



On the Corner

7

Corner-Boy Masculinity: Intersections of Inner-City Manhood

James Braxton Peterson

In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Houston Baker analyzes the intersecting matrices of lack and desire for the enigmatic bluesman. These crossroads of lack and desire, according to Baker, became a foundational intersection for the formulation of African American identity. Fast forward to the postindustrial economic conditions of the twenty-first-century inner city and this foundational intersection finds an extraordinary consistency with the lack of economic opportunity available to generations of inner-city youth who are (through various media) exposed to many of the most desirable outposts of capitalist society, and the corollary to this desire-producing exposure: an utter absence of the structural and civic resources necessary to transcend abject poverty. The spectacle of this society notwithstanding, various verbal and visual discourses generated in popular media seek to construct original models of masculinity for these generational constituents. In this chapter I engage emerging theoretical conceptions of black masculinity (à la Mark Anthony Neal and others) and juxtapose these ideas with several specific constructions of black masculinity articulated and visualized and exemplified through the characters of *The Wire*. Of significance to this discussion is a collaboration between the rapper Common and the Last Poets, aptly entitled, “The Corner,” which brilliantly articulates the urban corner as a master site for the both the

production and representations of black masculinity. “The Corner” in many ways reflects the complex intersections of black male identities depicted on the corners of the television version of Baltimore, Maryland. My focus then is on the proliferation of various complex representations of urban black masculinity detailed in *The Wire*.

The Wire reveals a dramatically realistic Baltimore where corner boys formulate an inner-city ‘juvenocracy’ based on the unchecked drug trade.¹ Yet even within this hyperviolent world of man-children, extraordinary models of black masculinity emerge. “[M]asculinity is a social fact produced through a set of both educational and social practices that function to regulate and circumscribe the lives of young men, as well as reinforce dominant social norms at a time of transition and uncertainty” (Davis 292): the models of masculinity in *The Wire* (most notably here in Seasons Four and Five) intersect and/or converge on the proverbial corners of the inner-city experience. Preston “Bodie” Broadus is raised, comes of age, thrives, and dies on the corner. Omar Little makes his name in the street by terrorizing those same corners, even though his sexual identity should preclude him from the legendary street status he attains. The various types of masculinity performed in *The Wire* provide incisive depictions of a wide range of black male being. The corner is merely the nexus through which this cornucopia of black manhood is expressed.

I

The opening epigraph for the “Corner Boys” episode of *The Wire* cites Zenobia as saying: “We got our thing, but it’s just part of the big thing” (4.08). Corner boys are the youngest initiates or entrants into the illicit drug “game.” From Avon Barksdale to Marlo Stanfield, drug bosses on *The Wire* exploit their allure with the youngest denizens of inner-city neighborhoods in order to compel them to work the corners. The drug lord thereby accomplishes (at least) two objectives: first, since the majority of the corner boys are younger than the age of legal responsibility they function as buffers for the bosses, automatically circumventing the criminal justice system; and second, by recruiting the youngest of the youth, the drug organization indoctrinates them into the central

“code of the street”. In his ethnographic research conducted in inner-city Philadelphia, Elijah Anderson draws the following conclusions:

It must be continually underscored that much of this violence and drug activity is a reflection of the dislocations brought about by economic transformations . . . [W]here the wider economy is not receptive to these dislocated people, the underground economy is. . . . [T]he facts of race relations, unemployment, dislocation, and destitution create alienation, and alienation allows for certain receptivity to overtures made by people seeking youthful new recruits for the drug trade. (Anderson, *Code of the Street* 120)

Thus Zenobia’s words take on powerful meanings in the context of the classroom scenario in which she makes this claim.

Although Zenobia is an African American girl, she is, in the context of this episode and from the viewpoint of her alternative educators, a corner boy.² This status is marked by her posture, attitude, and vocal outbursts in class. She, like several other junior-high school students, is forced into a program where they are studied and in some ways further alienated from their classmates and traditional classrooms. As a group they face extraordinary challenges that include neglect, abuse, violence, and their resultant psycho-social trauma. Over the course of the “Corner Boys” episode, the researchers, mostly led by former police officer Howard “Bunny” Colvin, make what is termed a “breakthrough.” They have been trying for weeks to establish a genuine connection with the students in this recently isolated research project. Their work will eventually fall under the scrutiny of various political interests, but in this episode they are still relatively free to explore the possibilities of an educational experiment that removes the most troubled and troublesome youth from the traditional classroom—so that students in those classrooms can work relatively free from distraction—and uses nontraditional pedagogies to harness the dysfunctional social attitudes common among the corner-boy students.

The “breakthrough” occurs in this episode when Colvin intercedes during one of the other researchers’ exercises. Colvin has become somewhat flustered with their efforts to have a genuine interaction with the

corner-boy students and it dawns on him suddenly that even in this nontraditional, less school-like setting, the corner-boy students are consistently trying to get over on their teachers and the researchers. Colvin then confronts the class on this fact. He unveils their in-school hustle as a mere training ground for the streets—where they are the corner boys and the teachers, administrators, and researchers are the police. Here Zenobia (through body language, visage, and subtle commentary) underscores the fact that this is true in less metaphorical ways since Colvin actually has been a police officer. Ultimately Colvin gives them various opportunities to reflect on, discuss, and write about their lives as corner boys. He even invites them to develop a code for corner-boy life, lists of rules, the do's and don'ts of corner-boy livelihood.

These scenes are powerful moments for educators who watch *The Wire* and know the challenges, possibilities, and failures of inner-city classrooms overrun by children of the drug trade. As James E. Davis notes,

[t]he interaction of school context and masculine identities and socialization is important to consider . . . These performances of masculinity are not necessarily linked to troublemaking but to how teachers and other adults interpret these performances. (Davis 298)

Davis's insight sheds light on the interaction that ensues in the corner-boy classroom after Colvin radically reinterprets the educational proceedings. Once the corner-boy students accept the interpretation of their classroom as a training ground for their involvement in the illegal drug trade—as well as their own limited life experiences and truncated opportunities on the mean streets of Baltimore—they become willing participants in the educational process. The idea that masculinity is directly linked to economic prowess (and possibility) is especially relevant and particularly compelling to dispossessed African American youth (Davis 296). Therefore the corner-boy students almost instantly become excited and engaged in their classroom. They participate in discussions, work together in groups to construct the code of streets from the corner-boy perspective, and even talk about their learning with peers outside of the classroom.

Zenobia's claim, "We got our thing, but it's just a part of the big thing," is delivered in the midst of one of these engaging dialogues. Essentially, she situates the drug trade within the context of the dislocating power of the global economy. From the corner-boy perspective, at the crossroads of lack and desire, selling drugs is no different from selling cigarettes or alcohol except that some trades are arbitrarily deemed legal and others are not. This suggestion and these scenes unveil an abiding intersectionality with respect to how black masculinity is conceptualized and operationalized on *The Wire*. That girls can be corner boys is important to recognize here, but the youths' acknowledgment of the relationship between aspirational masculinity, global capital, arbitrary illegality, and the possibility of public education as a means to overcome socioeconomic and violent challenges are also powerful intersecting messages in these scenes.

Alycee J. Lane states that "[i]ntersectionality calls into question the construction of monolithic identities and forces one to consider how one is positioned by the intersecting and multiple hegemonies that structure American culture" (325). If black masculinity was or is in any way monolithic, the corner-as-metaphor in *The Wire* represents numerous attempts to deconstruct the monolithic notion of black manhood. Since the corner is literally an urban intersection it is a fitting metaphor for the deconstructive work necessary to unpack, dismantle, and reformulate notions of black masculinity in the twenty-first century. Some of the socioeconomic forces that rigidly construct black masculinity are the material lack and ad-induced desire that collude to produce the collective willingness to engage in the underground economy. Poor public education, crumbling postindustrial residential neighborhoods, and the inherently violent communities that result from these structural challenges all work to obscure the full range of black masculine possibilities. It follows that the literature, film, and music that represent black masculine behavior tend toward these monolithic depictions. *The Wire* departs from this monolithic morass and dwells comfortably within the spaces of intersectionality that the real-life geography of an urban corner subtly reflects.

The quintessential corner boy of the series is Bodie Broadus. Bodie works corners for the Barksdale cartel as well as Marlo Stanfield's cartel. He even attempts a brief stint on his own as the power struggle

within the drug trade shifts from Barksdale to Stanfield, but for most of *The Wire* he is the most hard-working, loyal, and dedicated hustler on the corner. Technically speaking, he has younger corner boys and/or hoppers working for him, but the preponderance of Bodie's scenes in *The Wire* are set on a corner or at some urban intersection where he hustles drugs. Bodie's determination and loyalty allow him to thrive within the Barksdale drug organization, but after the cartel crumbles, he is quickly absorbed by Marlo's organization. Bodie's work ethic is indefatigable over several seasons. He is a worker bee and thus he debunks stereotypes about black male laziness. Moreover, Bodie challenges the Horatio Alger narrative of drug dealing and hustling. His hard work, loyalty, and heart do not allow him to achieve the economic spoils of his bosses. In fact, Bodie seems to live a fairly meager, working class existence. He usually eats in bodegas or cheap corner store shops. He never wears expensive clothes or jewelry and he never really flashes or flosses his cash. Bodie lives at the intersection of working class and hustler black masculinities and is not permitted to live through to the conclusion of *The Wire*. In one of his last extended dialogues of the series, he analyzes his years in "the game" with police officer Jimmy McNulty and concludes that the "game is rigged" (4.11); he is and has been just a pawn. McNulty is ultimately able to convince Bodie to consider providing some information to police. Through a series of somewhat random events, Marlo is made aware of the possibility that Bodie will become an informant. He is murdered by Marlo's assassins, Chris and Snoop. He may well have had a chance to escape, but he refuses to leave "his" corner. Bodie's murder is a poignant moment: although he is murdered like so many other victims in *The Wire*, he is in fact an emblematic figure of a murdered generation of corner boys.

More than any other character on *The Wire*, Bodie reflects the cacophony of voices in one of the rapper Common's most popular singles, "The Corner." (2005/BE) "The Corner" features contributions by Kanye West and The Last Poets. Lyrically, "The Corner" has three vocal and conceptual perspectives—three trajectories representing the concept of the urban corner intersect through the vocal performances of the artists. Common rhymes verses that suggest the hopelessness of

urban environments centered on the street life that corners have come to represent:

Corners leave souls opened and closed, hoping for more
 With nowhere to go, rolling in droves
 They shoot the wrong way, 'cause they ain't knowing they goal
 The streets ain't safe cause they ain't knowing the code

In addition to constructing the mosaic and internal rhyme schemes of these lines, Common is also one of the most skillful practitioners of enjambment, a technique in which rappers/MCs break poetic lines in the midst of a sentence.³

Got cousins with flows hope they open some doors
 So we can cop clothes & roll in a Rolls
 Now I roll in a "Olds" with windows that don't roll
 Down the roads where cars get broke in & stole
 These are the stories told by Stony & Cottage Grove
 The world is cold the block is hot as a stove
 On the corners

The total poetic effect of Common's repeated use of enjambment throughout his verses is to sound as if he is rhyming around corners. Thus the form of Common's delivery reflects the culturally intersecting space of the song's subject while the content of the lyrics reveals the working class aesthetics inherent in Bodie's characterization as the quintessential corner boy on *The Wire*.

Kanye West and The Last Poets represent two distinct but likewise intersecting examples of "The Corner." West's hook can be interpreted as a both a subtle critique and tacit glorification of the violent ways and means of the underground economy.

I wish I could give ya this feeling
 I wish I could give ya this feeling
 On the corners, robbing, killing, dying
 Just to make a living (huh)

The rapper wishes that he could somehow give his listeners the feeling of the corner. In fact by wishing it he likely does provide his listeners (many of whom do not live in inner-city neighborhoods) with some sense of the allure that the drug trade produces at the crossroads of lack and desire. West's voice and conceptual thread are limited to the hook or refrain of the song but his lyrics clearly intersect and confront the general thematics of Common's more somber, less glorified verses.

The Last Poets proffer a distinct yet intersecting trajectory into this song. They are relegated to the ad-lib portion of the song, but their presence is remarkable for at least two reasons: first, the Last Poets are the artistic progenitors of all rappers/MCs, but they are rarely recognized as such. Second, their verses produce a completely new conceptualization of the corner as a nostalgic historical monument of inner-city existence:

The corner was our Rock of Gibraltar, our Stonehenge
Our Taj Mahal, our monument,
Our testimonial to freedom, to peace and to love
Down on the corner.

By positioning the corner as a monument, The Last Poets have further fleshed out an intersecting discourse on the ultimate point of urban existence. The 'corner' depicted in Common's lyrics, Kanye West's refrain, and The Last Poets' ad-libs is the foundational component of Bodie's demographic identity. He says as much in his last extended dialogue on the series. He represents the underground economy's working class aesthetics depicted by Common's verses; Bodie lives and dies on the corners gently glorified in West's refrain; and he spends much of his life paying homage to a historicized version of those corners that at the point of his murder no longer exists.

II

Corner-boy masculinity exists and conceptually thrives at the intersections represented by several pairings or groupings of characters in *The Wire*. Like the ways in which Bodie's narrative can be compared to Common's lyrics or Zenobia's complex encapsulation of the cog-like

existence of the corner boy, corner-boy masculinity is enmeshed in the public sphere through lived experiences, artistic production, and various social theories. In *New Black Man*, Mark Anthony Neal traces some of these intersecting theories and experiences and suggests that a “New-BlackMan” [*sic*] exists “for those willing to embrace the fuzzy edges of black masculinity that in reality is still under construction” (Neal 29). According to Neal, our uncritical allegiance to the “Strong Black Man,” forged in the crucible of racial hatred and historical oppression, obscures the multifaceted range of black masculine expression in reality, in the media, and in artistic production. My argument here is that *The Wire* (almost by default) challenges the rigid conceptualizations of the “Strong Black Man” and offers the broader range reflected by Neal’s sense of the “NewBlackMan”:

NewBlackMan is about resisting being inscribed by a wide range of forces and finding a comfort with a complex and progressive existence as a black man in America. As such NewBlackMan is not so much about conceiving of a more positive version of black masculinity . . . but rather a concept that acknowledges the many complex aspects, often contradictory, that make up a progressive and meaningful black masculinity. (29)

Corner-boy masculinity is only one of many intersecting and socially intertextual models for understanding how black masculinity is fleshed out through the various characters depicted in *The Wire*. Complex aspects of black masculinity are studiously rendered throughout the series. Both police officers and drug dealers can be cruel and unforgiving. They can also be altruistic and compassionate. Characters like Sergeant Ellis Carver, Stringer Bell, and Bodie all fluctuate between these binary oppositions. Their development as characters through various story arcs are an important aspect of the realism of *The Wire*. Corner-boy masculinity then fits into the series’ fleshed out paradigm for depictions of black male identity that are consistent with Neal’s NewBlackMan model.

Over the course of Season Four, Namond Brice becomes a corner boy under Bodie. Namond’s parents overdetermine his identity, and through his character audiences bear honest witness to the struggles that young

men face every day with the brutality of urban inner-city life, with nothing less than their manhood hanging in the balance. Namond's father Wee-Bey Brice is an enforcer for the Barksdale drug cartel who will spend the rest of his life in jail for his crimes (and for not ratting out the Barksdales). Namond is thus confronted with the credible reputation of his father, but also the awesome weight of his violent legacy. These challenges are only exacerbated by his mother, De'Londa, who, after enjoying the spoils of Wee-Bey's affiliation with the Barksdales, fully expects her son to carry on in his father's footsteps. De'Londa is an easy-to-demonize maternal figure that seems to have stepped right out of the 1965 Moynihan Report. As S. Craig Watkins summarizes,

The report concluded that the structure of family life in the black community constituted a "tangle of pathology . . . capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world" . . . Further, the report argued that the matriarchal structure of black culture weakened the ability of black men to function as authority figures. This particular notion of black familial life has become a widespread, if not dominant, paradigm for comprehending the social and economic disintegration of late twentieth-century black urban life. (Watkins 218–219)

De'Londa is certainly a powerful and at times physically imposing matriarch. At one point she "bitch-slaps" Namond when he makes yet another attempt to express his unwillingness to be the man that she wants him to be (4.13). Namond's mother does all that she can to instill him with a materialistic set of values—in fact amongst the four young men on whom Season Four centers (Namond, Duquan, Michael, and Randy), Namond is always the best dressed. He also lives in the most economically sound household, a middle-class by-product of his father's work with the Barksdales. Even though he appears to be the most economically comfortable, his mother eventually coerces him to sell drugs with Bodie. Thus the Moynihanian notion of pathology in the black family is not a default by-product of fatherlessness. For the Brice family, Namond's pathological behavior is the desired result. Explicitly because of his absence due to incarceration, Namond's father is actually a dominant presence in Namond's life. His mother, De'Londa consistently

compares Namond to Wee-Bey, and Namond always comes up lacking. De'Londa's materialism drives her to push Namond toward the underground economy of the drug trade and, at least initially, Wee-Bey's limited sense of the world beyond his prison cell and the streets of Baltimore make him likewise complicit in the parental push to turn Namond into a criminal.

De'Londa's influence on Namond utterly shapes his sense of himself as a man. Although he is ultimately saved from her by his father's decision to relinquish custody to Bunny Colvin, De'Londa represents the signal role that mothers play in the construction of black masculinity (4.13). By focusing so effortlessly on the deleterious effects of her materialism and general affinity for the trappings of the drug trade, *The Wire* puts into bold relief the awesome potential of the single parent household to mold and negatively impact the young black male. Through Namond, the audience of *The Wire* experiences the emotional trauma of becoming a black man in a nihilistic material environment. We are often invited to critique his emotional responses in certain brutal scenes (notably his confrontations with Kenard, Michael, and his mother; 4.12), but ultimately viewers pity Namond and appreciate the fact that at least he (of the four corner boys in Season Four) will have an opportunity to live. The series does not simply proffer a middle-class existence over an impoverished one as a panacea for all that ails the corner boys. In fact Namond's life with his mother is not much different from his new life with Colvin, especially in terms of class. If anything Namond would have more access to the material trappings of middle-class status with his mother. Instead the series suggests that a stable household with attentive, caring, and compassionate parents makes the signal difference in Namond's life. The potential opportunities of this new life with Colvin and his wife are powerfully reflected in the closing scenes of Season Four (4.13). Namond finishes his homework on the porch as he is eating his breakfast. One of his homies from his corner-boy days drives by in a stolen vehicle. Both boys appear visibly older than at the outset of the season. As the boy in the stolen car speeds through the intersection he nearly causes an accident. Namond stares thoughtfully at the intersection and the corners. The camera view lingers on the intersection, emphasizing the difference in this neighborhood. Namond notices this difference as well: there are no corner boys on these corners.

On the opposite end of Namond's emotional character is Michael Lee's stoic, brooding demeanor and budding violent nature. Unlike Namond, Michael does not have any parents to push him into being a corner boy. Even though his mother is an addict who regularly sells their groceries and otherwise makes life impossible for Michael and his little brother Bug, Michael distinguishes himself from his peers by not taking ostensibly free money from Marlo at the beginning of the school year (4.01). Marlo takes an instant interest in Michael and soon Chris Partlow, Marlo's lieutenant and all around enforcer, begins to court Michael. For the most part Michael refuses these advances. He does not have any natural, contrived, or coerced affinity for the underworld. However, Chris makes it clear to him that if ever he needs Marlo's help, it is available. Of the four boys in Season Four, Michael most represents the traditional "Strong Black Man." He is the natural leader of the four: he is fathering his younger brother; he protects Dukie, Randy, and Namond at different points throughout the season; and he at least attempts to be his own man by resisting the offers from Marlo and his crew.⁴

Eventually Michael does need the help of Chris and Snoop, two of the most ruthless murderers in television history. When Bug's father returns home from prison, Michael is agitated and upset. He blames his mother for the man's return and after only one interaction, it is clear that Michael has been sexually abused by him (4.09). Michael walks with Chris and Snoop in order to identify Bug's father for the hit (4.10). They mark him coming up to a corner to buy drugs for Michael's mother. Snoop asks him, "What the fuck did he do to you?" to which Michael offers no reply. However Chris gives him a knowing look. When Chris and Snoop return to that same corner to escort Bug's father to his death, Chris asks him questions about sexual assault along the way. Throughout the season Chris and Snoop have murdered multiple people with guns, usually a gunshot to the head. But Chris brutally beats Bug's father to death. He punches and kicks him repeatedly and then spits on him to punctuate his hate for this man he does not know. Snoop can only look on in surprise, but a plausible interpretation of this brutal slaying is that Chris identifies with Michael based on a common past as victims of sexual assault and rape. That two men bond over being rape survivors is a singular achievement in this series—one of many. Yet this bond is formulated over the series's most brutal murder and it will require Michael's

wholesale (if temporary) capitulation to the Stanfield organization. He is, after the brutal beat down of Bug's father, all in. Michael's circumstantial decision to join the Stanfield crew allows him to graduate quickly from corner boy to captain of his own corner. Among the four youths central to Season Four, Michael distinguishes himself, so it is not surprising that he ascends in the underground economy of the illegal drug trade. However, the conclusion of the series suggests that Michael becomes a figure similar to Omar Little in that he is depicted as robbing one of the drug dealing hubs (5.13). Thus Michael's character intersects with Omar's character albeit after Omar is murdered by Kenard (5.11). This intersection is a poignant and powerful point in the show's imagining of corner-boy masculinity. Michael's brutal beating of Kenard is just one step in the nihilistic socialization of Kenard that largely takes place off camera and in the background of the series' narrative. Kenard continues to work for Michael as a corner boy throughout Season Five and his striking nihilistic persona is all the more present in the series as a result of his age. His age is never clearly revealed but he appears to be about 9 or 10. That he ends up killing Omar Little is one of the more striking turns of events on *The Wire*, but the action is particularly significant in that it paves the way for Michael to inherit Omar's legacy. Thus the corner-boy masculinity model in this case incorporates an intersection of three characters whose violent ways and specific roles within the world of *The Wire* are all the more pronounced through their complex interrelated story arcs.

One final example to consider here by way of conclusion is the extraordinary character, Omar Little. Technically speaking Omar is not a corner boy: that is, he does not sell drugs and he is older than any of the corner boys described so far. He is much closer in age to the drug bosses, detectives, and politicians that populate the world of *The Wire*. However, Omar is one of the most feared figures in this world. After playing a pivotal role in crippling the Barksdale organization by assassinating Stringer Bell (3.12) he spends much of Seasons Four and Five robbing the drug "co-op" and hunting members of Marlo's organization whom he holds responsible for the torture and murder of his friend and mentor, Butchie (5.03). Omar is an urban Robin Hood whose sartorial presentation reflects the aesthetics of the wild west. The duster, vest, and shotguns notwithstanding, however, Omar is also gay. This fact remains

somewhat unremarkable throughout his reign on *The Wire*, but the creators allow him to express his love for Brandon (Season Three) and for Reynaldo (Seasons Four and Five). Omar is not the first gay character or black gay character to appear on film or television. He is, however, the first black gay character to so readily and regularly empower himself through the phallic symbolism of the gun.

Omar's homosexuality only becomes remarkable as it intersects with his character's persona as a violent vigilante. His character is then a repository of what Mark Anthony Neal refers to as "black meta-identities," various and varied identities that exist beneath the surface of the American public sphere (Neal 28). Through Omar's various identities—vigilante, gay man, feared and respected underworld figure—the corner-boy masculinity model also becomes visible. When Omar emerges from his hideouts during the day, corner boys spot him from a distance and warn all of the dealers and people in the vicinity that "Omar is coming! Omar is coming!" (4.04). In a silk pink bathrobe and bearing an enormous silver-plated pistol Omar walks and stalks the corners, embodying the intersectional nature of corner-boy masculinity, his reputation for violence somehow utterly obscuring homophobic perspectives of black manhood. This kind of confrontation with traditional notions of black masculinity centers on the contestation between Omar's sexuality and his fearless wielding of the most pronounced phallic symbol in American society—the gun. This character is an anomaly amidst the depictions of the black manhood in television history. Note well though that Omar's positionality in *The Wire* is a function of a wide range of black masculinities portrayed through a diverse group of African American actors.

Yet the corner-boy masculinity model distinguishes itself from Neal's studious portrait of the NewBlackMan as well as other scholarship dedicated toward fluid conceptualizations of black masculinity. Corner-boy masculinity lends itself to the narratological intersections of characters complexly situated within the labyrinthine world of inner-city Baltimore. Here, the setting, with its near claustrophobic enclaves, narrow streets, and countless intersections, suggests itself as an environmental model of the ideological expression of one of the most complex identities in the world. The wide-ranging and intersectional nature of black masculinity as it is depicted and portrayed on *The Wire* directly

engages organic and or authentic notions of identity in our own realities. Although Omar Little likely does not walk among us, the pathways of black masculinity expressed through his character intersect with our own sense of ourselves as African American men.

Notes

1. Michael Eric Dyson coins the term “juvenocracy” in *Race Rules*. It refers to urban communities that are dominated by youth who are emboldened and empowered by their status in various nefarious underground economies.

2. At various points in the season the corner-boy students are referred to as “corner kids,” especially notable when Bunny Colvin theorizes that corner kids distinguish themselves from stoop kids based upon their domestic situation and how that situation (drug-addicted parents, neglect and the like) translates for them in the school system. More often than not, though, this group of students is referred to as corner boys.

3. Technically speaking, enjambment is the continuation of a syntactic unit from one line or couplet of a poem to the next without pause. This is an intriguing and perhaps perplexing technique to discern within rap music since we rarely see or know how an artist actually writes and organizes his/her lines.

4. He protects Dukie from Namond throughout the season; he fights on behalf of Randy when their schoolmates believe that Randy is a snitch (4.11); and he beats Kenard when Kenard tries to hustle Namond out of some drugs (4.12).