

**“Yea. I’m in my hood. No strap”: Black Child Play as Praxis & Community Sustenance**

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2021

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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2021

# **“Yea. I’m in my hood. No strap”: Black Child Play as Praxis & Community Sustenance**

Ariana Denise Brazier, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2021

Based on three summers of intensive ethnographic research inside an Atlanta school cluster and neighborhood community, this dissertation analyzes the intersection of Black child play and protest in order to illuminate the way their play and joy are methods of developing and channeling collective responses to their everyday experiences of institutional anti-Blackness and intergenerational oppression. I consider how Black child play and Black joy are reflective of a relationship between ratchet, a term commonly used to define the precarious and fluid realities of poor and working class Blacks, and womanism, a community-oriented form of Black feminism situated within the everyday. More specifically, I forward a ratchet womanist lens to frame how Black child play sources the radically visionary/imaginative, self-sufficient, and community-oriented aspects of womanism in a politics of the body existing under state-sanctioned deprivation that normalizes the conditions of the Black Ghetto. The connection to our bodies is critical to human survival—ratchet is the practicing and conditioning of our bodies to intend towards creative, subversive, and sustainable usage especially in the presence of overwhelming struggle. Hence, a ratchet womanist lens compels us to examine how Black children come to know and be known by their larger communities, and the ways this knowledge informs their self- and social consciousness. Simultaneously, we must imagine how we—people who are not Black children—can live in such a way that Black children can own lovingly their Black child bodies.

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PREVIEW

## Acknowledgements

To my Mama and co-conspirator—Julia I. Brazier—who has instilled me in the value of play as cultural labor, the survival in freedom dreaming, and the communicative capacities of hugs, and to my Dad and coach—Captain Dean A. Brazier, USN (Ret.), 1956–2019—who always instructed me to “practice like you play.” I have cultivated play as my practice, and so, I know I’ve made you proud, Dad. Thank you both for your incredible love, visionary sacrifice, my brothers, and your own uninhibited laughter.

To my love and best friend—Frank Kamara—thank you for making me braver than I ever imagined and laugh louder than the world could possibly handle.

To my brothers, my backbone—Dean A. Brazier, Jr. (TJ), Sean A. Brazier, and Ryan J. Brazier—thank you for keeping me grounded, holding me together, and giving me more reasons to stand taller each day. Oh, and thank you for the games, jokes, and competition that remind me to never really grow up.

To my little sister-cousin—Kamryn Days—our relationship is the truth I’ll always need and our every moment together is an inspiration.

To the Mamas and Aunties, *my* Big sisters and Friends in the Thomasville community—Intiasar Frankson (Ms. Z), Monique Reed, Kimberly Dukes, and TyTy—thank you for the joy you’ve brought me, the knowledge you’ve taught me, and the family you’ve shared with me. May all of the dreams you dream and harbor for yourself, your children, and communities come true. So many worlds exist because of you.

To my baby boy—Remix—Black joyous freedom is your birthright. Your village has claimed it for you.

## 1.0 pLaY bReAk

August 2017

Hey Sean,

I wanted to take a long moment and thank you for such an amazing summer. From start to finish, this summer was amazing. I am not even sure where to begin. Working with PBSA [Purpose Built Schools Atlanta] was awesome in that I truly believe I have found new family. But working alongside you was just indescribably incredible. To actually witness *every day* the impact you have and continue to have on the lives of so many families made for a profound experience that I know will motivate me throughout the next phase of my life.

So, there is this quote: “The universe has been sliding me love notes in the form of people.” Through you I received many love notes in the form of people and new relationships that I could never have expected would come to mean so much to me. You know how much I love people, and I thought I knew just how much I could love people—but then I met these people and my heart just kept expanding to include all of them too. It is a scary thing to love people as much as I do, but these new relationships have reassured me that I am where I am supposed to be and I am who I am supposed to be. None of this would have been possible without all of the effort and commitment that you’ve poured into *all of the work you have ever done*. Great things happen to great people and through you, PBSA was great to me and countless others.

And of course, I enjoyed our many outings, as well as all of our study and dinner dates. As you should already know, your friendship means so much to me. I am glad God (or the universe, or whatever power you would like to insert here) knew that we would want/need each other throughout our lives, not merely as best friends but as close siblings.

I know that we are two powerful individuals and though I am pretty much always anxious about the future, your example is a constant reminder of my own power. That is reassurance enough. I am proud of you and all that you have accomplished, and I am already proud of all that you will accomplish. The future is lookin bright.

Anyways, I just wanted to thank you and tell you that you’re awesome and tell you that I love you.

## 2.0 Introduction

*“Done effectively through urban regime politics, Atlanta's white kingmakers analyzed the city's black leadership, gathering what blackface they needed....”*

- Maurice Hobson

*“In the spring of 2010, as the school year ended and I began my new job as a counselor, excavators clawed down the sturdy brick walls of Thomasville Heights, home to three victims of the Atlanta child murders, and the last public housing project in Atlanta to be razed. That year, there were five thousand people on [Atlanta Housing Authority's] waiting list for housing vouchers; many of them had been on the list for nine years.”*

- Shani Robinson & Anna Simonton

*“As property values skyrocketed in areas where public housing dwindled and charter schools proliferated, it became clear that whatever varied purposes public education had served over time, in Atlanta it increasingly had a singularly powerful function: to drive the real estate market.”*

- Shani Robinson & Anna Simonton

*“Atlanta is an interesting case for investigating the courses of urban inequality. It is a city that presents a paradox of phenomenal growth in contrast to the unexpected high level of inner-city poverty and economic stagnation, and of a Black mecca in contrast to the unexpected high level of segregation.”*

- Mark Pendergrast

In December 2018, Peachtree-Pine Shelter was forced to close its doors on its last remaining residents and clients after a decades-long political and legal battle with the city of Atlanta. No city-funded alternative had been established in the shelter's place. Legally a shelter for homeless men, it also maintained a section for emergency housing that served women and children in the right wing of the building where the offices were located. On Atlanta's coldest nights, Peachtree-Pine Shelter, managed by the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless, would house over 700 individuals. The emergency shelter was recognized for its policy of accepting just about anyone—those who had been turned away because of occupancy restrictions, lack of

identification or prior registration, or accessibility or health-related needs that other shelters could not accommodate. Mark Pendergrast recounts the shelter's founding:

The Task Force for the Homeless got its start in 1981, after seventeen homeless men died during a cold snap. In 1985, Anita Beaty took over the organization. In the run-up to the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics, she became a vocal advocate for homeless rights, as the city offered free bus tickets to any homeless people who would leave town. The Task Force sued the city over sweeps to clear the streets in which police carried blank arrest papers preprinted with 'African American male' and 'homeless' (116).

While the Peachtree-Pine Shelter had its own exploitative policies entrenched in anti-Blackness, misogyny, and transphobia on both structural and interpersonal levels, it served a critical role as "the emergency relief valve for a system long broken" (Torpy). But in January 2019, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC) announced that Central Atlanta Progress (CAP)<sup>1</sup> had sold the 28,500-square-foot facility for \$6.2 million to Emory University, whose hospital is located conveniently across the street from the shelter building (Stafford).

My short tenure as a volunteer case manager for the Metro Atlanta Taskforce in 2014 was my first introduction to the anti-Black sociopolitical histories of the Black Mecca, i.e. "The Atlanta Way." The Atlanta Way refers to the historic, concealed cooperation between Black elites (political leaders, business owners, etc.) and wealthy white elites that enabled these leaders to

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<sup>1</sup> Their website describes CAP as "a private nonprofit community development organization providing leadership, programs and services to preserve and strengthen the economic vitality of Downtown Atlanta." See: "About CAP." *Atlanta Downtown*, Central Atlanta Progress, [www.atlantadowntown.com/cap](http://www.atlantadowntown.com/cap).

“negotiate incremental advances in racial issues to avoid public protest and preserve the city’s business-friendly image” (Bagby). However, despite over forty years of Black mayors, even the incremental advances remain elusory for the average Black resident of Atlanta, a city that “leads the nation in income inequality and lack of economic mobility. The median household income for a white family in the city is \$83,722, compared to \$28,105 for a Black family” (Donnelly). The shelter served a predominantly Black clientele, while the streets outside its walls were replete with predominantly Black men, women, and nonbinary and teenage sex workers, hustlers, and addicts. According to the narratives shared during their interviews with caseworkers, many of the individuals utilizing the shelter’s services had been forced out of their already decrepit homes due to health concerns related to mold or rat and roach infestations or they had been evicted due to loss of income or the presence of relatives with felony records. The Peachtree-Pine Shelter was considered rock bottom.

During his tenure as Atlanta’s fifth Black mayor, Kasim Reed enacted the Homeless Initiative Registry, Quality of Life ordinances, and panhandling prohibitions, and oversaw the shuttering of the Peachtree-Pine Shelter—decisive policies that criminalized Atlanta’s disproportionately Black homeless and housing-insecure residents and enabled gentrification across the city. Commenting on the simultaneous gentrification of some of Atlanta’s oldest neighborhoods (Summerhill, Mechanicsville, Peoplestown, Pittsburgh, and Grant Park) and the ongoing legal battle to evict the Metro Atlanta Task Force from the building on Peachtree and Pine in 2017, Atlanta grassroots organizer and writer Da’Shaun Harrison posed an urgent query about the unique situation in Atlanta: “It is a wonder, with sixty-seven percent of Atlanta’s council being Black, serving under a Black mayor, why the council (specifically Kwanza Hall) would introduce an ordinance to shut down Peachtree-Pine and build a police precinct in its place.” Harrison later

concludes that “[i]f white supremacy can recruit and weaponize Black American people to advocate for and push its policies, it can undermine the importance of the Black Liberation Movement and create what is ultimately the only and real black-on-black crime.” Atlanta’s legacy of Black leadership<sup>2</sup>—complete with acclaimed titles, degrees from Black institutions, famed net worth, and histories of Civil Rights activism—is frequently perceived, or assumed, to connote solidarity with Black Atlanta. Yet these leaders have become some of capitalism’s principal gatekeepers, employing anti-Black rhetoric and policies that further embolden racist media and news coverage of impoverished communities, which reinforces the perceived urgent need of such policies and rhetoric. This cyclical process preserves elitism, racism, and the exploited role of the subjugated poor.

The city’s sixth Black mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, currently in office, sustains the legacy of The Atlanta Way. She has authorized the criminalization of Atlanta’s water boys,<sup>3</sup> ATV riders,<sup>4</sup> Black Lives Matter activists, and grassroots organizers, and continues to ignore the plight of Black low-income residents, resulting in their displacement from the city’s historically Black neighborhoods. Meanwhile, “[t]he City of Atlanta has an affordable housing crisis” as “Atlanta ranks 5th out of 70 large US cities in the rate of eviction notices per rental homes.” And, “[t]he last time the Atlanta Housing Authority opened its waitlist in 2017, it received 80,000 applications. Only 30,000 made it on the waitlist” (Stokes). The housing crisis has a distinct effect on Atlanta

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<sup>2</sup> Atlanta’s Black elites also include administration of education and higher learning institutions; rappers, musical producers and pop culture icons; as well as historic and/or mega church leaders.

<sup>3</sup> See: Godfrey, Gavin. “The Water Boy’s Hustle.” *Atlanta Magazine*, 16 Oct. 2020, [www.atlantamagazine.com/news-culture-articles/the-water-boys-hustle/](http://www.atlantamagazine.com/news-culture-articles/the-water-boys-hustle/).

<sup>4</sup> See: Keenan, Sean Richard. “Arresting 11, Atlanta Police, State Troopers Crack down on Illegal Dirt Bike and ATV Use.” *Curbed Atlanta*, Vox Media LLC, 10 July 2018, [atlanta.curbed.com/2018/7/10/17552752/police-georgia-state-troopers-dirt-bike-atv](http://atlanta.curbed.com/2018/7/10/17552752/police-georgia-state-troopers-dirt-bike-atv).

Public School (APS) districts’ demographics, funding, and performance ratings as “75% of the nearly 58,634 [students] are Black; 77% have below-average household income” (Mandel).

By 2011, the city that built the nation’s first public housing complexes in the 1930s became the first American city to demolish all its public housing. The proposed plans during the demolition years mirror the plans on the table today: replace the public housing stock with mixed-income developments and affordable housing units. In fact, Bottoms’ mayoral campaign centered affordability for Atlantans, and in mid-2019, her administration released the Housing Affordability Action Plan. According to Dan Immergluck, Professor at Georgia State’s Urban Studies Institute, the plan has some strengths and noteworthy flaws, including the lack of specificity in the label “affordable” as the plan “[fails] to specify that a large portion of public subsidy will go to such low-income residents would mean underserving those who are seriously cost-burdened and most vulnerable to instability, eviction, and displacement.” Immergluck also notes the “vagueness of the actions” and the process going forward: without specified objectives, actionable items, or a viable timeline, residents will not be able to hold Bottoms and her administration accountable effectively.

Nevertheless, efforts facilitated by and on behalf of Atlanta’s Black low- and no-income residents are visible throughout the city, including the 2016 protests to save the Peachtree-Pine Shelter outside the building and inside the Atlanta City Council meetings,<sup>5</sup> 2017 Tent City outside of Turner Field,<sup>6</sup> 2018 protests focused on displacement caused by the Atlanta BeltLine,<sup>7</sup> and 2019

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<sup>5</sup> See: Stokes, Stephannie. “Over Protest, City Council Takes Step To Close Peachtree-Pine.” *90.1 FM WABE*, 4 Oct. 2016, [www.wabe.org/over-protest-city-council-takes-step-close-peachtree-pine/](http://www.wabe.org/over-protest-city-council-takes-step-close-peachtree-pine/).

<sup>6</sup> See: Tatum, Gloria. “TENT CITY AT TURNER FIELD ENTERS DAY NINE, CBA DEMANDED.” *Atlanta Progressive News*, Atlanta Progressive News, 9 Apr. 2017, [atlantaprogressivenews.com/2017/04/09/tent-city-at-turner-field-enters-day-nine-cba-demanded/](http://atlantaprogressivenews.com/2017/04/09/tent-city-at-turner-field-enters-day-nine-cba-demanded/).

<sup>7</sup> See: Staff: “Protesters Target High Atlanta BeltLine Prices Outside Atlanta City Hall.” *11Alive.Com*, WXIA-TV, 20 July 2018, [www.11alive.com/article/news/local/protesters-target-high-atlanta-beltline-prices-outside-atlanta-city-hall/85-576051824](http://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/protesters-target-high-atlanta-beltline-prices-outside-atlanta-city-hall/85-576051824).

sit-ins outside of Keisha Lance Bottoms' office protesting the lack of affordable housing and demanding justice for residents of Peoplestown.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.1 Thomasville and Traplanta**

In the summer of 2018, amidst the aforementioned string of public protests and demonstrations, an organizing effort began to take shape in the Four Seasons neighborhood. Maternal rage over Black male deaths and worsening living conditions erupted at the same time that their demands for the “right-to-return” to the apartments after renovations were seemingly being ignored by The Millennia Companies, the prospective developer working to finalize its purchase of the apartment complex. The collective rage and grief exhibited by these mothers illuminated their constant exposure to “crisis, dislocation, and loss” (Williams 22)—the most wretched manifestations of the afterlife of slavery. The loss was threefold: first, the loss of neighborhood kinship networks from gentrification-induced mass evictions; second, the loss of Black life as their sons were victims of murder due to the complexities of survival economies and imposition of outsiders in unstable territory; and third, the impending loss of the “last option,” as Four Seasons is widely known as the “last projects in Atlanta.” Kimberly Dukes, a former resident, community organizer, and mother of ten, articulated the fear gripping Four Seasons residents as she explained how the violence would worsen due to gentrification: “It's going to get worse

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<sup>8</sup> See: Habersham, Raisa. “Activists, Residents Stage Sit-in Outside Atlanta Mayor's Office.” *Ajc*, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 16 Dec. 2019, [www.ajc.com/news/crime--law/atlanta-loss-affordable-housing-subject-protest/5vFU9clJDdn6U6AabndVDP/](http://www.ajc.com/news/crime--law/atlanta-loss-affordable-housing-subject-protest/5vFU9clJDdn6U6AabndVDP/).

because people are scared and don't have control of what's next." Families were beginning to experience the panic and grief of entrapment—of Atlanta, the trap.

Located in Southeast Atlanta, two blocks past the U.S. Federal Penitentiary on McDonough Boulevard, just before you hit the intersection that opens onto Moreland, is the Thomasville Heights neighborhood. To the left of the neighborhood's welcome sign is Thomasville Heights Elementary School and to the right stands Forest Cove Apartments, the sprawling 396-unit Section 8 complex also known as Four Seasons; across the street from both is the massive vacant lot where the Thomasville Heights projects once stood. When I was first introduced to the neighborhood in 2017 through my work with Purpose Built Schools Atlanta (PBSA), the nonprofit that was reorganizing the Carver school cluster into a public charter school cluster, 90% of Thomasville Heights Elementary School's student population resided across the street in Four Seasons where the median household income for nonworking families was \$2,500/year, for working families was \$16,806, 80% of the neighborhood had a high school diploma or less, and only half the population was in the labor force (American Community Survey).

As of spring 2020, 95% of Thomasville's student body resides across the street in Four Seasons and "each of the school's 417 students is considered by the Georgia Department of Education as 'economically disadvantaged.' All but two are Black. The families sit in the city's bottom household income bracket—\$9,400. And, the school has been among the bottom 5% of performers for as long as the state has been keeping CCRPI scores" (Mandel). Since PBSA's takeover, which coincided with the entrance of the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation (AVLF) into the school cluster, the school's turnover rate has been reduced to 25% from 40% three years ago (Mandel).

As of December 2020, the livelihoods of the approximately 860 residents in Four Seasons and the longevity of Thomasville Heights Elementary School are at stake as the pending property sales and plans for a \$51 million renovation will force tenants out of their homes during the proposed upgrades. This, despite the initial plans in 2018 that reassured residents they would not be removed from the property, but moved to different units while theirs was renovated. While Millennia has managed Four Seasons since 2018, residents have argued that conditions have continued to worsen over the years, with grievances including environmental hazards, accumulating trash, violence from hired security staff, crumbling infrastructure, managerial neglect, and retaliation.

*AJC*'s Vanessa McCray reports that the property manager and developer, school leaders, and nonprofit leaders are working to identify “new places for already vulnerable families to live while construction occurs, ensuring that children’s education is not disrupted and that they receive social services, and making sure tenants come back when the work is done.”<sup>9</sup> News and media reports typically center Thomasville Heights Elementary School, though I am sure Price Middle School and Carver STEAM High School will be directly impacted by the impending displacement as Thomasville students generally feed into Price before they enter Carver STEAM. Students from Slater Elementary School, the fourth school that comprises this cluster, are heavily located in and around The Villages at Carver, also known as Carver Homes, a mixed-income housing complex that was constructed after the city-sanctioned demolition of the public housing project George

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<sup>9</sup> This task seems particularly difficult as it has become “increasingly hard for recipients of Section 8 vouchers to find willing landlords in the city. According to the ordinance, more than a thousand vouchers expired over the course of a year because the tenants couldn’t locate housing” (Stokes). Another Atlanta city-sanctioned trap.

Washington Carver Homes. My research centers children at Thomasville, Slater, and Price, though I spent the most time with Thomasville families and teaching staff.<sup>10</sup>

In news, school, policy, and media reports about the rapid gentrification displacing Atlanta's residents—especially those in Thomasville who are consistently characterized by the interpersonal and gang-related violence as well as drug sales associated with “trapping”—there remains intentional silence about the structural racism enshrined in city policy that has preserved the Atlanta Way and undergirded the entrapment of low-income Black folks. These narratives of neighborhood violence are not untrue as violence and trapping do dictate the daily realities and color the memories of Four Season and Thomasville residents. Four Seasons is the trap. The “choice to ‘trap,’ a black vernacular term that denotes a house where crack cocaine and other drugs are sold or used, had little to do with the fascination for street life, yet was seen as a way to supplement income after working a 9 to 5 job” (Hobson 242). Socioeconomic disinvestment and resource deprivation, failing education systems, persistent felony records, and respectability politics leave Black people in the neighborhood with scarce options to ensure their family's basic survival. Rodney Carmichael summarizes what a closer examination of the situation in Thomasville reveals about Atlanta: “[In a city that] is saddled with too much of the same racial baggage and class exclusion [...] The same pols who disgrace their districts by failing to advocate for economic equity find themselves more offended by crass lyrical content than the crass conditions that inspire it. Meanwhile, systemic ills continue to fester at will. It's enough to make you wonder who the real trappers are in this town.”

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<sup>10</sup> I feel this is largely because I worked with the PALS [Parents As Leaders] team, which was primarily composed of Thomasville parents while I awaited IRB approval of my research study/before I officially began my fieldwork. So, I had established strong bonds with the parents and their families prior to the commencement of my research.

The crass conditions described in trap music are the outcome of the ratchet political structure (Brown and Young) in which poor Black folks are living. Brown and Young argue that Black women (though I am broadening the scope to include all Black people) “who engage in ratchet behavior often do so as a reaction to their membership in a polity that defines their humanity with the structures of ratchet politics [...] ratchet politics [are] policies, structures or institutions that promote and/or result in inequality, oppression, marginalization, and denies human beings his or her full humanity as a citizen or resident of a nation state” (7). As a means to survive, Black folks behave in ratchet ways that oppose the ratchet polity. In the process, their experiences, practices, and imaginings found a critique of survivability and question how far one can deviate from the norm to escape governmental and societal foreclosures. In a move to save one’s own life and expand their own access to creative possibilities, ratchet behavior endeavors beyond limits towards embodied illustrations of how much queerness, joy, money, recognition, or attention one can get in the doing.

In most spaces beyond the Black ghetto, ratchet is yet another social trap. Atlanta is full of traps—with the most violent set in motion by those brokering deals behind the closed doors of board rooms and private offices, dispossessing Black children of the fullness of their Black bodies and Black joy. For example: gentrifying leasing companies implement tenant guidelines prohibiting loud music, large gatherings, loitering, or guests; new development brings increased traffic and fenced-in construction sites that obstruct and/or crowd out previous play spaces; gentrifying neighbors bring a heightened police presence that reads every Black child as a superpredator, Black boys and men as dopeboys and felons, Black girls and women as negligent mothers; underperforming schools enforce hyper-structured daily schedules and high-stakes standardized testing that deprioritizes culturally relevant curricula and unstructured playtime (this

is if their school does not close and/or is not ultimately replaced with a charter school instead); intentional community disinvestment leads to the depletion of job opportunities and potential sources of income; media portrayals of the neighborhood elevate the social stigma that follows residents into job interviews and welfare institutions and shapes their interactions with individuals and institutions beyond the geographic borders of their community; displacement causes the disintegration of community and kinship networks that counter the marginalization of their children by centering them as the source of their community's sustenance.

Though I will elaborate upon many of these traps, I am vehemently committed to highlighting and amplifying the significance of this last point about the children being *the source* as I consider the ways in which Black children and their joyful, imaginative play practices sustain entire communities. The children and families in PBSA, especially those from Thomasville, taught me this communal maxim through their living.

## 2.2 Research Overview

During an interview with *Hood Affairs*, Worl, activist-rapper and Four Seasons native, walks through the apartment complex on a late afternoon and explains that Four Seasons is Atlanta's last remaining housing project. As he speaks of the myriad forms of violence *and* the intergenerational community that formed his childhood, children are seen and heard playing and interacting throughout the background. At one point during the interview, a group of men chillin' on a sidewalk address Worl—acknowledging them first, Worl then turns toward the camera and

happily states, “Yea, I’m in my hood. No strap.”<sup>11</sup> Worl is at home. His taking pride in a zone of comfort and familiarity does not negate the danger he speaks of in the same interview but here, niggas got his back. He is cared for and recognized as a human and an activist who contributes to his community by telling its story and remaining connected with the folks and families who raised him, are raising his kids, and preserving the joy that exists in Four Seasons. Four Seasons is family and there is no need to be strapped when you are with family.

“Yea, I’m in my hood. No Strap,” extends the discourse of love-based ethics (Chin; hooks; Sharpe) and community to include explicitly Black children, especially those living in poverty, as community gatekeepers and activists. Such a repositioning of Black children is critical because Black children’s voices and analyses frequently remain obscure and/or absent from notable social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Black Girl Magic even amidst the increasing violence of the school-to-prison pipeline, environmental racism, and housing insecurity. Thus, this dissertation expands these movements by intervening within public and academic conceptualizations of the Black child as my fieldwork amplifies the actual voices of Black children.

Moreover, the establishment of political communities that are rooted in the radical ethic of love occurs through praxis (Cox). By centralizing and conceptualizing their play as an embodied praxis, we can better understand how celebrating the subversive intellectual and cultural practices exhibited by the Black children in my study is an invitation into intentional consciousness-raising circles. Through these circles, we can experience the intense joy generated amidst the struggle as we struggle together in community (hooks; Love).

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<sup>11</sup> “WORLD 4 SEASONS PROJECTS - REP MY CITY: [ ATLANTA SEASON 1 ] EPISODE 2” YouTube, uploaded by Hood Affairs, 20 June 2018, [https://youtu.be/7fCyCD5K\\_Ic](https://youtu.be/7fCyCD5K_Ic)

I kindle this conceptualization of Black children through community-based collaborative research that analyzes the intersection of Black child play and protest in order to illuminate the way play, and the resulting Black child joy, is a method of developing and channeling collective responses to their everyday experiences of institutional anti-Blackness and intergenerational oppression. More specifically, I consider how Black child play and joy reflect a relationship between *ratchet*, a term commonly used to define the precarious realities of poor and working class Blacks (Brown; Love; Young), and *womanism*, a community-oriented form of Black feminism situated within the everyday (Phillips; Walker). Together, these two lenses allow me to continue engaging with Black children's play through fieldwork and to consider more seriously the Black women of the Thomasville community who have sustained the lives of these children and their extensive kinship networks (Stack) for generations. Both the ratchet expressions and womanist ethics evident in play assist in the co-construction and trans-generational survival of low-income Black communities.

More pointedly, I forward a ratchet womanist lens to frame how Black child play sources the radically visionary/imaginative, self-sufficient, and community-oriented aspects of womanism in a politics of the body existing under state-sanctioned deprivation that normalizes the conditions of the Black Ghetto. The connection to our bodies is critical to human survival—ratchet is the practicing and conditioning of our bodies to intend towards creative, subversive, and sustainable usage especially in the presence of overwhelming struggle. Hence, a ratchet womanist lens compels us to examine how Black children come to know and be known by their larger communities and the ways in which this knowledge informs their self- and social consciousness. Simultaneously, we must imagine how we—people who are not Black children—can live in such a way that Black children can own lovingly their Black child bodies (Durr).

Hale and Bocknek assert that “[t]he intergenerational historical narratives of Black families are encapsulated in the social and communication patterns parents transmit to children and relevant to the study of early development. Play is a known medium through which children work through difficult and complex issues, actively move from one development stage to the next and consolidate parts of their identities” (88). In my fieldwork, I witnessed the ways in which low-income and poor Black children discover and create new forms of play that open them up to alternative and parallel realities that reframe their current circumstances and resituate them within their social networks. My study of Black child play and corresponding fieldwork intentionally vacillates between play and protest, ratchet and womanism, and the ways their communities shape these relationships. Therefore, I also documented the adults’ (mostly parents’) interactions and expressions in order to identify the mechanisms and practices the larger community employs in addressing their daily challenges. I used both children and adult participants’ descriptions of their own behavior and opinions to construct my analysis.

### **2.3 Note on Methodology**

Ocho Jinks, a 6th grade student at Price Middle School, began taking ownership over my research towards the end of the summer in 2018. On multiple occasions, Ocho Jinks would get off the bus and immediately ask me, “Where’s our notebook?” “You got our journal?” or “You takin notes, Ari?” Ocho Jinks’s persistent questions and his unequivocal declaration of our shared ownership over the research process continually mandated my accountability to “our research,” thus ensuring that my ethnographic approach remained fluid and collaborative. His type of engagement and investment in this dissertation was evident in countless students throughout

Thomasville, Slater, and Price, and their parents who would jokingly tell me “Oh, Lawd, Ari. Don’t put this in your notes” on some occasions, and request I take notes at their community meetings, help create their grocery lists, or document a story they wanted to be told to others.

The experiences of Black, low-income children require unique methodological approaches to the challenges of locating them within their own culture as Black children’s intersectional identities are frequently severed into categories that isolate and address only fractions of their existence. My dissertation seeks to counter the violence of this severance by identifying the myriad forms through which Black children’s agency is manifested and the ways in which communities are transformed by their presence. Moreover, the potent complexities of personal expression from the Black children discussed in my research affirm the need for a “comprehensive ethnographical analysis of the self-directed behavior of Black children in their home environment” in order to understand the ways in which Black child play behaviors and expressive styles shape and are shaped by their sociocultural environments (Hale and Bocknek 93). My own ethnographic method is a modified form of community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) (Israel, Eng, Parker, and Schulz). This approach invites community members to help with interpretation of data that enhances the possibility of generating culturally-specific interventions. My modified CBPAR form combines elements from the Black ratchet imagination (Love), as well as public (Amar), collaborative (Brown; Cox; Ginwright) and relational (Desmond) ethnographies while centralizing a consciousness of Black youth’s precarity and agency.

Accordingly, I primarily sought the “insider view” (Eng, Strazza, Rhodes, Griffith, Shirah, and Mebane) from the children and youth living in abject poverty and with the associated institutional violence, trauma, and neglect in order to identify the events and practices that children, living in Black bodies, are conditioned to accept as norms—and more importantly, their radical