

# Introduction

Siento odio profundo por tu racismo  
Ya no me confundo con tu ironía  
Y lloro sin que sepas que el llanto mío  
tiene lágrimas negras como mi vida

I feel profound hatred for your racism  
I am now no longer confused by your irony  
And I cry without you knowing that my cry  
has black tears like my life

—“Lágrimas negras,” Hermanos de Causa

In “Lágrimas negras” (Black tears) by the Havana-based hip hop duo Hermanos de Causa (Brothers of the cause), the artists Soandres and Pelón provide a biting critique of the racialized hardships they, as young black men, encounter in the Cuban everyday. Borrowing the title from the classic bolero first popularized in the 1930s by the celebrated Cuban composer Miguel Matamoros, Hermanos de Causa poetically refigure the terms of “Lágrimas negras” by placing black life amid Cuba’s evolving social malaise at its narrative center. Where the original composition offered a ballad of romantic sorrow, Hermanos de Causa speak of “black tears” of racial marginalization, criminalized gazes, and the simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility that

has come to mark Afro-Cuban life following the island's post-Soviet economic crisis of the early 1990s. The artists in this sense offer a poignant play on blackness that reflects a shifting Cuban complexity of race and nationhood, while foregrounding the salience of black subjectivity itself as a site of political life and contest.

Cut to a humid July evening in 2006 during a party I attended at a rooftop flat in Regla, a residential barrio a quick ferry ride across the harbor from the tourist-laden district of Habana Vieja. Atop the narrow staircase leading to the apartment, one is greeted by a large portrait of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the heroic patriarch of the Haitian Revolution, poised in military garb with his foot pressed triumphantly upon the head of a hissing snake. A photo of Malcolm X sits prominently amid other images garnishing the living room walls, as a large spray-painted figure of an afro-adorned man sits affixed to an outside wall of the flat's rooftop patio. The evening's hosts, Alexey Rodríguez and Magia López of the hip hop duo Obsesión, had invited a collection of local MCs and members of a visiting Canadian hip hop delegation for an informal gathering of food, music, and rum.

As guests assembled, a few clustered casually around an old Soviet television in Alexey's parents' bedroom to view the nightly state-run newscast when it was announced that there would be a notice of national importance within an hour's time. Given the newscaster's tone, word quickly spread through the party. A milling crowd had gathered in front of the television for the impending news when it was announced that President Fidel Castro had undergone intestinal surgery for an unspecified ailment. Governance, we were told, would be temporarily transferred to Fidel's younger brother, Raúl, and a handful of state confidants. The terms of the transfer were read aloud from a statement apparently authenticated by Fidel Castro's dated, frail-looking signature. A pensive mood settled over the gathering as many expressed concern about Fidel's health, as well as the uncertainties regarding the ultimate significance of this news. Despite all, the party continued, albeit with a tangibly more subdued energy.

Meanwhile, throughout the night U.S. news broadcasts were in a frenzy, airing images of euphoric crowds of Cuban Americans in the streets of Miami celebrating the news of Fidel Castro's illness and speculating on his imminent if not presumed death. In the days following, Washington was awash with predictions of chaos, mass hysteria, and explosive retaliation, as "liberated" Cubans were now expected to take their turn in the streets. Statements

from the Bush administration vacillated between “support” for a “democratic transition” coupled with veiled threats to those who might hinder the move to “a free Cuba,” and urgent calls for calm to counter the potential threat of a mass Cuban exodus fleeing for U.S. shores. The morning following the announcement, however, Havana’s two million residents awoke and went about business largely as usual. In short, daily life continued in Cuba, though clearly not without a new set of ambiguities. While Miami’s largely white Cuban American establishment overwhelmingly cheered the development, many among the island’s Afro-Cuban population—including Magia’s and Alexey’s families—shared a more ambivalent relationship to the news, given levels of identification with Cuba’s revolutionary past.

The announcement of Fidel Castro’s retirement and succession to Raúl, while unquestionably historic, did not in the end lead to a popular uprising or a collapse of the Cuban state as prophesized by some. Indeed, the only ensuing hysteria seemed to have occurred among invested parties to the north. The significance and historical complexities of the Cuban Revolution could not in the end be reduced simply to the figure of Fidel Castro. Such would require erasure of over fifty years of mobilization and sacrifice among everyday Cubans in working toward and imagining, in all its lived incongruities, a socialist future. Negated would be Cubans’ own historical presence and agency, not to mention alternative lines of revolutionarily informed subjectivity (M. Perry 2008a). Rather than a singularly disjunctive event, Fidel Castro’s passage from central stage should be viewed within a broader ongoing narrative of national transformation as revolutionary Cuba has struggled to navigate its entry into global capitalism following the 1989 collapse of the Soviet bloc. Social flux and its attendant frictions have therefore long been defining facets of Cuban society, ones through which the Cuban state and ordinary Cubans continue to navigate—in varying and frequently competing ways—without abandoning all historical continuity.

I juxtapose the party vignette with Hermanos de Causa’s “Lágrimas negras” to underscore a key tension that has shaped and come to define Cuba’s *movimiento de hip hop* (hip hop movement). At one end are rapidly eroding national narratives of revolutionary struggle, lore, and utopic promise within which Cuban *raperos* (rappers or MCs) live as members of a generation coming of age in a period of prodigious social change. However, on the waning periphery, these young people remain inheritors of the island’s revolutionary history and as such both live with and embody those same tensions that

mark Cuba's evolving condition and uncertainties. They are at one time a part of and yet critically apart from a previous moment, in essence betwixt and between two Cubas—one of a receding past and one in process of becoming. Such liminality offers this generation of artists a privileged vantage point as chroniclers of revolutionary decline, if not potential custodians of its utopic call.

It is also vital to note that for many core and founding members of Cuba's hip hop movement, race—through its varying confluences with gender, class, and sexuality—has served as a politically meaningful lens through which the incongruencies of a shifting national typography have been most saliently lived and mediated anew. Indeed, *Hermanos de Causa's* testament to life as young black men speaks to a raced materiality of Cuban citizenship vis-à-vis the island's emerging market economy, one that stands in fraught tension with enduring claims to the contrary rooted in Cuba's nonracial national foundations and elaborated upon during the post-1959 revolutionary period. It is precisely this "irony" to which Soandres and Pelón speak, and whose mystification they proclaim "no longer confuses." Embedded in *Hermanos de Causa's* read on race and racism then are those disjunctures between the ideological claims and the everyday practice of revolutionary socialism in today's Cuba—a critique suggesting a certain disenfranchisement of Afro-Cubans from the revolutionary national promise in ways that may implicate the Cuban state itself.

This book thus explores questions of social maneuver within the shifting, often frictive fields of global-local interface that mark Cuban life today. At its center is an inquiry into the rise of Cuban hip hop in relation to ongoing elaborations of race and class following the island's post-Soviet-era trauma of the early 1990s. Here I focus on the ways young self-identified black Cubans who comprise a pioneering core of raperos and their followers not only give voice to the lived quotidian of race, but also craft new understandings of black Cuban selfhood and forms of racial citizenship by way of rap music and the broader global imagine of hip hop culture.

Through this twofold sense of articulation—at one time a performative voicing and productive crafting of self—these artists can be seen as moving in strategically flexible, globally attuned ways (Ong 1999) in response to the particular urgencies of Cuba's unfolding economy at the millennium's turn. Amid an era increasingly brokered by market liberalizations, a withering socialist state, deepening social stratification, and—significantly—resurgent

levels of racial inequality, how might such black self-fashionings complicate Cuban legacies of nonracial exceptionalism while advancing alternative citizenship claims both within and beyond the nation? With these queries I seek to consider hip hop's rise within Cuba's historical arc and enduring dilemmas of race and nationhood, while locating it as a social phenomenon of a particularly fluid moment of neoliberal flux and transformation.

The everyday contours and social complexities of this history are borne out in the lives and work of a collection of Havana-based rap artists, producers, and DJs who have contributed collective voice and social form to Cuba's hip hop community. Beyond realms of music, many embrace hip hop as an alternative mode of identity, in effect a *whole way of life* that transcends national and temporal boundedness through a quest for global membership and black cosmopolitan belonging. I explore the ways these evolving social imaginaries thus operate both within and beyond Cuban fields of vision by challenging national prescriptions of race and their obfuscating effects, while embodying multiple claims to citizenship as contemporary Afro-Cubans. Those involved range generally in age from their early twenties to midthirties and are largely drawn from working-class barrios with sizable Afro-Cuban populations.

The book's narrative lines emerge in conversation with these individuals and through engagement with those places where raperos fashion community by way of music concerts and festivals, recording sessions, organizational meetings and colloquia, informal classes, and more intimate spaces of home and everyday life. The bulk of ethnographic material is drawn from research conducted between 1999 and 2006, a period that in many ways marked the movement's apogee of racial politics. The book's concluding chapter carries the conversation into the present by addressing recent developments both in and beyond Cuba. Taken as such, *Negro Soy Yo* offers a longitudinal and indeed historicized perspective on the evolving story of Cuban hip hop amid ongoing negotiations of a transformative present.

A critical facet in this mix has been the revolutionary state's varying positions on, and shifting efforts to manage, raperos' emergent voicings and embedded challenges. Equally instrumental have been raperos' involvements with two important, at times overlapping communities of outside interlocutors. The first of these entails a range of intergenerational engagements with an older cohort of Afro-Cuban intellectuals and family mem-

bers, along with a select few African American political exiles on the island. Many among this older generation have been drawn to hip hop for what is seen as raperos' vanguardist position vis-à-vis the island's current spectrum of racial politics. An additional set of dialogues has occurred by way of the transnational, enabling Cuban affirmations of black selfhood at the confluence of nation and diasporic geographies of blackness.

Amid the mix, the now hyperglobal field of hip hop continues to be an important cultural space through which cosmopolitan understandings of contemporary black belonging can be marshaled in challenging local conditions of racial subjugation (M. Perry 2008b). Such agencies illuminate the workings of diaspora as a lived social formation, one constituted through certain kinds of identity practice in the making and moving of diaspora in a mobilized sense (Edwards 2003). Here hip hop offers extranational routes (Gilroy 1993) through which some young Afro-Cubans not only envision black alterities but in fact engage in the active "crafting of selves" (Kondo 1990) as globally conscious subjects. Cuban hip hop in this sense evokes what Josh Kun has termed an *audiotopic sensibility* offering, in this instance, not only "new maps for re-imagining the present social world" (Kun 2005: 23), but innovative ways of revisioning both being and moving in the world as well.

What I propose, then, by way of the cultural politics and poetics of Cuban hip hop, is an effort to think through the quotidian play of shifting governmentalities and evolving practices of race as they unfold under the expanding global reach of neoliberal capital. Attending to what Wendy Brown identifies as the political rationalities of neoliberalism (Brown 2003; see also Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008), the emphasis here is on regulatory effects of neoliberal logics as they impact the social terrain of imagination and practice, if not subjectivity itself. In its broadest sense this approach seeks a historicized understanding of hip hop's ascendance in Cuba as one intimately tied to the island's own ambivalences of neoliberal condition. Here I suggest it is indeed no coincidence that hip hop Cubano has evolved precisely during Cuba's recent period of historic flux. Although the early roots of rap music on the island can be traced back to the mid-1980s, it was not until the national crisis of the early to mid-1990s that hip hop as a self-defined movimiento began to take conscious Cuban form. Cuban hip hop is thus born and acutely reflective of this ongoing moment of national rupture and reformation.

What then are the historical terms that have shaped this particular juncture? Beyond a musing query, it is precisely these terms and their fault lines

upon which many raperos and aligned others maneuver in fashioning alternative black Cuban claims to national legitimacy, musically and otherwise. By way of Afro-Atlantic analogy, then, what does it indeed mean in an enduring Du Boisian sense to embody a “two-ness” of being at one time both black and Cuban at the millennial turn (Du Bois [1903] 1989)? Such frictions remain poignant grounds of struggle for many Cuban raperos through both life and art.

### **Dilemmas of Racial Disenfranchisement**

The economic crisis of the early 1990s in the wake of the Eastern bloc’s collapse and subsequent suspension of Soviet subsidies unquestionably engendered profound realignments within Cuba’s social landscape, revolutionary trajectory, and broader national narrative. Efforts to preserve the salience of state socialism in the face of deepening market realities have exposed, exacerbated, and in many ways elaborated upon a set of historical tensions laid progressively bare in the current everyday. The most immediate of these has been widening social inequality tied to differing levels and means of access within the island’s increasingly monetized economy. Amid this flux, a once revolutionary call for *la lucha*—that collective national “struggle” to build a socialist Cuba—in today’s parlance is associated more with the daily hustle for the island’s globally pegged currency now so essential to Cuban life.

In addition to urgencies of class, racial difference has emerged as a critical, largely correlative factor in shaping social position and play within Cuba’s shifting economic terrain. This reality, in turn, presents a set of fraught complexities for Cuba where the dismantling of racial discrimination is touted as a key triumph of the Cuban Revolution in its professed realization of a racially egalitarian, if not ultimately postracial, socialist society. Indeed, claims to a nonracial exceptionalism have in fact been historically instrumental to Cuba’s very formation as a modern nation.

It was of course sugar, that brutal irony of “sweetness and power” (Mintz 1986), that gave rise to the island’s inherent entanglements of race and nationhood as colonial Cuba became the Caribbean’s largest sugar producer following the collapse of Saint-Domingue’s sugar industry at the onset of the Haitian Revolution. Cuba’s groundings in modernity were thus born of that very “machine” of plantation-based slavery reiterated throughout the Caribbean region (Benítez-Rojo 1992).

Yet Africans and their descendants were far from simply fodder for a colonial idiom of raced capitalism. Numerous slave revolts occurred during the eighteenth century, with the first large-scale expression unfolding in 1812 in a series of uprisings known collectively as the Aponte Rebellion in which an alliance of enslaved and free people of color, inspired by the recent triumph of the Haitian Revolution, mobilized in shared pursuit of slavery's end (Childs 2006; Fischer 2004). Although violently crushed, the rebellion instilled a deep fear among white elites of a black Haitian-style revolt, setting the stage for the La Escalera massacre of 1844, which resulted in the execution and imprisonment of thousands of enslaved and free people of color in response to an alleged conspiracy to end slavery and colonial rule (Paquette 1988).<sup>1</sup> In both moments state-sanctioned terror as a technology of raced subjugation was leveled at African descendants seeking human freedom, inscribing, in turn, the early parameters of black Cuban subjectivity in the most material of terms.

A foundational confluence of black freedom, citizenship, and national liberation emerged in Cuba's late nineteenth-century wars of independence in which upward of 70 percent of the voluntary rank and file of the independence army were men of color. Many were inspired through manumission along with the independence movement's broader associations with slavery's abolition and a future promise of a racially just Cuba. Instrumental in the mix was General Antonio Maceo—a free *mulato* and leading commander in the independence army who, following the larger movement's refusal to emancipate enslaved blacks en masse, organized plantation raids encouraging liberated blacks to join the anticolonial struggle.

Although killed in battle two years before national independence, Maceo's symbolism as heroic liberator of both black Cubans and the Cuban nation remains complex. Under Maceo and other black commanders' leadership, the centrality of blacks in the nationalist struggle posed a radical challenge to those who sought the exclusion of Afro-descendants from equal participation in a newly liberated Cuba (Helg 1995). Indeed, for many formerly enslaved Cubans, Maceo represented the martyred embodiment of black Cuban citizenship. Among white *criollo* elite, however, regard for Maceo was tempered by fear of a black *caudillo* (leader) ushering a "black" Cuba into being (Duharte Jiménez 1993; Ferrer 1998a). Subsequent efforts to expunge Maceo's raced significance reflect early interests in purging blackness

from Cuba's mythic foundations and narratives of national identity (Kapcia 2000: 200–201; cf. Trouillot 1995).<sup>2</sup>

Appeals to a deracialized Cuba were in fact ideologically integral to the independence movement itself. José Martí—the criollo intellectual, prominent independence figure, and celebrated father of Cuban nationalism—recognized racial difference as an obstacle to a unified nationalist front, advancing calls for a nonracial Cuba with lasting resonance into the revolutionary present. Martí's advocacy of a racially transcendent liberation struggle—and by extension an envisioned nation—was also aimed at appeasing white fears of an unleashed black population coming to power on the eve of independence (Ferrer 1998a; Pérez 1999).<sup>3</sup> While blacks may have redeployed Martí's advocacy of nonracialism to justify entitlement to full citizenship (de la Fuente 1999; Ferrer 1998a), the same postracial logic impeded political redress to racially lived inequality. By juxtaposing “race” against “nation” in this way, racial identification (if not subjectivity itself) was ultimately cast as counternational (Martí [1893] 1975). Within this postracial scripting, claiming one's blackness (or whiteness) was akin to antipatriotism, one ultimately treasonous with respect to the nonracial solvency of the Cuban nation itself.

The rise of the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Color) in 1908 posed an intrinsic challenge to early Cuba's conflictive and otherwise unfulfilled profession of nonracial equality.<sup>4</sup> Drawing the bulk of its membership from former combatants of the independence wars disillusioned with black Cubans' continued confinement to the lower working and peasant classes, the Partido pressed demands for political redress (Helg 1995). While the Partido called for the full enfranchisement of blacks as equal citizens within the Cuban nation, its appeal to racial solidarity threatened the early republic's efforts to silence race through a nonracial status quo. In response to legislation prohibiting political parties organized along racial lines that effectively banned the Partido, members staged a 1912 Havana protest in which former independence fighters reportedly carried arms. Beyond symbols of violent threat, Partido members may have alternately displayed arms as testimonials of citizenship rooted in their status as national combatants.

Regardless of terms, the protest was brutally crushed by the Cuban army, decimating the Partido's ranks and agenda as more than three thousand

blacks were massacred during an ensuing island-wide reign of terror. The events of 1912 thus stood as a poignant reminder of the disciplining use of state violence in forging and policing national parameters of a regulatory nonracialism.<sup>5</sup> Although its significance was long obscured by official accounts of an infamous “Race War” of 1912, the Partido’s challenge and subsequent massacre remain poignant moments of historical memory and recovery within *raperos* circles.

While 1912 ended overtly political forms of mobilization as Afro-Cubans alternatively sought redress through existing political parties and trade unions (de la Fuente 2001), this did not translate to the demise of all autonomous spheres of black social practice. Black Cubans continued to organize around religious and cultural life forged under enslavement and given institutional form through *cabildos de nación* (ethnic-based social welfare societies) and later *sociedades de color* of the early twentieth century. As mutual-aid and leisure associations drawn from professional urban classes of color, the *sociedades* laid claims to a black cosmopolitanism nourished in important part through engagement with black communities and political struggle beyond the national (Guridy 2010; see also Fernández Robaina 1998).

With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the soon-to-be-declared socialist state took up the elimination of racial discrimination as a centerpiece of its early revolutionary program. While black intellectuals were reportedly active in pushing for public debate on the issue (de la Fuente 2001), the challenge of promoting interracial fraternity toward a nationalist front, in this case revolutionary socialism, was once again paramount. During one of two notable speeches on race in 1959, a recently victorious Fidel Castro evoked José Martí and his nonracial ideals in declaring: “We have to uproot the last colonial vestiges, conscious of making that phase of Martí’s a reality. He said it before, we have to repeat it now: that the Cuban is more than white, more than black, we are Cuban.”<sup>6</sup> A ban on racial discrimination in employment and public spheres of education and recreation followed, while a broader approach held that residual forms of racism would eventually disappear with the purging of the class-based foundations of racial inequality. An implicit limitation of this latter facet is that while race, as the late Stuart Hall cogently notes, may operate as a modality through which class is historically lived (1980), the particularity of raced power, practice, and subjectivity cannot, in turn, be reduced simply to an epiphenomenon of class.

This formulation, moreover, tends to posit a false dichotomy between institutional and ideological expressions of racialized power (Essed 2002; Goldberg 1993; Hall 1980; Harrison 1995; Omi and Winant 1994). Such framing finds popular expression in today's Cuban parlance, one that often privileges the individualizing *prejuicio* (prejudice) over more structural *racismo* (racism) when referencing Cuba's enduring racial challenges. The common Cuban refrain "Hay prejuicio pero no hay racismo" (There is prejudice but no racism), for instance, limits the exercise of raced power to that of individual practice, thereby restricting calls that would challenge the broader systemics of racial exclusion and privilege. Rather than recognizing racism as a complexly dynamic and reproductive social process, its workings in this sense are rendered obfuscated through a discursive silencing.

Indeed, within three short years of 1959, racism was officially declared eliminated from Cuban society. From that point on discussions of raced power and/or politics of any form in a now ostensibly postracial Cuba were deemed subversive given demands for a united front to build socialism.<sup>7</sup> Reminiscent of earlier moments, race was again juxtaposed to nation, and racial forms of identification were ultimately rendered counterrevolutionary if not counternational. Black Cubans thus concerned with the persistence of racial inequalities found themselves in a dilemma. If they chose to organize around racially associated grievances, they risked being labeled counterrevolutionary; if they did not, they chanced complacency in their own subjugation.<sup>8</sup> Such silencings were institutionalized by state bannings of black social organizations including *sociedades de color* (Guridy 2010), along with reported suppression of Afro-Cuban religious communities and organizations (C. Moore 1989). At the very level of the ontological, any enunciation of a black, subjectively lived racial difference was in the end marked suspect, echoing again a raced disenfranchisement of Afro-Cubans from full voice and belonging within purports of a nonracial nation.<sup>9</sup>

Critiques and limitations notwithstanding, it is vital to underscore that black Cubans did in large part benefit from the social gains of the revolution. Although race-responsive efforts were never undertaken, black and darker-skinned Cubans—historically among the poorest and most marginal populations—gained considerably from the revolution's efforts to build a more egalitarian society through state socialism. Expansions of low-income housing, for instance, significantly impacted the black urban poor, many of whom lived in shanty-like conditions prior to 1959 (de la Fuente 2001), while

the revolution's socialization of medicine increased health care access and improved outcomes for poorer black and darker-skinned Cubans.

Additional interventions occurred within spheres of education, where the eradication of private schools in 1961 (most of which were racially segregated) and the massive nationwide literacy campaign initiated the same year launched a national educational system radically more inclusive of black Cubans. Accompanying shifts toward professional training in areas like medicine and engineering, moreover, dramatically expanded black professional ranks. Participation in this history engendered levels of Afro-Cuban revolutionary affinity in noted contrast to the waves of wealthier white compatriots who fled the island at the onset of the revolutionary period given threats (both real and perceived) to lines of racial and class privilege. Legacies of these achievements, as we shall see, carry meaningful, if often conflicted, resonance among Havana-area raperos.

The disjoint between the instrumentality of race in the ongoing making of Cuban nationhood and official odes to a nonracial nationalism have been sharply exacerbated by market shifts and a concurrent retreat of state socialism since the early 1990s. Governmental efforts to regulate and police the incongruencies introduced by what amounted to a Cuban neoliberal turn have compounded, at times significantly, the racial marginalization of black and darker-skinned Cubans. Neoliberal reworkings of the social via overlapping lines of racial and class difference have in this sense further complicated the utopic claims of the revolutionary project and Cuba's broader national promise. It is precisely amid these cleavages and their attendant incoherencies that Cuban hip hop emerged and moves.

Yet this neoliberal Cuban condition to which I refer is a deeply ambivalent one. Unlike much of the Global South compelled to accommodate neoliberal reforms by way of international lending agencies and regional free-trade agreements, Cuba's socialist leadership has long renounced participation within such accords. These efforts notwithstanding, it is clear that more informal modes of economic liberalization undertaken by the revolutionary state since the collapse of the Soviet bloc set in motion developments that have increasingly aligned with global workings of market capital. Comparable in this sense with Katherine Verdery's insights into postsocialist change in Romania, this movement has generally been one characterized by a transformative dynamism rather than a linear or teleo-

logic transition to neoliberal marketization (Verdery 1996). Reminiscent of a collapsing Romanian socialism, Cuba's evolving condition is a similarly fluid and contingent one, marked by uncertainty and struggle over the future terms of a postsocialist Cuba. Indeed, given evolving gestures toward a Cuban-U.S. thaw, such market elaborations and their unpredictabilities are surely to intensify in the near term.

In light of such ambiguities, Aihwa Ong's notion of neoliberalism "as exception" (Ong 2006) is productive for considering the ways market rationales have permeated to Cuban society as state-induced "exceptions" in the face of ongoing claims to preserve revolutionary socialism, engendering a deeply fraught ambivalence of the neoliberal condition the island presently occupies. Ong's work, moreover, points toward how such neoliberal deviations often produce areas of exclusion as well as inform alternative modes of social practice fashioned at the confluence of national and transnational social geographies. Regarding Cuban hip hop, this framing is particularly helpful when considering the reciprocally raced nature of socioeconomic marginalization on one hand, and raperos' multivalent claims to national/transnational belonging (or, in effect, citizenship) on the other within an unfolding neoliberal moment.

As has been similarly documented in the Caribbean and broader Latin American region (Babb 2004; Desforges 2000; Gregory 2006; Klak and Myers 1998; Scher 2011), Cuba's expansion of foreign tourism emerged as a pivotal postcrisis facet of the island's neoliberal shift. In addition to generating its own logics of class and racially marked exclusion that articulate with other aspects of Cuba's new monetized economy, the tourism industry has enabled a commodification and vending of Afro-Cuban cultural forms for consumption by foreign tourists and the Cuban state alike.

While illuminating interrelated dimensions of racial inequality and neoliberal modes of multicultural packaging, tourism's racial currents have also encouraged an enterprising range of racially coded strategies—often gendered and frequently sexualized—that some black and darker-skinned Cubans have adopted to access an expanding marketplace from which they are otherwise often excluded. In many instances these efforts are mediated through the varying ways "blackness" is performed in light of globally tied, locally articulated economies of consumption and desire. It is thus within the evolving folds of neoliberalization that darker-skinned Cubans

find themselves disenfranchised from full participation within Cuba's new economy (if not new market-entitled realms of citizenship), while simultaneously managing creative maneuver through alternative spheres of racial space.

### **Mobilizing Blackness**

Amid such shifting typographies of race, class, capital, and nationhood itself, some black and darker-skinned young people have turned to hip hop to craft new understandings of black selves born of the racial materiality of a particular moment and tension of local-global convergence. Cuban rappers, in this sense, similarly navigate racialized realms of exclusion and possibility, ones in which the active field of maneuver is identity. In exploring these complexities, my approach builds upon recognition of how grammars of racial subject-making are often negotiated through webs of social power that interpellate subalternly raced subjects as such (Du Bois [1903] 1989; Fanon [1952] 1967; see also Althusser 1971; Foucault 1979). And yet it is the space of identity, that outwardly conscious and self-aware expression of subjectivity, that serves as the performative intermediary in the movement from racialized subjects to racially self-aware social actors.

Here, Stuart Hall's emphasis on an analytics of identification (rather than identity *per se*) is informative in underscoring the operative, self-positioning act of identifying with others as the foundational basis for forging and maintaining group identities (Hall 1996). As historically variable as such collective solidarities of recognition may indeed be, they are the very *terra firma* upon which social groups act and move in corporately invested ways, be they indigenous social movements or Tea Party activists. The salient question therefore is ultimately one of positioned actors and political ends.

Regarding identity claims among black and darker-skinned rappers, affinities of blackness—at one time nationally moored and globally expansive—are for many instrumental in the crafting of both music and selves. Indeed, as these young men and women navigate Cuba's new monetized landscape, racial status has increasingly come to mark economic location and realms of social mobility. Race in this sense, to borrow again from Stuart Hall, has assumed added importance as a key social idiom through which class is currently lived in Cuba. Hall's framing, moreover, suggests a rethinking of what constitutes a social class *per se*, particularly in light of Afro-descendant

communities whose raciality is grounded in the very class edifice intrinsic to the formation of the modern Western world (James [1963] 1989; E. Williams [1944] 1994). While historically contingent and mediated by way of other axes of social difference, race for these communities has frequently served as one of the more enduring lenses through which inequality is indeed most tangibly “lived.”

To evoke Marx’s oft-cited distinction between a class-in-itself versus a class-for-itself, Hall’s proposition encourages recognition of the ways racial identity may serve as a socially salient and therefore politically productive mode of collective (i.e., “class”) organization and action (cf. Gilroy 1991).<sup>10</sup> This materiality of race—or for the sake of this discussion, “blackness” itself—has thus the capacity to be generative of communal ontologies of being as well as collaborative strategies of practice. For many racially marked raperos, the globally conversant space of hip hop has proved instrumental precisely in this sense by enabling new Cuban grammars of both black being and doing.

By illuminating the narrative lines of such black self-fashionings, I explore a nexus of alliances between raperos and a constellation of interlocutors that have contributed important shape to Cuba’s evolving hip hop movement. Key among these have been ongoing histories of exchange with visiting hip hop artists, producers, and cultural activists, primarily from North America, who have provided discursive and material support for raperos. Yet many key figures in Havana’s hip hop community also share a cogent set of relationships with two local circles of individuals who have contributed to the movement’s trajectory in meaningful ways. The first is an established (as well as an emerging) generation of Afro-Cuban intellectuals who have encouraged formative dialogues around Cuban questions of race, history, and contemporary culture. The second involves two Havana-based African American political exiles who have, through varying and sometimes intimate ways, impacted lives and broader ideological conversations within the community. By way of mentorship and other engagements, these exiles have been influential in expanding transnational understandings among raperos, while facilitating alliances with African American hip hop artists and activists—in effect, elaborating routes of black internationalism within the movimiento.

Arising in part through these varying involvements, many black and darker-skinned raperos tie themselves via their music and everyday lives to

reclaimed histories of Afro-Cuban radicality, while simultaneously marking their belonging to Afro-hemispheric traditions of black political life and struggle. In doing so, these artists lay claim as contemporary Afro-Cubans to multiple notions of citizenship both critically within, and decidedly beyond, Cuba's nonracial national imaginary.

Of equal gravitas, I examine the shifting interplay between hip hop Cubano as an ascendant social phenomenon and the Cuban state as it has sought to mediate and contain hip hop's emergent voicings and antiracist challenges. From willful neglect, to institutionalizing efforts, to more recent curtailment of governmental support, the revolutionary state has long been a key interlocutor, albeit ambivalently positioned, with island rappers. Despite (or perhaps precisely through) such labors, hip hop arose as an important site of social analysis and critique by pushing accounts of racial and class dynamics into highly regulated realms of Cuban public discourse.

Cuban hip hop in this sense emerged as a kind of disruptive black spectacle, rendering realities of race both visible and acutely audible. As I have argued, these artists have become significant actors within a nascent counterpublic sphere predicated on black political difference and antiracist advocacy in an ostensibly postracial Cuba (M. Perry 2004, 2008b; see also de la Fuente 2008, 2010; Fernandes and Stanyek 2007; Saunders 2009). While dialogues between Cuban MCs and a current range of black-identified intellectuals and cultural producers have given rise to new spaces and routes of racial self-articulation, they have also evolved in conversation with intermittent state openings to public address and Cuba's expanding market economy.

### **Raced Ethnography**

It has, however, been suggested that scholarly emphasis on an analytics of race vis-à-vis hip hop Cubano has been a largely misplaced enterprise. A diverse field of commentators on contemporary Cuba, including Sujatha Fernandes (2003, 2006; Fernandes and Stanyek 2007), Alan West-Durán (2004), Ronni Armstead (2007), Tanya Saunders (2009, 2010), and Alejandro de la Fuente (2008, 2010), have varyingly foregrounded the role of racial identity within Havana's hip hop community as an integral facet of the movement's politics and social coherence. While my work (M. Perry 2004, 2008a, 2008b) is in dialogue with this scholarship, my intervention is directed at providing

an ethnographically grounded and historicized analysis of Cuban hip hop as a multivalent site of racial maneuver in an emerging neoliberal moment.

By contrast, the British ethnomusicologist Geoffrey Baker is highly critical of such approaches, taking particular issue with my work and what he views as its “race agenda” and “overarching race-based narrative” regarding Cuban hip hop (Baker 2011: 268–69). Drawing upon field data conducted just subsequent to my own, Baker suggests raperos’ (self-)racialization was a gradual one, peaking in the early 2000s precisely during my primary research period. While broadly accurate, where Baker and I differ concerns the terms, contributing factors, and political nature of such black self-fashionings. In the spirit of intellectual exchange, I offer the following thoughts regarding the core issues and limitations his critiques raise, while providing the opportunity to further situate my analytical approach and ethnographic positionality in the field.

A central contention of Baker involves the suggestion that outside entities, from U.S.-based hip hop artists and activists to North American scholars like myself, introduced “Americanized” conceptions of race to Cuba, thereby imposing a foreign racial construct upon an otherwise autochthonously nonracial social landscape (Baker 2011: 267). Once these foreign influences dissipated, he argues, racial currents of identification waned, reverting back to a more “traditional Cuban style [of hip hop], focused on the presence of people of different skin colors [who] identified hip hop spaces as racially mixed” (285). While levels of black identification among raperos may indeed have lessened in recent years for various factors I will later discuss, to suggest that this shift is reducible to the fading of imposed ideas from “outside” risks not only decoupling the conjunctural circumstances of the moment, but also devaluing these artists’—and, in a wider sense, Afro-Cubans’—historical agency in forging understandings of self and ways of being alternative to dominant national prescriptions.

One familiar with standing scholarship on *mestizaje* in the Caribbean and broader Latin American region, of which Cuba’s nonracial foundations are a variant, is cognizant of the ways national constructions of racial neutrality more often than not obscure the raced workings of marginalization and subordination affecting communities of African descent (see Godreau 2006; Hanchard 1998; Lilly Caldwell 2007; Martínez-Echazábal 1998; Safa 1998; Sagás 2000; Wade 1995; Whitten and Torres 1998). Similar conclusions have been drawn by scholars of Cuba and its history (de la Fuente 2001;

N. Fernandez 2010; Fernández Robaina 1990; Ferrer 1998a, 1999; R. Moore 1994, 1997; Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000; Sawyer 2005).

As has been chronicled of various moments, moreover, Afro-Cubans have long engaged extranationally with other Afro-descended populations in making and mobilizing notions of black Cuban alterity toward antiracist and/or liberatory-directed ends (Brock and Fuertes et al. 1998; Childs 2006; Ellis 1998; García 2006; Guridy 2010; C. Moore 1989; Palmié 2002; Schwartz 1998; Sublette 2007). Such agencies were operative in the 1812 Aponte Rebellion by way of the Haitian Revolution, as they were with the poet Nicolás Guillén's decades-long intellectual rapport with Langston Hughes, with the journalist Gustavo Urrutia's affinities with the NAACP and Booker T. Washington, and, as I argue, with black-identified raperos in crafting political imaginaries beyond the national. All are variations on a theme, yet ones responsive to the complexities of their own historical present. Historicization, therefore, is critical.

Identity claims among raperos can be viewed yet more broadly in conversation with the rise of identity-centered social movements throughout the Latin American region involving indigenous as well as Afro-descended populations, many of them marshaled around a politics of antiracism (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Anderson 2009; Hale 1997; Ng'weno 2007; Wade 1995; Warren 2001). Such mobilizations of difference, moreover, have often articulated with the expansion of neoliberal policies and related state turns toward multiculturalist positions, displacing *mestizaje* as a dominant national paradigm (Hale 2002; Laurie and Bonnett 2002; Postero 2005; Sieder 2002; Wade 1999). As I have similarly suggested here, a comparable mix of identity politics, market transformation, and an ever fluid national landscape are also in dynamic play in Cuba today. Locating Cuban hip hop within such regional shifts may therefore yield analytic perspectives that provide broader contextualization and nuances of understanding regarding its racial undercurrents.

A central focus for Baker's analysis is the U.S.-based Black August collective that participated in a series of annual Cuban hip hop festivals between 1998 and 2003. Among other commitments, the collective organized performances by African American and Nuyorican hip hop artists and related involvements of U.S. cultural activists. Like Baker, I recognize the instrumentality of Black August in animating transnational conversations that have been important in framing notions of blackness within Havana's hip hop

community. Yet while I identify the collective as one among various actors and/or factors, Black August figures in Baker's analysis as a primary progenitor of racial thinking among raperos. Dimensions of black identity within this formulation ultimately begin and end with Black August. Along similar lines, Baker critiques my work and that of other North American scholars exploring racial poetics within Cuban hip hop for "describ[ing] and analyz[ing] Cuban culture using terms and theoretical constructs derived from people of color in the United States" (Baker 2011: 286).<sup>11</sup> It is implied that through engagements with island hop hip via scholarship and other involvements, we (largely scholars of color), much like Black August, have imposed foreign modes of racial thinking upon hip hop artists and their followers.

Such critiques are reminiscent of a set of challenges leveled by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant against, among others, the political scientist Michael Hanchard and his work *Orpheus and Power* (1998), which examines Brazil's *movimento negro*. In their article "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason," Bourdieu and Wacquant take Hanchard to task in arguing:

By applying North American racial categories to the Brazilian situation, this book makes the particular history of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement into the universal standard for the struggle of all groups oppressed on grounds of colour (or caste). Instead of dissecting the constitution of the Brazilian ethnoracial order according to its own logic, such inquiries are most often content to replace wholesale the national myth of "racial democracy" . . . by the myth according to which all societies are "racist," including those within which "race" relations seem at first sight to be less distant and hostile. From being an analytic tool, the concept of racism becomes a mere instrument of accusation; under the guise of science, it is the logic of the trial which asserts itself. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999: 44)

Hanchard in this light is seen as a black U.S. scholar extending a racializing gaze onto Brazil's otherwise alien "ethnoracial order," thereby advancing an imperialist projection of North American power and cultural hegemony into historically differentiated realms of the Global South. In his defense, Hanchard suggests:

Their critique relies on presumptions and critical analytical methods which privilege the nation-state and "national" culture as the sole object

for comparative analysis, and as a consequence ignore how Afro-Brazilian politics, the U.S. civil rights movements in particular and transnational black politics more generally problematize the facile, even superficial, distinctions between imperialist and anti-imperialist nation-states. . . . Bourdieu and Wacquant ignore the complexity and specificity of black agency in both Brazil and the United States, which leads them to equate black transnationalism with imperialism and U.S. foreign policy. In their version of political ethnocentrism, the politics of nation-states are privileged and the mobilizations of non-state actors are neglected and, when identified, poorly understood. (Hanchard 2003: 6–7)

Numerous scholars have subsequently waded into the debate from U.S. (Lilly Caldwell 2007; French 2003; Stam and Shohat 2012; Telles 2002) and Brazilian (Costa 2002; Pinho and Figueiredo 2002; Santos 2002) vantage points, calling into question the premise of externally imposed racial paradigms of analysis and attendant dismissals of transnational histories of racial thought and practice.

My raced positionality as a black North American scholar is indeed informative—and unapologetically so—of my scholarship and, I would add, embodied position in the Cuban field. This is to suggest that in an immediate sense, my subjectivity as African American is an unquestionable location from which I move and engage intellectually and socially in the world. Notions of a neutral ethnographic objectivity have long been challenged in the field of anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991; Clifford 1986; Sanjek 1990; Scheper-Hughes 1992) and ultimately undermined by the unveiling of power in the production of all knowledge claims (Foucault [1969] 2002; Haraway 1991; Said 1979). Researchers and scholars all therefore move as situated subjects seeking to understand through interpretive means—positivist claims notwithstanding—the social world. My racial as well as gendered, classed, sexual, and national orientations thus collectively inform the ways I come to approach and engage my research and interlocutors.

Regarding the Cuban field, my experience as a racially marked nonwhite subject navigating the streets of Havana, where I was commonly read as a black or varyingly *mulato* Cuban, unquestionably shaped the ethnographic nature of my query into the ways race is currently lived in Cuba. My at times daily experience of being stopped by Cuban police and asked for my *camet de identidad*, or national identification card, exposed me, like many of my rap-

ero peers, to a quotidian consequence of being black, male, and (relatively) young within the context of Cuba's new racially charged and policed social landscape. My inability to enter tourist hotels without being challenged by male security personnel was yet another expression of my gendered racialization within the island's expanding market logics. Yet if I presented the questioning officer the tattered photocopy of my U.S. passport I had become conditioned to carry, or spoke my accented Spanish (or better yet English!) to hotel security guards, I would often be permitted to pass without further consequence. In the latter case, I would be free to indulge in the hotel's restricted currency zone otherwise long off-limits to most Cubans. Thus, though I was "black," my positionality as a foreign national clearly remained one of marked privilege.

At the same time, my racial situatedness served as an important site of engagement with my Cuban peers, where the space of blackness, through both its sameness *and* difference, became an initiating ground of dialogue. Again, I speak here of black peers in reference to those individuals within Cuba's hip hop community who politically self-identify as black regardless of how they might be externally labeled within Cuba's graduated racial system.<sup>12</sup> Such political identifications, particularly as they find articulation through the nationally expansive lens of hip hop, became a vital point of entry through which my ethnographic engagement with raperos moves. My project is thus positioned within ongoing conversations around advancing transnational fields of dialogue toward antiracist and broader social justice ends. This book is therefore in part an exploration into the possibilities—and potential limitations—of "blackness" as a methodological framework through which to conduct comparative, cross-national racial analyses among Afro-descendant communities at this current juncture of frenetic geospatial interconnectivity.

I am of course far from the first to travel this path within an ethnographic context. The pioneering work of Katherine Dunham, for one, stands as an example extraordinaire of this kind of transnational intervention. For Dunham, realms of dance provided an embodied medium for diasporic dialogue and translation (Dunham [1969] 1994; see also Aschenbrenner 2002). Zora Neale Hurston's earlier ethnographic forays into the Caribbean (Hurston [1935] 1990, [1937] 1990) are also illustrative of such dialogic pioneering efforts. A later generation of African American anthropologists such as Lynn Bolles (1996), Irma McClaurin (1996), Faye Harrison (1997), Edmund Gor-

don (1998), and Angela Gilliam (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999), among others, have varyingly approached the question of black transnationality as an ethnographic practice of the field.

In her piece “When Black Is Not Enough,” Josephine Beoku-Betts invokes Patricia Hill Collins’s notion of the “outsider within” (1990) to think about the locality of Afrodiasporic ethnographers working among differentiated black communities (Beoku-Betts 1994). Rather than present an unproblematic celebration, Beoku-Betts underscores the complexities of raced outsiders doing cross-national research. As a British anthropologist of Nigerian descent working with Gullah women of the South Carolinian Sea Islands, her status as a “black” insider was far from given, but rather an ambiguous one necessitating ongoing negotiation. Analogously, the Haitian American ethnographer Gina Ulysse evokes her position as a “regional native/local outsider” in the context of her work with Jamaican market women in Kingston (Ulysse 2008). Embracing a transnational black feminist methodology, Ulysse underscores the challenges, tensions, and limitations as well as the analytic insights afforded through such transnational race-work. In their respective scholarship on black women’s organizing in Brazil, the African American ethnographers Kia Lilly Caldwell (2007) and Keisha-Khan Perry (2012) similarly evoke black feminist epistemologies as a mediated language of Afro-hemispheric encounter and ethnography.

What these overlapping conversations and debates unveil is the centrality of power in shaping the relative positionality of researcher vis-à-vis the “researched”—relationalities in which race among other social vectors can serve as a differentiating, though far from politically transcendent, factor. Indeed, far from claiming that racial semblances elide difference, such approaches elaborate a particular space or standpoint from which to initiate conversation among and between black-identified communities of African descent. Diasporic populations are of course by definition formed in difference, but a difference situated within broader shared understandings of sociohistorical, cultural, and often political forms of affinity. Such recognition in no way elides questions of power and privilege, but instead works to mediate some collective grounding of blackness through dialogic *intercambio* (exchange), in essence putting blackness reflexively to work toward an affective politics of affinity.

Hip hop today, by its very globalized and dialogically resonant nature, is all about the transnationally affective (M. Perry 2008b; see also Fernandes

2011; Mitchell et al. 2002; Sharma 2010). How and where, then, do I enter this conversation? Raised for the early part of my childhood on Manhattan's Lower East Side, I recall being dragged by my teenage babysitter to local "street jams" in the neighboring Baruch and Jacob Riis public housing projects in the mid-1970s where youth, almost exclusively African American and Puerto Rican, gathered on summer afternoons to indulge in the music of local DJs via makeshift audio equipment powered by way of illicit taps into city streetlamps. Although unaware at the time that what was unfolding around me throughout patchworks of public housing projects would soon give rise to an urban cultural phenomenon, I would come into budding awareness of self amid the formative period of hip hop's early ascendance during the 1980s.

It was during later travels, however, that I became cognizant of how hip hop, once a collaborative expression of postindustrial cultural improvisation among African American, Puerto Rican, and West Indian inner-city youth, was now being refashioned transnationally by other marginalized youth to give critical voice to their own subjective experience and sense of selfhood. In the interim a onetime marginal youth culture encompassing expressive elements of music, verbal lyricism, dance, graffiti art, and fashion had evolved into a multibillion-dollar global industry. I became fascinated with the apparent tension between hip hop as a global site of corporate commodification and simultaneously one of utopic yearnings and their possibilities. My Cuban foray thus springs in important part from this history.

While my work seeks to enter within and build upon currents of Afro-diasporic interchange, scholarly and otherwise, such efforts are certainly not without their challenges. Beyond questions of race, another methodologically related issue pertains to the at times vexed politics of conducting fieldwork in Cuba as a U.S. national. Given the highly charged nature of Cuban-U.S. relations resulting from legacies of Cold War tension and antagonistic posturing by successive U.S. administrations, the most enduring of which is the ongoing U.S. trade embargo, navigating this divide as a U.S. researcher can be a complex undertaking, recent thaws notwithstanding.

An immediate challenge for one sympathetic to many of the egalitarian ideals of the Cuban Revolution, along with its internationalist commitments to anticolonial/anti-imperialist histories of struggle, has been how to develop analyses that address the limitations, contradictions, and very real

autocratic tendencies of the revolutionary project without risking misappropriations of such conclusions by interests bent on undermining that same project for deleterious gain. In this sense I find myself in a position somewhat analogous to that of many within Havana's hip hop community regarding how to engage critique without playing into, or at least compounding, injurious designs out of Miami or Washington. The obvious distinction between me and my rapero peers is that my analysis is voiced from a location of a national outsider, a distinction further complicated by the particularities of a U.S. vantage point and ongoing legacies of empire. The realities of these chasms came into rather stark focus during an informal meeting I helped organize in 2001 involving a prominent collection of Havana-area raperos and others in which I was accused by one well-positioned Cuban of being a CIA informant. There was a long-standing and intricate set of dynamics at play that meeting day—some personal, some professional—and while the individual voicing the concern and I later made amends, my location as a U.S. researcher was rendered hypervisible, if potentially suspect.

Yet would such anxieties have been beyond consideration? Some months prior, a close rapero friend expressed concern that Cuban hip hop could offer an opportune site for infiltration and provocateur work by those seeking to debilitate the revolutionary state. Nadine Fernandez suggests Cuba's leadership has indeed long been concerned that the race question in particular could be manipulated by adversaries of the state who would exploit the issue as a nationally divisive tactic (N. Fernandez 2001: 119). Given recent revelations involving covert U.S. efforts through the auspices of USAID to ferment provocateurism within Cuban hip hop (see chapter 6), such concerns were far from folly. During my research Cuban MCs were acutely aware of the political stakes as socially engaged artists in a globally complex era of geopolitics. Raperos in fact repeatedly saw their words and lyrics manipulated by U.S. journalists in order to fit reductive readings of Cuban hip hop as a site of counterrevolutionary dissent rather than one largely committed to critical engagements within conceptions (albeit expansive) of the revolutionary process itself. Such were among the broader implications of the field that necessitated nuanced sensitivity on my part, ones that also carried their own interpellating force and potential costs.

As one invested in black transnationalism as a strategic paradigm in combating globalized forms of racial subjugation, Cuban hip hop was for me a consequential site for both mapping and perusing such Afro-hemispheric

commitments. Raperos' own transnationally expansive understandings of black-selfhood in this sense enabled a space of dialogue, one within which I could critically engage as a black "outsider within," complexities and contractions notwithstanding. Such conjoining practices of blackness, I would offer, are potentially generative of alternative political vistas themselves.

Throughout this book's narrative I have chosen to largely forgo the common ethnographic practice of using pseudonyms. The immediate reason is that many of the artists, intellectuals, and other hip-hop-affiliated individuals of whom I mostly write are outspoken public figures. It is thus imperative that I give proper recognition to the art, work, and lives of these individuals as they have contributed to the evolving lines of hip hop's rise in Cuba. Yet by acknowledging the majority of my Cuban interlocutors I assume added levels of responsibility and accountability to them and their histories. Over my years of involvement in Havana, countless Cuban friends and colleagues have lent a tremendous amount of their own time, intellect, and political commitment to this project. I consider many in this sense collaborators who have a long-awaited invested stake in this book and its outcome. I thus feel, in vintage hip hop vernacular, a deep indebted responsibility to represent(!) this history to the best of my ability and positioned understanding.

### **Narrative Layout**

Situating hip hop's Cuban ascent within the immediacies of the island's ongoing transformation, chapter 1 opens with my introduction to Havana in 1998 and the fraught complexities of race and class encountered in the wake of the legalization of the U.S. dollar and the subsequent rise of a dual-currency economy following the economic crises of the early 1990s. Drawing on my initial experience living with an Afro-Cuban family, the chapter folds into an examination of Cuba's new raced economies of commingling exclusion and market assimilation, as well as the entrepreneurial strategies some black and darker-skinned Cubans have creatively fashioned amid its workings.

Interstitial in the mix is a query into the ambivalent nature of Cuba's evolving neoliberal condition, its relation to the island's tourism industry, and their conjoining raced effects vis-à-vis spaces and embodied performances of blackness. Here I explore the ahistoricizing nature of folkloric representations of Afro-Cuban expressive culture and their recent mone-

tizations, as well as the revolutionary state's role in such packaging. The chapter then moves to a discussion of the rise of raced forms of regulation as the Cuban state has sought to police the social incongruencies of the moment, and the questions these developments raise via lived realms of Cuban citizenship. The political urgencies of such developments are brought into focus with the chapter's concluding segue into critiques among Cuban raperos regarding the systemics of raced policing of black youth.

Chapter 2 delves into hip hop's rise in Havana during the rapid social flux of the 1990s. The chapter foregrounds the role of race in the early making of hip hop, while introducing a range of key figures in Havana's nascent hip hop community, as well as the revolutionary state's peripheral engagement with the young cultural movement. Here I discuss the crafting of "black spaces" through the ways raperos and their immediate predecessors arose from local spaces of practice in which self-consciously modern understandings of cosmopolitan blackness were celebrated and enacted in new Cuban ways. The chapter then carries the conversation into an exploration of the Cuban hip hop festival of 1997 as an early and highly spectacular illustration of the ways Cuban blackness found new dynamic play and lyric form through a globally conversant lens of hip hop.

Chapter 3 moves into the ethnographic setting of my own research (1999 onward) with a focus on emerging identity currents within Cuban hip hop. The chapter opens with my early engagements with key actors within Havana's hip hop community, with a particular focus on the pioneering hip hop duo Obsesión. The chapter follows with a descriptive exploration of an evolving range of locales through which raperos constituted themselves as an artistic and cultural community. The chapter continues with an exploration of the 2000 Cuban hip hop festival, which represented a significant turning point in the movement's organizational character vis-à-vis expanding institutional investments by the Cuban state. The festival's frame also offers insight into raperos' involvements with African American and Puerto Rican collaborators from the United States, and the significance of such exchange regarding political discourse and dimensions of identity within Cuban hip hop. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of a stage performance of the Havana-based rap duo Anónimo Consejo, as exemplary of positioned critiques within broader conceptions of revolutionary history and struggle.

Chapter 4 draws upon a descriptive sampling of personal narratives and

music-making practices in mapping the performative, often gendered nature of black self-fashioning among members of Havana's hip hop community. The chapter opens with rapero mediations of subjectivity through the coupling of two alternative streams of racial citizenship—one rooted in a recuperative claiming of a critical black subject of Cuban history, the other through national-expansive and often masculinist appeals to Afro-hemispheric histories of black radical struggle. The chapter explores how these creative routes of self-invention were shaped through a confluence of mentoring relationships with Afro-Cuban intellectuals and African American political exiles. This is followed by a discussion of the rise of black feminist-aligned discourse and subjectivity within rapero circles by way of an increasingly vocal presence of women. Through such interventions, I suggest, these women pose challenges to the largely masculinist frames of Cuban hip hop and broader Cuban spheres of racialized patriarchy, while constituting themselves as political subjects through artistic praxis.

Chapter 5 centers on the Cuban state's evolving efforts to incorporate hip hop within institutional frames of revolutionary national culture and raperos' varying negotiations of these moves. While related discussions are initiated in previous chapters, this chapter focuses on later developments culminating in the 2002 establishment of the Agencia Cubana de Rap (ACR, or Cuban Rap Agency) under Cuba's Ministry of Culture, which signified the height of incorporative state strategies. These events are examined in overlapping relation to Cuban cultural policy, intensifying market pressures, and the global commercialization of Cuban popular music. Also examined is the simultaneous rise of Afro-Cuban intellectual involvements with hip hop vis-à-vis a broader interplay of intermittent state openings and an emergent black public sphere. Here it is suggested that black and darker-skinned raperos have been active in shaping a nascent black counterpublic rooted in claims of a black political difference within an otherwise nonracial Cuban national imaginary underscoring, in turn, dilemmas of Cuban race and national citizenship in the neoliberal era.

Chapter 6 focuses on more recent reconfigurations of Cuban hip hop in relation to further economic, social, and ideological erosion on the island accompanied by waning state support. Central to this discussion are efforts by raperos to establish alternative projects and support structures independent of state institutions and influence. This chapter also explores the gradual decentering of hip hop's racial currents in dialogue with two concurrent

developments, both of which resonate in one form or another with Cuba's expanding marketplace. The first is the rise of more commercially minded reggaetón music, which has displaced much of the space—official, popular, and talent-wise—that hip hop once occupied. Included here is a discussion of reggaetón's Cuban genesis in eastern Santiago de Cuba and its westward march toward Havana.

A second related development concerns the departure abroad by many key figures within Havana's black-identified rapero community. While informed by a range of overlapping factors varying in impact on the character of island hip hop, the national exodus has also contributed to an internationalization of Cuban hip hop into diaspora as artists have sought to reconstitute community through social media and international travel. This chapter concludes with the continued challenges faced by black antiracist efforts in Cuba, while acknowledging the role and legacies of Cuban raperos within this unfolding moment of political practice and national transformation.

A short postscript revisits the book's main arguments and contributions, while offering a closing vignette and a related coda.