(W)reckoning Dual Pandemics Through Food and Hip-hop Topoi: An Analysis of *Ghetto Gastro*'s Afrocentric PCI Rhetoric

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"We don't even want a piece of the pie – we just wanna make the pie bigger."
–Jon Gray, *Ghetto Gastro* co-founder (Parham).

Contemporary chefs are pushing the boundaries of their work beyond the kitchen, taking on roles as Public Chef Intellectuals (PCIs). PCIs are public figures who rhetorically use their culinary knowledge, experience, and skills (Eckstein and Young). PCIs are distinct from "celebrity chefs" who profit from marketing their foodie persona like a product (Eckstein and Young, 205). In contrast, PCIs educate, build awareness, and create change in food cultures and systems, transferring culinary "knowledge from the technical sphere to the public sphere" (Eckstein and Young 207). Chefs Padma Lakshmi and Dave Chang are key examples of PCIs in popular food culture. Lakshmi's *Taste the Nation* and Chang's *Ugly Delicious* are food television shows educating mass audiences about underrepresented food cultures. PCI rhetoric is also expressed through a chef's interactions with food as "topoi," the symbols and materials of specific places acted upon to make rhetorical

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arguments (Dickinson 3). PCIs use food as topoi in physical and digital places to craft arguments about issues related to food and culture.

Currently, PCIs are responding to COVID-19's amplification of racism, xenophobia, and food insecurity in low-income urban communities. Popular media magnified these intersections during the pandemic. For example, the racist and unjust murder of George Floyd which took place outside of Cup Foods, led to news reports that highlighted the immigrant-owned convenience store in a low-income community experiencing food insecurity (Jackson; Sider). Stories of street food vendors – a labor force made up of many undocumented immigrants who feed low-income communities – described racist and xenophobic barriers in receiving federal aid and issues of over-policing (Abellard). Rates of food insecurity skyrocketed nationwide in low-income urban communities due to the pandemic. This garnered the attention of PCIs like Chef José Andrés, whose World Central Kitchen, which monitors food shortages globally and distributes meals via pop-up kitchens to low-income communities (Gregory) and Chef Marcus Samuelsson's restaurant "Red Rooster," which feeds vulnerable populations in low-income areas of Harlem (Samuelsson).

One significant group responding to these issues is the Bronx-based culinary collective, *Ghetto Gastro* (GG). Formed in 2012, GG is a group of professional chefs, entrepreneurs, fashion influencers, and artists breaking barriers in food culture (Parham). They have hosted dinners for Martha Stewart, appeared as guest stars on the *Rachael Ray Show*, and worked with Marvel to develop a "Taste of Wakanda" menu for the premier of *Black-Panther* (Parham). Co-created by Bronx locals Jon Gray, Lester Walker, Pierre Serrao, and Malcom Livingston II, GG is a self-determined "Black Power Kitchen " invested in racial equity and inclusion (Parham).

In this paper, we argue GG expresses an Afrocentric PCI rhetoric that uses food and hip-hop topoi to (w)reckon intersecting issues of racism, xenophobia, and food insecurity magnified by COVID-19. GG's Afrocentric PCI rhetoric combines elements of food and hip-hop rhetoric to critically flip the script on dominant, white Eurocentric representations and interests. In doing so, GG's Afrocentric PCI rhetoric decenters whiteness in popular food culture and attends to issues of food insecurity in low-income communities heightened by COVID-19. We analyze GG's activist responses during the pandemic including their pop-up events and marketing of limited-edition products. Previous scholarship contends PCIs use topoi to change public perceptions about food sustainability (Eckstein and Young

274) and disrupt “whitewashed appropriations of culinary traditions” (Young and Eckstein 56). Our study contributes to this scholarship revealing how GG disrupts whiteness in the culinary world using the (w)reckoning of Afrocentric PCI rhetoric to educate, represent, and create material change for Black and African identities in popular culture and in low-income communities. Before describing our theoretical framework, we contextualize issues of racism, xenophobia, and food insecurity within the Bronx that GG rhetoric addresses.

Contextualizing the Bronx: The Roots of *Ghetto Gastro’s* Afrocentric PCI Rhetoric

GG’s food and hip-hop rhetoric is grounded in the Bronx’s historical issues of urban development, gentrification, racist housing policies, and policing that pushed people of color into low-income neighborhoods (Gonzalez). Redlining, systemic racist urban planning, and policing plunged the Bronx into an economic and cultural tailspin (Wallace). Construction projects like the Robert Moses Cross-Bronx Expressway cut across neighborhoods, destroying existing residential homes (Caro). In the 1960s and 70s, Bronx landlords set their buildings on fire to collect insurance money and evict residents of color (Wallace). Police used tactics like “stop-and-frisk mandates” and made racially motivated arrests that contributed to socio-economic hurdles faced by Bronx residents (Southall and Gold).

Dominant discourses fetishize the Bronx’s history of violence, structural damage, and racism – stereotypically framing it as a dangerous place. During game two of the 1977 World Series, sportscaster Howard Cosell narrated the televised scene of fires coming from low-income apartment buildings outside Yankee Stadium stating, “Ladies and gentlemen, the Bronx is burning” (Lee). This phrase popularized the Bronx’s reputation as a dangerous place in mainstream media. Reception of these discourses created a reductive image of the Bronx as a place riddled with violence, poverty, and economic catastrophes. These representations dismiss the context of racist and xenophobic systems that have contributed to the problem, and overshadow the creativity, innovation, and relationships formed among and between lower income communities in the Bronx.

GG draws from the Bronx cultural history of food and hip-hop to dismantle these stereotypes. The Bronx is a transcultural hub with rich intercultural influences of African, Caribbean, and Latinx foodways (R. Morgan). Bronx food practices such as family-owned restaurants, bodegas, and street food vending create various

interethnic enclaves that foster hospitable and affordable food for low-income communities (R. Morgan). Alongside these food-based interactions, hip-hop music and culture also started in the Bronx. In the 1970s and 80s b-boys, MCs, rappers, and artists occupied fast-food parking lots and heavily policed street corners, reclaiming their neighborhoods and appropriating the mechanisms of industry that disproportionately benefited white men (Knight; Naison). Hip-hop artists and fans occupied these spaces fusing Black American, African, and Latinx cultural traditions into public spaces. Without food and hip-hop, an Afrocentric history of the Bronx would have succumbed to cultural erasure brought on by discriminatory housing, zoning, and policing practices.

Today, the Bronx is "one of the most food insecure areas in the country," and food insecurity is expected to rise to 40% as a result of COVID-19 (Soni). SNAP recipients increased by 69,000 and "one in 10 Bronx residents" visited a food pantry or soup kitchen in 2020 (David). Grassroots movements by local food activists have emerged, such as Black Urban Growers, the Oaxacan restaurant La Morada, and GG. All are collectively demanding food justice in the Bronx and bringing attention to their local "food apartheid" (Lakhani; Torrens; R. Morgan). Optimistically, voices of food activism circulating in popular media are creating more awareness about food justice and racial equity in the Bronx. We suggest GG's Afrocentric PCI rhetoric attends to "food apartheid," calling out racism within food systems benefitting more affluent, culturally white neighborhoods. GG's rhetoric during COVID-19 provides an opportunity to understand how PCIs address intersecting issues of racism, xenophobia, and food insecurity. But how does GG's Afrocentric PCI rhetoric draw from food and hip-hop specifically as a mechanism of social change?

(W)reckoning Through Afrocentric Food and Hip-hop Topoi

Food's materiality in action influences people's attitudes and behaviors (Frye and Bruner). It takes material conditions and power seriously while recognizing the consumption, production, and distribution of food as rhetorical acts (Young, Eckstein, and Conley). Food rhetoric reifies power such as corporate messages of industrial agriculture that "mislead and obscure relationships between the production, marketing, selling, and consumption of food" for profit (Boerboom, viii). Yet, food is also a resistive rhetoric drawing from place to offer critical

stances, alternative meanings, representations, and ways of being (Frye and Bruner).

Food's relationship to place is key for understanding its rhetorical impact. This understanding includes cultural values communicated through specific arrangements and/or preparations of food material (Fox and Aldred), symbolic representations of food that elicit feelings of nostalgia for places like one's home country (Tran), and embodied interactions and ethics with food like local food consumption (Carolan). Eckstein and Young suggest that relationships between food, place, and people rhetorically influence perceptions, understandings, and engagements with food systems and culture. PCI's craft these "protopublic spaces" using food as rhetorical *topoi* (Eckstein and Young).

Topoi are collections of languages, symbols, materials, and other everyday practices that constantly modulate cultural meanings (Dickinson). For example, de Certeau explains that humans walk through a city in accordance with the rhetoric of city planning and follow the directions created by natural landscapes, bureaucrats, politicians, and engineers as they materialize in space. People resist the city cutting across empty lots, passing through back alleys, and creating alternative "paths" as rhetorical resources (de Certeau). Topoi are reflective of people's shared and located experiences with(in) place and can engage in critical and strategic communication (Dickinson).

PCIs engage food topoi to influence public perceptions about food and culture (Eckstein and Young). As a theoretical lens, topoi allow us to examine how GG's Afrocentric symbolic and material practices of food and place constitute alternative meanings and representations that challenge power. Chef Dan Barber's pop-up project "wastED," used food topoi to transform public perceptions about food waste and sustainability (Eckstein and Young). Chef Sean Brock's cookbook *Heritage* uses "terroir and topoi of the Lowcountry" in South Carolina to advocate for cultural and environmental sustainability and combat the erasure of Black American and West African foodways in Southern food culture (Young and Eckstein). Likewise, GG's rhetorical topoi draws from Afrocentrism to critique and deconstruct the dominance of whiteness and Eurocentrism embedded within social structures and systems of food (Asante).

Afrocentric rhetoric counters paternalistic victimization and tokenism with expressions of agency and self-determination, reflecting shared and individualized Black and African experiences as a form of empowerment (Asante; Strother-Jordan). GG's food rhetoric engages in a "reckoning" with dominance (Conley and

Eckstein 6) in similar ways that hip-hop operates as a form of "wreck" (Pough 17). Wreck disrupts the invisibility and stereotypes of Black people, using the "spectacle" of hip-hop in the public sphere to self-determine one's own representation (Pough). Hip-hop communicates one's authenticity of self and place through explicit lyrics, urban style, and Black vernacular defying conventions and dominance of whiteness in public spaces (Pough; M. Morgan; Brooks; Campbell). We refer to this rhetorical juxtaposition as a *(w)reckoning* – a food and hip-hop-based activism used to make do, appropriate, and reclaim rhetorical resources available to advocate for Black and African identities overlooked in local communities and in popular food culture.

Making Do, Appropriation, Reclamation

Food and hip-hop both enact rhetorical tactics of making do, appropriation, and reclamation. Making do manipulates symbolic and material resources to make the best of a disadvantageous situation (de Certeau). Making do is a common tactic for maintaining Black and African foodways disrupted by histories of colonialism, indentured servitude, slavery, and gentrification. For example, the cuisine of Black and African people such as chitlins, collard greens, and ham hocks emerged from needing to create something delicious, or "make do" with limited resources (Kelly). Making do is also reflected in hip-hop. Early hip hop artists performed in Burger King parking lots, and B Boy dancers regularly competed on street corners with freestyling MC's (Naison). Many credit DJ Kool Herc for "inventing" hip-hop in his Bronx apartment building by developing Jamaican style "sound systems" linking multiple turntables to a series of speakers and amplifiers (Knight). DJs, MCs, producers, and other hip-hop tastemakers accessed what was available to them locally to make music (Naison; Knight). Making do in both food and hip-hop represents how each discourse can be an Afrocentric source of rhetorical (w)reckoning.

Food and hip-hop also both utilize rhetorical appropriation and reclamation. Appropriation is when one culture or group adopts cultural elements of another group (Young and Brunk). Appropriation is problematic when dominant groups appropriate culture forcefully without consideration of marginalized groups; but it is resistive when underrepresented groups appropriate dominant culture to reclaim agency and representation (Ziff and Rao). Reclamation refers to the process of cultural groups taking back words, symbols, and representations used against them

in disparaging and oppressive ways. Reclamation is a collective effort that deconstructs and reinterprets problematic terms and places their meaning back into the control of marginalized groups (Brontsema).

Black and African food traditions have been culturally appropriated, silenced, and distorted by whiteness in food culture (Vats). Soul food, cuisines based in African and African American foodways in the Southern United States, are frequently stereotyped as cheap, greasy, heavy, unhealthy, and inferior to white, European palates (Vats). White people often appropriate Soul Food and other Afrocentric cuisines without recognizing their historical significance (Vats). In response to these issues, chefs have created critical food spaces to dismantle these stereotypes such as Eduardo Jordan's Seattle-based restaurant JuneBaby. Celebrating Black Southern cuisine in a fine-dining context, JuneBaby appropriates a Eurocentric dominated space and reclaims Soul Food as nutritious and worth paying for.

Hip-hop also engages in appropriation and reclamation. In the first half of the nineteenth century, several cultural groups of the Latinx diaspora and African Americans moved into the Bronx and brought their musical traditions along (Gonzalez). Clubs in the Bronx leaked the sounds of marimba, reggaetón, be-bop, jazz, and blues (Knight). After extreme reductions in public funding for musical education and performing, Bronx musicians reclaimed agency over their musical traditions by appropriating the improvisational tactics popular in many African and Black American performance traditions (Robinson). Hip-hop DJ's "freestyled" their sets, mixing records and rhythms that they pulled from massive vinyl collections (Knight; Naison). Rappers and MCs were known to freestyle battle one another, laying down impromptu rhymes and rhythms as onlookers judged their timing and flow (M. Morgan). Freestyling allowed hip-hop artists to develop a new Bronx-based musical genre. By appropriating the improvisational styles, hip-hop artists cemented the role of the Bronx in archiving Afrocentric performances in American culture. GG draws from Bronx food and hip-hop to craft their own artistic PCI expression, while giving their profits back to low-income communities in the Bronx afflicted by COVID-19.

Performative Pop-Up Events: (W)reckoning Space and Addressing Dual Pandemics

In May of 2020, BLM protestors took to the streets to protest George Floyd's murder. Protestors shirked stay at home orders still in place across the country to demand police reform but were met with aggressive crowd control measures like rubber bullets and pepper spray. City governments attempted to deter crowds with early curfews. GG seized on the moment to address the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism (Cooper). Collaborating with Rethink Food NYC, a nonprofit that recycles restaurant surpluses for food insecure populations, and the Bronx-based Oaxacan restaurant La Morada, GG served more than 20,000 meals to protestors (Taylor). The group effort started as a campaign to send meals "to seniors, people of color, low-income families, and formerly incarcerated individuals in the borough, which has more coronavirus cases than anywhere else in the city" (Taylor). But when racial injustice brought protestors into the streets of New York, the collective stood behind their commitment to address the racist politics of food. GG embraced the improvisational style embedded in hip-hop, moving their activism to locations outside their borough.

Recognizing the power of food in the fight for racial justice, GG reclaimed public spaces in Domino and Washington Square Parks (Taylor). They nourished the health of Black and Brown communities forwarding an Afrocentric ethos placing public health and racial equality on the same plane. This rhetorical leveling of the dual pandemics deconstructs Eurocentric understandings of public health that suppose pandemics are novel and the greatest public health threat to communities of color. GG asserted their self-determination in fighting pandemics on multiple fronts. Ignoring Eurocentric recommendations to stay inside, they "took it to the streets." Together with BLM protestors, GG used their talents and resources to represent their individual experiences with racism as evidence of the particular forms of oppression Black men experience in relationship with US American police. GG co-founder Jon Gray explains his relationship with the police:

> When I was going to Truman High School, I had to go through metal detectors. They had a precinct within the school. So, it was this constant state of surveillance and policing. And when I left school, I had to deal with stop and frisk. Before I turned 25, I was probably harassed and arrested by police more than 15 times. (quoted in Cooper).

Gray then connected his and his family's hardships with the violence experienced by communities of color. He exclaimed, "They see that even during a lockdown, they're [the police] still killing us" (quoted in Cooper).

GG reclaimed public space using a hip-hop style of improvisation during their pop-up for BLM. In 2020, GG reclaimed the streets of New York as a place to nourish public discourse about anti-Black racism and how it compounded in the pandemic. GG helped organize getting food trucks to a public demonstration where thousands of people willfully violated COVID-19 regulations, which banned citizens from using their streets for anything other than essential services. Public health professionals weighed the negative impacts of quarantine and isolation against the danger of spikes in COVID-19 transmission. Leaders around the world made the call to close streets and other public places of political discussion for the safety of communities. Prior to Floyd's death, media coverage of the pandemic focused on the need for social distancing over social progress, focusing on the hundreds of thousands of lives tragically lost to COVID-19 to the exclusion of discourse about the public health impacts of police violence in Black communities. As BLM protests ramped up, conservative pundits framed the demonstrations as hypocritical (Watson). Conservatives implied protestors were morally confused, supposing that a concern for public health measures was at odds with first amendment rights, including the freedom to assemble. Many seemed unaware of the hypocrisy written into their own jests. Nevertheless, media coverage paid little mind to the intersectional experience of being Black and staying at home during a global health crisis.

Ignoring shouts of hypocrisy, GG improvised. The PCIs choice to feed protestors demonstrates a fused food and hip-hop activism. GG improvised their response to BLM protests like a good DJ spins records. DJ's and PCIs alike access the rhetorical topoi in the Bronx and nearby historically impoverished neighborhoods, like Brooklyn and Greenwich Village, and embody the history of resistance that has kept Afrocentric cultures alive in the greater New York area. Hip-hop artists have used street corners, public parks, cultural technologies, and the history of African American and Latinx persons in New York as rhetorical resources for Afrocentric messages since the late 1970s (Knight; Naison). They used what they had available to them locally to develop a genre that has dominated popular music ever since, preventing the Bronx culture from being burned down and swept up for a check. From the ashes of disaster, hip-hop artists cemented Afrocentric sounds and performances at the center of popular culture.

Similarly, GG's flexibility allowed them to change their plan of action as the rhetorical exigence shifted. The collective responded to an audience hungry for overdue representation of the real public health inequalities that COVID-19 amplified for low-income communities. GG's hip-hop style and rhetorical improvisation further emphasized that issues of police violence and food injustice were each significant and urgent contributors to maintaining racism. GG shifted the resources and community partnerships they had already established to respond and "make do," with the call to protest yet another grievous assault on a Black man trying to survive in a community experiencing food apartheid and police violence. They did so fully masked and while meticulously following public health recommendations to the extent possible during a lawful assembly. GG's performative pop-up events activated an Afrocentric PCI rhetoric that w(reckoned) with dual pandemic discourses.

Food is a Weapon: (W)reckoning Popular Politics of Value

Beyond pop-up events, the strategic marketing of GG's limited-edition t-shirts functions as Afrocentric PCI rhetoric. Western society historically maintains social and political control over meanings that construct economic and cultural values around food products, methods, and materials (Appadurai). Consumer products play a role in perpetuating the dominance of social hierarchies around whiteness within food cultures and systems (Appadurai). Black and African representations, culinary knowledge, and foodways have largely been undervalued, ignored, and dismissed under the guise of popular white consumer culture of food (Vats). However, Appadurai reminds us, "Consumption is subject to social control and political redefinition" (5). GG shows how consumer culture can operate in resistance to such dominance. GG utilizes food and hip-hop topoi selling their limited-edition t-shirts for public consumption through strategies of making do and appropriation to reclaim Black and African representation in popular food culture and give back to low-income communities in the Bronx.

GG's marketing of limited-edition t-shirts appropriates norms of the streetwear industry. Streetwear is a popular genre of fashion within consumer culture. Companies like Supreme, Palace, and Adidas sell "limited edition" clothing at a high price and profit from the "authenticity" of urban street culture and style (Pham). Streetwear also has an intimate relationship with hip-hop culture. Yet, streetwear is often marketed as a "luxury product" in the fashion industry and

perpetuates racist and classist taste hierarchies wherein only elite groups of people can afford to purchase such products (Mull). Many streetwear companies also engage in the unconscious cultural appropriation of street culture. Hip-hop style for one, draws from expressions predominantly shaped by urban communities of color resisting standardized whiteness of conventional dress (Morgado; Mull).

GG (w)reckons and appropriates the generalized marketing strategies of streetwear companies through promotions of their limited edition "Food is a Weapon" t-shirt. At $77, GG's t-shirt expresses Afrocentrism and draws from food and hip-hop topoi to reclaim the representation and value of Black and African identities in popular food culture. Unlike most streetwear companies that absorb a majority of the profits from these sales, 100% of the revenue made from GG's products are distributed to local nonprofits working to aid communities in the Bronx experiencing food insecurity. Appropriating a white dominant capitalist system, GG's limited-edition t-shirts flip the script of companies extracting profit from histories of cultural exploitation among Black and African communities and culture. GG reclaims value to Black and African representations and people whitewashed in popular food culture through their marketing. GG's "Food is a Weapon" t-shirt functions as topoi because it operates as a symbolic and material resource that makes arguments about issues occurring in low-income urban areas amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

GG co-founder Jon Gray explains "Food is a Weapon" contains a double meaning – "just as food can be used as a mechanism of oppression, it also serves as a platform of empowerment" (Parham). Double meanings are a common feature of Afrocentric rhetoric, communicating resistance through "signifyin'." Signifyin' is a form of wordplay that communicates Black and African lived experiences and localized meanings to subvert dominant narratives of culture controlled by Whiteness (Gates; Brooks). Signifyin' manipulates "the gap" between denotative and connotative meanings of words, directing audiences to their connotative, context-bound meaning (Gates). Signifyin' reflects both tactics of appropriation and reclamation because it uses oppressors' syntax to disguise messages so they are only decodable by minority audiences in the know (Gates). GG's "Food is a Weapon" t-shirt employs signifyin' as wordplay drawing from symbolic Afrocentric food and hip-hop topoi through the materialism of a t-shirt as an activist message against racism, xenophobia, and food insecurity experienced in the Bronx.

The phrase "Food Is a Weapon" draws attention to the larger context of food insecurity among low-income communities of color as a signifyin' message. As

food and hip-hop topoi, the shirt articulates how food has been a 'weapon' of oppression among low-income urban communities like those in the Bronx. The Bronx is home to Hunts Point, the world's largest food distribution center profiting $2 billion annually (Tishgart, 2017). While supplying over 23,000 restaurateurs, residents still lack access to quality food indicating a lack of distribution and infrastructure for quality food in the Bronx (Tishgart, 2017). Even though these statistics are not communicated directly on the "Food is a Weapon" t-shirt, people who know or have witnessed and experienced food insecurity in the Bronx or in places like it, understand the meaning of "Food is a Weapon" as a call to action.

This message is further contextualized and reinforced on GG's online shop portal for the "Food is a Weapon" shirt. Co-founders Jon Gray and Pierre Serrao are depicted modeling the t-shirt with Gray holding up a fist symbolic of the Black Power Movement. These images are supplemented by the following caption:

> Access to food is and has been a race issue. Underserved areas historically exist as areas of food apartheid. We don't use the term food deserts because that implies a natural occurrence of some sort. This shit is anything but natural, but much like public lynching of Black people it is as American as apple pie. Food for thought. You do the dishes. (ghettogastro.com)

The marketing of GG's t-shirt uses food and hip-hop topoi to communicate and historicize how Black and African foodways have been appropriated and erased by white supremacy. While people might be attracted to the t-shirt's "limited edition" exclusiveness, they are confronted with a message of Afrocentric activism when they purchase the shirt online. This message suggests if you are a consumer and enjoy the fashion, style, and message of the "Food is a Weapon" t-shirt, you should also understand the context of Black, African, and Indigenous labor and exploitation embedded within larger food culture itself. GG's shirt makes the argument that purchasing this shirt is more than simply purchasing something fashionable; a purchase is an action supporting their anti-racist food-based activism. Furthermore, it educates consumers about the influence of Black and African foodways in American cuisine erased, uprooted, and silenced by histories of colonialism and Eurocentric privilege that still impact communities of color today. As a signifyin' double message, GG's "Food is a Weapon" t-shirt appropriates a marketing strategy used by streetwear companies to exploit consumer attitudes and habits of purchasing luxury items to reclaim Black and African representation in food culture.

The “Food is a Weapon” t-shirt simultaneously communicates that food is also a tool of empowerment. The materialism of the t-shirt is designed in a red, black, and green color pattern, representative of the colors of the Pan-African flag, a symbol of global Black Power Movements. The Pan-African colors and the “Food is a Weapon” message printed across the front of the shirt echoes back to Black Power Civil Rights era activism that fought against intersecting issues of food insecurity through a “making do” ethos. One of the most successful programs addressing food insecurity and injustice was the “Free Breakfast for Children Program” organized by Black Panther leaders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale (Milkman). Echoing these “making do” tactics of the Black Power Movement, GG uses the “Food is a Weapon” shirt as a form of empowerment beyond symbolic representations and into Afrocentric practice giving 100% of the profits to local nonprofits attending to intersecting issues of racism, xenophobia, and food insecurity in the Bronx. GG navigates racist and xenophobic food systems providing capital from “Food is a Weapon” profits to feed food-insecure communities in the Bronx. Rather than relying on white-dominated food systems and institutions that have historically failed to attend to these issues, GG makes do with this situation enacting Afrocentric (w)reckoning to create their own forms of change toward food insecurity in low-income communities of color. Using the signifyin’ through the “Food is a Weapon” message to market their t-shirts, their marketing strategy embraces “Robinhood-like” tactics using affluence of people who purchase the shirt to give back to low-income communities experiencing food insecurity in the Bronx (Tishgart).

The “Food is a Weapon” t-shirt functions as Afrocentric PCI (w)reckoning through strategies of making do, appropriation, and reclamation. GG’s marketing strategy sets a high price for Black-owned products reclaiming their value in popular food culture. The dominance of whiteness in food culture has created racial inequity. High-end restaurants and top-tier cooking products owned and operated by white people charge expensive prices because they are considered “professional” or “high quality.” Meanwhile, food products and materials created by people of color are expected to be cheap and affordable when equal, if not more, intellectual effort was put into those products. When GG’s streetwear is purchased and worn by consumers, it spreads arguments that food has been used as a “weapon” of oppression and empowerment among Black and African communities. Embedding Afrocentric PCI activist messages within the materialism of consumer culture, GG enacts (w)reckoning to reclaim Afrocentric representations in popular

culture, while giving back to low-income communities in need deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic rather than exploiting them for profit.

Conclusion

PCIs have always been civic-minded, prone to using their social prestige to spread critical messages about food justice. Amid multiple pandemics, GG shows that PCIs must remain flexible, ready to improvise or respond to communities' shifting needs. PCIs cannot afford to focus on single-issue politics. They reclaim public spaces to debate Afrocentric politics, improve foodways, reframe public health discourse, appropriate hip-hop marketing styles, reinvest their profits in the Bronx, and educate on Afrocentric causes like food justice and racial equality. PCIs can access the rhetorical topoi built by the communities they intend to uplift. Accessing local topoi to address issues of racism with Afrocentric rhetoric allows PCIs to craft messages specific to their audiences and "make do" with the rhetorical resources at hand.

Our study contributes to research on rhetorical topoi and the spatial characteristics of rhetorical persuasion. Space and place scholars acknowledge that arguments are specific to the places they originate (Dickinson). It follows that the Bronx must contend with intersectional, compounding oppressions of food inequities and racist violence. GG's Bronx-based Afrocentric PCI rhetoric is multifaceted, replete with examples of "making do," and expanded by hip-hop performance and marketing strategies. We suggest topoi that construct rhetorical arguments about food justice are equally as specific and located. Our analysis focuses on only one collective as a case study in PCI rhetoric, leaving need for many focused analyses of PCI rhetoric grounded in the emplaced politics of communities. Space and place scholars can develop understandings of the particularity of PCI discourse by asking a series of related questions. Because we are advocating communication analysis grounded in the politics of place, we believe that pop culture studies can flourish considering questions like what topoi are accessible to PCIs for making arguments for food justice in other major cities, in rural areas, globally, or in exclusively online spaces?

Our analysis also contributes to communication research interested in possibilities for disrupting white supremacy. We demonstrate how Afrocentric topoi flatten hierarchies between the dual pandemics of racism and COVID-19. We show how GG skillfully appropriates the capitalist mechanisms of marketing and

distributing hip-hop streetwear to reclaim the material resources. Our analysis suggests that accessing local topoi and incorporating the rhetorical styles of other types of public intellectuals like musicians and performance artists creates dynamic opportunities for PCIs and can (w)reckon hegemonic systems of Whiteness.

Finally, our analysis of GG's PCI rhetoric shows that food and hip-hop convey a critical edge in Afrocentric politics. Moreover, culinary discourse is enriched with other discourses related to arts and culture. We explore hip-hop as an example of an additional intellectual discourse that pairs well with Afrocentric food rhetoric. We acknowledge that other arts and cultural rhetorics might similarly expand the role of PCIs in popular culture. PCIs can team up with political leaders, community organizers, academics, visual artists, and other social influencers to expand their ability to create more equitable foodways.

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