

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Collective Coping Mechanisms: An Examination of  
Social Dynamics at College Parties

By

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July 2023

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts degree in the  
Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

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**Abstract:**

African American undergraduate students at Predominately White Institutions turn to peer networks and campus organizations to cope with academic stress and racial tension. The tendency to seek solace and emotional support in communal spaces is called collective coping. This study investigated the collective coping present at a Black Student Organizations' rendition of Freak Nik. The social and behavioral patterns described by the study participants have been present throughout history at jooks, juke joints, and rent parties.

This paper continues as follows: An examination of relevant literature will provide us with a definition of collective coping, and its relationship to Black Student Organizations. I will then provide a theoretical framework for the linguistic analysis that follows and review prominent themes of jooks, juke joints, and rent parties. These themes will serve as the foundation of our comparison.

Next, I will provide an outline of the events of the Black Student Organization's Freak Nik party, as told by interviewees. A linguistic analysis will examine participants' semantics, assessing their language style and screening for patterns across the data set. These patterns will in turn provide insight into the African American students' communal identity. Lastly, key events of the Freak Nik party will be compared to those of jooks, juke joints, and rent parties.

**Introduction:**

Previous research has examined the treatment of African American students at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Such research has studied African American students and microaggressions (Lewis, et al., 2013), racial trauma (Wei, et al., 2012), sexual orientation and gender expression (Majied, 2010), identities (WILKINS, 2012), and sexual behavior (Hall &

Witherspoon, 2011). However, few studies have examined the collective coping mechanisms utilized by such students. This research will investigate the experiences of individual African American undergraduates and a Black Student Organization<sup>1</sup>, as such groups are a place of refuge and community (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). Essentially, in the face of racial tension in their academic environment, how do African American undergraduate students deal?

Previous studies surrounding students' coping mechanisms have focused on their relation to African American culture and collective self-esteem (Constantine, et al., 2002). This research will build upon this perspective, examining such behaviors as political forms of resistance and preservations of cultural knowledge. Individual and group experiences will be compared in a cyclical manner as African American's collectivistic tendencies can be seen as an essential cultural coping behavior (Constantine, et al., 2002).

Traditional models of coping prioritize individualism and Western ideology; therefore, such models are ineffective for the purposes of this study (Lewis, et al., 2013). Instead, this study is rooted in the understanding that coping mechanisms are influenced by one's identities and access to resources. Considering the cultural background of interviewees and the topic of investigation, collective coping mechanisms will be the area of examination.

The social life of African American undergraduates, specifically parties orchestrated by the Black Student Organization, point to collective coping mechanisms and social dynamics present throughout African American history. To examine such mechanisms and occurrences, interviewees were asked to recollect parties organized by the university's Black Student Organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as Black Student Unions, Organization of Black Students, or Black Student Associations. Wording varies depending on the university. Additionally, the Black Student Organizations mentioned throughout the text are assumed to be comprised of undergraduate students.

**Literature review:**

Coping mechanisms, collective coping, and Black Student Organizations:

African American undergraduate students at Predominately White Institutions endure microaggressions at the hands of their peers (Wei, et al., 2012). Such microaggressions have been linked to racial trauma and systemic racism present at an institutional and societal level (Gaskew, et al., 2022). These incidents, and their psychological impact, are exacerbated when students occupy composite marginalized identities regarding their sexual orientation, sexual behavior, and or gender expression (MOORE, 2012).

When faced with such microaggressions, African American undergraduate students turn to communal sites such as campus clubs, religious organizations, and peer networks. This tendency to seek solace and emotional support in communal spaces is called collective coping. As defined by Constantine (2002), collective coping is a group's dependency on support networks to cope with stress-inducing environments.

Collective coping embodies the behavioral tendencies, and their cathartic impact, present at communal sites. The communal site examined in this study is one university's Black Student Organization. Such organizations are distinctive for their simultaneous cathartic and political nature. These organizations exist as sites of collective coping, political resistance, and the preservation of cultural knowledge.

Communal sites, Black Student Organizations, and political nature:

When considering this political nature, I attempt to argue that the parties thrown by the Black Student Organization serve as a multidimensional site for collective coping and political resistance. Such an argument is made embracing the "both and" nature of Black social organizations as stated by Patricia Hill Collins in her work, *Black Feminist Thought*. This nature

of pluralism highlighted by Collins (2000) lays the foundation for the analysis and arguments present throughout this work.

The Black Feminist perspective highlights the concurrent nature of individual experiences and collective consciousness. The interviews aim to reveal the interviewee's personal social experiences while simultaneously inquiring about the collective coping sites coordinated by the Black Student Organization.

Linguistic analysis:

Language serves as a vessel for an individual to connect and form their identity alongside their community (Smitherman, et al., 2000). Smitherman (1986) states, "An individual's language is intricately bound up with his or her sense of identity and group consciousness" (p. 171). Through a linguistic analysis, we will connect the individual interviewees to the Black Student Organization in which they belong to, ultimately allowing us to investigate their broader communal identity. Shared vocabulary and semantics will illuminate a communal consciousness and identify the role the Black Student Organization plays in connecting individual African American undergraduates to their wider African American community (Datnow & Cooper, 1997).

Such linguistic tendencies, such as a shared vocabulary and semantic patterns, is present throughout African American history and is a fundamental aspect of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)<sup>2</sup> and culture. Bell (2018) illuminates the communal nature of African American language, social practices, and people, in addition to revealing the phenomenon's historical roots. Language, social practices, and community occupy a simultaneous existence. As we inquire into the semantic patterns of interviewees, we will

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<sup>2</sup> Also known as Ebonics, or Black English. African American Vernacular English was chosen to reflect the terminological development of this area of study.

simultaneously peer into their social practices and communal identity. Language will serve as the tool for our investigation.

AAVE is composed of elements that appear as isolated peculiarities when they are fundamental aspects of a living system (Smitherman, 2000). Instead of analyzing narratives as isolated peculiarities, they were combined and analyzed as a system.

The symbolic and metaphoric nature of AAVE appeared repeatedly in the semantic patterns of interviewees. The synchronicity in the semantics of participants exist as a function of Black Semantics. According to Smitherman (1986), “There are four traditions that Black Semantics draws from: West African language background; servitude and oppression; music and “cool talk”; the traditional black church” (p. 43). For the purposes of this linguistic examination and the scope of this study, servitude and oppression and music and “cool talk” are the semantic traditions analyzed.

Historical relevance, cultural knowledge, and political resistance:

The recollective nature of the interview data prompted a historical analysis. As interviewees were asked to recall events, the researcher was similarly called to look to the past. This manifested into research of social and cultural tendencies present throughout African American history. Said research birthed a comparative analysis of the Black Student Organization parties to jooks, juke joints, and rent parties.

Zora Neale Hurston described the jook as a “Negro pleasure house...”, a place where, “...men and women dance, drink, and gamble” (Hazzard-Donald, 19, pg. 79). This term was used to describe casual social gatherings frequented by African Americans during antebellum and the years that followed. At jooks, people who were enslaved momentarily transformed their

circumstances through communal social gatherings. Jooks served as social scenes where African Americans could defy their oppression through dancing, music, and political organization.

As slavery ended, and antebellum waned, the jook became the juke joint, which then manifested into another institution, the rent party (Hazzard-Donald, 1990). This transformation of such social gatherings is called the jook continuum (Hazzard-Donald, 1990). This term refers to the continuity, relevance, and influence of the jook. Social gatherings located on the jook continuum are noted for their cultural continuation, collective nature, and political defiance.

As stated previously, the topic of examination is undergraduate parties thrown by a Black Student Organization. These parties were interpreted for their political nature and viewed as sites of resistance. Additionally, the Black Student Organization's rendition of Freak Nik exists as a continuation of social and behavioral patterns present at jooks, juke joints, and rent parties and exists on the jook continuum.

In these select scenes, African American students from various backgrounds engage in political resistance and a momentary transformation of realities. As put by Bell (2018), "These communities did not represent an escape from reality, but they were rational attempts by African Americans to manipulate the hostile environment in which they lived ... they engaged in what Toni Morrison fashioned as remembering and (dis)remembering elements of their African culture through revisions of the past and through political activity" (p. 7).

### **Methodology:**

#### **Participants:**

Jooks, juke joints, and rent parties primarily consisted of African American working-class citizens. These social gatherings' have remained culturally relevant through a series of

transformations. Considering this reality, how have the historical tendencies of African American working class influenced African American undergraduate students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How does class and higher education influence such cultural links?

In the article, “Black Nationalism and the Afro-American Student,” Stanford (1971) explains such linkages. The following excerpt examines the connection between African American undergraduate students and everyday African American working-class society. Stanford’s words are worth citing at length,

Being the more educated class of an oppressed nation, it is sociologically the potential colonial bourgeoisie, but like colonial bourgeoisies of all oppressed nations, their class interests cannot be fulfilled under the colonial regime. Because America is a racist capitalistic society, it cannot absorb all black students as a class into its economic system because its system is built on racial and economic exploitation. For the most part black youth will be future black workers. The black worker is a super-exploited, wage slave, meaning that he is still a slave. Only the name of slavery has been changed; the condition remains almost the same... because they cannot achieve their goals within the system, black students will transform as a class; from being a bourgeois assimilationist, alienate elite to become revolutionary nationalist intelligentsia for the movement. (p. 27-28)

What cultural links aided in the transformation and preservation of such cultural tendencies? Stanford marks a significant cultural turning point on March 21, 1967, at Howard University. Stanford’s statements on this transformation are as follows,

...these students engaged in what they called a cultural revolution at Howard, a rechanneling of the student body’s values towards changing Howard from a “Negro college with white innards” to a black university relevant to the black community and its



struggle. Black students at other colleges slowly began to pick up on what was going on at Howard... By 1969 the black studies revolt had hit over 50 Negro colleges alone. The black student movement that was just a small nucleus four years ago has now taken on proportions of a mass movement with wide ramifications for the black community...

With more and more students coming from black working class backgrounds (families), they are more reality-based, striving to make their education meet the needs of their mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters at home... Black students are no longer trying to become white, and if black students (the future bourgeoisie) don't want to become white then who does anymore? (p. 28)

With the Black power movement, and its influence on undergraduate African American students, the political nature and collective organizing distinctive of the Black Nationalist movement spawned the political nature seen in Black Student Organizations today. The activism of undergraduate, student run clubs during the Black Power Movement, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), laid the foundation for the political ideology and consciousness of modern-day Black Student Organizations.

Design:

This study investigated the social gatherings orchestrated by a Black Student Organization at a Predominately White Institution in the American Midwest. The researcher's aim was to investigate social and behavioral dynamics present at an African American social gathering, specifically an undergraduate party organized by the Black Student Organization and pinpoint historical themes.

#### Procedure:

The study took place at multiple off campus bars in the urban Midwest of the United States. Interviews were semi structured and conducted with 12 students who were enrolled in the university's undergraduate program at the time the interview was conducted. Interviewees were at least 21 years of age and self-identified as African American. Identifying information of participants was not collected. Interviews began with the researcher inquiring about the social events thrown by the Black Student Organization, and continued with follow up questions, specifically prompting participants to describe a party hosted by the Black Student Organization. The main researcher identifies as a Black woman and was a graduate student when interviews were conducted.

Interviews were not audio recorded. Sentences, points of emphasis, such as statements of exclamation, were recorded in a notebook, with consent of the interviewee. Such quotations will be included in the party description section and appear as close to original form as possible.

Given the demographic of study, and racial identity of interviewees and the interviewer, discussions occurred in African American Vernacular English. Participant's linguistics choices and social dynamics described serve as the contents of analysis.

#### Disclosure:

The interviewer implemented nonverbal signifiers to aid in the deconstruction of interviewer, interviewee power dynamic. Additionally, informality was encouraged in attempt to create a casual environment in which an informal conversation could occur. This methodology was strategically chosen to place emphasis on oral narrative and recollections of interviewees' memory.

## Measures:

The data analysis process consisted of four parts. First, interviewees' descriptions were organized by party. Second, once descriptions of the same party were put together, descriptions were then sorted chronologically into three categories, before, during, and after. The "before" category included events such as venue inquiries, contract negotiations, and party promotion. The "during" category contained events such as attendee's arrival, music selection, and other events that transpired the night of the said party. The "after" category included student's behaviors and reactions to the party the morning after and in the time following the party's conclusion.

Third, interview data was organized adhering to folklore format, and participants' narratives were examined for semantic similarities. Fourth, after stories were constructed and linguistically assessed, broader social dynamics were analyzed, and linked to historical phenomenon. Interview data appears chronologically in terms of the progression of the party, not the time the interview was conducted.

## Results:

### Organization structure:

Community organizations exist as a series of interdependent relationships (Hill Collins, 2000). Such relationships function to aid in an equitable labor distribution of the Black Student Organization. An analysis of the Organization's<sup>3</sup> structure will allow us to understand the

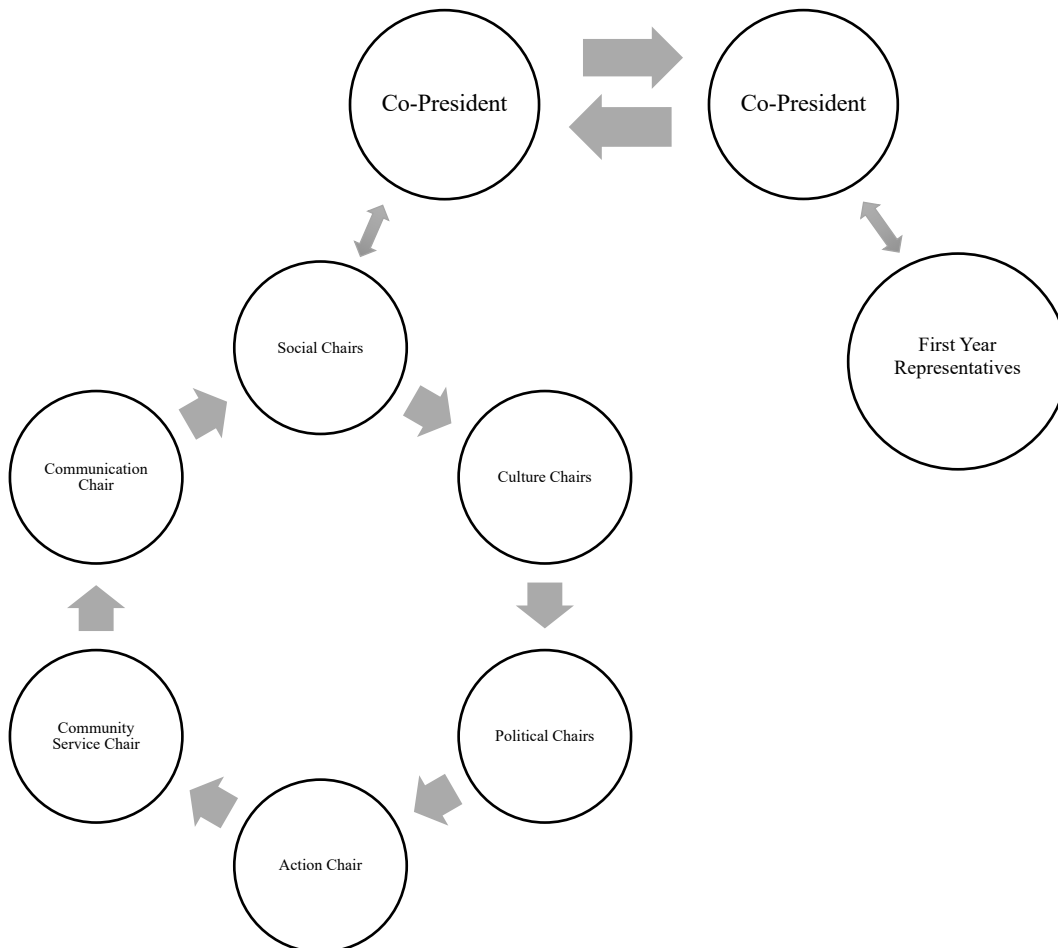
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<sup>3</sup> Here and in the pages that follow, the Black Student Organization of study is occasionally referred to as the Organization. When the "o" in organization is capitalized, the organization of discussion is the Black Student Organization of study.

division of labor and bureaucratic duties assigned to Organization members. This analysis will enhance our understanding of the Organization’s political nature.

The structure of the Black Student Organization was described by Organization members. There are two categories, the board and members. The board is comprised of co-presidents (2), treasurer, secretary, historian, social chairs (3), culture chairs (2), political chairs (2), action chair, community service chair, communications chair, and first-year representatives (3). Presidents, action chair, and political chair are elected via an internal board, which is comprised of existing board members. All other positions are elected via public election in the months preceding summer break. There are outlined roles, such as co-president, historian, or culture chair, but each Organization member contributes to function of the entire organization.

Organizational flow chart:



Party events:

Before a social gathering can materialize, the Black Student Organization must complete several bureaucratic processes. The first of which, involves locating a party venue. When discussing this process, an interviewee stated that, “there is no place to party for free”. The Organization’s location search mainly involves contract negotiations with white fraternity organizations around campus. These white fraternity organizations are the few student organizations that have houses close to campus. The fraternity houses’ proximity to campus makes them optimal party venues. This interviewee also indicated that, while such space is available to be rented by any university club or organization, the Black Student Organization rents the space the most.

When asked to detail the process, another interviewee stated that there is “a lot of courting to throw a party there [the fraternity house]”. The most time-consuming aspect of the “courting” process is the drafting and negotiating of the lease agreement.

To secure the lease agreement, the Organization is required to provide the fraternity with a detailed outline of Organization and fraternity member duties to be conducted for the duration of the party. This outline includes advertising agreements, ticket and drink pricing, financial platform<sup>4</sup>, financial responsibilities, labor agreements, liabilities, and a non-compliance clause.

Throughout the interview process, one party was frequently mentioned and described by study participants. This party was the Black Student Organization’s rendition of Freak Nik. According to a study participant, Organization members were assigned roles throughout the preparation and execution of the Freak Nik party. Details of assigned duties are included in the

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<sup>4</sup> For the Freak Nik party, Venmo was the financial platform for the acquisition of ticket and drink revenue.

labor agreements section of the leasing contract. An excerpt of this contract was shown to the researcher, and the roles were listed as follows<sup>5</sup>

Fraternity:

1. Providing 2 sober monitors for the duration of the night (shifts acceptable)
2. Providing 1 Brother at the door for the duration of the night (shifts acceptable)

Black Student Organization:

1. Providing 2 sober monitors for the duration of the night (shifts not acceptable)
2. Providing 1 Board member at the door for the duration of the night (shifts acceptable...)
3. Providing 2 Board members behind the bar for the duration of the night (shifts acceptable)
4. Providing 1 Board member at the DJ booth for the duration of the night (shifts acceptable)

The next chronological occurrence described by participants was the party's inception. The Organization started the event by stationing a member at the front door to collect entry fees. The entry fee is determined by numerous factors. Such factors include one's race, proximity to the Organization, and the Organizations upcoming financial obligations.

Typically, entrance rates are set at \$5.00 USD for Organization members, and \$10.00 USD for non-members. However, the amount charged at the door is dependent on the financial needs and requirements of the Black Student Organization as a whole. For example, if the Organization is planning an upcoming conference, or organizing a panel of speakers, the entry fee may

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<sup>5</sup> The contents of each role appears as it does on the lease agreement, however, the numbered bullet points and description headers were added. Additionally, not all labor expectations are listed above.

increase. Conversely, if the Organization has no looming financial responsibilities entrance rates may decrease.

Members of the Organization's board are permitted to enter the party free of charge, or "our people get in for free", as told by one interviewee. Ultimately, the entrance fee is determined by the discretion of the member posted at the door. This nature of comping for members and close friends is mirrored in the pricing of beverages.

Once in the party, Organization members can order drinks for a reduced rate, or free of charge, depending on the situational context. However, this does not reign true for the party's white attendants. These attendants are instructed to pay upwards of \$15.00 USD for a "two dollar shot", as stated by one participant. These attendants pay the inflated price for the drink, often not realizing how much they spent until the next morning. Although white students don't voice objections in the moment, they express their complaints about the inflated pricing model utilizing an anonymous online chat platform.

One interviewee described the beginning moments of Freak Nik as "more white". They noted that African American students tend to arrive to parties later than their white peers. This interviewee shared a tonal shift that occurred when Organization members decide it's time to encourage white students to leave, or "weed them out". When describing this process the participant noted a few behavioral tendencies, the most prominent being, a change in musical catalogue. This shift influences the Organization's member's behavior as well, stating, "The music will take them out." This change in music then prompts an increase of enthusiasm and crowd interaction from African American partygoers and marks the beginning of the exodus of white attendees.

This participant continued their description by sharing, “they [white undergraduates] know that this is not the house for them. We watch people order their lyfts home just by being ourselves”. Once the white students are filtered out, the Black students continue to engage in collective coping, allowing them to transform their undergraduate experience.

“Culture vulture”:

In all twelve interviews, study participants used the term “culture vulture” when referring to white undergraduate students who attended the Organization’s Freak Nik party. This metaphoric and imagistic term reveals the African American students’ conceptualization of the white attendees and points to a communal identity and consciousness. Their communal identity and consciousness can be observed in the African American undergraduates linguistic and behavioral patterns.

The participants utilization of “culture vulture” reveals a shared language and understanding. As put by Bell (2018), “The lucidity of their symbolic and metaphorical language provides crystalline insights into the ways in which they transformed their experiences into images that tell their stories of both oppression and liberation” (p. 19). The clarity of the term “culture vulture” metaphoric symbolism provides us with insight into how African American undergraduate students conceptualize white party goers.

Linguistically, the term “culture vulture” is consistent with the tonal and rhythmic practices of African American Vernacular English. To conduct a proper analysis of this terminology, we will analyze each word, and its symbolisms, individually. Then, an analysis of the two words together will be examined and thus applied.



The use of the word “culture” speaks to a communal understanding of the cultural significance of the event, it speaks to an understanding that the behavioral patterns exist as a part of a larger cultural system and shared history. The white attendees of the party watch and observe party events, however, this is not how their presence is interpreted the interviewees. The term “vulture” carries a negative connotation, as vultures survive in nature by feeding on dead animal remains. The description of these partygoers as vultures implies a collective conceptualization that their attendance exists to feast on the remains of the African American students’ culture.

The use of “culture vulture” displays a political understanding of the implications and societal themes present when a white student attends the Black Student Organization’s party. This linguistic decision shows an acute awareness and consciousness amongst the Freak Nik attendees and African American student body. The utilization of Black Semantics in the form of the term “culture vulture” provides a vessel for African American students to display their consciousness and assert their political and cultural power. While the white student may penetrate the cathartic space carved out by the Organization, the African American students counter this disruption through their language and behavior.

Terms such as “culture vulture”, changes in music catalog, and a flexible pricing model exist as strategic ways African American students reclaim the space and display their collective consciousness.

### **Discussion:**

Historical relevance:

The historical roots of African American social gatherings can be traced to the jook. The jook began in antebellum, however, it’s cultural influence and remnants remain in modern

society. Like African American language, cultural tendencies continually transform to adapt to modern society.

As previously mentioned, this study examined undergraduate parties as a form of collective coping. Interviews with students offered descriptions of one party in particular, the Black Student Organization's rendition of Freak Nik. What justifies the placement of this party, and ones like it, on the jook continuum? Before we can answer this question, let's explore the party in a broader context, beginning with its name.

In *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, linguist Dr. Geneva Smitherman (1986) states, "What's in a name, then? Everything, as we acknowledge that names are not merely words but concepts which suggest implications, values, history, and consequences beyond the word or "mere" name itself. Words fit into a total symbolic and cultural system that can only be decoded within the context of that system" (p. 42). Smitherman points to importance of names and their conceptual and historical value. The name Freak Nik is suggestive of historical events and social patterns. The name of this party exists as an offspring of the cultural system in which it originated.

To properly understand such a system, we must examine the original Freak Nik. This examination will assist in our comprehension of the historical reference implemented by the Organization's event title.

The original Freak Nik began as a spring break picnic organized by Atlanta University Center's DC Metro Club. This club consisted of students from Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV). The picnic quickly grew into a prominent spring break destination for students of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and African American students across the United States.

The name “Freak Nik” was a combination of freak and picnic, in addition to a nod to Rick James’ song “Superfreak” which was of particularly popularity within the student body (Whack & Burns, 2019). Student organizers wished for picnic attendees to act “freaky”. As put by Marcellus Barksdale, one of Freak Nik’s original organizers, “This is where we were going to be able to get freaky” (Whack & Burns, 2019). This picnic began with the intention to create a space for students to be themselves.

With this historical context, we can then imply that the Black Student Organization had a similar vision for their adaptation of the Atlanta-based picnic. The original Freak Nik was organized by African American students for African American students. The Black Student Organization continued this tradition with their rendition of Freak Nik.

Freak Nik is representative of 90s African American culture, meaning, African American fashion trends of the 1990s are worn when such a name is chosen for a party. Freak Nik’s prominence and cultural impact is primarily known and kept alive within the African American community. While widely known in the African American community, and amongst the African American undergraduates, the same cannot be said for the white students at the university. The Organization’s application of this theme served as a buffer between the African American and white students at the university.

This historical cultural reference and party theme serves two purposes. It signals to African American students at the university that the party is thrown for them, while simultaneously reversing the power dynamics present in other university environments. As African American students are seen and felt as the outsider in the educational contexts of the university, this party flipped that narrative (Lewis, 2012). White students were excluded from the party’s cultural reference and overall aesthetic theme.

The Organization's version of Freak Nik provided a space for students to engage in cathartic, liberatory, and political practices. Such cathartic and political occurrences are comparable to that seen at jook, or in juke joints, as represented by the party's placement on the jook continuum.

Looking to history, for a jook, juke joint, or rent party to occur, connections throughout community were required. According to Hazzard (1990), "Average citizens without capital or political clout were in no position to open establishments of this sort. Political power had become a determinant" (pg. 124). The execution of such social gatherings required a possession of political, social, and financial capital. Such multifaceted requirements indicate the necessity of group organizations (Hazzard, 1990). Where one individual may not possess all forms of essential capital, as a member of a group, they then contribute to the power of the whole.

Incorporating a modern context, the typical undergraduate student doesn't possess the political, social, and financial capital required to organize and executive a party. An individual can't successfully administrate a party of scale, however, once a member of an organization, this feat becomes possible. Collective coping sites, such as social gatherings, serve as a place of resistance, and require political capital to occur. The political power necessitated to organize such events speaks to the political nature of the interactions that occur at said events.

The Black Student Organization's orchestrated parties are interpreted as political because they impact the power relations present in the larger student body. Bell (2018) asserts that political activity is comprised of organized collective action that has a direct impact on preexisting power relations. Unlike the dynamics of the day-to-day educational environment, at the Organization's Freak Nik, the African American undergraduate students were the majority and in control of the cultural capital.

The Black Student Organization's rendition of Freak Nik historical adaptation justify its' placement on the jook continuum. Referring to the chronological order of the party's events, the first similarity is seen before one enters the party.

As previously described, the Organization often rents venue space from white fraternities around campus. Looking to history, at plantation dances, the overseer would control access to property (Hazzard-Donald, 1990). Plantation owners and overseers utilized this ownership to control and observe the behavior of those frequenting dances. Large gatherings of enslaved people were interpreted by onlookers as dangerous, as this was where insurrections were plotted, and authority was defied. While white fraternities may not own the property outright, the similarities remain.

In the leasing contract for Freak Nik, the fraternity outlined three "Brothers" to monitor the front door and party activities. We must ask ourselves, what does their monitoring symbolize? If we were to incorporate the historical surveillance of African American bodies, and students' interpretation of white attendees as "vultures", we can infer that, in these select social scenes, white fraternity members take the place of overseers, and African American undergraduate students that of the enslaved. White fraternity members utilize their control of venue space to control and observe the behavior of those who use the space. However, this control does not negate the collective coping and political defiance that simultaneously occurs.

While the Organization must pay to use the space, they are able to recoup their money with an entrance fee. This financial incentive is seen in the rent party, as such gatherings were named for their financial incentive.

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the economic state of the United States took a turn for the worse, rent parties took over social scene of urban communities. As people were

faced with multifaceted economic obstacles, making rent became a monthly challenge. In this environment, rent parties thrived. The rent party served as a fusion between the collective coping mechanisms embodied in the jook, and the financial necessities of its participants.

According to Katrina Hazzard-Donald (1990) rent parties were brought to fruition “By establishing a cooperative network, a core of other individuals willing to assist. Usually, a promise to return the courtesy was sufficient. This volunteer work was an investment against future hard times” (pg. 98). During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, community members offered their labor to contribute to the fruition of a rent party. While not financially compensated for their labor, community members contributed for the betterment of the cooperative network. This cooperative network served to combat financial hardship and contributed to a sense of community. The Organization’s Freak Nik resembles similar cathartic and financial motives, and cooperative network.

The sliding entry rate is representative of the cooperative and communal nature of the organization. Board members offer their time and labor to plan and execute a party, which exists as a space where African American students can join and collectively cope. Organization members indirectly exchange their labor for reduced entry rates. This cooperative network is foundational to the overall function of the Black Student Organization. Similarly, organization members are not financial compensated for their labor in party related efforts. However, such labor contributes to the party’s execution and overall cooperative network. Such an exchange occurred in the organization and execution of rent parties.

**Conclusion:**

This study examined collective coping and behavioral themes present at a Black Student Organizations' college party. To examine such mechanisms and behavioral themes, study participants were asked to recollect parties organized by the university's Black Student Organization. Through interviews, the researcher was able to investigate the Black Student Organization's autonomous and communal nature.

Additionally, we investigated how the social life of African American undergraduates, point to coping mechanisms and social dynamics existent throughout African American history. The historically political nature of Black Student Organization across the country lead to the examination of the political nature of their collective coping mechanisms. The historical roots of African American social gatherings, such as the Organization's Freak Nik, can be traced to the jook, juke joint, and rent party. The historical similarities between these social gatherings justify the placement of the Organization's Freak Nik on the jook continuum.

The Black Student Organization's rendition of Freak Nik party provided a space for African American undergraduates to collectively cope and define their existence through the kinship, community solidarity, and political resistance.

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