"Where Did I Go Wrong?": Complicating Black and Brown Masculinities in Texas Gulf South Rap Music

Jimmy Patiño, University of Minnesota

Accepted: Fall 2025 / Published online: Spring 2026

Abstract

This essay explores the complex performance of Black and Latino masculinities in rap music styles and sounds that emerged out of the unique hip hop culture of the Texas Gulf South. Focusing on the continued vitality of gangsta rap music in the 21st century as explored through the Mexican American artist Flatline, the essay locates expressions of vulnerability in the lyrics and sound related to the grounded experiences of the "hyperghetto." Using a decolonial feminist lens, the essay contributes to a critical reflection on hip hop's continued tie to inner city racialized communities, offering a complex look at how heteropatriarchal expressions exist alongside pained laments and angered condemnation of the policing, caging and limited life chances resulting from hostile policies and practices toward racialized urban communities.

Keywords

Black and Latino Masculinity, Southern Rap, Houston Hip Hop, Hyperghetto, Flatline

1 Introduction

Corpus Christi, Texas born rapper Flatline—aka José Jesús Mendoza—holds a gun to his head as he sips on a glass of whisky while asking "where did I go wrong?" in the video to his 2012 track of the same title.[1] A guitar rift from 1970s Venezuelan pop group Los Terricolas' "Dos Cosas" is sampled in the background in a slowed-down beat similar to other Southern-style rap tracks.[2] The chorus features Flatline singing, "Every day's a struggle/ gotta move on/ law trying to catch me with a pocket full of stones/ Where did I go wrong, Where did I go wrong, so wrong." While his hard times have him "Bleeding down the block" he is sure to remind that he does so "ridin' on chrome" referring to the supped up classic car he has on luxury wheel rims as he repeats, "Where did I go wrong?" Both bragging and lamenting about his life as a drug dealer, the song features expressions of vulnerability and regret interlaced with assertions of masculine authority, power and principle. These themes reflect a tradition within Houston-based rap music and street narratives in hip hop culture more broadly. Flatline explains in the second verse, "This the price you gotta pay to try to make it out the gutta/ if it is then that's the chance I'm gonna have to fuckin' take/ on my way to Alabama with some work up in my tank/ doing what I gotta do cause that's the facts of fuckin' life/ tryin' to make it out the struggle for my children and my wife." His vulnerability within life in the "gutta" leads to Flatline transporting drugs ("work up in my tank") to Alabama. It's the "chance he has to take" to improve his economic standing and it requires an aggressive posturing.[3] He continues rapping, "just steppin' out the house I'm takin' a chance of fuckin dying…" as he then warns "undercovers" (police), "haters" and "competition" who are "waiting for the first chance to try and put me in the ground," that "I'm a Viking/ faster than lighting/ pull up on me nigga I smoke you like a philly titan."[4]

Flatline's "Where did I go Wrong" and other music, style and themes he performs reflect the continuity of

Published by Texas A&M University-Kingsville
with support from the office of the Provost

Editor: Dr. Veronica Duran

the Black-Mexican hip hop cultural context that emerged out of Houston in the 1990s. What is intriguing is the more recent expression of lament and vulnerability in a Houston-sound hip hop track by a newer Mexican artist.[5] Furthermore, upon additional internet searching it was discovered that at 37-years-old, Flatline, an avid fisherman, was shot and killed during an altercation with a man near a Corpus Christi pier in February of 2015.[6] This tragic information is further intriguing because it reveals that the vulnerability Flatline express in "Where Did I Go Wrong"—and continued structural "hood" context that produces it—was something he seemed to live in his day-to-day life and that may have played out in his violent death. In this regard, what might we make of a Mexican hip hop masculinity that is a mixed expression of vulnerability and authoritative masculinity? While this is not new to hip hop—we might think of the vivid street narratives performed by rap artists such as Tupac, Notorious B.I.G. and leading Houston rapper Scarface—it's important to ask how rappers like Flatline reflect both this tradition of articulating racialized urban masculinities within broader hip hop culture and the particularities of the Texas Gulf South and ethnic Mexican and Latino men in particular.

This essay takes Flatline's video, song and broader representation to contemplate Latino and Black masculinities in hip hop within the context of hyper-policed racialized geographies and the illicit drug industry by focusing on expressions of vulnerability in Houston rap music. These expressions do not overcome problematic gender constructions within hip hop that tend to objectify and hypersexualize Black and Brown women, reproduce exclusive masculine spaces, and reify reactionary suspicion of Black and Brown women as detrimental to the plights of the male-identified subjectivities represented by rappers. I contend, however, that focus on the vulnerabilities expressed by these rappers reveals the ways the structural context of the postindustrial 'hood/barrio create conditions in which they articulate nuanced notions of manhood. These societal forces produced by organized abandonment, violent policing, and resource deficient urban neighborhoods encourage expressions of gendered violence and toxic masculinity. These concepts help define a complex set of contextual issues that create the material conditions from which these vulnerable "thug," "gangsta," and "criminal" identities emerge. These identities reveal the ways racial capitalism produces severe limits—what scholar Lisa Cacho has called social death—for inner city men of color. Indeed, in his very stage name, Flatline reflects a proximity to death that Black and Brown men in these contexts have historically articulated as does the name of his record label Bloody Money Music, and, tragically, in his very real death in early 2015. Flatline's other street and stage name, Ike Turner, reflects the complicated reality that while many Black/Brown street masculinities are indeed vulnerable, they often perform identities that have a propensity toward gendered violence that reveals a complex dialectic.

Decolonizing Feminisms & Black-Brown Relations

The essay builds on scholarship emerging from women of color feminisms concerning masculinity and relational ethnic studies analyses of Black-Brown relations and hybrid regional identities in hip hop culture. The essay asserts the ways in which these vulnerable masculinities are indeed the result of structural forces and how that context leads to a situation where the articulation of dignity by many Black/Brown rappers and hip hop enthusiasts talks back to these repressive circumstances. My focus on this structural vulnerability seeks to better contextualize the raw material of hegemony where articulations of masculinity, femininity, and racialized class subjectivities emerge intersectionally. While the essay centers on cisgender straight lumpenproletariat men of color, it insists that such an analysis must consider the protracted struggles and outlooks of working-class women of color and/or queer of color members of these communities. In that regard, Aisha S. Durham's definition of hip hop feminism is instructional as "…a sociocultural, intellectual and political movement grounded in the situated knowledge of women of color from the broader hip hop or the U.S. post-civil rights generation who recognize culture as a pivotal site for political intervention to challenge, resist, and mobilize collectives to dismantle systems of exploitation."[7] Within this line of thinking, the essay looks at the positionality of working class Black/Brown men in relationship to the ways patriarchal culture—when considering its intersection with race and class oppression—result in, according to feminist critic bell hooks, Black men enduring "the worst imposition of gendered masculine patriarchal identity." hooks asserts that "As an advocate of feminist politics,

I have consistently called attention to the need for men to critique patriarchy and involve themselves in shaping feminist movement and addressing male liberation."[8] Recalling an earlier essay she wrote, hooks suggests, "we can break the life threatening choke-hold patriarchal masculinity imposes on black men and create life sustaining visions of a reconstructed black masculinity that can provide black men ways to save their lives and the lives of their brothers and sisters in struggle."[9] In other words, hooks reminds that heteropatriarchy is part and parcel to the colonial contexts that interweave with white supremacy and capitalism to repress men of color in particular ways, all while continuing to recognize how women, other feminized folks of color, and queer community members find themselves more extensively and differentially vulnerable in such a context.

Similarly, queer Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa captures the intersectional and colonial positionality of ethnic Mexican men in the U.S. through an analysis of the imposition of the notion "machismo."[10] Less an actual reality, Anzaldúa references her farm worker father as someone who countered the colonially imposed notion of manhood:

> The modern meaning of the word 'machismo", as well as the concept, is actually an Anglo invention. For men like my father, being 'macho' meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us yet being able to show love. Today's macho has doubts about his ability to fit and protect his family. His 'machismo' is an adaptation to oppression and low self-esteem. It is a result of hierarchical male dominance.[11]

Anzaldúa later asserts in Borderlands/La Frontera, "Tenderness, a sign of vulnerability, is so feared that it is showered on women with verbal abuse and blows. Men, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles…We need a new masculinity, and the new man needs a movement."[12]

Decolonial feminisms, therefore, assist this essay in highlighting how Brown and Black masculinities in Houston hip hop do indeed acknowledge and contemplate particular vulnerabilities they experience within racial capitalism and highlight the ways these rappers consistently repeat how structural repression from mass incarceration and expectations of heteropatriarchy harms them and impedes the intimacy necessary for collective struggle. Simultaneously, decolonial feminism offers the framework through which to critically analyze those moments when these masculinities assert subjectivities that—while attempting to assert their own dignity—often do so at the expense of women and gender nonconforming members of their community "as an adaptation to oppression."[13]

These masculinities articulated in Gulf South hip hop reference a second key intervention the essay explores—an intersecting material relationship between Black and Brown urban youth within the day-to-day practices of hyper-policing, mass incarceration and social marginalization of the barrio and ghetto. While intersecting, the experiences of these communities more broadly are not identical and differentiated in important ways. For example, while Latino men experience about double the rate of incarceration compared to white men, African-Americans are incarcerated at about 5 times the rate of white men.[14] While this indicates ways the prison industrial complex targets African Americans in particular, the continued lack of access to educational advancement, persistence of poverty, and shrinking economic opportunities has led and continues to lead many Latino/a children toward the machinations of mass incarceration and hyper-ghettoization. These material circumstances further intersect between African Americans and Black Latinos/as, as indicated in the higher deportation rate among Black immigrants.[15] Black and Mexican-origin communities' experiences with geographic marginalization also intersect historically, as ethnic Mexicans in the United States were subject to what historian Albert Camarillo referred to as "barrioization" and forms of segregation beginning after the conquest of north Mexico and consistently throughout the twentieth century.[16]

While Latinos/as have noticeably higher rates of employment—albeit concentrated in low wage sectors—and more partnered family arrangements they share lower rates of living in concentrated/segregated poverty with African Americans, revealing trends noted in 2010 that pointed towards increasing rates of Latino/a unemployment,

criminalization, and economic displacement. Latinos and African Americans share in 2022 about the same rates of poverty and are both overrepresented compared their makeup of the total population. Latinos/as make up 19.3 percent of the U.S. population and 28.4 of those in poverty while African Americans make up 13.5 percent of the population and 20.1 percent of those in poverty.[17] Within this structural context, the particular interactions within the regional hip hop culture of Houston and the broader Gulf South provides raw material for innovative articulations of Latino/a identities that intersect with their Black counterparts in unique ways. Overtly racist forms of repression and control have historically targeted African Americans and Mexican Americans in Texas and these two groups consistently make up the majorities in its largest urban areas—especially Houston which in 2020 was 25 percent African American and 47 percent Latino/a, of which the vast majority are Mexican (75 percent), Salvadoran (9 percent) and Honduran (3 percent).[18] There is some evidence that relations in Houston among African Americans and Latinos/as can be characterized "mainly by accommodation" and somewhat better than other areas.[19] Rappers coming out of these "hyperghetto" contexts—fusing segregated housing practices with mass incarceration policies—while performing identities in an industry that rewards certain types of gangsta fashions and styles, nonetheless speak to these shared experiences in racialized communities with concentrated poverty in urban Texas.[20] The Gulf South therefore offers a unique site in which to explore these intersections where Latinos/as are, according to John Márquez, "building with blacks and often from or through blackness a new kind of hybrid political subject."[21]

Foundations and Proliferation of H-Town Hip Hop

While Flatline is from Corpus Christi his persona, identity and style are an extension of the local hip hop culture based about 200 miles northeast in Houston. One of the centers of Southern hip hop due in part to being home to the headquarters of Rap-A-Lot records, Houston produced nationally recognized groups beginning with the Geto Boys in the 1980s, DJ Screw and nearby Port Arthur-based UGK in the 1990s, and rappers such as Chamillionaire, Lil Flip, and Paul Wall in the 2000s. Houston was the site of a creative fusion between its localized cultures and peoples in the past 40 years—Southern, African-American, Mexican, Central American, Louisiana Creole of Color, West Indian Caribbean among others. While many of these populations have decades of history here, the burgeoning oil industry in the Texas Gulf Coast region further attracted these diverse populations at a moment in the 1970s and 80s when much of the U.S. was suffering from recession.

A news article from the Houston Press on Flatline's first successful song and video called "Fuckin' Wit Texas" explained how his style is indistinguishable from Houston based hip hop culture,

> The initial scenes (of the video) are stereotypical Houston. Cars and trucks with suicide doors dripped in candy red paint, swangin' aggressively through Texas streets, bullying average looking vehicles to the curb and stopping traffic. The shit just looks mean. Then you had a large group of Meskins throwin' up the H. So naturally, we thought "Houston" and asked ourselves, "All right, which of Houston's Latino rappers teamed up with (Houston-based rapper) Trae?" We weren't going to get the right answer because we were asking the wrong question. Hell, we were in the wrong area code…the video made an obvious statement: Houston's rap culture is spreading like peanut butter throughout Texas and the Southwest.[22]

The historical context in which this localized culture emerged in the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s was characterized by the rise of mass incarceration, militarization of policing forces, and mass migrations that deeply affected community of color. Scholars such as Tricia Rose describe hip hop as a cultural form that in part negotiates marginalization and urban deterioration with the experiences of working-class communities of color as a result of deindustrialization.[23] Historian George Lipsitz outlines the demise of the inner city since the mid twentieth century as due to the globalized mode of production and the institutional racism practiced in suburbanization, housing, lending, and taxing policies. Investment in suburban projects left the inner city depopulated and underfunded, and neighborhoods where poor Black and Brown folks experience social abandonment. One of the abandoned Freeway construction facilitated suburbanites while dividing and displacing city residents. Urban renewal led

to loss of homes and dislocation. Depopulation and the loss of a large tax-base led to the vulnerability of city neighborhoods and therefore the placement of prisons, railroad crossings and garbage dumps. Global capitalism led to the transfer of high-tech jobs to the suburbs and manufacturing jobs out of the city and to the Global South.[24] Houston and the Texas Gulf region exhibited many of these traits and a history of white vigilantism against communities of color that evolved into racialized regimes of local police units following the oil bust of the mid-1980s.[25]

While the oil and petroleum industries continue to provide an industrial base, unemployment for Black and Latino/a Houstonians continues to be higher than the median rate.[26] Coupled with the influx of drugs into communities of color, high unemployment in inner-city neighborhoods led to deterioration, violence, and social dislocation. This is reflected in the lyrics and language of Houston rap artists.[27] An 2002 album by early Houston rap group, the Geto Boys is titled "Uncut Dope," a local label is named Dope House Records, and African American Houston singer Big Moe has a 1996 song named "Sippin' Codeine," a downer drug that is drank. Mexican rapper VG Skillz' hook in his 2004 song "Above Water" says "Sometimes the rap game reminds me of the crack game," and a Geto Boys 2002 track begins their song "Trigga Happy Nigga" by sharing the ingredients for "Ghetto dope processed in Fifth Ward Texas" as metaphors for the songs they mix and sell. Instead of suggesting that these artists encourage drug use, these titles and themes reflect the social conditions of the Houston streets where the illicit drug industry—and equally violent war on drugs policies—have adversely affected its communities.

In this context by the beginning of the twenty-first century, Houston had become a central site in which new forms of hip hop culture emerged, particularly as part of the rise of "Dirty South" or Southern rap music. As one journalist wrote of Houston's sound in the early 2000s, "The Houston Sound is, above all, slow, a perpetually decelerating music that is equally good at conveying menace, calm, and grief…Houston's MCs rap charmingly about their possessions but are comfortable singing about death, racist cops and life in prison."[28] Houston's longer history as a center of blues and gospel music fed into the emergence of its unique hip hop sound.[29]

As scholars such as John Márquez and Marco Cervantes have written, for Latino/a participants in the local Houston hip hop culture, most of which are Mexican and Central American, a distinct identity formation was developed that differs from California-based Chicano "cholo" rappers. Márquez explains, "Houston-area Latinos/ as boast about their ties to blackness and their pride in Southern roots."[30] Local Latino/a hip hop culture features the progenies of Mexican and Central American migrants speaking in southern Black dialects, sporting gold grills in their teeth, exhibiting their versions of fade haircuts and participating in the Texas version of lowriding culture—Cadillacs and elbow rims rather than Chevy impalas and Dayton wire rims. Some Mexican Houston rappers emerged in groups mixed with African Americans such as Aggravated, the Most Hated, and Southern Intellect in the 1990s. SPM, the South Park Mexican, and Chingo Bling reached commercial success the latter of which produces satire mixing Northern Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Southern African American hip hop themes. Most Latino/a rappers from Houston, however, are predominately English-speaking usually with only subtle symbols referring to their ethnic identities and an overt expression of Black urban culture and Southern slang.[31] As an example, Flatline does not speak Spanish in his raps, features the same stylistic culture and themes as Black rappers, and speaks in an urban Black English Southern slang. Possibly a subtle reference to his Latino-ness is the use of Venezuelan pop group Los Terricolas in "Where did I go wrong." One could imagine this record remixed and snatched up from the album collection of ethnic Mexican parents or elders—relatives who listened to the transnational Spanish-language market that Los Terricolas was featured in a generation before. In this context, Flatline reflects the influence of Houston culture, especially in predominately ethnic Mexican Corpus Christi and wider South Texas where SPM and other Houston rappers have had a tremendous influence.

Articulating Structural Vulnerabilities

Flatline came from a working poor community in Corpus Christi. In the documentary "Real Recognize Real" about his life as a rapper, he shows the audience the abandoned homes in the neighborhood where he use to sell drugs and later took over to produce music in. These abandoned homes represent the plight of poverty

homes where Flatline sold drugs from is where the video for "Where did I go wrong" took place. The dilapidated house—wood rotting and pieces missing, white paint chipped and uneven, nails and jagged metal exposed, and windowsills rusted—reflects the material conditions from which he and the themes he raps about emerged. Flatline explained in a documentary,

> This broke-down, fucked up house right here, muthfuckas used to be posted up in this bitch. We use to make money off this muthafucka man. All these years later I came back to the 'hood. Now that I'm off the block we ain't doin all that man, we makin' this legal scratch…A lot of the stuff that I do—that you see in the video—we don't just pull up in front of a fucking spot or in a 'hood we ain't from or we ain't never ran through or done any dirt in, we take you back to our 'hood my nigga…This is the house where I just shot the video "Where Did I Go Wrong." I shot the video in front of this house you know what I'm sayin, that house has a lot of history. All my family lives up and down this street my cousin… it's all family up and down this block, know what I'm sayin? It's nothing but love and respect. Respect for the O.G.'s man, they look at me as an O.G. That's what it's all about man. If you ain't got respect in your own 'hood nigga, you ain't got nothing.[32]

Flatline's explanation here about where he comes from and how it is intimately tied to his art, music and video shows the way many rappers continue to see rap music as a way for marginalized youth from poor urban communities to articulate their experiences. That the experience is "real" highlights a notion of authenticity long present within hip hop culture. In this case it refers to Flatline's roots and connections to his 'hood, somewhere he really used to sell drugs, "do dirt" to make money, and have family in. In fact, Flatline outlines how it would be unauthentic, or violate a key value in his notion of hip hop culture, to film a video by "just pull(ing) up in a fucking spot in a 'hood we ain't from or never ran through or done any dirt." Going "back to the 'hood" to identify an allegiance and continued identification with the poor Brown neighborhood they came from, even if they are now "making legal scratch" or gaining some success and ability to leave the neighborhood. Part of never leaving the hood requires for Flatline an expression of continued vulnerability to the structural conditions of the neighborhood. Furthermore, Flatline's usage of language familiar to 'hood youth—using strong curse words, talking in street slang and code, and usage of the word "nigga" for example reflects a connection to the barrio he comes from, raps about and identifies as his primary audience. Peculiarly, debates about the appropriateness or lack thereof, of a Brown, non-Black, Mexican American using the term "nigga" does not at all register for rappers and other youth in contexts like this in 20-teens Texas.[33]

The structural vulnerabilities that Flatline reveals in "Where did I go Wrong" are part of a longer tradition in hip hop broadly and Houston–based rap music more specifically. Indeed, the blues tradition conjured within Southern hip hop highlights perhaps a longer tradition of reveling in hard times and reflecting everything from relationship troubles to repression from police and murderous competition in the illicit drug market. The seminal Houston hip hop group that first brought national attention to Houston in the late 1980s, the Geto Boys, performed this tradition, particularly as expressed by the soul-searching lyrics of one of its members, Brad Jordan, who is known by his MC name, Scarface. Scarface, from the South Acres neighborhood in south Houston, made up the Geto Boys in the early 1990s with Jamaican immigrant come Houston Fifth Ward neighborhood resident Bushwick Bill and Willie D, also a product of the African American Fifth Ward community. The Geto Boys seminal track that reached number 1 in 1991 on the Billboard rap singles charts, "My Mind is Playin' Tricks on Me," demonstrated the theme of vulnerability and internal struggle. This includes extreme paranoia—seeing things that are not there as Willie D raps about running from rivals trying to kill him only to realize it is a group of elderly folks. Similarly, Bushwick Bill beats up a man following him only to discover he is punching nothing but the concrete. This paranoia relates to the inability and/or difficulty of maintaining intimate and familial relationships. Scarface famously raps in the song,

> I often drift when I drive
> Having fatal thoughts of suicide

If I can get it over with
And then I'm worry-free but that's bullshit
I got a little boy to look after
And if I die then my child will be a bastard
I had a woman down with me
But to me it seemed like she was out to get me
She help me out and this shit
But to me she was just another bitch
Now she's back with her mother
Now I'm realizing that I love her
Now I'm feeling lonely
My mind is playing tricks on me[34]

While popular culture is mediated between lived realities, ideological baggage and corporate interests "My Mind is Playing Tricks On Me" also reveals aspects of Black masculinity that are vulnerable—afraid, lonely, in self-doubt—due to the social paranoia induced by the divested neighborhoods these rappers are often from. Tellingly, these vulnerabilities are rapped about in this classic hip hop track over samples of Isaac Hayes' "Hungup on My Baby," an instrumental song whose title suggests themes of romantic love, desire and intimacy and can be described musically as uplifting and inspiring.[35] "My Mind is Playin' Tricks on Me" transforms these themes into an inability to love and a feeling of loneliness and slows down the upbeat tempo of the Hayes sample. Featured in the lyrics is forthright confrontation with Scarface's thoughts and acts of misogyny ("but to me she was just another bitch") and its relationship to an inability to experience the intimacy of romantic relationships ("now I'm realizing that I love her"), parenthood ("if I die then my son'll be a bastard") and family ("now I'm feelin' lonely"). Rather than affirming the usage of the word "bitch" to refer to women as can be found in other rap tracks, Scarface suggests a critique of this violent, dehumanizing language in his self-reflection—it warns that a practice of this condemnation of women was a regrettable mistake for him, leading to his loneliness and isolation.

This theme is repeated by seminal Houston area rappers, Underground Kingz (UGK) featuring the rap duo of Bun B and Pimp C from nearby Port Arthur, Texas. Their 1996 hit "One Day" featured a chorus that repeated "One day you here and then you're gone" and begins with Bun B narrating how his mother kicked him out at 15 leaving him to deal "crack, cocaine and codeine." Strained relationships with women—mothers and romantic partners—are a theme in the expression of pain and vulnerability for these rappers (see Scarface's verse above). Reflecting fear of impending death and struggles in the 'hood and era of mass incarceration Bun B continues, "I treat every day just like my last one/ cause ain't nothing promised to me/ the only thing promised to a playa is the penitentiary." Bun B extends in another verse, "in the hood ain't nothing but drama/ everyone tryin to harm ya/… gang bangin got the ghetto hotta than a sauna/…Down in Orange my nigga Pops died on the corner/ over a funky ass dice game/ I saw him once before he died wish it was twice mane…" The themes tied to material struggles of Black and Brown men in the hood emerge, including trouble with family relationships and intimacy, emanate fear of death from cops and drug dealing rivals, grief over dead homies and impending incarceration.

Bun B's verses contextualize Pimp C's concluding verse of the song, which is in particularly gendered language. It reveals the dialectical interaction of structural violence on the hood and aggressive masculinities prepared to survive in the hostile context. Describing his life as a drug dealer he explains his competition as "Niggas be lookin' shife, so I look shife back / Can't show no weakness with these bitches get yo' life jacked." The treatment by police and the incarcerating state are no different as Pimp C rhymes, "Mane it's a trip where I stay, especially for me / 'Dem bitches trying to lock me up for the whole century." Pimp C then lists homies in prison saying "They gave my nigga Donny 40, Dante 19 / I wish that we could smoke again and take a tight lean." Pimp C concludes with existential crisis as he recalls his homeboy losing his child in a house fire, "I asked God, 'Why you let these killers live and take my homeboy's son away."[36] The masculinities Pimp C articulate here are attached

to the hostility of participation in the drug trade market, the violence of disinvestment that leaves poor Black communities with few options, and militarized targeting of Black men by police. These war-like conditions—where social death is lived out and physical death is imminent—create a context where dehumanization and narrowing of ranks becomes useful to survive, and is imposed and responded to, inevitably, in violently gendered terms. Enemies (police, rivals, etc.) become "bitches"—toxic masculinities become normalized.

Mexican rappers soon revealed their resonance to these themes and rap tradition in Southeast Texas as exampled by the mixed Black and Brown group Aggravated's album and title track "I Am Your Future" in 1995. In the song they tell the story of a boy whose mother has relationships with drug dealers who become the boy's role models. The song highlights the difficult situation for the 13-year-old mother, "barely a child herself," also reflecting the ways the hood context stresses relations between family relationships. The mother "proves them wrong" by surviving and keeps her "corazón" or love for her son "kicking strong" but the economic challenges lead her to depend on men within the illicit drug trade. The boy becomes a full-fledged hustler and drug dealer by the end of the song as Aggravated warns, "Moms and dads I'm talking to you / these are the things our children do" while the chorus repeatedly asks, "How can the youth be humble when we live in an age of rage?"[37]

Some members of Aggravated formed another rap group call The Most Hated who in one of their best known songs, "Freeworld," assert anger, angst and analysis about their structural vulnerabilities—particularly police harassment—in day-to-day life in the streets. They chant in the chorus, "I've been pulled over by them laws / I've been jacked against the wall / I've been searched through my drawls without no probable cause / but still I'm sent to the back seat / it's just to harass me / the questions they ask me are the same ones from last week." Articulating a history of the rise of the crack epidemic and results of the broader drug war in communities of color from the 1980s through the social paranoia over gang activities in the 1990s, Black and Mexican rappers in Houston maintained the themes of articulating vulnerability to this context and gives voice to the human anguish this results in. Emerging from the social context of the barrio and 'hood these vulnerabilities lead to and result from drug dealing, struggles with intimate relationships, and battles with police and incarceration. The success of Houston rapper South Park Mexican or SPM in the late 1990s affirmed the participation of and resonance with broader Latino/a fans in the local culture. SPM helped Flatline's career and put him on tour in his concert circuit.

"A Menace to society cause the ghetto raised me crazy"

That these themes continue in contemporary music like Flatlines' demonstrate a persistence of the conditions that create these vulnerabilities. More in "Where did I go wrong" reveals themes that focus on the inability to be a viable family partner and parent, paranoia about women and stressed intimate relationships, and proximity to inevitable and impending death. The images early in the video, for example, feature Flatline drinking hard liquor and looking at pictures of his children. Elementary age boys appear in one frame, and a newborn baby boy in another. Reflecting stresses on family life, Flatline later raps, "(I'm) Trying to make it out the struggle for my children and my wife…if they take me from my family shit I might as well die." The final verse features Flatline and other Brown men walking through a cemetery among headstones with Spanish-surnames. He complains, "I gave my life to the dope game and ain't got shit in return." Suspicious and pained, he raps further about his disdain, "There ain't no friends in this game in the city of sharks / where your own baby mama set you up with the narcs…a cold heart's what they gave me / a G's what they made me / a menace to society cause the ghetto raised me crazy." He explores more about how economic circumstances affect his role as family provider… "what am I supposed to do when everything just falls apart / got the lights cut off so my children in the dark…" Referencing the limits of employment and the pressure of the approaching Christmas season he mentions that a 9 to 5 job is not enough to pay the bills, plus rapping and hustling are the only two skills he has. His inability to take care of his family leads to danger for what is presumed to be another father's family—"gonna do what I gotta do to try and make a profit / its jackin' season nigga betta lock your fuckin' door." Masculinity is imagined in a heteronormative household with a man of the house as protector and bread winner, again a notion that is hegemonic and structural. Flatline then walks away, passing gravestone markers having explained the confines

of his circumstance—intimate, societal and structural—to leave you contemplating how it may affect you. The open grave is either for him or for his next victim as his circumstances has led him to "jackin' season" or a spree of theft and aggravated robbery.

These vulnerabilities are further articulated by Flatline in "Prison Rap Song" which begins with the early verses of the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Under the Bridge"—a song itself about personal anguish and drug addiction.38 Flatline became involved with rapping and catapulted a full-fledged career during a stint in state prison when he joined a gospel-based band that played shows for inmates on holidays. He remembered, "I was doing shows for like two, three thousand inmates in the rec yard."[39] While Flatline does not mention why he ended up in prison, we might assume it related to his open discussion about his career as a drug dealer. The experience likely feeds into the production of the song and video "Prison Song" as he opens the first verse rapping, "spending time in a correctional facility / thinking back I wander what it could have been / if I'd of chose to fly straight and get good grades / instead I became a thug and ended up in a cage."[40] The video pieced together by Flatline's label Blood Money Music, shows clips of mostly Black and Brown men in penitentiaries engaging in everyday activities including working out, walking the yard together, and sitting in their cells. Other clips picture prison guards locking the jail cell doors, a prison bus arriving with new prisoners and some images of fights among the inmates. In the lyrics Flatline raps a verse in honor of Southeast Houston Mexican rapper Lil Bing who is serving a life sentence for murder in a Texas state prison. In the next verse Flatline reminds, "If you got a loved one locked behind bars, be sure to show them some love you know what I'm sayin cause its hard doing time when you ain't got shit."[41] The YouTube page the video is featured on contains a message by Flatline saying, "A SONG DEDICATED TO ALL MY NIGGAS DOING TIME IN FEDERAL AND STATE PENITENTIARIES... KEEP YO HEAD UP YOULL BE HOME SOON..." The message then lists the names of seven of his homies that are in prison.[42]

Flatline also reveals sentiments of nurture and emotional vulnerability in his public expression of his life as a father. Shortly after the initiation of his career his son was diagnosed with autism. This seemed to stall his career, according to Flatline, and when he returned, he was very open with the struggles of fathering and co-parenting an autistic child, going so far as to produce a rap song specifically about these struggles. The video to the song begins with a Latina women, possibly a medical expert, explaining what autism is and providing information about it. The hook and name of the song, "When the Children Cry" begins and Flatline begins rapping about his experience with his son while a ticker at the bottom of the screen flashes facts and further information about the disorder. Flatline explained the song and video as,

> THIS A SONG I WROTE FOR MY 9 YEAR OLD SON "TREY" WHO HAS AUTISM. HE IS MY WORLD! MY MISSION IN LIFE IS TO HELP MAKE HIM BETTER. I AM A PROUD FATHER AND WANTED TO WRITE THIS SONG FROM A PARENTS PERSPECTIVE. THIS SONG IS DEDICATED TO ALL THE CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD WITH AUTISM. AND A BIG SALUTE TO THE PARENTS THAT STRUGGLE EVERYDAY WITH RAISING THESE AMAZING CHILDREN. ITS HARD WORK BUT WE WILL NOT GIVE UP ON OUR BABIES! THERE IS HOPE!!! HELP SPREAD AUTISM AWARENESS! - MOMMY AND DADDY LOVE YOU TREY "TAY-TAY[43]

Ending it with mommy and daddy love you Trey, the video features him sitting with the boy's mother talking with the doctor together and visibly showing their disappointment and devastation. Perhaps this is the ideal family situation Flatline and other rappers consider in their ruminations of the struggles that occur for them in the 'hood. When asked what he wanted folks to know about him in his documentary, he says, "Flatline is somebody with a big heart, I'm all about my kids, you know what I'm saying, I'm all about my kids to start off with."[44] While being a concerned parent certainly has an unfair double standard that provides more credit to fathers for doing what mothers are expected to do, Flatline's expression of concern and advocacy with his son's condition suggest

an extension of the vulnerabilities usually expressed in Gulf South rap. Flatline explains, "I talk about it (his son's condition) a lot in my music. That's what a lot of people say that I get a little too personal sometimes you know what I mean. But I talk about what I live you know what I'm sayin'?"[45] This might suggest the way that Flatline has pushed masculinities beyond bounds recognizable to many people, extending the expressions of vulnerability from police repressions and economic hardship to introducing masculinities that are nurturing and personal. These possibilities and examples of masculinities that can be vulnerable, self-reflective and even nurturing do not stand alone but alongside and even overrun by continued investments in masculinities based on gendered hierarchies and violence.

Flatline a.k.a Ike Turner

These kinds of emotional appeals for affection, understanding and support complicate a notion of toxic masculinity among men of color within gangsta rap. They reveal the contexts of mass incarceration, police brutality, street violence within the illict drug trade and the ways these structural forces impede intimacy, community and family. Rather than explain away the ways these rap artists' subjectivities also reveal homophobic, patriarchal and tenets of gendered violence and subordination, these structural conditions may help explain them. Indeed, Flatline proudly asserts another nickname for himself, as Ike Turner, the name of the infamous wife beater and abuser of the soul diva Tina Turner. In the "Real Recognize Real" documentary, Flatline introduces himself as he does on a number of occasions as, "My name is Flatline, aka Ike Turner, aka Bitch-slap-a-Nigga-on-Site, aka Mr. Get-that-muthafuckin-money, know what I'm saying."[46] These assertions of braggadocio are important to rap music's use of cultural expression to quell otherwise real violence and competition. Braggadocio within gangsta rap, however, has routinely slipped into a celebration of brute force at the expense of women and other feminized community members. These same expressions are tied to structural contexts that encourage forms of toxic masculinity. The militarized masculinity of police, of hypercompetitive and imposing imperialist markets reflected in the drug trade, and the structural violences that create impoverished environments in inner cities play into a situation where violent masculinities are useful and a product of the struggle for survival in these contexts, reproducing the violence imposed systematically.

Proudly claiming a title like Ike Turner exemplifies this context where it is particularly valuable to exhibit one's strength and virility by celebrating the violence and dominance of the perceived strong over the weak, such as in a domestic violence situation. Flatline's use of this abusive situation is utilized to assert dominance over his competition, again a position derived from the competition within the drug market and the struggles to survive. To "bitch-slap a nigga" could be to defeat an impending threat to status and even life. As the example of Pimp C also demonstrated, weakness is signified by "bitch," the female victim of domestic abuse. Therefore, while having the power to "bitch-slap a nigga" is useful to survive a violent context in the 'hood, its cultural representation is complicit in otherwise abuse and oppression of feminized identities who are vulnerable themselves to the status quo of heteropatriarchal intimate violence as well as the state violences of the hyperghetto.

Therefore, while these kinds of problematic expressions are understood better when put in the structural context of militarized police violence against Black and Brown men in the inner city, its representation in gangsta rapper's claims for dignity routinely leads to the dehumanization of women and other feminized members of community. This might be exemplified when Flatline raps in "Where did I go wrong" that he wants to make it out the struggle for his children and his wife on the one hand but later claims that he is suspicious of the mother of his child in a world "where your own baby mama sets you up with the narcs." Furthermore, other less serious more playful videos and music continues to refer to women of color in their communities as objects that bolster their male ego and are sexualized props of exchange for asserting one's masculinity in competition with another man. In part the economic depravity that leads to poverty enhances conflict between intimate partners and co-parents while alternatives such as the illicit drug industry necessitate violent competition, also impairing family and community cooperation. While the agency of the individual rap artists and many men of color they describe cannot be overlooked, particularly in the maintenance of a rap scene where artists are overwhelmingly male and

some are rewarded by a multimillion-dollar industry for perpetuating such images, understanding the structural context is paramount. Rappers like Flatline emerged from a context where structural violence rules the day, producing and encouraging both expressions of vulnerability and complicity in gendered hierarchies.

It is important to also consider that while Flatline and other Gulf South rappers operate on an underground circuit, they are nonetheless in an industry where the ideology and pressures of "coming up" or profit-seeking are driving forces. Flatlines' mentor SPM was the central artist at Dope House Records, a label responsible for the rise of many Houston Latino/a rappers that was based on the pursuit of building "an empire of powerhouse artists and multi-million dollar deals."[47] In this context, and with added market pressures where sex (i.e. objectification of women) and violence sell, severe limits to a full out expression of a masculinity that asserts an outright feminist outlook seems improbable. The Geto Boys became known chiefly for their violence, often misogynist and at times outright disturbing depictions in the midst of gangsta rap's entrance into the mainstream in the late 1980s and 90s. UGK became widely known for their depictions of themselves as "pimps" as their pinnacle market success came in a song collaboration with multimillionaire rapper and businessman Jay-Z. This song entitled "Big Pimpin'" begins with Jay-Z rapping—while aboard a yacht surrounded by Black women in high heels and bikinis—"you know I thug'em hug'em love'em leave'em but I don't trust or need'em." As hip hop scholars have noted, objectifying depictions of women as disposable and untrustworthy is deeply rooted in rap music and its marketing popularization. It reminds that there are severe limits on hip hop as a site of constructing the counterhegemonic masculinities suggested by hooks and Anzaldúa due to the ways marketing forces exacerbate patriarchal tendencies already existent in communities to encourage these types of depictions.[48] If we follow H-Town rap culture's influence on underground scenes elsewhere there may be examples of potential paths forward.

A Black/Brown Feminist Critique Through Gangsta Rap, Chopped and Screwed

Black/Brown men rappers can build off of a tradition of asserting their vulnerability to the structural contents of the 'hood to articulate a critique of heteropatriarchy. This is demonstrated by following the translocal influence of the Gulf South sound to the Los Angeles-based Filipino rapper Bambu's music. Several of Bambu's songs hold an important connection to H-town rap music in the now broadening usage of screw music, a method that solidified slowed-down music as foundational to the regional subgenre. In the early 1990s, south Houston artist DJ Screw aka Robert Earl Davis, Jr. began using DJ-ing techniques to slow down certain hip hop tracks and repeat particular verses to highlight them. This became "screwed and chopped" music as DJ Screw began making mixed tapes of popular tracks to a slowed tempo using this technique and distributing them to friends in Houston's southside. Soon, enthusiasts across Houston and wider Texas began lining up at his house to buy Screw's "gray tapes" (they were mixed on grey Maxell tapes) for $10 apiece. Screw would soon team with what would become the Screwed Up Clik (SUC)—area rappers who would make original music to be chopped and screwed on mixed tapes. These rappers would become Houston legends, including Big Moe, Fat Pat, Big Pokey, Lil' Keke, Hawk, and later Z-Ro and Trae, the latter two of which worked with Flatline on a few song projects. DJ Screw also worked with the Black and Brown group Aggravated putting a screwed and chopped bonus track on their inaugural album where Screw, who often introduced his tracks with his slow and chill shout outs to other rappers, announced he's "hookin' up with that Latin Sector…H-Town representin'."[49] This musical innovation created in the streets of Houston and embraced by the H-Town hip hop community has since gone nationwide as music powerhouses including Beyoncé, Erykah Badú and Kendrick Lamar have featured the screwed technique in their music.

Screw music became synonymous with Houston-based rap music. The slowed-down sounds were reminiscent of blues, gospel, and the slow rural roots of these art forms and the Southern hip hop sound. Yet Screw music was also attached to the urban poor Black neighborhoods in which drugs and violence was always a feature in the lyrics in the screwed and chopped sound. Indeed, screwed and chopped versions of most of the songs discussed thus far were reintroduced by DJ Screw. In relation to the struggles of the streets featured in H-Town music, being inebriated on marijuana, alcohol or "drank"—a mix of codeine-based cough syrup and juice—was also

tantamount with screw music. Being intoxicated or "on lean" while listening to the slowed down sound made the rapper's lyrics easier to understand and allowed for a chilled-out beat that grooved with the high. Indeed, the screwed and chopped beat and its reception by the city's Black and Brown youth reflected a bottom-up technology that slowed things down in an otherwise overwhelming circumstance of social death, mass incarceration, police violence and other challenges in the hyperghettos of H-town. As DJ Screw explained, "The Screw sound is when I mix tapes with songs that people can relax to. Slower tempos, to feel the music and so you can hear what the rapper is saying."[50] It also reflected the real struggles of illicit drug use—again the tie between the social death of life in the 'hood and proximity to physical death rapped about—as "drank" was determined as the cause of death for DJ Screw in 2000 (although his partner Nikki Williams disputes this citing other health problems) and for SUC member and singer Big Moe who overdosed in 2007.[51]

Bambu is a Filipino rapper raised in several parts of Black and Brown Los Angeles. Formerly with the rap group Native Guns, Bambu's politicized rap music does not shy away from gangsta themes. A former gang member himself Bambu says, "I don't stray away from gangsta rap, I still say that I make gangsta rap. I just tell the other side of the story and continue the story after you do the drive-by, after you rob homeboy, after you get sent up to prison. Why we hate each other…its not that I'm doing conscious, political (rap). I'm doing gangsta rap. I'm letting you know though, why this is happening."[52]

Bambu grew up in a similar environment that other gangsta rappers describe, telling stories about struggles with the police, drug dealing, gang bangin', and interpersonal relationships. For example, Bambu raps about the conditions of his 'hood in "Beach Cruisin,"

> I see evidence of late-night debauchery on the block
> Broken 40 o-z's and drive-by's made on the sidewalk
> I talk to older playas on the corner and build
> About the changes that they seen, all the kids they seen killed
> And I'm sad for a minute[53]

Also revealing the themes of structural vulnerability in the hood, Bambu differs from many gangsta rappers in his politicized analysis of how the problems of the 'hood relate to capitalism, imperialism and white supremacy, and in his insistence on making such claims without colluding with patriarchal tendencies. Continuing the verse on "Beach Cruisin" Bambu gives analysis after describing the deadly conditions of the 'hood:

> I reflect on all the reasons that we turn into victims
> Historical colonial brain-washing of us
> Got us hatin' on us
> We've been strategically crushed

In addition to the politicized analysis featured, Bambu articulates a gangsta masculinity that focuses on the ways patriarchy privileges men of color in certain ways and that despite the difficult circumstances these men encounter, it's important to work on disinvesting from the ways the structural context encourages many men of color to acquiesce to male dominance.

These themes tie to a 2015 song "My Potnas" that relates to the H-town sound through its usage of a screwed and chopped chorus repeating, "Rollin with my potnas burnin' swisha after swisha." The chorus refers to the ritual shared by many hip hop youth cruising in their cars, listening to music and smoking marijuana in "swishas": a reference to the Swisher Sweet brand of cigars which are cut open, emptied of tobacco and filled and rolled with marijuana. "My Potnas"—urban slang reference partners or friends—emphasizes the solidarity and circles of trust and community built within urban youth of color. The song's video, featuring commentary on the murder of teenager Trayvon Martin and the failure to convict his killer George Zimmerman, shows homies cruising and

smoking swishas with Bambu at the wheel. Later it parodies the Trayvon Martin incident by reversing roles and featuring a white youth wearing a hoodie, being harassed and eventually shot when Bambu exits his car and argues with him after following him. The solidarity of a crew or group of homies cruising and smoking swishas is usually reserved for men in rap culture, but this video features a women playing a key role in the ritual of cruising—rolling the swishas on her lap in the back seat. The young woman is light-skinned, possibly Filipina or Latina, and features several tattoos, a nose ring, and her eyeliner extended outward reflecting the Chicana chola technique of decorating with makeup around the eyes. She rolls the swisha on the book The Filipino Martyrs an account of the 1899 the war in the Phillipines where the U.S. forces start shifting hostilities from Spain to Filipino rebels. Her tattoos solidify her inclusion in the collective as an image of her rolling the swishas reveals one of the tattoos that decoratively reads "Fuck the police" in large lettering on her upper thigh just below the book on her lap where she's finishing up the rolling for her homies. There is no indication that her membership is necessarily related to being in a romantic relationship with the men in the car—Bambu and another Brown Asian young man sit in the front seat—revealing she is one of the homies. This inclusion of a woman in the collective of homies breaks the male-exclusivity so often associated with gangs, crews and other organized groups by urban Black/Brown youth and creates a different kind of gender-fluid solidarity.

Bambu accomplishes this inclusion of women in the struggle while continuing to assert the intersections of "Black and Brown" working class denizens of urban communities. Growing up the son of Filipino immigrants in the Black community of Watts and subject to gang life, police violence and raised primarily by his mother after his parents' divorce, he raps in "As We Prey,"

> Through the scope of Black music I am there
> the son of immigrants from the Phillipines saying
> educated from the bottom by a standardized test…
> ..from the days of watchin' mama catch the bus
> and seein' me in cuffs
> now teachin' young son to keep his checkered hand up
> how to act when they show up to say he look suspicious
> all the shit you probably don't have to teach the white children

Here Bambu acknowledges the Black roots of hip hop and explains his intersection with it as a Brown Filipino subject to racialized class experiences including his mom having to catch the bus, scrapes with the prison complex ("seein' me in cuffs"), and having to teach his Brown son how to survive inevitable encounters with racial profiling. This also makes him Brown because white children are less likely to need such instruction about life or death interactions with the police. Like Flatline, these expressions of structural vulnerability are laced throughout Bambu's music. Interestingly, Bambu articulates a distinction as Brown from Black while simultaneously revealing the intersection of struggles in the oft repeated phrase "Black and Brown."

As a Filipino son to immigrants from the 'hood, Bambu is "Brown" not only bringing their identities closer to African Americans but also that of Latinos/as, especially being subject to the immigration regime. Indeed, Filipinos/as have been regarded as Latinos/as in some cases due to their colonial history with Spain and the United States, Spanish surnames and Catholicism, close social relations with ethnic Mexicans in places like California and shared struggles with racialization in the U.S.[54] In his track, "Guerra," Bambu reveals the intersections of different Brown people in a dystopic future USA and demonstrates his familiarity with Spanish:

> ¿Por que? Is the question you'll be asking policia
> Murdering tu gente, finishing tu vida
> Man fuck your resident visa you a danger to America
> A muthafucking terrorist

And since they can't tell the difference between
A Mexican, Puerto Rican and me from the Philippines
We'll all be in the same camp, concentrated out
Now the whole world is aiming their guns at the White House[55]

In this song Bambu identifies the shared struggle of Brown immigrants—whether Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, or Filipinos—within the logic of deportation. This logic subjects them to a mass incarceration system that racial profiles Brown folks as potential "illegal aliens" and detains them—and concentrates them out in the same "camp." Policia (police) and la migra (Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agents) make up the structural policing forces that monitor, harass, and brutalize Brown bodies. The song "Guerra" was performed with the Chicano/a Los Angeles son jarocho group Quetzal, revealing further the articulation of cross-community solidarity and practice within hip hop and music.[56] Bambu's emphasis on class analysis, and even anti-capitalist critique, enables him to make these connections.

Bambu articulates these solidarities and expressions of structural vulnerabilities in the hood while being vigilant about recognizing his privilege as a man and seeking justice for the struggles of Black and Brown women in their communities at the intersection of heteropatriarchy, capitalism and racism. In his song "Moms," he tells the story of his mother—as he tells stories about and from the perspective of many Brown women in his songs. His mother, he explains in "Moms," was a young woman in the Philippines influenced by the American Dream trope who fantasized about moving to the United States. She married his father and the family soon after moved to Los Angeles. His father eventually leaves his marriage and the family and later begins a relationship with another woman. Bambu's mother is left to raise the kids and work. Bambu then switches gears in the song as the music becomes calmer and violins surround a gentle beat and he self-reflects on how his mother's experience has affected him as a Brown man. He shifts from the position of storyteller to engage in a dialog with his romantic partner about his struggles with patriarchy—and his willingness to work on confronting them in order to be a better partner. He explains,

Yeah that's the story of my mama
And that's the reasons why I never make it rain with dollars
And that's the reason why I find it difficult to love you
Cause mama never had the time to show me how to function
Through the hard times, mama use to shut the door and cry
So (I'm) sorry when we fight I kick the door inside
And yeah I got some issues with you listening
And that shit probably comes from being raised not given the attention that I wanted but
I want to make us work
So I read Grace Lee Boggs' and bell hooks' work
The real shit, the practice so much harder than the theory
When we get to fightin' I'm fightin' the demon in me
The patriarchy in me all the womanizing in me
Start to creep up when a bunch of pretty Brown women near me
But you don't never worry, never trip
Make up to break up shit for you, me and our kid

Bambu in this verse highlights the story of his mother, the mistreatment she experienced due to colonial constructs of Christianity and the myth of the American Dream alongside his father's own mistreatment of her, to understand his own positioning and limits in a patriarchal society as he attempts to work out issues with his partner and mother of his children. Rather than posture a hypermasculine toughness, defensiveness and emotional

withdrawal in the face of relationship difficulties with her, he uses his empathetic recognition of his mother's physical and emotion labor to share how patriarchy has brought him to the table with limits and faults—and a commitment to work through them, asserting a feminist politics of solidarity, allyship, and politicized intimacy. Bambu asserts that this work involves reading radical feminists of color bell hooks and Grace Lee Boggs to build on his work-in-progress feminist solidarity, particularly in his domestic relationship with his partner.

The song then shifts to a party anthem as Bambu criticizes the shared misogyny of both U.S. capitalist media—"yeah she fly but I don't care/ profile pic with her ass in the air/ exploitation, exploitation/ a worker in the field in her underwear"—and the Taliban who, "…oppress all the women when they wear/ A burqa and they murder a women for getting' raped/ and for infidelity they getting' stoned by prayer." A voice then raps in the screwed, slow-down H-town style: "Fuck'em, Fuck'em, Fuck'em Let'em all die slow/ Let's try the others side of the coin with less clothes/ women being used as a marketing tool to sell everything from cell phones to bottles of brew." H-town's screwed style is transformed to highlight the global gender oppression that U.S. society shares with the Taliban and fundamentalist Islam regimes that American politicians hypocritically criticize—and argues that the same misogyny is alive and well in the exploitive capitalism featured in hip hop video production that routinely exploits women's bodies.

The song concludes with women's voices, including, fittingly, Bambu's mother to highlight the gangsta rap political position against the racialized policing system in the hood. This critique is like other gangsta rappers analyzed thus far, but this time inclusive of women of color in that positioning as Bambu credits his mother as the source of this critical rapping, when he raps, "mama had me on that fuck da police shit." After this verse the song stops to feature his mother mixing Tagalog and accented English. She exclaims, "Every time I see the sign on their (police's) car saying to protect and to serve, I say to myself 'shit you are there to accuse and to abuse.' To them (police) all suspects are guilty until proven innocent and beaten up." Bambu then states, "I told you," followed by another women chanting several times "I feel exploited/ oppressed/ objectified in my flesh" over a hype party beat—the kinds of party beats that usually feature scantily clad women's bodies in mainstream hip hop videos. These women's voices overlaying the party beat accomplishes a disruption of the toxic masculinized spaces within hip hop subjectivity, suggesting a decolonial feminist masculinity practiced by Bambu and other Brown men in the song.

***

Focus on the vulnerabilities to conditions of hyperghettoization within Texas Gulf South rap music and broader hip hop culture complicates discussions about men of color masculinities and provides insight into ways "Black and Brown" communities intersect through their experiences and cultural politics. Highlighting that many gangsta rappers are revealing vulnerabilities disrupts assumptions that rap masculinities are monolithically toxic, misogynistic and homophobic. Rather they articulate pain, anguish and suffering that mass incarceration and hyperpolicing have on their day-to-day lives and even in their intimate relationships. As Chicano hip hop scholar Pancho MacFarland asserts, rappers "theorize represent and give voice to the cares, concerns, desires, hopes, dreams, and problems" of inner city youth of color to "articulate a criticism of capitalist globalization in their lyrics."[57] Often, however, these struggles are articulated in a way that normalizes gendered hierarchy and violence at the expense of women and LGBTQ folks due to ongoing heteropatriarchy within communities of color, the hypermasculine state violences that target these communities, and the influence of corporatization on hip hop culture.

Furthermore, while there are differences in the way structures of racism within the criminal justice system, employment, segregation and poverty concentration that often target Blackness specifically, Latinas/os and other racialized "Brown" communities have shared and are increasingly sharing such circumstances as revealed in rap music themes. As geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore asserts regarding mass incarceration policies among a Black and Brown community group in Los Angeles, "You have to be white to be prosecuted under white law, but you

do not have to be Black to be prosecuted under Black law."[58] The particular context of Houston where a regional form of hip hop emerged to influence rappers in the Gulf South in a way where Mexicans and other Latinas/os articulated a proximity to Blackness provides an important perspective on the intersecting experiences of Black and Brown in the inner city. Indeed, sociologist Nestor Rodríguez highlights demographic trends beginning in the last decades of the twentieth century where Latinas/os and African Americans increasingly lived in closer proximity to one another, particularly with Mexican and Central American immigrants moving into historic Black neighborhoods. Rodríguez also suggests that this process was less conflictual in Houston then it was in other urban settings.[59] Therefore, using a cultural idiom that emerged out of such a context, Texas Gulf South rappers like Flatline and their narratives of structural vulnerability. The intersecting, albeit uneven, ways the hyper-ghetto affects Latinos/as and African Americans finds articulation in this regional genre of hip hop.[60]

As mentioned, the vulnerability to the structural oppression in the 'hood as expressed in H-town hip hop is significant to highlight, even as it is limited in the ways it often recapitulates to structures of gendered violence. Bambu serves as an example of possibilities but also highlights his access to women of color epistemologies (i.e. his mention of reading bell hooks and Grace Lee Boggs) that too often do not reach young people in marginalized communities of color. More often, these youth come across rappers like the Geto Boys, UGK, SPM and Flatline, who demonstrate a hood-experience based on vulnerability alongside problematic expressions of masculinity. Therefore, rather than define an artist like Flatline monolithically as, for example, a caring father who is not afraid of expressing nurture and vulnerable parts of his masculine identity or as Ike Turner, another rapper objectifying women and reinforcing the heteronormative hegemonic culture, we lay them side by side, and even consider their dialectical relationship. It is important to simultaneously critique the toxic aspects to these masculinities with the innovative analytical tools developed by women of color feminism and queer of color critique while highlighting, as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and many others demonstrate, how these gendered violences are rooted in racist, colonial and capitalist practices that benefit elites to the endangerment of poor men of color in their struggles to create community—and how the brunt of this violent system too often falls on the backs of Black and Brown women and working class community members with nonconforming gender subjectivities. The complex narrative of Flatline's life and death works here as an exploration of how these larger structural processes interact with the on-the-ground lives and deaths in the hood—his murder case was dismissed after the man that shot and killed him claimed self-defense. His family and friends continue to challenge the court decision while highlighting his role as a father, an advocate for families with autistic children, and a community leader.[61] With at least half a dozen tribute songs created since the shooting, even Flatline's very death reveals rap music as a space for Black and Brown men to simultaneously articulate their vulnerabilities, sorrows, and struggles alongside affirming contested, reforming, but consistently limited notions of their masculinity.[62]

Endnotes

1. I wish to thank Luis Alvarez, Aureliano DeSoto, Jessica Lopez Lyman, Ethan Blue, Rachel Buff, Kency Cornejo, Patricia Nguyen, Jermaine Ross, Steven Osuna and Myrna García for feedback, for support and critical feedback on this article.

2. Los Terricolas, "Dos Cosas," in Amor Traicionero, Discomoda, 1974.

3. "Gutta" refers to the gutter and metaphor for growing up in an impoverished crime-ridden neighborhood. Reference to "…work up in my tank" refers to the act of delivering illicit drugs by hiding them in the gas tank of his car, where again, Flatline refers to his life as a drug dealer.

4. Flatline, "Where did I go wrong," by José Jesús Mendoza, in Respect My Gansta, Bloody Money Music, 2012; World Famous Compound Films, Flatline, Where did I go Wrong-Official Compound film, youtube video, posted by "Bloody Money," July 22, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEwO7RhnwIA

5. I use the identity marker "Mexican" to describe Mexican-origin rappers and hip hop enthusiasts in Houston because it is the most common self-identifier among these rappers. They also use "Latin" and "Hispanic," but most often call themselves Mexican without attached –American or any other identifier that would make distinctions from Mexicans in Mexico and Mexican-origin peoples in the United States, even as most of rappers are socialized in the U.S. Interestingly the way many of them often say Mexican sounds like "Meskin" due to the Southern Black Urban English dialect they often speak in, as will be explored further later in the paper.

6. "Two Vigils Held for Murdered Corpus Christi Rapper," Channel 3 News Corpus Christi, retrieved online, posted by Houston Records, February 21, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf8Ow_Oq0BM; Julie Garcia, "Man faces murder charge in rapper's death," Corpus Christi Caller Times, December 9, 2016.

7. Aisha S. Durham, Home With Hip Hop Feminism: Performances in Communication and Culture, (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 3.

8. bell hooks, "We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity," (New York: Routledge, 2004), x, xi.

9. bell hooks, "Reconstructing Black Masculinity," in bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 87-113.

10. Early Scholarship on ethnic Mexican and Latino/a masculinity features work such as Maxine Baca Zinn, "Chicano Men and Masculinity," Journal of Ethnic Studies 10, 1984, 29-44 and Alfredo Mirandé, Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture, (Boulder: Westview, 1997). More recent scholarship in this area includes Aída Hurtado, Beyond Machismo: Intersectional Latino Masculinities, (Austin: Univresity of Texas Press, 2016), and Ricard T. Rodríguez, Next of Kin: The Family In Chicano/a Cultural Politics, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

11. Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987, 2012, 4th Edition), 105.

12. Anzaldúa, 1987, 2012, 106.

13. Anzaldúa, 1987, 2012, 106.

14. According to the Prison Policy Initiative in 2010 Latinos/as were twice as likely to be incarcertated compared to whites while African-Americans were 5 times as likely. Leah Sakala, "Breaking Down Mass Incarceration in the 2010 Census: State-by-State Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity," Prison Policy Initiative, May 28, 2004, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html

15. Black immigrants make up 7 percent of the immigrant population in the United States, but 21 percent of those facing deportation as a result of contact with the criminal justice system. "Co-Founder of Black Lives Matter: 'Black immigrants face even more problems than other races,'" The Chicago Crusader, October 19, 2016, accessed online, http://chicagocrusader.com/co-founder-black-lives-matter-black-immigrants-face-even-problems-races/

16. Albert Camarillo, Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, [1979], 2005. On de jure segregation in the first half of the twentieth century in a comparative perspective see Albert Camarillo, "Navigating Segregated Life in America's Racial Borderhoods, 1910s-1950s, Journal of American History 100, no. 3, (2013): 645-662.

17. Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes, "U.S. Concetration poverty in the wake of the Great Recession," (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Policy Institute, March 31, 2006), https://www.brookings.edu/research/u-s-concentrated-poverty-in-the-wake-of-the-great-recession/; Em Shrider, "Black Individuals Had Record Low Official Poverty Rate in 2022," U.S Census, September 12, 2023.

18. U.S. Census, "2020 Race and Population Totals," https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALPL2020 ; Latino national group data taken from, Pew Research Center, "Hispanic Population and Origin in Select U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 2014," accessed online, http://www.pewhispanic.org/interactives/hispanic-population-in-select-u-s-metropolitan-areas/

19. Tatcho Mindiola, Nestor Rodríguez, and Yolanda Flores Nieman, Black-Brown Relations and Stereotypes, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 114; Nestor Rodríguez, "U.S. Immigration and Intergroup Relations in the Late 20th Century: African Americans and Latinos," In S. Jonas and S.D. Thomas, eds., Immigration: A Civil Rights Issue for the Americas, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 131-144.

20. On "hyper-ghetto" see Loic Wacant, and its usage in the case study written by Eric Tang, Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015). As Tang explains Wacant's conception, The hyperghetto names not only the intensification of intractable inner city problems but also the way in which the traditional ghetto has become what Wacquant refers to as a space of "naked relegation."
It is reserved for the isolation and enclosure of the poorest urban residents who are no longer regarded as those to be recruited and disciplined into the lowest rungs of the workforce; rather, they are seen as subjects to be warehoused. In particular, the hyperghetto has functioned as a site of captivity for a decidedly post-Civil Rights and, more significantly, postinsurrectionist Black subproletariat."

21. John Márquez, Black and Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 64.

22. Rolando Rodriguez, "We've Got Flatline. Clear! Houston Can Jumpstart the Heart of a Music Career,"

Houston Press, January 1, 2010.

23. Tricia Rose, Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 21.

24. George Lipsitz, The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

25. Joe Feagin, The Free Enterprise City: Houston in Political and Economic Perspective, (New Brunswick & London: University of Rutgers Press, 1988) and John Márquez, Black and Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 115, 122-131.

26. Tatcho Mindiola, Nestor Rodriguez, and Yolanda Niemann Flores, Black-Brown Relations and Stereotypes, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

27. I have written about this contextual phenomenon before, from a different site of research, in: Jimmy Patiño, "Growin' up in the 'hood same as me": Black and Brown Hip Hop Subjectivities at an H-town Record Store," The Journal of South Texas, 30, vol. 2, (Spring 2017).

28. Sasha Frere-Jones, "A Place in the Sun," The New Yorker, November 6, 2005.

29. John Márquez, Black and Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 152-153.

30. Márquez, 2013, 157.

31. Marco Cervantes refers to these formations as "Chicano/a Blackness" and traces a history of "Tejano/a Afro-Mestizaje." Marco Cervantes, Afro-Mestizaje: Toward a Mapping of Chicana/o Blackness in Tejana/o Literature and Popular Music, 1920-2010, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas, San Antonio, 2010. Also see Marco Cervantes, "Squeezebox Poetics: Locating Afromestizaje in Esteban Jordan's Texas Conjunto Performance," American Quarterly 65(4), December 2016.

32. Bloody Money Music, Real Recognize Real: A Bloody Documentary, youtube video, posted by "Bloody Money," March 31, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg0yAyOUruI

33. On the use of "nigga" in gangsta rap and its class connotations see Robin D.G. Kelley, Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class, (New York: Free Press, 1994), 210. On Houston Latino/a rappers and the term "nigga" see John Márquez, Black and Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 159-160. For discussion about the use of "nigga" among Latino/a rappers more broadly see Ben Westhoff, "Not your Father's N-Word," Houston Press, April 3, 2008 and Raquel Cepeda, "The N-word is Flourishing Among Generation Hip Hop Latinos," Village Voice, October 22, 2008.

34. Geto Boys, "My Mind is Playin' Tricks on Me," in We Can't Be Stopped, (Houston: Priority and Rap-A-Lot Records, 1991).

35. Issac Hayes, "Hung Up on My Baby," Three Tough Guys, (Enterprise/Stax, 1974).

36. UGK, "One Day," in Ridin' Dirty, (New York: Jive Records, 1996).

37. Aggravated, "I am your future," in I Am Your Future, (Houston: Aggravated Records, 1995).

38. Red Hot Chili Peppers, "Under the Bridge," in Blood Sugar Sex Magik, (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1992).

39. Bloody Money Music, Real Recognize Real: A Bloody Documentary, youtube video, posted by "Bloody Money," March 31, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg0yAyOUruI

40. Flatline, "Prison Song," youtube video, posted by "Bloody Money," October 24, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xph7ubT09nI

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Flatline, "When the Children Cry," youtube video, posted "Bloody Money" on May 16, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTRf5d_TyGI

44. Bloody Money Music, Real Recognize Real: A Bloody Documentary, youtube video, posted by "Bloody Money," March 31, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg0yAyOUruI

45. Ibid.

46. Bloody Money Music, Real Recognize Real: A Bloody Documentary, youtube video, posted by "Bloody Money," March 31, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg0yAyOUruI

47. Dopehouserecords.com, accessed 2004.

48. See Joann Morgan, When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks it Down, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999); Gwedolyn Pough, Check It While I Wreck It! Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004); and Aisha S. Durham, Home With Hip Hop Feminism: Performances in Communication and Culture, (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). On Latinos/as, hip hop and gender depictions see Pancho McFarland, Chicano Rap: Gender and Violence in the Postindustrial Barrio, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Raquel Rivera, Nuyoricans from the Hip Hop Zone, (New York: Palgrave MacMullin, 2003), and Richard T. Rodríguez, "The Verse of the Godfather." In Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture & Chicana/o Sexualities, ed. Alicia Gaspar de Alba, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

49. Aggravated, "I'm Your Future (Screwed)," in Accept, (Houston: HTX Records, 1994).

50. "RIP DJ Screw True King of the South," November 2010, Online, http://screweduprecords.com/category/quotes/

51. Michael Hall, "The Slow Life and Fast Death of DJ Screw," Texas Monthly, April 2006; "My Life with DJ Screw," as told to Creg Lovett by Nikki Williams, 2011, Houston Hip Hop Recording Artists Collections, Box 1, Folder 13, University of Houston Special Collections; Eyder Peralta, "Houston rappers remember Big Moe, dead at 33," Houston Chronicle, 15 October 2007.

52. Davy D TV, Interview, "Hip Hop Wisdom: Bambu Speaks on Filipinos in Hip Hop & Gang Life in LA," uploaded on May 24, 2010, by Davey D's Hip Hop Corner-Davy D TV, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYg-W5h95wuw

53. Bambu, "Beach Cruisin," In I Scream Bars for the Children, (Los Angeles: Bambu, 2007).

54. See Rudy P. Guevarra, Jr., Mexipino: Multiethnic Identities and Community in San Diego, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012); and Anthony Christian Ocampo, The Latinos of Asia: How Filipinos Break the Rules of Race, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016).

55. Bambu featuring Quetzal, "Guerra," In I Scream Bars for the Children, (Los Angeles: Bambu, 2007).

56. Bambu featuring Quetzal, "Guerra," In I Scream Bars for the Children, (Los Angeles: Bambu, 2007).

57. Pancho MacFarland, Chicano Rap: Gender and Violence in the Postindustrial Barrio, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 116, 115.

58. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Global California, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 227.

59. Nestor Rodríguez, "U.S. Immigration and Intergroup Relations in the Late 20th Century: African Americans and Latinos," In S. Jonas and S.D. Thomas, eds., Immigration: A Civil Rights Issue for the Americas, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 131-144.

60. Again, on the use of "nigga" in gangsta rap and its class connotations see Robin D.G. Kelley, Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class, (New York: Free Press, 1994), 210. On Houston Latino/a rappers and the term "nigga" see John Márquez, Black and Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 159-160. For discussion about the use of "nigga" among Latino/a rappers more broadly see Ben Westhoff, "Not your Father's N-Word," Houston Press, April 3, 2008 and Raquel Cepeda, "The N-word is Flourishing Among Generation Hip Hop Latinos," Village Voice, October 22, 2008.

61. Andy Liscano, "Documentary Film and Petition Hope to Re-Open Local Rapper Murder Case," Action 10 News KZTV Corpus Christi, October 24, 2018, https://www.kztv10.com/news/local-news/2018/10/24/documentary-film-and-petition-hope-to-re-open-local-rapper-murder-case/; Frank Lopez, "Corpus Christi Demands Reopening of Flatline Murder Case After Emotional Documentary Releases," October 11, 2018, Medium, https://bycompoundfilms.medium.com/flatlinemurdercase-ec7e873624ab; Frank Lopez, The Flatline Conspiracy, Compound Films, https://youtu.be/tGNs_X-3Ptk

62. Big Cease, Eternal and Vago, "For the Last Time (Flatline Tribute)," YouTube video, posted by hataproofrecords, March 10, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69UteE2gDWA; Ro Banks, "I Miss You (Flatline Tribute)," YouTube video, posted by xrosecitymexicanx, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tFo3Wp5gUQ