Sarah Pike: Thank you all for your patience and with our technical difficulties. And we're really pleased to have everybody here, so thanks for coming to this wonderful event. I'm Sarah Pike, I'm director of the Humanities Center here at Chico State. And the Humanity Center theme this year is "Revolutions." I was really pleased when [inaudible] topic of revolution. So I'm [inaudible]. She's going to be introduced by her colleague, Rob, from the English Department.

Rob: Dr. Tracy Butts, also known as Dr. Tracy F. Baby, received the Bachelor of Arts in literal arts and sciences, masters of art in English, and from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and a doctorate in English from the University of Georgia. An associate professor in English, she teaches courses in Africa-American, American, American Multicultural and Women's Literature. She's published articles on African-American literature and given several presentations on American Studies and diversity issues at national conferences and forums. Her interests include Black women writers, about feminist and women in theory, contemporary American literature, and her current research uses hip-hop culture as a in 19th Century African-American literature, including Phyllis Wheatley's poems on various subjects, Frederick Douglas's narrative of the life of the American slave, and Harriet Jacobs's instance in life as a slave girls. Prior to becoming the university's chief diversity officer, she served as the director for the Center of Multicultural and Gender Studies. She's also one of the most lively and warm presences in the English Department. Please welcome Dr. Tracy Butts.
Dr. Tracy Butts: Thank you very much. Hey, you did well with the “F. baby”. When I asked Rob to introduce me as Dr. Tracy F. Baby, "Please say the 'baby'," he was like, "Do you literally mean, "Say 'the baby,'" and I was like, "Yes. I want you to say it." I was like, "Some people will get it." And so I heard chuckle, so, you know. My colleague, Vicky Bess, sent me an email today, you know, I guess it's only fitting that today is Lil Wayne's birthday, you know, since we're channeling Lil Wayne. The title of my talk is I wanted to write a poem that rhymes, but revolution doesn't lend itself to hip-hopping. So my paper takes its title from the opening stands of Nikki Giovanni's poem: “For Sandra”.
Published in 1968 during the Black Arts Movement, “For Sandra” reads: I wanted to write a poem that rhymes, but revolution doesn't lend itself to be-bopping. Then my neighbor who thinks I hate asked, "Do you ever write tree poems?" I like trees so I thought, "I'll write a beautiful green tree poem." Peeped from my window to check the image,
noticed the schoolyard was covered with asphalt, no green, no trees grow in Manhattan. Then well I thought, "The sky; I'll do a big blue sky poem." But all the clouds have winged low since no-Dick was elected. So I thought again, and it occurred to me, "Maybe I shouldn't write at all,
but clean my gun and check my kerosene supply. Perhaps these are not poetic times at all." Giovanni's poem simultaneously gives voice to the militancy of the Black Arts Movement. Maybe I shouldn't write at all, but clean my gun and check my kerosene supply. And the speakers feared that these were not poetic times at all; that poetry is an ineffective means of waging a revolution. Of Black poetry early in her career, Giovanni, who recorded 5 albums in the 1970s has more recently been credited by hip-hop scholar, Mark Anthony Neal as being, along with the late Gil Scott-Heron in the last poets, a godparent of hip-hop. The poem's existence suggests that ultimately both Giovanni and the speaker do believe in the power of the words to bring about widespread change. Giovanni’s “For Sandra”, along with Amiri Baraka's poem, "Black Art".
Published in 1969, both outlined the Black artistic esthetic that would define much of the portrait of Black Arts Movement, and would also prove influential in shaping hip-hop culture, particularly Black rap music. And I want to stop here just to make a little interjection. I want to talk about hip-hop. I'm referring to hip-hop as a cultural movement. There's a larger cultural movement. And when I talk about rap music, I'm talking about it as being one of the cultural elements of hip-hop. A lot of times people will use rap and hip-hop interchangeably, or some people will argue that hip-hop refers to rap music that is conscious, and rap refers to rap music that is not quite so conscious. And I want to move us away from that way of thinking, because I think in some respects we do hip-hop culture a disservice when we reduce it to just being about rap music. If you think about hip-hop, it's a larger cultural movement, it influences not just the kinds of music that we listen to or the way we dance, but the things we buy, the way we talk, the kinds of ideologies that we embrace or that we espouse. So when I talk about hip-hop I'm talking about the larger cultural movement. And I'll use examples from hip-hop culture, and then I'll use specific examples from rap music as well. Often cited as the founder of the Black Arts Movement, which began in 1965 in Harlem in New York, Baraka's Black art reads as follows:
Poems are bullshit unless they are teeth or trees or lemons piled on a step. Or Black ladies dying of men leaving nickel hearts beating them down. Fuck poems and they are useful. Would they shoot, come at you, love what you are, breathe like wrestlers, or shutter strangely after pissing. We want live words of the hip world, live flesh &
and coursing blood. Hearts, brains, souls splintering fire. We want poems like fists beating niggers out of Jocks or dagger points in the slimy bellies of the owner-Jews. Black poems to smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches whose brains are red jelly stuck between "lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking Whores! We want "poems that kill." Assassin poems, poems that shoot guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
and take their weapons, leaving them dead with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland. Knockoff poems for dope selling, wops or slick half-White politicians. Airplane poems where [makes sounds] setting fire and death to whities ass. Look at the liberal Spokesman for the Jews clutch his throat & puke himself into eternity . . . rrrrrrrr There’s a negroleader pinned to a bar stool in Sardi’s eyeballs melting
Another Negro leader on the steps of the White House, one kneeling between the sheriff’s thighs negotiating coolly for his people. Aggh...stumbles across the room...
Put it on him, poem. Strip him naked to the world! Another bad poem cracking steel knuckles in a Jew lady’s mouth.
Poem scream poison gas on beasts in green berets.
Clean out the world for virtue and love.
Let there be no love poems written until love.
can exist freely and cleanly. Let Black people understand that they are the lovers and the sons of warriors and sons of warriors are poems and poets and all the loveliness here in the world. We want a Black poem and a Black World. Let the world be a Black Poem And Let All Black People Speak This Poem
silently or loud. Both Giovanni and Baraka eschew art simply for art’s sake, arguing instead that art should do something, like spark a revolution. Black art needs to reflect the social, economic, political and physical realities of one’s life and surroundings. Realization dies on the speaker when the environment is at odds with the natural world. It lacks trees, and as a result of the politics, both domestic and international, of no-Dick, President Richard Nixon, it lacks an unobstructed view of the sky. Consequently, Giovanni feels herself trapped in the concrete jungle. According to Baraka, poems are bullshit, unless they bite, effect, break your heart, gives you release, cause you to grapple or wrestle with them, or of the controversial issues, exposed you to the world, and in turn reveals to the world the true beauty of Blacks. Baraka wanted concrete images in his poems so that Black readers would recognize themselves and be inspired to revolt against their circumstances. And by its very nature.
Hip-hop is revolutionary. The genesis of hip-hop coincides with the waning years of the Black Arts Movement. According to legend, hip-hop sprang into being on August 11, 1973 at a house party hosted by DJ [inaudible] and his sister in the Bronx, New York. And scholars generally cite 1975 as the end of the Black Arts Movement. DJ [inaudible] had performed the groundbreaking art form of the merry-go-round, playing the same 2 records, isolated in the funkiest percussion sections, extending those 5-second break beats into 5 minutes of dance theory. He taps his Jamaican roots where island DJs at yard parties would toast individuals. [Inaudible] the mikes moved the original Bronx house party crowd with shout-outs over the records, which began the element. Just as that party in 1973 was one of necessity, so too was the larger hip-hop movement. Many of hip-hops founders came of age at the tail end of President Lyndon B. Johnson's great society programs, which were domestic social reform programs suggesting issues in education, medical care, urban problems and transportation, designed to alleviate poverty and racial injustice. With his loss of federal funding, working class residents were left with limited affordable housing, a shrinking job market, and diminishing social services. The poorest neighborhoods and the least powerful groups were the least protected, and had the smallest safety nets. In 1975, New York State was experiencing a financial crisis. According to Tricia Rose, author of "Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America," virtually bankrupt and in a critical state of disrepair, New York City and New York State administrators finally negotiated a federal loan, albeit one the company buying elaborate package of service cuts, and that carried harsh repayment times.
Before the crisis ended, Daniel Wokovitz notes, 60,000 city employees went off the payroll, and a social and public program suffered drastic cuts. The city had avoided default only after the Teachers Union allowed this teachers' fund to become collateral for city loans. These deep social service cuts were part of a larger trend in unequal wealth distribution, and was accompanied by a housing crisis that continued well into the 1980s. Between 1978 and 1986, the people in the bottom 20% of the income scale experienced an absolute decline in income, whereas the top 20% experienced most of the economic growth. Blacks and Hispanics disproportionately occupied this bottom 5th. Seems a little like déjà vu, doesn't it? To paraphrase Rose, hip-hop transformed straight technological parts intended for cultural and industrial. And took sources of pleasure and power and welded and sliced them together with those abandoned user services to create not only a means of survival, but also a source of pleasure and entertainment. Nikki Giovanni sums up the matter in her poem, "All Eyes On You," which she dedicated to rapper Tupac Shakur. And the poem speaks to the ingenuity and revolutionary nature of hip-hop. She says, "They took away band, so boys started scratching. They took away jump, so the boys started break-dancing. The boys started rapping because they gave them the guns and the drugs, but not the schools and the libraries. So this is the beginning. Hip-hop culture has refused to capitulate to middle-class values, and ideas of respectability. It has maintained Giovanni's and Baraka's insistence upon telling it like it is. Like its cultural predecessors, those participants in the Black Arts Movement, hip-hoppers are unapologetically bold, brash and in your face, right? And so when we look at some of the rappers, including some early and some later ones.
you see that hip-hop gives voice to issues of poverty, and there I have the lyrics for "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 1982. And, again, I probably should read that to you. The lyrics go: "A child is born with no state of mind, blind to the ways of mankind. God is smiling on you but he's frowning too because only God knows what you'll go through." It's hard to read it without actually, you know, singing it. You'll grow in the ghetto, living second rate and your eyes will sing a song of deep hate. The places you're playing, where you stay looks like one great big alley way. You'll admire all the number book takers, thugs, pimps, pushers and the big money makers driving big cars, spending 20s and 10s. And you want to grow up to be just like them, huh. Smugglers, scramblers, burglars, gamblers,
Pickpockets, peddlers even panhandlers
You say: "I'm cool, I'm no fool!"
But then you wind up dropping out of high school
Now you're unemployed, all non-void
Walking 'round like you're Pretty Boy Floyd
Turned stickup kid, look what you've done did
Got sent up for a eight year bid
Now your manhood is took and you're a may tag
Spend the next two years as a undercover fag
Being used and abused to serve like hell
Till one day you was found hung dead in a cell
It was plain to see that your life was lost
You was cold and your body swung back and forth
But now your eyes sing the sad, sad song
Of how you lived so fast and died so young

pickpockets, peddlers even panhandlers. You say, 'I'm cool, I'm no fool.' But then you wind up dropping out of high school. Now you're unemployed, all non-void, walking around like you're Pretty Boy Floyd. Turned stickup kid, look what you've done did, got sent up for an eight year bid. Now your manhood is took and you're a may tag, spend the next two years as a undercover fag. Being used and abused to serve like hell until one day you was found hung dead in a cell. It was plain to see that your life was lost. You was cold and your body swung back and forth. But now your eyes sing the sad, sad song of how you lived so fast and died so young.
Don't push me because I'm close to the edge I'm trying not to lose my head. It's like a jungle sometimes," right? Well, you know, what's interesting is that for me the message is going to be one of the first songs to give voice to the feelings of hopelessness and despair that many were feeling at that time. And so it really becomes a voice for disaffected and in many ways marginalized community of people.
My next song N.W.A.'s "Fuck the Police." Rap music also gave voice to issues of police brutality. "Fuck the Police" coming straight from the underground. You know, "A nigger got it bad because I'm brown," and not the other color so police think they have the authority to kill a minority. Fuck that shit, because I'm not the one for a punk mother fucker with a badge and a gun to be beating on, and throwing in jail. We could go toe to toe in the middle of a cell."
Rap music gave voice to issues of racial profiling, right; Jay-Z's "99 Problems" from 2004. "The year is '94 and my trunk is raw. In my rearview mirror is the motherfucking law. I got two choices, you all, pull the over car hmm, bounce on the double put the pedal to the pedal." And I'm not trying to see no highway chase with Jake. Plus I've got a few dollars. I can fight the case. So I pull over to the side of the road. 'Son do you know why I'm stopping you for?' 'Because I'm young and I'm black and my hats real low? Or do I look like a mind reader sir, I don't know. Am I under arrest or should I guess some more? 'Well you was doin fifty-five in the fifty-four;" Kanye West "All Falls Down" We shine because they hate us, floss cause they degrade us We trying to buy back our 40 acres And for that paper, look how low we a'stop Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigger in a Coop. Could we move forward again?
But hip-hop culture also addressed some of the issues that it saw in its own community, like issues of Black-on-Black crime, or gang violence. Here are the lyrics to "Self-Destruction" by the Stop the Violence Movement. This is the part of the rap by D-Nice. "It's time to stand together in a unity, because if not then we're soon to be self-deployed --" and, you know, I memorized this song. I think it was like '88 or '89 and I remember memorizing all the words. You know, "Self-destroyed, unemployed, the rap race will be lost without a trace, or a clue of what to do." So, "And stop the violence and kick the silence down the road that we call eternity, where knowledge is formed and you learn to be self-sufficient, independent. To teach to each is what rap intended, but society wants to invade, so do not, whatever, the trap that they laid. Self-destruction, that's where you're headed."
Cash out "Cashing Out," we get again this refusal to buy into sort of middle-class ideas and values. And so when we look at something, "I've got a condo on my wrist girl, I'm cashing out. Got a condo around my neck, I'm cashing out," you know, our first instinct is to say, "This is absolutely ridiculous. You know, you're wasting your money on, and then you're wearing it, whereby anybody can come and take it." But if we consider the current real estate market, and the current, you know, stock market, in some respects the way to go would have been to put your money in jewelry and put it on your neck and your wrist, right, given how things are standing. If we can move to the next slide. Perhaps one of the move revolutionary aspects of hip-hop culture is its expression and celebration of Black love, Black pride and Black beauty. This open expression of Black love, which Nikki Giovanni equates with Black wealth, was not openly celebrated in the ways in which it is during the Black Arts Movement and in hip-hop.
And so if we look at something like India.Arie’s “Brown Skin”:

“Skin so brown, lips so round, baby how can I be down? Beautiful mahogany, you make me feel like a queen. Tell me what’s that thing you do that makes me wanna get next to you, yeah. Brown skin, you know I love your brown skin. I can’t tell where yours begins, I can’t tell where mine ends. Brown skin, up against my brown skin. Need some every now and then: oh hey.”

**Dr. Tracy Butts:** Thank you. And so this is just the lyrics and the expression of Black love, something that we don’t often get. And even now, 2012, this notion of this sort of Black love is not one that we often see being perpetuated in the media.
I want us to look a little bit at this clip by Jaheim, song "Fabulousness" -- "Fabulous." I added some stuff to it. You can see, you know, this video someone recorded from MTV. But if you think about the message that gets portrayed in the video, and even the images, the fact that through hip-hop, you know, these types of images are going to go into a number of homes, not just Black homes, right, but homes in the Midwest, all across the nation, where perhaps people may not have much contact or exposure with other Black people, or they may be raised on images of Black -- as other or something violent. But then to have these types of images come into your home and counter those notions becomes really revolutionary in and of itself as well.
And so one of the things that, you know, people have been talking -- saying about hip-hop since its beginning -- and if we think about it, hip-hop is just shy of 40 years old, but since its genesis, you know, its critics have been prognosticating its death. You know, at first it was like it wouldn't last. Then it was like, "Oh, it's going to die." And then it's, "Oh, it is dead." And yet, you know, it continues to exist. But I wanted to take a minute to also have us listen to the slip by this linguist, Dominick Water, for some of my linguistic here.
The more McWater talks, the more it becomes clear that he has a very limited understanding of hip-hop, and even a limited understanding of the Civil Rights Movement, and even grassroots activism. You know, to say that grassroots activism didn't have a beat, I mean, he must have missed the protestors from the Civil Rights Movement, you know, marching to "We Shall Overcome," or "This Little Light of Mine." It may not have been the same beat as what we hear in hip-hop, but it was a beat nonetheless. And it helped set the time and the pave of the Movement. It's also interesting too that one said that hip-hop has never created anything, and that it's really just an excuse for acting up. But it's failure to recognize acting up as a form of rebellion in and of itself. I mean, if we were to talk to people who were critics of the Civil Rights Movement, they would say that those students who were sitting in in protest were acting up. We could tell that he's not a hip-hop person if you look at just this example. He's always giving people feelings of outcast [phonetic]. Right? And people are listening to Tupac. You know, I mean, Tupac's been dead, what, a decade? Right; and so he's sort of stuck in this time warp. And what you could see is that he has firmly embraced this notion of middle-class respectability. And he wants to enforce that notion of middle-class respectability on, you know, young Blacks, Latinos, and the White students who are revolting in their own way.
So what we see what McWater is this sort of longing for and is romanticizing of, let's say the Civil Rights Movement, of King's dreams. Because one of the things that McWater talks about is just how, you know, he has been able to achieve certain things because of the dream. Well, part of me suspects if you slide us forward a couple of times -- and this is a mural here in Chico. I've never seen it personally, but I hear that it's here in Chico. Near your house?
And this is another mural of King's dream, but this one is in Australia.
By the end of King's life he was starting to rethink his position. Right; he was looking for ways to expand the Movement. And this is a picture from the Poor Peoples' Campaign March in 1968. Right; King recognized that maybe race wasn't the only way to go about seeking equality, that we had to look at some other things. We had to get some other groups and other voices involved. Unfortunately, his life was cut short. The thing about hip-hop is that it has the potential to do what no other movement has done in this country. It has the potential to link causes in a way that we've never been able to do.
so as I mentioned, that King's dream still needs to be fulfilled. I suspect that if King were alive he would be attempting to modify that dream; because although integration came with benefits, it also came at tremendous cost for the Black community. If you think about the ways in which the Black community has suffered as a result; the kin networks and the bonds that it lost as a result of desegregation.
So the sag; part of me thinks that as soon as we get over the fascination with the sag, that we will actually be able to have the sort of global revolution that hip-hop is moving towards. But I want to say that the sag is representative of revolt in a number of ways. I mean, in its most literal sense when we see it, you know, most of us are revolted by the notion of it. But if we think about it as a pushback against these understandings of respectability, of decency, or what have you, this desire to wear your pants down is about snubbing your nose at convention and at society. You know, it's revolt in its most purest form. What's also interesting is that if you look at the picture on the bottom left, where grandma says, "Pull them up," you notice that there's a Black grandmother and a White grandmother, right; which suggests that the sagging is not just, you know, a Black issue. And as you could see from the Calvin Klein ad, right, even Klein wanted to show a little bit of sag to see a little underwear, right? Well, part of what I think happens is that as other groups tend to sag, the Black sag gets lower in response. And so you see from the person at the top left it's not enough to sag in one pair, he has to sag two pair of pants all at one time. And the guy at the counter, I don't know what he's doing. But, you know, and then if you think about the way in which sag has come to represent a threat, I mean even if I didn't see it as a revolt, to the point that Flint, Michigan now has a crackdown on indecency. Right; you get a warning if we could see your underwear. Right; if your underwear -- if your pants are down under your butt you get a disorderly conduct, and something could happen, and you can possibly face jail time. And if they see underwear and cracks, right, that's indecent exposure. Right? I think as soon as the pants come all the way down, the guys are just walking out in the street in underwear, we can be ready for revolution. So we should stop fussing about the sags probably.
Recently, Jay-Z and Beyonce have come under criticism, under fire by Harry Belafonte, who says they're not living up to their sense of social responsibility, especially considering the amount of celebrity that they carry. And you know what I find interesting is that Jay-Z and Kanye West's "Watch The Throne" is perhaps their most political work to date.
There's a song on the CD called "We Made It In America." And the opening refrain of the song pays homage to some of the central figures in the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King, Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz. And it also connects them with Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in casting the Kings and the Shabazz's alongside of Mother Mary, Father Joseph and Sweet Baby Jesus. Jay-Z and Kanye are aligning the activism of the Civil Rights Movement with the religion of the Black community. And they're making assertion that Blacks made in America through sort of amalgamation of activism and religion. And part of the Jay-Z course of the song reads, "We made it in America, sweet Baby Jesus, oh sweet Baby Jesus, we made it in America. I pledge allegiance to my grandma for the banana pudding, our piece of Americana. Our apple pie was supplied through Arm & Hammer, straight out of the kitchen. Shh, don't wake Nana. Built a republic that still stands. And trying to lead a nation to lead to my little man's or my daughter. So I'm boiling this water. The scales was lopsided. I'm just restoring order. Hold up, here comes grandma, what's up Yiayia? What's that smell? Oh, I'm just boiling some agua. No papa, bad Santa. The streets raise me. Pardon my bad manners. I got my liberty chopping grams up. Sweet justice, I pray God understand us. I pledge allegiance to all the scramblers. This is the 'Star Spangled Banner.'" What Jay-Z is doing is making a play on we made it in America, this notion that Jay-Z and Kanye West are products of America. And like his grandmother, Jay-Z also supported his family through his fields in the kitchen cooking up some things. His grandmother threw her apple pies in, and banana pudding, and Jay threw the drugs that he cooked up.
What this gives us is a narrative on Black unemployment and underemployment, and the assertion that they’re as much a part of Americana as our apple pie and baseball. And it’s also interesting to note the play on Americana, and the corruption of America and cocaine, which ultimately suggests that the drug war was also manufactured here in America. And then again we get this other notion of made it in America as in to pull one's self up one's bootstrap. And we see that for Jay in the sense that he’s going from being a hustler to a multimillionaire and CEO of a company, which perfectly underscores his claims that he did in fact make it here. One of the things that's interesting is that this album allows us to see, in some respects, the form of a corporate takeover, right? For Jay-Z and Kanye West, it's not just enough for King's dream to come true in the sense of little Black boys and little Black girls holding hands with little White boys and little White girls enjoying each other at their table of fellowship. They want to own the table. And they want to own the table in a way of redistributing that wealth because they recognize that the scales of justice have been unbalanced. And this is attempt to, at the very least, double those scales, or to at least gain some more for themselves in there. I was looking today -- and there's this video for "No Church in the Wild," which is also on the "Watch The Throne" CD.
And I was noticing that there's an official video, which is this one which is set in 1862.

Link to Video in Presentation

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVDrxqZ5w3I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVDrxqZ5w3I)
This is the official video of “No Church in the Wild”.

• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJt7gNi3N r4
This video is Talib Kweli’s “Papers Please.” And what we see is Kweli taking a stance on the anti-immigration reform in Arizona. One of the first times that we're now -- see normally when we hear conversation about immigration, what we're told is that, you know, Blacks who feel that, you know, illegal immigrants or undocumented workers are coming here to this country and taking our jobs. This video is pushing back against this notion. Right?

Link to Video in Presentation

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnKiC2sKqE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnKiC2sKqE)
The next video we're not going to look at, it was just a video of this artist, Wendell, in which he passed himself as a roadrunner, and in this video he's helping to lead a group of undocumented people across the border in this video. He's located in Arizona, and so part of what he's doing is aligning his particular cause or taking a stance against Arizona's anti-immigration bill. If we scoot forward I think. So this is the one I want to skip; and if we go to the next one. Arabic hip-hop has become significant in terms of influencing the Arab Spring. And the other morning as I was getting dressed, Mitt Romney was speaking to the UN, and he was talking about this, but not so much this. He was talking about how -- the young man, the 26-year-old vendor who set himself on fire in protest of his inability to find work and to be able to take care of his family. And Romney was saying that, you know, what we need to do is we need to give people more work. All right; work helps to cut down on corruption. You can't have corruption if you're working. [Laughter] We're not going to talk about Enron, or Bank of America, or any of those people. But I wanted us to see this video, because in some respects what this video does is it counters McWater's notion that the revolution is not going to occur with a fist raised in the air.