible." (1981/2006, p. 258) Creating and retelling stories that recount the past and celebrate life in the face of tremendous oppression is how indigenous Americans strengthen their individual agency, communities and nations. And notably, hip hop culture is an oral culture itself, recorded but not written. Stories are performed and preserved in new forms that assist survival. For Ortiz this is a very simple issue. In his poem "Survival this way", he describes the process of lovingly telling stories to the children that is essential: "We told ourselves over and over again, 'We shall survive this way.'" (1992, p. 168)

Elaborating on the relationship between storytellers and the survival of indigenous people and their traditions, Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko has reminded us that there are similarities between Native stories of "survivance" (Vizenor) and European pre-Christian traditions. There is "wisdom" in the old stories and traditions, she says, no matter where they are from. For Dian Million (Tanana Athabascan), that wisdom is expressed because "Story has always been practical, strategic, and restorative." (2011, p. 322) As German-Jewish cultural critic Walter Benjamin wrote in 1936, a "real" story "contains, openly or covertly, something useful." (1968, p. 84) But the telling is a process that

inherently holds its own truths. It isn't simply lessons learned or historical memory that is gleaned from a story. Much more is involved in passing along the wisdom of the stories. Benjamin noted a story's "usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral, in another, some practical advice, in a third in a proverb or maxim." (1968, p. 84) So for Mary Leen, at Western New Mexico University, "Stories have the power to take action." (2011)

Nonetheless, as we have noted the wisdom of a story is not limited to its obvious "usefulness." The wisdom of a story is also contained in the very process of telling, listening and responding to the words. Sometimes it is the interaction of the words themselves, exchanged within a system of knowledge, that generate wisdom. It "is no accident that archetypes" are drawn "out of these old stories because of that wisdom," declares Silko. (n.d.) Unfortunately, many stereotypes are archetypes pushed to absurd levels of fear, twisting knowledge into hate rather than wisdom.

Because the message is often embedded in the interaction that is storytelling, the give and take between both the teller and the listener (Silko) has much more in common with the relationships within the hip hop community, than with books and newspapers. The exchange of information, inspiration and action, of fighting alcoholism and stereotypes, undertaking voter registration and community organizing, all work toward establishing communal links and strong community. It is the active Native resistance to the loss of land, life and culture imposed as an "identity of defeat" upon indigenous Americans (Momaday) that is most distinctive in modern indigenous life. And as Litefoot exclaims on his CD *Relentless Pursuit*: "I'm sick of survivin'; I want to *live* my life." (2008) (emphasis in original) Finally, Craig Womack concludes: "We can have history imposed on us, or we can create our own." (2008, p. 374)

Contemporary Issues

As mentioned above, ancestral forces in Native hip hop are “worked through simultaneously” with contemporary issues (Dooley; Rose; Yaiva). Those issues for indigenous youth today include many confronting all young people, no matter their heritage or physical location. There are also issues specific to indigenous communities, whether urban or rural that affect Native identity formation.

Native people are not immune to the influence toward consumption and individualism that emanates from television, radio and the internet, which affect all Americans to one degree or another. But the very nature of indigenous existence offers a perspective that is open to alternatives to mainstream culture. Defining oneself as Native implicitly defines oneself in opposition to many predominant hegemonic ideas and values. And while it is no surprise that Gangsta rap has infiltrated Native communities, it is also unsurprising that indigenous artists often tackle the difficult issues raised by such expressions head on. While some in Native hip hop embrace negativity at times, the emphasis here is on artists who tend toward positivity. As we’ve seen, the same artist can express both positive and negative values, sometimes even in the same song. Both Litefoot and NightShield express important emotions and values in regard to indigenous identity, history and survival, but both also express unenlightened ideas at times toward women and gays.

Nonetheless, there are Native rappers who openly and honestly develop reciprocal and equal relationships within their communities. In fact, “Many young rappers are using their music to spread a positive message. For some it’s showing kids how music can lift them out of a life of crime. For others it’s about representing Native culture.” (Morast, 2003) There are messages about Native pride and hope alongside the documentation of oppression past and present.

Native hip hop can tell important truths and expose stereotypes and lies, speaking truth to power in a country that continues to structurally and practically oppress Native

American Indians. Common topics of concern for today's youth are war, gender and sexual relations, poverty, youthful parenthood, suicide, drugs, relationships with an older generation, economic standing, fighting alcoholism and protecting wilderness areas. Specific topics for Native youth include indigenous sovereignty, human rights and the struggle against typical stereotypes. New stories recount the terrors of past and present, and express Native identities as powerfully as anywhere else in Indian Country today.

By establishing positive positions, "standards" are set that artists choose to express certain values over others. Those values are not simply expressions of contemporary relations, but also expressions influenced by past relations. Positivity is expressed as struggle against patriarchal colonialism in all its structures, relations and practices. Combining elements from diverse resources, the hip hop artists we address stand out for their self-conscious attitude to be serious and instill Native pride, but also to have fun to keep hope alive. Reinforcing these ideas Robin D. G. Kelley, African-American professor at the University of Southern California, in his book *Yo' Mama's Dysfunktional!* explains that "playfulness and storytelling are as central to hip hop," as they are to Black and indigenous communities generally. (1997, p. 38) Such playfulness is widely seen in Cherokee rapper Litefoot's work when he "Walks Funny" and expresses his "Native Style." "My mentality is original aboriginality," he declares. (2008) And as far as Cornel West's list of "old school" characteristics, Litefoot certainly exposes lies, tells important truths, and has a lot of fun doing so. His many expressions of Native identity over the years exhibit pride and stamina.

Litefoot

An actor (*Indian in the Cupboard*, *Mortal Kombat*) and rapper who grew up in Oklahoma, Litefoot (1996, 1998, 1999) is articulate in describing the oppression and lack of opportunity for indigenous Americans past and present. In the past Litefoot generally directed his anger toward the government and corporate greed. Held to be the first Native rapper,

Litefoot is Cherokee and Chichimeca, and he first showed interest in hip hop in the late 1980s, with the CD "The Money" eventually released in 1992 when he still lived in Oklahoma. Currently he and his wife and their fourteen year old son live in Seattle. Since the 1980s he has produced over a dozen albums, in which Litefoot's high standards for musical innovation and self-conscious identity and political struggle have been shown to be very popular. And in April of 2010, Litefoot spoke at Virginia Tech University on the topic of "Building bridges between the Native American and African American communities."

Litefoot works to model success for today's Native youth by walking in both the traditional and contemporary worlds, encouraging the youth as an example of what they can become. His website Footsoldierz.com is a key tool in the Reach the Rez movement (Hanna, 2007) where the rapper works with grade school and high school children across the continent.

Litefoot's 2008 offering, *Relentless Pursuit* is innovative, political and has high production values. Another powerhouse of energy, it also, as noted, has some misogynist and homophobic tendencies, as well as some obsessive individualism, so typical of popular music. His focus on being the "Chief" in several new songs tends toward "macho" posturing at times, while reaching out to the wider indigenous community does emerge as a main theme. But here, one song, "Different People" contains more history and meaning than full albums by other artists. It is a pedagogical tour de force. He understands that, and boasts with bold and prolific vulgarity. Some will say that the best tracks are sabotaged by the individualistic boasting that Litefoot eventually undertakes. But his songs of identity and history, community and spirituality stand as dynamic contributions to Native hip hop, as well as to indigenous identity and community "from sea to sea".

Redvolution, Litefoot's 2004 release utilized a wider range of sounds than *Relentless Pursuit*, with hip hop that at times featured metal guitars and beats, and at other times relied on Gangsta rap; then he would explore trance and even electronic experiments. But,

Litefoot's lyrics beyond those on identity and politics, especially regarding gender and sexual relations, have at times tended to be unenlightened as we've seen. Though he is by no means the worst offender of women and gays among Native rappers, with the Dago Braves holding a firm grasp on that title with *Kumeyaay Cool Guys* (2008). Despite certain limitations, Litefoot clearly sees people like Rush Limbaugh as a threat to progress, while also noting that "Snoop Dogg's not on the Rez."

Outlining a clear critique of government propaganda and lies in "Different People" and many previous raps; on "What's it gonna take?" (2004) Litefoot directly took on explicit racial stereotyping. Litefoot denounces Andre 3000 of the Pop rap group Outkast of an extreme insult toward Indians at the Grammy ceremony in 2004 where Andre's performance included a group "resplendent in neon green Halloween-Hiawatha approximations of Native American regalia – fringe, headbands, and feathers – Andre and Big Boi rose before a smoking teepee, prancing proudly through" the group's very popular "Hey Ya!", "the chorus itself evocative of powwow singing." (Verán, 2004) As expected the performance raised such criticism from those understanding the oppression of negative stereotypes that there were boycotts. Litefoot fought back in "What's it gonna take?" with a sharp critique that was quite insightful in its documentation of the affront and what it means to Native people. But when he asked whether Andre sat around and "ate watermelon all day long," (2004) he didn't stay on higher ground but rather spent some time with more stereotypes. The anger is easy to understand, but the vulgar verbal response exposes certain limitations of the hip hop culture itself.

Outkast's performance was at best insensitive to concerns over stereotypes, and the situation takes on racial aspects when we know that Andre didn't admit there was anything wrong with the stage show.

This raises regularly occurring themes in Litefoot's work – the ongoing struggles for equality and respect. In "Equality" Litefoot chants:

All we're asking for is equality....All we're fighting for is equality....

All we're standing for is equality....All we're marching for is equality....

Does blood have to spill for equality? (2004)

Though this sounds radical enough, it falls short of Litefoot's most outrageous question, when he asked whether it wouldn't be a good idea to invite Osama bin Laden to "come visit the Rez.../so the media will come and visit/and see how things really are?" (2004) Litefoot notes the lack of jobs and education on the Rez, reflects on the poverty and knows the country's governmental policies provide pennies on the dollar for jobs, education and healthcare on reservations, while fully funding wars around the world.

Litefoot's productions are thoughtful and intriguing to the point where he was a Native American Music Award winner for *Native American Me* (2003). This CD won Artist of the Year in 2004 at the NAMA ceremony, and is a work of art. Here Litefoot developed his theme of remembering the "ancestors", and his grandfather receives elegiac thanks and praise. But though this CD fosters an enthusiastic response, it too disappoints at the point that Litefoot's "Cinnamon" – reminiscent in content to Neil Young's "Cinnamon girl," – becomes a male fantasy accompanied by female vocals and a pounding beat, with lyrics that degrade women, not unlike Young himself. Supposedly "flattering" his female friend, he objectifies her as he offers a comparison of her "ass for days" with J-Lo and Beyoncé. Here Litefoot does not struggle against patriarchal relations as Jaimes*Guerrero has articulated them, but rather revels in their application. Though struggling against colonialism, his "macho" posturing reinforces patriarchal stereotypes. Nonetheless, that is not where he focuses his energy. Even on *Relentless Pursuit*, flawed with some homophobia and vulgar misogyny, Litefoot challenges us to see things differently.

Litefoot is popular with indigenous youth, and his performances at the University of Arizona starting in 2000 have drawn enthusiastic – if not huge – groups of indigenous youth and elders. Litefoot is perhaps the most outspoken of the rappers we address. And he cannot be ignored in discussions of positive Native hip hop, despite his many contradictions. His innovation makes him a necessary point of focus, but another innovator, Buggin' Malone is also a NAMA award winner with a style quite different from Litefoot's. Less frenetic and with an enlightened outlook toward women and reciprocity, Malone struggles consistently for positivity, and against patriarchal relations.

Buggin' Malone

Buggin' Malone won his Native American Music Award for best rap/hip hop artist in 2006. Born Wayne Malone in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he is of Oneida, Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk ancestry. While many Native performers have songs about the ceaseless imprisonment of Leonard Peltier, a theme that has taken on compelling urgency as it goes on endlessly; Malone has two quite distinct ones - "Dedication to Leonard Peltier" on *Birth of a Warrior* (2003), and "Beat Goz On (Peltier)" on *Spirit World* (2005), his second album. But Buggin' Malone isn't at a loss for ideas, nor is he unnecessarily repetitive. His over all approach to life organically embraces repeated protest against the injustice of Peltier's incarceration.

Malone takes pedagogy and affirmation very seriously, with very little time for play. And he is adamant about reciprocity in gender relations. He went so far as to tell Cherie Marshall of *Red Honey* magazine, "We are warriors not gangsters. We need to respect women and ourselves. We are to be protectors and providers." (2006a) Influenced by Kanye West and Dr. Dre in his work, Malone claims two emphases: spiritual and political. "I don't rap about street and dance like mostly everybody else....I do not rap about disrespectful things. I rap how it was growing up as a kid....I feel we are still trying to fight for freedom. I don't try to focus on drugs, alcohol, how many women I can get, Cadillacs, or kids killing

each other. I try to focus on poverty, HIV....” (Marshall, 2006a) Gangs are also a big concern for Malone, even on the Rez. He wants to pass on the wisdom of the past to combat these issues. He has learned powerful lessons from his youthful incarceration, and often gives his life over to the Lord and creator. His community and family based values embrace struggles for political and gender justice.

Some of Malone’s past is exhibited in his cry for the freedom of Leonard Peltier, because he cites the value for him of the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) for him, and that his outlook isn’t always welcomed everywhere. “I was raised with family members who were involved with A.I.M. and there are people out there...who feel either you love the movement or you hate the movement.” (Marshall, 2006a)

Malone's 2009 CD *Sacrifice* continues his laid back, conversational style. In "Lord have mercy" he decries wars overseas, when children at home don't have enough to eat. He's "Learning life's lessons/while I'm layin' down this message." On "I am universal", the Native American Indian "movement flows from my pen and production." His "warriors" cover his back, because he knows there are "haters" that don't appreciate what he's doing. There is some boasting here, as on "4 my Nativz", but it is understated compared to Litefoot's latest. As a "poor revolutionary" Malone is always sincere, but there are times when some of his words get in the way and his poetics suffer. Sometimes one word could suffice instead of two, the pronoun understood. "Beautiful Thang" is a compassionate love song that samples Barry White, and clearly reflects White's sensuous style. On "Hear my warcry" Malone raps that "the rich are getting richer" while he remains on the "poor side"; and in "By any meanz" Malone launches "lyrical missiles", and he will "die for what is right", fighting against "hypocritical wars." He wants his affirmations to be heard by his ancestors and family, as well as the "underground". Telling the truth about the Native past, and exposing lies and stereotypes are central to Malone’s outlook.

Rapture, Buggin' Malone's 2010 offering begins with a sample of candidate Obama's voice speaking to indigenous people, promising to include them in the American Dream when he is elected President. Malone then raps bluntly that this is "political hip hop", and again decries the "wars over seas" when "so many innocent die." "Losin' my religion" is a gripping tale of self-doubt and notions of suicide, overcome by prayerful self-reflection. In both "Agony" and "Stories of a child", Malone tells tales of modern day suffering of indigenous people. This album, too, has a playful side, a love song, "Seducing your mind" that is both sensitive and assertive. He respects the woman (his wife) enough to recognize the mental aspects of a physical relationship. There is some boasting on this album, but it is set more in conversational tones, woven into biographical material that makes it less brash. There is also some vulgarity, but it is quite understated, becoming more pronounced on a collaboration with NightShield. Buggin' Malone's underground sound doesn't share Litefoot's high production values and intense musical innovation, but he is an important one of many fascinating Native rappers currently performing, and he is joined here by another award winner, Shadowyze, who has also blazed an innovative trail.

Shadowyze

Born in San Antonio, Texas, Shadowyze (Shadow-wise) moved to Pensacola, Florida as a youth. Shawn Enfinger by birth, he cites Creek, Swedish and Irish heritage. Shadowyze started his rap career in the late 1980s, releasing two CDs in the 1990s. After a trip to Mexico in 1998 he was inspired to release a third album *Murder in Our Backyard*. (1999) This CD took a strong anti-imperialist bent and exposed the Mexican military's brutal repression of the Maya in Chiapas. In 2000 Shadowyze released a fourth album, *Spirit Warrior* and his pedagogical approach meant his lyrics again focused on Native oppression across the country: genocide, human rights, the poor, government removal and neglect on reservations. Shadowyze has called for Leonard Peltier's freedom, has rallied against the School of the

Americas, and actually has driven truck loads of relief supplies to indigenous Hurricane Katrina victims.

On *World of Illusions* (2003) Shadowyze followed up on previous ideas, expounding on homelessness, materialistic worship of possessions, religious wars, and the corporate greed that causes the pollution of the Earth. He also includes insight into how playful characters of the past in all cultures trick and scam people, not simply Native cultures. Notably, Shadowyze' "Diary of a Hustler" thoughtfully expresses aspects of the life of a brash hustler to a very danceable beat. This song predated by two years the 2005 Academy Award winning "It's hard out here for a pimp" from Three 6 Mafia (*Hustle & Flow*). The story Shadowyze tells is even more satisfying musically than "It's Hard," and it is an insightful and thought-provoking tale that contrasts completely with the insipid ode to a pimp's life produced by Three 6 Mafia.

Shadowyze' self-titled CD (2005) won him the Native American Music Awards hip hop/rap artist of the year in 2005 and it is much more complex in presentation. This album again emphasizes pedagogy and play, but doesn't ignore affirmation. Shadowyze makes us think about our daily lives of employment in "We Work." He addresses concerns regarding immigration in "Rise Up" – where he acknowledges the Native roots of so many immigrants: "They're killin' my people, and they call them illegal." Shadowyze again calls out against military oppression in "Stand up to the Guns". But on this CD Shadowyze is less enlightened in his sexual and gender relations. At the same time, the most thoughtful song on this album is a quiet lullaby for Shadowyze's young daughter. "Daddy's Little Girl", on which he exclaims "Not to Worry, Everything's gonna be alright", reflecting a respect for reciprocal gender relations and the struggle against patriarchy in how Shadowyze wants his daughter to carry on the knowledge of his ancestors.

Backdoor creeping and sexual satisfaction reminiscent of John Lee Hooker are front and center in “Boom Boom”, but it’s not blues but a hip hop beat that drives this song forward. It is a long way from John Trudell’s gentle love songs. “Fastlane” starts with the Eagles “Life in the Fast Lane” riffs, and elaborates on life in the city that is so destructive: “Social unrest in the belly of the beast/Trapped in the Fastlane.” Most of these songs celebrate the “party spirit”, with danceable beats and collaborations with (Kid) Frost and other East Coast rappers who know what it takes to get people dancing. Nonetheless, Shadowyze’ new party spirit tends toward patriarchal gender relations and contradicts Rollin’ Fox’s laid-back, and quite serious Apache/ Pomo hip hop, where gender relations are downplayed.

Rollin' Fox

Rollin' Fox is another indigenous rapper who takes on the warrior mantle as a sign of authenticity and responsibility. Affirmation and pedagogy are key for this Native rapper. While most indigenous rappers call themselves warriors, for Rollin’ Fox in "4 Real",

I’m a warrior, who believes in his Native way...

We stay on the Earth...Livin’ in two worlds, can’t you see?

That I have to stay away from the hate and greed...

Gotta survive....And never surrender to the ways of the white man....

Native till I die, a warrior till I die. (2001)

But Rollin’ Fox is not a warrior the same way as two boxers in the ring are shown in television advertisements or on cable, pounding each other into the ground. Nor is his warrior code the same as that of a soldier following orders, as the Army recruitment ads infer, then off to war. There is rather a calm and rational exposition of Native values and ideals in the face of a dominant culture that does not respect the Native past, present or future. As Los

Nativos have exclaimed, Native warriors think for themselves and defend traditional values, they don't simply follow orders and do what they're told to do, "as soldiers do." (2004)

Rollin' Fox first became known as a part of Strictly Native Entertainment. Originally, Phoenix area Indian Funk Records produced Btaka Brown, Rollin' Fox's sibling, which evolved into Strictly Native Entertainment. The brothers brought together the Indian Funk Crew in the late 1990s and generated several interesting compilations, as well as two albums from Btaka. More recently Rollin' Fox developed Fox 1 Records to produce his own music, releasing *World Wide* in 2006. As we've noted, Rollin' Fox returns to the theme of a warrior's struggles to thrive in a field dominated by corporate giants and a repressive government with the B.I.A. being just "another dirty business." Nonetheless, Rollin' Fox is not without hope, and his conversational style makes him much easier to listen to than some others. On "Never Scared," (2001) a quiet Tupac-styled ballad, Rollin' Fox raps to save indigenous homelands, upholding Indian traditions. With "Mt. Graham" (2001) he offers a sample of the indigenous approach to overdevelopment in southeastern Arizona wilderness areas.

And with "Doesn't Matter" (2001) Rollin' Fox boldly states he'll "live or die for my tribe," with bass and beats that draw people into the mix. However, he's careful to explain "I'm a warrior using my voice, not my fist." On *Rez Cop* (2004), an extended play CD, Rollin' Fox works with reggae beats rapping with Casper Loma Da Wa the Hopi/Diné reggae artist. With this Rollin' Fox finds himself in the company of Yaiva, RedCloud, Shadowyze and other rappers to mix the rhythms and beats of the two genres. In "Welcome to Da Gathering" Rollin' Fox again states his warrior code. This song is the centerpiece of a compilation named *Underground Nativez: Da Gathering* (Various artists, 2004) including contributions from across the continent, such as Memoree, Nomadic, Shadowyze, Btaka, NightShield, Yaiva and Red Suspect (2006). Rollin' Fox does not play into the "macho"

posturing of Litefoot, NightShield and the Dago Braves. He raps respectfully about Mother Earth and supports struggles for Native self-determination.

The most powerful compilation on which we hear Rollin' Fox's rhymes and beats with the warrior theme is the CD "Save the Peaks" on which rappers come together to save the San Francisco Peaks in northern Arizona from unrestrained commercial use. The mountain is sacred for most Southwestern Native people. Released in 2005 *Winter Solstice* (Various artists) (which was followed in 2009 with *Summer Solstice*), has Casper Loma Da Wa's title song from his *Honor the People* CD, and includes Yaiva, Manic, Big Trubb, Aztlan Underground, JayNez with an R & B ballad, the deep reggae sounds of Shatta I, RedCloud the Christian rapper, the Last Poets-sounding Eagleman Redday, and a serious and insightful comment on adolescence by Overflow and NightShield. The wide scope of this effort is clear from the fact that traditional Native American beliefs are expressed, as well as Rastafarian and Christian ones.

Native Christian Rap

Though it is a small subset of indigenous hip hop, Native Christian rap deserves serious attention because it is so unique in a rather narrow realm. There are those who might expect that Christian rap music would focus on the "End Times," and the "Wrath of God," – with probable heavy metal back up to represent the "Last Days". Others might expect passionate expositions of love for Christ. But Native Christian rap is nothing if not complex. Ramondo Emerson does offer his ideas of the "last hours" on his CD *Holy Wrath* (2004), but he also brings a soft Tupac-styled ballad "My Life for You" declaring his fealty to Jesus. Gospel music infuses the hip hop of Supaman from Rezarecksion. And, Geno, a proud Apache, in his 2004 *Struggle II Survive* (2004), holds out against the haters and non-believers, but also finds that he gets "no love from these tribal leaders." (2004) There are

even rapping Pima Indians holding up the Christian banner in southern Arizona, Dem Warriors.

While there is a reverence for a higher power, Jesus Christ isn't always the focus. Certain traditional relations and beliefs, such as sweat lodges and medicine men, come into play. Portraits of Rez life appear in this music; tales of suffering and pain on reservations and in urban communities; and the issues addressed are similar to those of other indigenous rappers: alcohol abuse, incarceration youthful suicide and the reality of being poor. Boasting about his abilities as a rapper and "savior," Geno goes on to offer a song "to the ladies". In what he considers a compliment, he starts by recognizing that the woman is "not a ho" (2004) asking immediately for her phone number; he moves on in a not unexpected twist, to shift from a come-on to a pronouncement of undying love, because she "belongs" to him and Geno will "forever be your man." The perpetuation of patriarchal values and relations is deftly upheld.

However, the best known Christian rapper in this article is RedCloud from Los Angeles (Huichol/San Cristobal), who continues to stir controversy with his 2009 release *Hawthorne's Most Wanted*. Interestingly enough the LA Christian hip hop community is large enough to find itself split over the issue of smoking marijuana, with RedCloud being bounced from his long-time label for rapping favorably about the sacred herb. On *Traveling Circus* (2005) RedCloud's interests vary from Jesus Christ – "Never ever let you go" – to militarism on "War Party," where he calls for "peace in the Middle East" because "War, what is it good for? Absolutely nothin'!" specifically sampling Edwin Starr's powerful anti-war anthem. RedCloud has been popular with wider Los Angeles audiences, as well, winning the 2005 South Gate Emcee battle and the POWER 106 FM freestyle battle for five weeks straight in 2006. And RedCloud has said he "uses hip hop to reach the kids on the Rez because that's the language of today's youth." (Elias, 2006)

In interviews RedCloud has been known to espouse quite conservative Christian attitudes about women and their choices. However, early in his career with *Is this thing On?* (2000) RedCloud offered a critique of previous Christian missionaries, even as he considers himself to be a modern day Christian missionary:

You tell us you come to spread the Gospel of God.

Is the raping of our women in the Gospel of God?

Is the hunger of our children in the Gospel of God?" (Koyote Gospel) (2000)

Here hegemonic patriarchal and colonial relations and practices are confronted head on. This is not an uncommon theme in Native American poetry and music, and parallels the outlook of John Trudell in "Hanging on the Cross":

In the name of their savior. Forcing us on/the trinity of the chain:

Guilt, sin and blame.....Indians are Jesus, Hanging on the cross. (2001)

Women in Native North American Hip Hop

"The central issue that confronts American Indian women throughout the hemisphere is survival, *literal survival*, both on a cultural and biological level." -- Paula Gunn Allen (emphasis in original) (1992, p. 189)

First and foremost, the struggle for indigenous survival is a struggle against patriarchal and colonial structures, relations and practices of all kinds. Because indigenous hip hop women have very real differences in experience from Native men and from non-Natives, "they have a unique level of awareness, perspective and knowledge," that make "developing varied strategies for participation and transformation" of the culture a part of their music. (Berry, 1994) The women in Native American Indian hip hop may echo many themes expressed by the men, but they have their own issues and views, and quite powerfully, their own voices and language. As Toril Moi, the Norwegian feminist literary

critic has written, it is women's "different *social* experience that constitutes their different relationship to language." (1991, p. 154) (Emphasis in original)

While many indigenous women are currently producing music across the country – using their voices and language to create a wide range of contemporary and traditional music; there aren't many women in Native hip hop. Interestingly enough, two progenitors paved the way for the current group of Native hip hop women: Joy Harjo (Cherokee/Creek) and Swangideed Wayquay (Ojibwe). Harjo's remarkable poetry has been acclaimed around the world for decades, and her movement into the musical realm with Poetic Justice in the late 1990s found an emphasis on reggae (1996). With *Native Joy for real* in 2004 and then *Winding through the Milky Way* in 2008, Harjo expanded her musical influences and continued to develop her poetic style. Now with her 2010 album *Red Dreams: A Trail Beyond Tears*, we find Harjo pushing the limits of identity and community formation with bold experiments with Native flutes. She has been an exciting inspiration for indigenous women for years.

Wayquay (Lady Unafraid) is an Ojibwe poet whose career has paralleled Joy Harjo's in some ways. Wayquay's video "Navigate", from her album *Tribal Grind* (1997), won the 1999 NAMA music video honors, and she was recognized at the 9th annual ceremony in Niagara Falls in 2009. Raised in rural Pennsylvania, Wayquay moved to New York City in the late '80s. Her vocal delivery on *Tribal Grind* covers a wide range of styles, and she has at times sounded similar to Patti Smith in her poetic expression. But though some of Wayquay's cadences have been compared to those of hip hop, she is not really a part of the hip hop community, and she is not a rapper, she's a poet who utilizes a wide range of popular musical styles. Wayquay's long anticipated second album *Ghostflower*, her first this century, is due out soon.

Younger women who've emerged within Native hip hop culture find that they receive much less interest than men. For Memoree, speaking with Cherie Marshall in *Red Honey*, "...in the Native American Hip Hop industry males get a lot more respect for their talent than the women. Women have to work harder for their respect." It's more difficult "for the women to get people to notice us in the industry." (2006b) Strictly Native Entertainment features D. DeClay on the powerful collection *Native Warriors* (Various artists, 2003), but she is not found elsewhere on the website. And Queen Yonasda told Sherron Shabazz in early 2010: "Some people said you have to give respect in order to receive it, well in hip hop as a female you have to demand that respect. You're tested every minute of the day." (Shabazz)

Since women are more frequently used as a backup for male rappers, such as NightShield, Litefoot and Shadowyze; it is encouraging to find three indigenous women who've secured recording contracts: Eekwol, Memoree and Queen Yonasda. Memoree released *Soul Child*, Eekwol released *Apprentice to the Mystery* (2004) and Queen Yonasda released *God, Love & Music* in 2009 to favorable reviews.

Queen Yonasda

Queen YoNasDa (yo-na-Ja-ha) burst on the hip hop scene in Arizona in the Spring of 2010 when she responded to the State's "papers please" immigration law by organizing the local hip hop community for a statewide boycott. Her album is vibrant and expansive, if a bit uneven. "It has rock, soul, reggae, consciousness and club music," Yonasda told Sherron Shabazz at the *Hip Hop Music Examiner* in April of 2010. "Being raised as a Native American and a black woman, I want to bridge people from all walks of life through my music and through my works," she told Shabazz. Queen Yonasda's mother, the late Wauneta Lonewolf (Oglala Lakota) taught her the "Native American way." She has also been heavily influenced by her adoptive grandfather, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

Queen Yonasda has worked closely with Wu Tang Clan alums, including Raekwon, Cappadonna and Method Man, touring with them in the past few years, and utilizing powerful beats and rhythms from the crew. This makes for a fascinating accumulation of sounds on the album. Citing influences of Queen Latifa, Salt 'n' Peppa and Lauryn Hill, Queen Yonasda also cites Big Daddy Kane as an inspiration. She began her music career as a dancer and choreographer for BET's *Teen Summit*, *Planet Groove* and *Sound Stage*. She also spearheaded the "Hip Hop 4 Haiti" movement. Now, in response to Arizona's "racial profiling" law, she is in the process of re-making a video of Public Enemy's "By the time I get to Arizona" (originally penned in 1991 by Chuck D in response to the State's refusal to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. with a holiday.)

As the mother of a young boy, some of *God, Love & Music* brings out Yonasda's softer side, especially in "Struggle in progress" where she directly addresses her son and her ex-partner about the problems that arise when parents split up. But the bulk of the album is bouncy and upbeat, even the cranked up Wu Tang inspired rap. "Musically I'm still learning," Yonasda told fan site *Eventful*. "When it comes to my shows and my music, it's important for me to let them know my story. My ups and downs." (Yonasda, 2010) Queen Yonasda's story began in 1978 at the end of the American Indian Movement's "Longest Walk," when her mother gave birth to a baby girl in Washington, D.C. That 3,000 mile trek was initiated by A.I.M. to protest anti-Indian legislation, and Yonasda was given her name by Diné women elders on the march. Yonasda means "precious jewel" in the Navajo language. Now she is the National Director of Indigenous Nations Alliance, affiliated with the Nation of Islam. "What I do with the Indigenous Alliance is perform, put together workshops and put together events. I'll take people from urban communities and take them to the reservations so they can experience a sweat lodge ceremony." "What I've been doing is bridging that so everybody can start knowing who their great-grandparents are." We need "to learn from the Native

Americans to honor the Earth and honor our spiritual ways....," she told Shabazz (2010).

Much of this is inherent in the music Queen Yonasda makes, pedagogical, affirming, bold and self-assured, but far from the brash boasting of so many male rappers.

Eekwol

Eekwol is a Canadian rapper worth noting, who also avoids brash boasting. Her deep self-reflection is far from the vulgarities of the Dago Braves and NightShield. She sounds quite similar to Joy Harjo at times and has released *Apprentice to the Mystery*, which won best hip hop/rap album at the Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards in 2005. Eekwol (Lindsay Knight), from Muskoday First Nation, lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and produces music on her independent label along with her brother Mils. Her hit single "Too Sick" from *Apprentice to the Mystery*, was assessed as a "song of resistance and redemption" by Gail Mackay at the 8th Annual Indigenous Women's Symposium at Trent University in Ontario, Canada, in March, 2008. Eekwol told Windreamer at *Native Hip Hop* magazine that her name "represents equality in hip hop. I'm talking gender, cultural background....I don't want to be categorized because I'm a female, or Aboriginal, I wanna be recognized for my dedication, talent and love for this hip hop art. Eekwoly....I want young girls to see life as an equal stage with equal opportunity, not the same as guys, but of the same value." (Windreamer, 2005) And in March 2009 Eekwol took her message directly to the 5th Annual Aboriginal Youth, Violence and Changing Times Training Conference in Victoria, British Columbia.

Eekwol's lyrical pedagogy and affirmation shine over wide ranging musical expressions. She self-consciously shares what she knows about life with a younger generation. Embracing elements of acoustic guitar, synthesizer, at times orchestral arrangements and insistent beats – with Native flutes gathered into the mix, Eekwol is sometimes conversational, at others quite dramatic. She also asserts that she is a "reluctant warrior", claiming destiny has her relaying the messages of history that include rejecting

alcohol and gambling. On both “Too Sick” and “That’s just me” Eekwol is quite open about self-doubt, in sharp contrast to the tendency among most male rappers toward boasting.

More recently, Xela (aka Cihuatl-CE), an indigenous woman of the Los Angeles Womyn's collective Cihuatl Tomali, has been performing in the greater LA metro area. And so, with more women emerging as Eekwol, Xela and Queen Yonasda have done, and positive attitudes toward women such as Buggin’ Malone’s, the situation of women in Native American hip hop seems to be improving.

Conclusions

The Native identities of those discussed here are indelible and irrepressible in their affirmation of indigenous culture and pedagogical regard for the past. As Tina Kuckkahn (Ojibwa) has explained in a different context, “the combination of the contemporary and the ancient, the telling of stories, past and present, the dancing, the singing, praying and sharing,” of indigenous hip hop can “combine to lift up and affirm” (2005) Native people across the continent. This article has raised questions regarding identity and politics in indigenous hip hop in the United States. Asking how community, homeland and patriarchal colonialism affect expressed indigenous hip hop identities, we’ve examined specific lyrical content that illustrates the conclusions we’ve reached, primarily that the complex nature of indigenous hip hop cannot be easily categorized, but requires careful attention and a wide-ranging framework. By bringing together concepts from indigenous feminists such as Andrea Smith and M. Annette Jaimes*Guerrero, as well as such Native literary nationalist scholars as Robert Womack and Robert Allen Warrior, in addition to ideas from Manning Marable, Cornel West, and Paul Gilroy, we have attempted to outline a workable framework for discussing specific hip hop artists in North America who express positive values and ideas. Addressing pedagogy, affirmation, play, community and self-determination, we’ve contrasted lyrical contradictions within the Native hip hop community, focusing on the positive.

These positive rappers have chosen to emphasize affirmation and pedagogy and tend to avoid misogyny and homophobia creating positive Native identities. The seven artists discussed stand out in a growing number of indigenous hip hop artists in America. But while some may struggle to change themselves and confront others whose paths have proven to be self-destructive, others such as NightShield and the Dago Braves do at times revel in wild acts of crazy drunkenness when they get “crunk” on a Saturday night, reinforcing negative stereotypes. NightShield for example, on *Savage Display: The Total Package* in “Get Stupid,” (which is reminiscent of the Black Eyed Peas’ “Let’s Get Retarded”), celebrates the “party spirit”. (For popular consumption, of course, “Let’s Get Retarded” was changed to “Let’s Get It Started” and is now even a part of Ford commercials.) No amount of claimed “irony” or playful irreverence brings such songs to the side of “positivity,” especially in light of the rigid stereotype of the “drunken Indian” and the prevalence of alcoholism in Native communities. This said, NightShield is important because his outlook is quite complex, and he brings sophisticated production techniques wherever he performs. As cited above he can be quite thoughtful and insightful in his lyrics, especially in collaboration with others. But at the same time he’s rowdy, irreverent and vulgar, just like many traditional indigenous tricksters. Though the manner in which some Native rappers express their values and identities can be best understood within the context of traditional tricksters, as we’ve noted, this article does not attempt to address the complicated relations of what is seen as outside positive portrayals of identity that predominate among those who take that path.

NightShield performed at the 2007 NAMA ceremonies in Niagara Falls with Maniac to an enthusiastic audience. And *Total Package* received the Native American Music Awards nod for best hip hop/rap production in 2008. So he is certainly receiving justifiable attention, and his newest album *Loved and Hated* is compelling, if uneven.

Native musicians “walk in both worlds” (Litefoot; Rollin’ Fox) as long as they sustain open links to their indigenous past. The majority of these musicians note their own role in constituting their identities “by and through language.” (Mitchell, K., 1997) The Native American Indian rappers addressed here call for “warriors” to support their “Native Way,” declare their Native pride and their commitment to keep their culture alive. Though this general outlook doesn’t finally define what it means to “be” a warrior, from what we hear from these rapping warriors is that they are utilizing traditional culture daily to combat the legacies of colonialism. They teach history and affirm their Native ways. They struggle for freedom from oppression and the stereotypes that enable it. The ongoing contestation over the place each grouping holds in the national community will continue even after Obama’s words come to fruition and there is an indigenous place at the table. Yaiva has declared that it is long past time to be heard.

As we’ve noted Canadian, Mexican and Latin American indigenous hip hop artists are joining established and emerging US artists to continue the challenge to the “powers that be,” at the same time that they playfully embrace modern beats and rhythms. Indigenous hip hop is flourishing in North America and around the world, and will continue to do so for quite some time.

END

Footnotes:

*The now defunct group from the San Francisco Bay Area WithOut Reservation (WOR) set the political consciousness standard high. Their rap ranged far and wide regarding, Columbus, history and identity politics, with contemporary messages to fight alcoholism and stereotypes being very prominent.

** Indigo claims indigenous roots, but does not specify her Native heritage. Similar to other women artists, she avoids the boasting and bragging, but she is bold and brash in asserting her strong anti-war politics and her confident and responsible sense of identity and sexuality. Indigo actually combines politics and sexuality in a fascinating philosophical turn. She goes

so far as to propose a “World Wide Strike” by women, similar to Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, where sexual relations are halted until we “Bring the troops home”. “Stop the violence”, she demands. Indigo consciously aims to give voice to “the opinion of women and youth on love, violence and the environment,” Indigo told Amber Schadewald of Minneapolis’ *City Pages* in 2007 (“Mood Indigo”. *City Pages*. Vol.28 #1392 Minneapolis: August 8. Retrieved September 10, 2007 from <http://citypages.com/databank/28/1392/article/15739.asp>) Her debut album *Kiri’ke’* is generally free of profanity -- though she chooses quite novel and provocative language when calling for the sexual strike. Born Leah Bartizal in 1980 in St. Paul, Minnesota, and living now in Minneapolis, Indigo is a part of the Culture Shock Camp crew, including Quese IMC, and headed by Shock B (Frejo). Indigo told Schadewald at *City Pages* "We bring the true stuff, the part of hip hop you can't just consume. We want to show these kids music that brings meaning to your life." For Indigo music is for "educating people".

NOTES:

¹ Gabriel Yaiva, “Many Ways to Grow Corn”, on Various Artists, *Summer Solstice*

(Arizona: Native Movement/ECHOES, 2009), compact disc.

² Jack McNeel, “Healing Through Hip-Hop: Youth Overcome Addictions at the Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations, *Indian Country Today* (New York: July 8, 2011)

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/healing-through-hip-hop-youth-overcome-additions>.

³ Buffy Sainte-Marie, *The Best of Buffy Sainte-Marie* (Santa Monica, CA: Vanguard 3/4 2 1987), compact disc.

⁴ John Trudell, *Tribal Voice* (Los Angeles: Tribal Voice, 1983), audiocassette. John Trudell, *AKA Graffiti Man*. (San Francisco: Rykodisc RAC50223 1988), audiocassette. John Trudell, *Johnny Damas & Me*. (San Francisco: Rykodisc RCD10286, 1994), compact disc. John Trudell, *Blue Indians*, (Studio City, CA: Dangerous Discs DDIR 1113-2, 1999), compact disc..

⁵ Russell Means. *Electric Warrior: The Sound of Indian America*. (Albuquerque, NM: Sound of America Records SOAR, 1993), audiocassette.

- 6 Robbie Bee & the Boyz from the Rez, *Rebel Rouzer*. (Albuquerque, NM. Warrior/Soar SOAR 105. 1992), audiocassette. Robbie Bee & the Boyz from the Rez, *Reservation of Education* (Albuquerque, NM. Warrior/Soar War-604, 1993), compact disc.
- 7 WithOut Rezervation. *Are You Ready for W.O.R.?* (Phoenix, AZ: Canyon Records CR-7035, 1994), compact disc
- 8 Btaka, *Indian Funk*, (Clearlake Oaks, CA: Indian Funk Records/Black Bear BEAR101, 1995), compact disc. Btaka, *Indian Roots*, (Clearlake Oaks, CA: Indian Funk Records/Black Bear BB102, 1995), audiocassette.
- 9 Neal Ullestad, "American Indian Rap and Reggae: Dancing to the Beat of a Different Drummer" *Popular Music & Society* (Vol. 23.2 Summer 1999), 62-90. Reprinted in 2006 as "Native American Rap and Reggae: Dancing to the Beat of a Different Drummer." in Jennifer Post's *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, (London/New York: Routledge), 331-349.
- 10 Indigo. *Kiri'Ke'*. (Minneapolis: IndiGenius Music/Culture Shock Camp, 2007), compact disc. Contains "World Wide Strike".
- 11 El Vuh, *Elvuhlution*, (Los Angeles, CA: El Vuh Productions, 2007), compact disc.
- 12 Yaiva, *Straight Heat*, (4th World Entertainment, n.d.), compact disc. Yaiva, *Limited Edition*, (4th World Entertainment, n.d.), compact disc. Yaiva, *The Fire Starter*, (4th World Entertainment, 2006), compact disc.
- 13 Ras K' Dee, *Street Prison*, (San Francisco, CA: Nucuma Records, 2005), compact disc.
- 14 Night Shield, *Savage Display: The Total Package*, (Sioux Falls, SD: Night Shield Entertainment, 2005), compact disc. Night Shield, *Loved & Hated*, Sioux Falls, SD: Night Shield Entertainment, 2008), compact disc.
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