
Youth Culture, Ethnic Choice, and the Identity Politics of Guido

The police department of the small New Jersey shore town of South Belmar warily eyed the 2000 Labor Day weekend marking the last “fling” of the summer. An “internal police memo” written by an officer with an Irish surname identified a particular group for special scrutiny: “Let’s end the summer by taking a ‘bite’ out of the remaining ‘guidos’ and have some fun while we are doing it.” The “memo” was leaked to an Italian-American anti-defamation organization that lodged a formal protest with the town government. The town’s mayor, who had an Italian surname, maintained that the term “guido” did not refer to Italian Americans but to “people from the city,” scapegoating a social category too amorphous to field an anti-defamation constituency. This maneuver failed to satisfy an official of the Italian-American organization because “Everyone in the United States knows that ‘Guido’ is an Italian slur” [www.italianamericanonevoice.org, accessed 10/7/02].

Guido has become a new ethnic insult for Italian Americans, surpassing the historical epithets of guinea, dago, and wop.¹ I argue, however, that to leave matters there stifles an Italian-American narrative and misses an opportunity to de-fuse a new generation ethnic “slur.” This essay contends that Guido names the “moment” in which a distinctive youth style originating in New York City becomes symbolically linked to Italian ethnicity. The appropriation of American popular culture in the name of Italian ethnicity is predicated on the “agency” of contemporary “youth

¹ According to the interactive Internet “encyclopedia” *Wikipedia* “Guido is a derogatory ethnic slur term for a stereotypical young Italian-American male from the Northeastern United States.” [accessed 6/12/06]

formations" as a collective dynamic underscored by the cultural studies perspective (Austin and Willard, 1998). As a "youth formation," Guido represents a particular subject position inside the ethnic boundary. It is a "construction site" for ethnicity and an "ethnic formation" within popular youth culture.

The essay focuses on the way ethnicity is constructed in the "symbolic work" of Guido youth. In this account, ethnicity is "transacted" in "the creative choices of individuals and groups as they define themselves and others in ethnic ways" (Nagel, 1998: 57). The transactional perspective views choices to invoke ethnicity as a function of the "purposes" and "power" of social actors on both sides of the ethnic boundary (Royce, 1982:1-3). In particular, ethnicity is "strategically exploited and manipulated within specific contexts as various groups compete for scarce resources" (Matute- Bianchi, 1986:235).

The "creative choices" which reference Italian ethnicity to popular youth culture are problematic for the identity politics of Italian-American elites. Elite ideology denies Guido ethnic agency by exteriorizing it as a negative media stereotype and slur. However, this fails to appreciate a cultural narrative grounded in a particular Italian-American experience that is at the vortex of a new dynamic of prejudice. A scenario that allows room to "rework" ethnicity in the process of assimilation (Sansone, 1995) is also offered as an alternative the accepted sociological understanding of Italian-American identity organized around a traditional culture.

GUIDO AS YOUTH SUBCULTURE

A "youth subculture" is a collectivity whose practices "revolve around the symbolic meaning of stylized presentations of self as well as around the symbolic meanings those performances have" (Schwartz, 1987:16-18). Subcultural "meanings" are typically referenced to the commercial media and entertainment culture, but are "translated" and rearranged to suit a youth agenda (Clarke, 1976).

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Guido is a youth subculture in this basic sense that it names a “category” of youth defined by “style.”²

Guidos can easily be recognized in a crowd. No matter what the occasion a Guido is dressed like he is going to a club, or on his way to work out at the gym. Tight muscle tee shirts are a wardrobe staple. These shirts can be worn with sweatpants and Nikes or with a “shark skin suit” and dress loafers. An oversized gold chain and a diamond stud earring are accessories that complete the look. [Michael, 19, 2001]

It is the product of “symbolic work” that issues in the selection and arrangement of stock youth cultural elements (Willis, 1990). There is a conscious awareness of sharing a style-based identification with other youth that places them in a “youth category.” However, pop culture styles are referenced to Italian ethnicity and local urban spaces. A multi-layered youth identity establishes difference in relation to significant youth others. Collective identity and difference are “produced” in a peer group dynamic.

My friends and I pretty much have the same hairstyle. All the girls wear it straight and shoulder-length. All the guys wear it short and gel on top. If one were to wear it differently we have to make sure our friends would ‘approve’. We wear pretty much the same type of jewelry; things like gold crosses, pretty rings and bracelets our boyfriends gave to us. Before I started hanging out with this group all I listened to was rap and reggae. Now all I listen to is freestyle and club music. When we drive around in our cars, that is all that we play and when we go to clubs that is all that we hear. Most people say that freestyle is all Italians listen to. I have to say that for the most part, that is true. [Corrine, 2001]

² Earlier research based on ethnographic methods in the late 1980s mapped Guido as an Italian-American youth subculture in New York City (Tricarico, 1991). This discussion builds on that early documentation.

Contemporary youth subcultures typically exploit ethnicity to realize their own expressive and instrumental agendas (Lipsitz, 1994b; Maira, 2002). As the above testimonies suggest, youth make sense of being "Italian" in order to appropriate American pop culture styles that are not found in the ethnic heritage. Instead they are withdrawn from a youth culture "symbol bank" (Sansone, 1995). While symbols of ethnic solidarity are invoked to validate insider authenticity, this does not preclude the absorption of American popular culture. However, ethnicity is enlisted to filter and give coherence to collective style choices including the capacity to poach from other subcultures:

In recent years, body piercing has become a staple in an Italian teen's style. These piercings include tongue rings, eyebrow rings and belly rings. Guidos still wear gold crosses and Christ heads, but now tend to have earrings in both ears. [Corrine, 2004]

Despite appropriations from commercial style markets and global media like television and the Internet, there is a typical subcultural conceit that Guidos produce their own style:

Instead of wearing baggy and oversized clothes, Guidos make sure their clothes are tight. Straight legs are very common. They go perfect with their Skecher boots. Shirts have to be tight to show off their muscles and tattoos. You still need a gold chain to go with your outfit. New accessories have been added. Now it is almost mandatory to have one of the newest cell phones attached to your belt. [John, 2001]

"Guido" specifies the "agency" that produces a style ensemble or "bricolage" (Hebdige, 1979) of diverse cultural elements. When certain "stylized presentations" that symbolically represent Italian ethnicity surface within local youth culture scenes, Guido is at least implicitly possible. It is also deliberately performed or "styl-

ized" by second and third generation youth in reference to youth style markets. A youth "style tradition" (Sansone, 1995) has been configured around fashion choices like gold chains, warm-up suits, and tank-tops that can be confounded with a dynamic ethnic group culture that Royce (1982:3) characterizes as "traditional style".

Consciousness of shared ethnicity has supplied coherence especially in the face of fluid styles. In Guido, Italian-American ethnicity is symbolically represented as the style of a local youth category. Ethnicity serves as a device of style linkage – a way of being Italian becomes referenced to an ensemble of youth culture signifiers. To this extent, ethnicity also draws boundaries intended to include some and exclude others. It establishes parameters for stylized performances in the competition for scarce youth culture rewards.

Identities are transacted across boundaries. Thornton (1995: 162) points out that "Communications media create subcultures in the process of naming them and draw boundaries around them in the act of describing them." A 1997 *New York Times* article named Guido in the context of local style-based youth culture with cruising cars that "peel off for Francis Lewis Boulevard," "bellbottoms and platform shoes," and "'tight shirts" (Botton, 1997). Themes of youth culture fun and pleasure paper over narratives in the public discourse that label Guido as threats to mainstream civility. A deeper sense of "moral panic" was framed by the mainstream press in response to a 1989 "racial killing" in Bensonhurst, a section of South Brooklyn with 100,000 persons of Italian ancestry. The highly publicized incident marked the entrance of the term "Guido" into mainstream public discourse, framed as violent and racist. The moral panic in the mainstream print media demonized "Guido" as a "folk devil" responsible for "wilding", a metaphor employed to dehumanize African-American youth in "the Central Park jogger" case (Tricarico, 2001). Like ghetto youth, Guidos

were portrayed as a "menace to society" with the implication that they could not be comprehended as "white" notwithstanding a "racial attack." This narrative recalled the menacing "dago" of yesteryear and was situated in a wider ethnic group narrative when Bensonhurst was portrayed as a "closed" and "insular" world. Moral panic played off a prominent ethnic stereotype with a pronounced Mafia spin that established another parallel with Black "gangstas." Moral panic in the press seemed to legitimate a "menace" paradigm that was evident when a local politician criticized a Giuliani administration policy that targeted nonwhite neighborhoods for aggressive street policing: "What makes him think if he stopped every Italian kid in Gravesend, Coney Island, Ozone Park, and Bensonhurst, he wouldn't get a fair amount of gun possessions there?" (Tricarico, 2001).³

³ The Birmingham School distinguished between youth subcultures that "resist" mainstream values, like "punk," and those that embrace them (Stahl, 1999). Guido is a "commodity-oriented subculture" that seeks "incorporation" into mainstream culture (Muggleton and Weinzerl, 2003: 8). However, claiming distinction for style "talks back to" the ethnic stigma attached to immigrant Italians and Italian Americans. Episodes of street violence producing moral panic in the mass media (and the Jersey shore "police memo") echo the careers of working class British youth subcultures in the 1960s and 1970s (Cohen, 1983). Guidos can be compared to the "Teddy Boys" of the same period who combined qualities like "toughness" and "excitement" with "concerns with style," although they "did not create their own musical symbols, but took them over" from the commercial pop culture (Frith, 1981:219).

Deviance labels in the public discourse reinforce the boundary delineated by ethnicity. As used by the Birmingham School, the term "subculture" implies clearly demarcated boundaries. Critics prefer the term "life-style" which suggests more fluid styles and shifting membership (Bennett, 2000; Maffessoli, 1996; Muggleton and Weinzerl, 2003). Guido uses ethnicity to create clearly bounded youth culture identities and spaces contrasts with "post-subcultural" youth who "do not typically regard themselves in collective terms" (Bose, 2003:176). There are precedents in bounded ethnic youth subcultures for Mexican American "Pachuco" (Lipsitz, 1994b), South Asian Indian American "Desi" (Maira, 2002), and African American Hip Hop (Clay, 2003; Njubi, 2001; Dimitriadis, 2001; Rose, 1994). In the case of Guido, the boundary created by ethnicity is transacted not just with the mainstream, but with significant others including "post-subcultural" youth. A boundary is also created for Guido that is moral. Despite fluid and inclusive youth culture spaces like dance clubs and chat rooms that promote "intercultural communication" (Yon, 1999), it still meaningful to recognize Guido as having a more or less bounded "subcultural" style and scene.

THE GUIDO 'MOMENT'

If youth subcultures originate in a historical "moment" (Hebdige, 1979), Guido galvanized in the 1970s in an attempt to ride the disco wave that hit popular American culture. The 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever* can be read as an origin myth although the Rik Cohn essay in *New York Magazine* on which it was based suggests that an incipient vernacular urban dance subculture was already in place. Still, the appearance of a Hollywood film about young working class Italian Americans in Brooklyn provided media culture validation of the city's Italian-American youth's special calling to disco; the Guido name, reflecting a collective consciousness of this youth culture position, would crystallize later (see below). The formative significance of this origin myth is reflected in iconic images of the film's protagonist "Tony Manero" (John Travolta); a digital photograph of "Tony Manero" dancing in a white suit that adorns the web page of dance music radio DJ "Brooklyn's Own Joe Causi" symbolizes a claim to subcultural capital. The seminal Guido moment is invoked for the sake of authenticity in the web page biography for "DJ Mike C" of Internet radio station WKTU dedicated to "spread the [dance music] vibe on a global scale":

I learned to spin back in the late 80s. Self-proclaimed 'guidos' in my hometown of Brooklyn taught me everything I needed to know.
[personal e-mail communication, 2000]

Disco has afforded a comprehensive subcultural style featuring a signature "look," a sound, and an urban scene. As a youth culture "moment" it facilitated movement away from the anomic "greaser" youth style marking Italian-American neighborhoods. This is significant because "greaser" signified a "negatively privileged ethnicity" with a "dominated" ethnic culture (J. Hall, 1992). A racialized label which has been imposed on Mexican Americans

in the southwest, greaser is also a “taste culture” tainted by a lower class status. Urban greasers produced a significant pop culture moment in *Doo Wop*, which records a significant contribution from Italian Americans especially in New York City and Philadelphia. However, disco entailed a more intensive and broad-based commitment to stylized consumption. It facilitated a deeper foray into a popular entertainment and media culture with markedly fewer restrictions on commodified fun and pleasure. The outer limits of club culture consumption were represented by the new Manhattan discos in the 1970s like the hedonistic *Studio 54* (Owen, 2003).

The emergence of style-based youth subcultures is predicated on requisite discretionary income and consumption including sufficient leisure, a development bound up with delayed marriage and employment (Frith, 1982). Working class youth in Italian-American neighborhoods into the 1960s had limited discretionary income for youth cultural consumption; thus, Italian-American youth culture in the West End of Boston in the late 1950s was truncated by the onset of adulthood in their late teens (Gans, 1984). The material conditions for a sufficiently bounded Italian-American youth subculture crystallized in middle class and blue-collar Italian-American communities in the outlying boroughs. To this extent, Guido is hardly a “lower class” consumption pattern (D’Acierno, 1996:689).

Expanded opportunities for commodity consumption provide a sharp contrast with greaser. According to a self-identified “Guido” from Queens named Mike, “To be a true Guido means that you are able to afford the Guido lifestyle, which includes the expensive clothes, cars, and nights.” Nightclubs emerged as “cathedrals of consumption” (Ritzer, 2005), a development that took an ironic twist when the infamous Manhattan club *Limelight* opened in a renovated Episcopalian church. Compared to previous eras, contemporary youth are “able to choose from a greater range of

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consumer goods and services and images" and the new "urban nightscapes" were able to "offer abundant resources for experimentation and play" (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003:11). Italian-American youth subculture has incorporated sites of consumption such as tanning salons, gyms, pool halls, and beauty parlors where "Guidettes get manicures, pedicures, and have their eyebrows waxed." Impressive financial expenditure has been built into dating relationships. Josephine's "boyfriend" (and "future husband") has an income derived from "a family business."

This allows him to buy me the material items such as diamonds and the latest clothing gear. Just the other day he bought me the entire Chanel snowsuit for when we go out in his 2001 four-wheeler, now that winter is here. [Josephine, 20]

While Josephine is actually claiming a high ranking style in the status hierarchy, Guido also symbolizes the "consumer desire" (Lipsitz, 1994b:5) or "longing" for consumption if not its "visible practice" (Campbell, 1987:89).

Money is very important to Guidos and is seen as a high social status. If you don't have the money for the Guido lifestyle you have to pretend you do. [Michael, 19]

Guido also presupposed the erosion of a traditional family and community culture, relaxing the "adult surveillance" capable of stunting "youth formations" (Austin and Willard, 1998). Italian-American youth were freer to consume popular culture, which has historically provided "a free space for the imagination - an area liberated from old restraints and repressions, a place where desire did not have to be justified and explained" (Lipsitz, 1994a: 9). The pursuit of "immediate sense gratification" (i.e., a "party" ethos) within peer group contexts is not easily reconciled with a

traditional morality grounded in a scarcity economy; even when family values embrace core American consumer values, popular youth culture creates a more "autonomous" and "hedonistic" consumer (Lipsitz, 1994b:47; Campbell, 1987:89). Urban dance clubs afforded a dramatic break with ethnic family culture although youth like Josephine (above) could be "bifocal" (Lipsitz, 1994a) by remaining "close" to the family and even participate in ethnic communal functions like the religious *feste*.

Still, urban dance clubs occasioned a new kind of site to construct Italian (youth) identity. Clubs offer youth places to "indulge in 'adult' activities of flirtation, sex, drink and drugs, and explore cultural forms" (like music and clothes) as the basis for "autonomous and distinct identities" (Thornton, 1995:26). More than any other places dance clubs "play out fictive scenarios of changed identities" (Lipsitz, 1994a:8). According to a self-described "club junky":

Many young adults go to clubs to escape reality; it provides them with a fantasyland. The extra loud music puts people in a place they love, a place where they can get away from family members, school, and the workplace. Clubs make you forget all your problems and dance the night away." [Maria, 19, 2004]

Club culture stokes the fantasy of celebrity entertainment culture. Maria emphasized that clubs afford patrons the opportunity to be "discovered" by talent scouts for their dancing and even singing, adding that *Club DNA* in Astoria, Queens held a talent search modeled after the hit television program *American Idol*. Maria's personal fantasy was based on a Hollywood narrative: "Just like in the movie *Honey* about a young girl who was spotted in a club dancing and then danced in music videos which was her dream." A "young girl" waiting for the celebrity moment can pose as a *hot-tie*, a flagrantly sexualized club-based persona. While females are

typically cast by the male “gaze” as sex objects, it is a measure of changing sexual mores and the gender politics of club culture that females who “turn heads” and “break hearts” on the dance floor are empowered to label males as “hotties” as well.

Dance club culture shifted Italian-American youth identity beyond the provincial confines of the ethnic community. Clubbing creates a consciousness and practice that is fundamentally incompatible with the neighborhood bars and lounges, social clubs, Italian cafés and other “third places” characterized by provincial forms of solidarity and “adult surveillance.” A cosmopolitan dance club scene created conditions for the expansion of local peer groups, or “cliques,” into a youth “category” thrown into relief by differences from youth others (Schwartz, 1987: 16-18). Club culture, in other words, facilitated a breakthrough to a more inclusive identity referenced to ethnicity and coded as “Guido,” namely an Italian-American position in club culture. It became the linchpin of an Italian youth category:

You can't compare the club [*Sound Factory*] to anything! We [Italian Americans] tear up the dance floor. [Chat room profile, 2000]

As the preeminent Guido narrative, clubbing became a template for the consumption of popular culture and “urban nightscapes”: “Guidos dress like they’re going to a club even when they ‘re just hanging out.” Club culture style offered to sublimate, if not replace, the neighborhood of as the frame of urban Italian-American (youth) identity: “I have to say that [we] Italians love freestyle.” The club scene made it possible to imagine a youth category based on ethnicity that spanned the five boroughs and extended into the suburban diaspora.

MASS MEDIA SETTINGS

Consumption-oriented youth subcultures typically seek representation in the mass media. Commercial media outlets are increasingly amenable as evidenced by the new MTV channels that target content to Latinos, Indian Americans (Desis), Chinese Americans, and Korean Americans. Established mass media outlets possess considerable power to construct reality in contemporary society. "Winning space" in the commercial entertainment and media culture provides legitimacy in youth style markets, validating their credentials for stylized youth culture fun and pleasure.

As a local youth subculture, Guido found its reflection in local dance radio. While *Saturday Night Fever* possesses mythical value, this niche puts them on a par with the principal constituencies – Blacks, Latinos, gays – comprising the city's club culture (Fikentscher, 2000:110). The crash of disco and the ascendance of rap routed dance music from local airwaves and the closing of dance music station WKTU in the early nineties left Guidos without a "mediated center." It returned to the air in 1996 on the strength of a revived dance music scene, with a publicity stunt in Times Square that invoked the mythic energy of *Saturday Night Fever*. "KTU" was anointed by insiders as "the Guido station" and "the official radio station of all Italians," the mediated center of the club culture experience and commercial entertainment more generally. Moreover, WKTU cultivated a Guido connection in the radio personalities of "Goomba Johnny" Sialiano and "Brooklyn's Own Joe Causi." Sialiano is a stand-up comedian with an Italian neighborhood accent, whose material is lifted from Italian-American neighborhood culture, including local Mafia lore (see below). Causi grew up in Bensonhurst, the symbolic homeland of Guido, and claimed an authentic connection to dance music and the local club scene. On a Sunday evening show broadcast from *Studio 54* in the Fall of 2001, Causi played classic disco and hosted a cast of stylized Guido personas in "The Supreme Cuginette" and "Joey

Balls" and "Carminooch" whose comedy is rooted in the urban Italian-American neighborhood culture. Causi's persona featured stylized insider phrases like "How ya doin'?" and "fuggedabout-it". Neighborhood vernacular was turned up high in actual exchanges with ethnic homeboys, and for the expression of neighborhood ideology like the nostalgia mingled with resentment for a lapsed Italian Bensonhurst which has become, thanks to an influx of immigrants, "like the friggin' United Nations."

The emergence of Italian-American media celebrities linked to club culture provided iconic style leaders for an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). A radio niche also provided an identity space for an Italian-American youth category that is dispersing, making the center hold for a "postmodern tribe" (Maffessoli, 1996).⁴ A niche on WKTU is tenuous since the commercial mass media outlet is sensitive to market pressures. Market forces probably affected the departure of Joe Causi for a new local dance music station in 2004 and a growing commitment to a burgeoning Latino population in broadcast range with a historic ethnic connection to dance music styles like salsa, bachata, and meringue. Organic ethnic spokespersons like Causi articulate a boundary with significant others that are highly permeable. In particular, dance music like freestyle has been bound up with Latino rhythms. The crossover of Italians into Latin music was the Rosemary Clooney standard "Mambo Italiano" frequently played on WKTU seemingly to celebrate the new ethnic alliance and cultural blend: "Try an enchilada with your baccala." Goomba's persona was performed as part of a morning crew that was "anchored" by a Dominican and supported by a conspicuously Puerto Rican man who deferred to "Goomba" as "Papi." Although ethnocentric, Goomba routinely crosses the ethnic boundary especially for the sake of

⁴ Intermittent use of media spaces can be construed as a "postmodern tribal ritual" in the sense that it gives rise to formations "characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings, and dispersal" (Maffessoli, 1996:76).

Guido libido, as when erotic interest in the African American singer Sammantha Muumba led him to contemplate a "Muumba/Goomba" union on the air. Goomba also produced a rap song for his Guido anthem "Feds Threw a Party" which featured Latin beats and a sprinkling of Spanish lyrics. Nevertheless, Goomba routinely drew an ethnic boundary (evoking historic ethnic turf conflict) when he chastised his Puerto Rican sidekick during the 2004 *Meatball Contest*, "You don't call an Italian woman 'mommy'." The station's Latin and Italian-American personalities displayed a fraternization that made ethnic difference appear arbitrary as when Goomba joked that the professional baseball player Alfonso Soriano, who is a Black Dominican, was really "Italian" because his name ends in a vowel and because he was a star performer for the home team New York Yankees.

In contrast to a Westchester FM station that airs a nostalgic Saturday afternoon "Italian program" based on classic and contemporary music for adults, WKTU's agenda is to shape a hedonistic taste culture for its audience and ethnicity serves as a hook or device of style-linkage. There are commercial advertisements for products that cultivate the "look" of a "hottie" like tanning, "whitening strips" for teeth, and weight control. Promotional contests feature destinations of youth cultural hedonism as prizes including Spring Break in Cancun and a Caribbean resort aptly known as *Hedonism*. The station's personalities drop the names of celebrities whose commodified media personas are imaginatively consumed by fans. The microculture of dance radio is validated by the "consumption space" of urban dance clubs with their expensive cover charges, drinks, and personal overhead (clothes, haircuts, jewelry, etc.).

Local Italian-American youth appropriated the resources of Internet chat in the late 1990s for their social rituals and identity development. Adopting a new trend in youth culture practice, a chat room scene henceforth known as *ItalChat* surfaced in (cyber) -

space made available by a commercial Internet service provider. Compared to older media, a chat room scene gave freer rein to the agency of subcultural youth who established the interactive forum everyday in the name of Italian-American ethnicity. As a media space it is accessible to youth from throughout the metropolitan area and beyond and seems driven by the desire to expand network capital for the cultivation of dating and sexual partners. ItalChat facilitated identity experimentation in other subcultural styles, particularly gangsta Hip Hop. Females in ItalChat challenged male-centered prerogatives in Guido including the right to define a gendered subcultural persona. Gender empowerment was signaled by the substitution of the name "Bella," using the Italian word for "beauty" to liberate themselves from the derivative and demeaning "Guidette" label. When "Bellas" referred to "Guidos" as "Fellas", males acquired a derivative gender identity. An alternate gender order was proclaimed in the slogan "Bellas B4 Fellas."

STYLING STREET CULTURE

Guido is defined by an aggressive masculinity that marks a historical relationship to the "defended" Italian-American neighborhood (Tricarico, 1984). Schneider (1998) links this motif to lower class masculine "honor" manifest in physical intimidation and the control of turf. Elijah Anderson (1990) finds expression of this moral order in a "code of the street" in the lower class Black "ghetto." In a side note, he observed that, owing to similar structural conditions, this street culture "can be observed in working class Italian...communities" (Anderson, 1990:84). A "street experience of leisure" (Frith, 1983:218) frames Italian-American youth subculture into the present. Its classic features are "fighting" and "male camaraderie" (Frith, 1983:218). Street-based youth subcultures invest heavily in social capital to counter ubiquitous threats. This is expressed in the cultivation of reputations on the street

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("Don't f___ with a Guido!") based on having "lots of friends" who "watch each other's backs."

I remember one time I was at a club and saw these Guidos I am kind of friends with. They were about to get into a fight in which they were outnumbered and destined to lose but went out fighting for each other. This is a very good way to be and I think more subcultures should take care of their own as they do. [David, 19 year old male]

Having "your back covered" was not just a defensive strategy but license to "start a beef." As sites of masculinist competition, clubs and other forms of urban night life have retained features of the street that call for the appropriate social capital.

Organized masculine aggression is prominently imprinted in the local Italian-American youth style tradition; the "Big Bad Guidos" of the 1990s in northeastern Queens are descendants of the greaser "gang" known as "The Golden Guineas" who were based in the Fordham section of the Bronx and in Bensonhurst in the 1950s and 1960s. Youth gangs have been controlled by local Mafia syndicates which sought to monopolize organized crime activities and inhibit the intervention of law enforcement authorities (Tricarico, 1984). This inhibited the creation of potent youth gangs which have assumed prominence in inner city Black neighborhoods. Local Mafia crews were able to neutralize young males who made a name for themselves in the street both by intimidation and by recruitment into syndicate employment; tough Guidos could become Mafiosi although Mafiosi could also become Guidos (see below).

A "streetwise" ethos remains focused on the commitment among young males to defend neighborhood turf from denigrated minorities (Pinderhughes, 1997). Although the "moral panic" in response to the highly publicized Howard Beach (1986) and Bensonhurst (1989) incidents had subsided, a tough street culture

remained part of the fabric of more working class Italian-American communities like the Ridgewood and Glendale areas of Queens in 2001:

If they are really bored, they will drive around just to look for someone to beat up. Sometimes they would come back with a story of how they just jumped some Black kid because it looked like he was up to no good.
[C., 18 year old female]

Turf-based masculine honor is an established patterned response in transitional neighborhoods. In the summer of 2004, an Italian-American youth was charged in a violent street attack of a Sikh man in Ozone Park. A "racial attack" in Howard Beach the following summer once again thrust Italian-American youth subculture into the headlines (O'Donnell and Rashbaum, 2005). This episode echoed the 1986 incident not just as a "bias attack" but as "turf conflict." Nineteen years later, however, the principal Italian-American "attacker" and the Black "victim" had "a number of things in common":

Although neither had any steady work, both had a taste for luxury items, from the Prada shoes that Mr. Moore was carrying to the Rolex watch that Mr. Minucci was wearing. (Santora and Rashbaum, 2005).

Styles of consumption are embedded in street culture. Anderson (1990:72-74) maintains that "the basic requirement" of the "code of the street" is "the display of a certain predisposition to violence," relying on "facial expressions, gait, and direct talk" as well as "clothes, grooming, and jewelry." A stylized street culture was inhibited by economic constraints and by coherent immigrant traditions. "Guido" can be distinguished from "greaser" by the greater opportunity to stylize masculine aggression via hedonistic consumption (Frith, 1981: 192-195). It is noteworthy that Guido has

flourished in areas of second settlement, like Bensonhurst, with high rates of home ownership including areas like Howard Beach in Queens that can be described as middle class and suburban.

Stylization allows for the aesthetic manipulation of a masculine pose. Thus, the macho Guido attitude toward females is stylistically expressed in the "wife-beater" tee-shirt which is also known as a "guinea tee." For a 19 year-old college student who grew up on Long Island, Guido is a pose that "requires a Brooklyn accent with a lot of cursing, preferably in Italian." A muscular physique represents another prominent area of stylization. The accent here is on "looking ripped" as an aesthetically acceptable bodily representation ("look") rather than physical intimidation. It is also embedded in the stylized consumption of workout culture. Indeed, the contemporary Guido "look" makes street culture masculinity problematic in the form of "sculpted" eyebrows and shaved torsos. Clubbing restricts an aggressive masculine code within an expressive culture that privileges femininity (e.g., Guidettes) and a gay club aesthetic (Fikentscher, 2003). This is not to say that the club scene has disengaged from street culture. Violence can flare when rival individuals and groups with "street" sensibilities further provoked by alcohol and drugs compete for scarce resources like sexual partners. The business of selling drugs to club patrons has raised the level of physical risk. The creation of a drug marketplace attracted the attention of local Italian-American crime families. Chris Paciello, who once described himself as a "big Guido from New York," worked his way up the ladder by "shaking down drug dealers" in Manhattan clubs like *Limelight* before opening his own clubs in South Beach with the backing of the Bonnano crime family. Significantly, he moved into the Manhattan club scene from violent street crime in the Bath Beach and Bensonhurst sections of Brooklyn (Owen, 2003).⁵

⁵ Paciello's legal surname is Ludwigsen but he felt that Norwegian ancestry did not create the right impression for his street culture persona (Owen, 2003:89).

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While most Guidos are not in the Mafia, the Guido pose incorporates Mafia style:

Not only do they act like the Mafia but they try to appear like the Mafia as well. They talk with their hands, whisper to each other when they have to talk; they even kiss each other on the cheek. They obviously relate to all the Italian mob movies, such as *Goodfellas*, *The Godfather*, *Casino*, and many others. [Corrine, 18, 2001]

Mafia movie imagery has become a veritable life-style guide. Michael, for example, maintained that young Italian-American males like himself are “inspired by movies like *The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, *Scarface*, *Casino*, and *A Bronx Tale* because they portray spending money, having nice cars, nice clothes, beautiful women lots of power and the good life.”⁶ Another self-styled Guido from Queens referenced a scene from Mafia movie to describe a scene from his personal “life-movie”:

“We didn’t have to wait in line as one of the guys had a connection that put him on the waiting list of the club. It was like we were Ray Liotta when he entered the Copa Cabana through the back door in *Goodfellas*.” [Michael, 20, 2001]

Such imagery “sentimentalizes” and “distances” the male street culture traits of camaraderie and aggression within a Guido style pose (Frith, 1983:218). The importance of Mafia movies as a sym-

⁶ Although a film about the criminal “Marielito” Cubans in the Miami rackets, *Scarface* seems to be confounded as a Mafia movie perhaps because Al Pacino is in the lead role and because Hollywood has managed to define the American urban gangster as Italian American. Mentioning *Scarface* is important because it is popular with Hip Hop youth. On the other hand, the film *Donnie Brasco* is conspicuously omitted by these youth as a style reference even though its central Mafia character, “Lefty,” is played by Al Pacino. *Brasco* fails to depict a “cool” style of consumption and violence. Italian-American youth may be reappropriating Mafia films from gangsta for an ethnic narrative including nostalgia for a more traditional Italian-American experience centered on the family and the neighborhood.

bol bank is complemented by their development as a ritual social activity:

When my friends and I are really bored we usually watch a movie. Of course, it's a choice of *Goodfellas*, *The Godfather*, or *A Bronx Tale*. They were not my favorite movies until I started hanging out with these kids. When we first started to hang out, they would say a line from a movie. I never understood what they were talking about. Now that I've seen almost all the Italian Mafia movies, I can join with the quotes: 'I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse!' [Corrine, 18, 2001]⁷

⁷ Film has historically played a key role in the construction of youth culture identity and some, like *El Topo* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, have become youth “cult films.” Mediated Mafia narratives are immensely popular in gangsta Hip Hop with rappers taking the names “Gotti” and “Capone” and Snoop Dogg as “The Doggfather” and impresario for a festival of Mafia films on the Arts and Entertainment cable TV channel. A formative relationship with Italian-American gangster culture is enacted in the 2001 comedy *Made* with Hip Hop star P. Diddy that imagines the succession of stodgy, old Italian-American gangsters by cool, young gangstas. The 2004 Dreamworks animated film *Shark Tale* sends a similar message to very young audiences.

Identifying with *The Sopranos* and *The Godfather* is also a way of connecting to the mainstream media culture. Even “America’s Mayor” Rudy Giuliani references his “life-movie” to a Mafia film. A wedding announcement in *The New York Times* (5/26/03) recalled that Giuliani used the phrase, “hit by a thunderbolt,” to describe his first encounter with his new wife, referring to a line uttered by “Michael Corleone” in characterizing his initial meeting with “Appolonia” in *The Godfather*. Unlike Guidos, Giuliani does not admit that Mafia films are authentic ethnic texts. This came across when he emerged as an apologist for fictional Mafia narratives when he publicly supported Mayor Michael Bloomberg invitation of two *Sopranos* actors to march at his side in the 2002 Columbus Day Parade, the public platform for Italian-American cultural and political solidarity in the city. Anti-defamation protest caused Bloomberg to withdraw from the Manhattan parade, intensifying the ire of Italian-American elites when the Mayor and his actor “friends” appeared at the Bronx parade instead. Giuliani dismissively sided against the identity politics of media stereotyping:

I would urge some Italian Americans to be less sensitive. You could spend your whole life wanting to be insulted. Why? Why do you want to be insulted?

Mafia stereotypes in the mass media have been the focus of anti-defamation efforts in recent years. The commercial and artistic success of *The Sopranos* has made it a prime target. In Illinois, legislation was proposed by Italian-American lawmakers to halt production of the HBO series on the grounds of ethnic bigotry.

Giuliani is undoubtedly a source of consternation for anti-defamation elites since he is otherwise invaluable as mainstream “Who’s Who” for vigorously attacking real Mafiosi as a Federal Attorney.

Like gangstas who strive to “keep it real,” however, Guidos claim a more authentic relationship to the Mafia, not fundamentally through their mass media consumption but through the ethnic community.

The Italian American youth does not only see these people in movies like *Goodfellas* and *A Bronx Tale*, but in front of their very eyes, living right in front of them. The average Italian American youth lives in a predominantly Italian American neighborhood where you are sure to see “gangsters” [Michael, 20, 2001]⁸

Local Mafia figures are admired for their ability to command respect on the street and their consumption style. This is especially true of John Gotti undoubtedly because he was a media celebrity with unprecedented news coverage and was the subject of an HBO movie. Youth with Mafia family connections have comprised a Guido elite based on powerful “connections” and financial power, allowing them to be both style leaders as well as tough guys. A youth culture elite as media celebrity is on display in the 2004 cable TV reality show called *Growing Up Gotti* featuring the deceased Mafia capo’s three grandsons. While the elder Gotti cultivated a suave adult figure as “The Dapper Don,” the grandsons are at the nexus of Mafia authenticity and a Guido style that is merging with Hip Hop. Gotti as gangsta suggests that the Mafia is a dubious source of “cool” urban youth style and, perhaps, not streetwise enough to cope with new urban wiseguys. Poaching gangsta tracks Guido further in the direction of stylization. The adoption of stylized street jargon was cultivated in ItalChat:

⁸ The blurring of Italian-American Mafia and its media representation has reached the point where Mafiosi serve as “technical advisers” and a “made” member like Sammy “the Bull” Gravano regarded *The Godfather* as a code that not only “influenced the life” but “made our life seem honorable” (Goldberg, 2000). In a bizarre feedback loop, the mass media “images” Mafia members who pattern themselves on mass media images.

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Pimpin Da Benz or da Bema
Spendin da Phat Ca\$h

Gangsta-speak also figured in the appropriation of gangsta for an empowered female persona:

We Dem Italian Bitches That Got U Hataz Jaws Droppin, Neck Breakin,
Eye Starin...Me Me...

At the same time, gangsta culture has reinvigorated the Mafia myth. It “samples” Mafia narratives to create personas like “Capone” and “[Irv] Gotti” and acquires a historical memory for a subgenre known as “don rap.” Ironically, the poaching of gangsta delivers a “cool” version of the Mafia, challenging hard core Guidos to find new ways to draw a boundary with *blackness*. The negotiation with gangsta was highlighted in a *Growing Up Gotti* episode (2.20.05) featuring a Black rapper from the Midwest who legally changed his name to “Gotti” in homage to the erstwhile “Don.” The rapper was a house-guest at the big white mansion in Old Westbury, Long Island apparently in return for including the boys in a recording session for a song called “Vote Gotti for President.” A “fictional” kinship was intimated in references to the three Gotti brothers as his “cousins” who, in turn, “treat[ed] Gotti like a brother” according to their mother. The brothers notoriously symbolize the Guido crossover to Black youth culture and were now “talking about getting into the rap business themselves.” However, mother Victoria kept the rapper at a distance and was especially wary of the poaching of Gotti family cultural capital.

Mafia imagery was a prominent motif in the way WKTU’s Italian-American personalities delineated Guido style. The name “Goomba” taken by Johnny Sialiano is linked to the Mafia stereotype as a corruption of the Italian word “compare,” a term mean-

ingful in the Mafia model of social capital. This was the basis of an anti-defamation complaint against the Mayor of Yonkers' reference to "back room goombas" as a characterization of urban political corruption. "Goomba" and "Guido" are used interchangeably in some circles and there seems to be a push by a segment of Italian-American youth to restate their position in the name of "Goomba". This has been facilitated by a "how to" (be a "goomba") book written by an Italian American actor raised in Brooklyn who plays a gangster in *The Sopranos* (Schirripa, 2003). Goomba Johnny's Mafia credentials were aired in an autobiographical song that he recorded in 2001 called "Feds Threw A Party." The song is a response to his incarceration for involvement in a Manhattan club owned by Mafia associates including John Gotti. The lyrics present Goomba as a businessman who is persecuted by the F.B.I. and generalizes F.B.I. persecution as an Italian-American problem – the central motif in the anti-defamation efforts of the Italian-American Civil Rights League in the late 1960s. Goomba mocks the Mafia stereotype at the same time that he insinuates that he is a Mafia insider. This was implied when John Gotti's daughter Victoria was interviewed on his radio show to create exposure for her new reality TV program on which Goomba later appeared. An Italian-American who fashions a celebrity media persona around the Mafia constitutes a major problem for Italian-American anti-defamation organizations. "Goomba" was probably the architect of the 2003 WKTU parody of the mandatory public service broadcast emergency service called "Guido Alert" in which instructions were issued to Guidos to engage in "emergency" pop culture rituals like viewing *The Sopranos*. This elicited a formal complaint from the anti-defamation organization UNICO (www.groups.yahoo.com, accessed 9/19/03). Although offensive to Italian-American elites, the production was likely the inside joke of a media personality with impeccable Guido credentials, a salute to his Guido roots and a constituency that has acquired the social

power to have insider fun in the mainstream media culture. The playfulness of the spoof was consistent with the seasonal airing of "The 12 Guido Days of Christmas" by the comics "Joey Balls" and "Carminooch."

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF LOCAL YOUTH CULTURE DIFFERENCE

The youth style spectacle reflects wider social divisions. New York City's dance club culture is composed of a number of musical sub-scenes like "techno" and "house" which are related to constituencies defined by class, race, and sexual orientation (Fikentscher, 2000). Manhattan clubs have been at the top of the club culture hierarchy owing to an affiliation with a social elite of gay "club kids", media celebrities and other "V.I.P.'s" that are rigorously separated from "bridge and tunnel" constituencies (Owen, 2003). The desire to "party" in clubs like *Palladium* and *Sound Factory* is incorporated in a strategy for consuming "the city" on the part of lower status taste cultures from the outer boroughs like Guido.

In this club scene, ethnicity is performed *as style*: "Italians in the house!!!" Guido club style is signaled by the prevalence of "free style" and "house" (DJ mixed) music. Local clubs play "Guido music" like *Metropolis*, which closed in 2001 when a violent fight erupted on the dance floor between two groups of youth with connections to rival Mafia families, and *DNA*. Favored dance music genres are not created or monopolized by Guidos. However, the musical soundtrack becomes inflected by ethnicity when the song "L'Italiano" by Angelo Venuto and his group "The Italians" is played or when a club features a DJ with an "Italian" name and a local reputation. These symbolic maneuvers are designed to inhibit if not eliminate rival groups. Thus, a dress code proscribing "baggy pants" and "sneakers" discourages the "thug" or "gangsta" styles identified with ethnic youth in Black and Latino neighborhoods: "Thugged Out Stays Out!"

Being a Guido, and a Guidette, is an identity that is performed in relation to other stylized youth culture identities in the city. Border work is intensified by the fluidity of contemporary youth styles precipitated by the accessibility of mass media culture and by the social mixing of diverse cultures in contemporary "urban nightscapes" (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003:10). As a bounded identity, ethnicity asserts identity and difference when styles change and cross boundaries. In the Astoria, Queens dance club *DNA* it is easy to mistake a Guido" for a "Greedo" as Greek Americans who fashion a similar style pose are known; a Greek youth identity may be decided by the type of cross worn around the neck. The use of ethnicity would seem to be even more important to create a boundary with Blacks and Latinos who similarly define a youth culture in relation to the street and the dance club. Without emphasizing ethnicity, for example, they might be mistaken for Latino/as in the clubs that feature "*Latin Freestyle*". In light of turf disputes with Black and Hispanic youth, the most vexing border issue is how to consume Hip Hop now that it has become a dominant pop culture vernacular. Asserting Italian ethnicity appears to be an attempt to have it both ways, to claim difference and draw a social boundary while appropriating elements of what has defined the other culturally.

Tensions are exacerbated as groups "jockey for power" in the competition for scarce youth culture capital (Thornton, 1995:33-36). This is evidenced in the struggle to keep control over styles that provisionally establish "distinctive" boundaries. Guidos are accused by gays of poaching their styles like body shaving which Guidos link to the bodybuilding subculture; the imputed "gayification of Guido" reflects the assimilation of gay influence in disco culture (Fikentscher, 2000) and perhaps explains an exaggerated "homophobic" pose. Border work is most intense with Black youth culture. While poaching Hip Hop, Black youth are accused of appropriating Mafia imagery. Perhaps more importantly, ethnic

boundaries regulate competition for scarce youth culture rewards, most notably access to sexual partners. The club culture industry creates contact points for youth from diverse ethnic and class backgrounds abetted by commercialized mass media that disseminates information about the scene: "If you're looking for Italian girls come here" (the Internet site for *Club NYC*). Youth constituencies erect boundaries to regulate sexual competition, whether sorting themselves by style as a surrogate or code for ethnicity or, as the *Club NYC* blurb suggests, by blatant ethnic references. Ethnic boundaries are important in the eroticized atmosphere of dance clubs where inhibitions are lowered by the consumption of alcohol and drugs. Since ethnic boundaries are typically confounded with sexual boundaries (Nagel, 2003), the appearance of rival others who might be "looking for Italian girls" could prove incendiary as in the 1989 Bensonhurst incident.

While Guidos are known to restrict access to local clubs in the outlying boroughs, a boundary has been enforced *against* Guido in Manhattan clubs. The Guido persona has been a poor fit for a club culture formed by the "blended" sensibilities of "Blacks, Latinos, and gays" (Fikentscher, 2000:210). Their tribalism clashes with the "underground" global movements like the "rave scene" with its universalistic ethos of "Peace, Love, Unity, Respect." Violence has too often erupted from a signature Guido pose that conflates sexuality and physical intimidation; a posting on a local dance club industry message board (11/30/03) described "Hott, sweaty, sexy shirtless, muscely [sic] Italians." Their collective strategy to "hit on" girls tends to provoke conflicts with other groups. While Guidettes will go clubbing "just to dance," Guidos "dance just to meet girls" and notwithstanding the iconic significance of "Tony Manero," who was also a good fighter, they have earned a reputation as poor dancers. Their muscular look is read by club culture elites as intimidating rather than sensual. A former club industry security worker maintained that Guidos were "red flags" who

were "prone to violence" and "kept on a short rope" primarily to assuage the concerns of gay clubbers (C., personal communication, 2000). The macho and homophobic Guido pose has historically been discrepant with the gay culture that shaped disco and the microculture of prominent Manhattan clubs (Fikentscher, 2000). In the late 1990s, Guidos had become the cause for moral panic in the Manhattan club scene. This reverberated in a thread on the *Club NYC* web site in 1998: "The club scene in NYC has gone down so fast. Why? In one word Guidos...." *The Village Voice* columnist Trish Romano, assessing the closing of the Manhattan clubs Exit and Sound Factory in 2003, concluded that "perhaps the most serious consequence of the closures: Guidos will suddenly descend en masse, ruining the few remaining 'cool' clubs...."

Although macho aggression was a key piece of the problem, the bigger issue was the way ethnicity and class intersected in the formation of an urban youth subculture. While contemporary youth subcultures look to "escape" class through style (Thornton, 1995) Guidos make ethnicity salient. Their performance is read in lower class terms when the "bridge and tunnel" label is used by Manhattan club culture elites to place them outside the pale of club culture "cool." A 2006 installment of the *MTV* reality show "True Life" framed Guido (without explicitly naming it) as a class and ethnic outer borough style that has to be jettisoned to make it in Manhattan; in a "cool" version of *Pygmalion*, prospective social climbers were advised to hire a speech coach to shed the status markers in their neighborhood Italian-American speech code.

Ethnic identity and difference in local youth culture is rooted in larger divisions in the city. To a large extent, these divisions are based on claims to scarce resources like housing and safe neighborhoods and prestigious consumer items like Nike sneakers and *iPods*. There are skirmishes between young Italians and Albanians in the Bronx that are rooted in neighborhood succession. When asked about the relationship between Italians and Greeks in As-

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toria, a twenty-year-old named Fabrizio began by sounding a note of harmony: "Una faccia, una raza" ["One face, one race"]. However, this declaration of unity was immediately tempered:

We get along, but you have to watch out. Greeks are two-faced. They call you guinea and wop behind your back.

Fabrizio was even more wary of the Albanians who "pretend they're Italian" but are uncomfortably exotic: "Have you ever seen the guys smoking those funny looking things?" alluding to the water pipes favored in the Muslim cafes along Steinway Street in Astoria.

The negotiation of a Guido identity has primarily occurred at the racialized boundary with Blacks and Latinos who have dominated the dance music genres of "house" and "freestyle" as well as classic "disco." While Italian-American youth seem to have inserted themselves into Black and Latino (and gay) dance culture they have insisted on ethnic boundaries in regard to how this culture is to be "consumed." The same can now be said with regard to Hip Hop. The consumption of a shared youth culture seems to be eroding ethnic boundaries on the surface. This is suggested in a 2003 online review of a Manhattan club:

The women were incredible, lots of races, Spanish, Italian, black, white all the mixes were there and friendly [sic].

While the dance club is a site that "mixes" different ethnicities, group boundaries are still identifiable. It is telling that "Italians" appear as a separate constituency juxtaposed not only to Blacks and Latinos but also "whites" as a distinct "race."

ETHNICITY AND SUBCULTURAL IDEOLOGY

Youth subcultures fashion "ideologies" that "are a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass" (Thornton, 1995:10). As a youth subculture, Guidos stake a claim to prestige based on pop culture capital - having the "coolest" cars, etc. (Tricarico, 1991). However, this has been combined with a discourse of ethnic "distinction" that manufactures "a sense of social worth" (Thornton, 1995: 163) in its own right. Italian ethnicity is mined for "subcultural capital" that places them at the top of the hierarchy of "cool."

Youth subcultures invoke the symbolism of ethnicity to "win space." The formation of a style-based youth subculture in the name of ethnicity entails substantial "symbolic work." Paul Willis (1990:10) maintains that this is possible and even necessary because "traditional resources" and "inherited meanings" have "lost their legitimacy for a good proportion of young people." As suggested above, the symbolic representation of ethnicity as youth style presupposes the erosion of traditional ways of being Italian. However, youth are able to apply "symbolic resources and raw materials" to "produce meaning" adapted to a new set of circumstances.

A Guido identity connects Italian-American youth to popular American and youth scenes throughout the city. This symbolic work is evident in the choice of "Guido" as a collective identity. While Guido is the product of several identity intersections, it most obviously refers to Italian ethnicity. D'Acerno (1996:689) speculates that its origin can be traced to either a common Italian male name, reflecting the masculinist character of the "display" or, to the preeminence of a car culture, citing the Italian word "guidare" which means "to drive" (driving has historically been an implicitly male "display"). However, car culture is more definitive of greaser and Guido is predicated on club culture. It is also

likely that Guido has symbolic value *because* it presents as conspicuously "Italian" and more clearly demarcate a boundary with other youth subcultures. The moral properties of this quintessentially "Italian" name chosen by Italian-American youth is more readily apparent in the terms "cugine" and more recently "gomba" which explicitly trade on kinship metaphors and which have been interchangeable with Guido. A similar pattern seems to characterize the formation of a "Gino" youth subculture in Toronto.⁹ In this scenario, ethnicity becomes "subcultural capital" (Thornton, 1995). Identification with a conspicuously Italian, rather than Italian-American, male, may have initially been sparked by the stylish leisure of more recent immigrants conversant with Italian fashion ("moda Italiana"). Mafiosi could also be paragons of leisure in the eyes of neighborhood youth in contrast to working stiffs, which is a theme of the film "A Bronx Tale" that is popular within the subculture.

Symbolic work has also centered on a "reevaluation" of an "oppressed" ethnicity that is integral to "ethnogenesis" (Roosens, 1989). Guido uses stylish consumption to "talk back to", or challenge, a "negatively privileged ethnicity" (J. Hall, 1992). It also deploys "symbolic reversals" that challenge dominant "negative" meanings of Italian-ness. In the Internet chat room scene ItalChat, the historic insults "guinea" and "wop" were invoked within identity narratives. As Harold Isaac (1976:76) points out, when ethnic insults become "badges of basic group identity" insider solidarity is enhanced because "inferior status and outsidership" is

⁹ Gino appears to be a style-based youth subculture that invokes ethnicity to take a position in a cosmopolitan dance culture scene. However, there appear to be significant contrasts. Although there are signs of status competition with other youth subcultures, Gino does not seem to have a street culture tradition rooted in slum communities. The more recently established Italian immigrant community in Canada does not appear to be as historically encumbered by a "negatively privileged ethnicity" with status issues that include ambiguous whiteness. It would be interesting to determine whether "Gino" is consciously modeling "Guido." My thanks to Francesca D'Angelo for calling my attention to this phenomenon (email communication, 4.26.05). See also definitions for "Gino" in the *Urban Dictionary* (www.urbandictionary.com).

confronted directly. Inside the ethnic boundary, symbolic insults are used "banteringly, even affectionately, and sometimes, in a say-it-with-a-smile transference" (Ibid.,77-78). ItalChat youth played with these epithets in ways that mocked their very existence and the relations of power on which they were based:

What up my woparones?
The Ginzo is here!!!
Bensonhurst...where a ginny can be a ginny.
I am the ginniest ginny in this room.

Like wop and guinea, "Guido" can be appropriated in a symbolic reversal now that it has emerged as an ethnic epithet in the mainstream culture. It has become a name that, like "nigga," warrants a careful determination of insider status. This imparts value as a "symbolic challenge" in its own right, even surpassing wop and guinea, and Italian-American youth have claimed this nomenclature as an insider prerogative.¹⁰

The word 'Guido' is supposed to criticize Italians but some Italians actually like the fact that they are called 'Guido'. So really this word has many levels of affect. It all depends on what generation and how strong the person's pride is in the word 'Guido'. The word 'Guido' applies to me and also to my friends. Because we did take that offensively we actually like it when we are considered 'Guidos'. It gives us what you would say is a rep. [F., 2004]

¹⁰ While there appears to be a short historical memory for scurrilous ethnic labels among the young, ethnic slurs of Italian Americans still have currency. In ItalChat, for example, a "white boy" complained about "greasy guinnys" who "come to my country America." The lexicon of historical prejudice has not disappeared from the popular culture. In *Dr. Dolittle*, a major studio film geared to children, a talking guinea pig in the voice of comedian Chris Rock laments his species name: "Why do they call me a guinea pig? I'm not Italian and I don't eat pork!"

It is plausible that the insult originated inside the ethnic community. The lexicon of Guido may have been coined by more acculturated Italian Americans, reflecting a status system that assigns immigrants “just off the boat” an inferior status. In this scenario, “Guidos” is synonymous with “greenhorns” and “greaseballs.” The unequivocal Italian-ness of Guido is predicated on the repudiation of a system of ethnic stratification.

Guido style is not comparable the “remix culture” of second generation Indian youth known as *Desi* that features a traditional heritage through “bhangra” music and Bollywood (Maira, 2002). However, youth maintain that they can reconcile peer group practice with a traditional heritage that is the preserve of the Italian American family:

A Guido’s family is very important to him, and the same goes for a Guidette. A Guido is always protective of his family members. They always respect and stick up for their mothers and grandmothers, who they call ma and nonna. They usually work for their father and plan to take over the family business if there is one. A Guido always watches over their sisters and never lets a guy go near them. Guidos usually live at home until they get married. [Silvio, 20, 2002]

This may be an idealized interpretation, but it informs a commonly held belief in a core cultural difference that separates them from youth culture others. Moreover, while popular culture typically fuels rebellion against core parental values, no unmanageable tension is perceived with the traditional family system. For the most part, ethnic authenticity is left offstage in places like the family. It is also seen in the peer group culture. Accentuating ethnicity may be an attempt to assure parents that they are able to hold on to ethnicity despite a commitment to “club culture” and stylized personal consumption in general. Thus, ethnic constraints on the dating scene are compatible with parental preference for ethnic endogamy. Although widely viewed as “spoiled,” the

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“Italian-American Princess” can be read as an attempt to reconcile “hedonistic consumption” with traditional family culture.

A Guidette looks for protection and financial support from their family. Guidettes are very close with their fathers. They are their father’s favorite, which makes them Daddy’s Little Girl. That’s how the expression Italian American Princess came about. [Silvio]¹¹

Youth culture is also reconciled with family culture when siblings and cousins are in the peer group and go clubbing together. Representing a privileged Italian ethnicity became a conspicuous agenda for Italian American radio personalities on *WKTU*. Indeed, the station emerged as a prominent “construction site” for Italian pride. “Goomba Johnny” Sialiano is unrelentingly ethnic even promoting an invidious identification with Italian-American ethnicity as in this caller interview:

Goomba: “Hey kid, are you Italian? Big points if you’re Italian!”

Kid: “Yea!”

Goomba: “Always tell people you’re Italian. Be proud that you’re Italian!”

¹¹ *The Sopranos* offers representations of “spoiled” Italian-American youth in arriviste families. When introduced by his daughter to one of her fellow students at Columbia as European nobility, Tony Soprano replied with sarcasm that his daughter “Meadow” was “an Italian-American princess.” The stereotype of the “spoiled” Guido has been solidified by *Growing Up Gotti* which reinforce the stereotype’s connection to Mafia culture. While Tony Soprano’s children are expected to achieve academic distinction and professional status, despite egregiously mixed messages, the Gotti boys conspicuously consume youth culture fun and pleasure over mild and ambivalent maternal protests. Having said this, “spoiling” children with consumption is broadly consistent with an ideology of assimilation focused on the well-being of children and can legitimated (“spun”) by traditional themes of familial nurturance. It is plausible that children are been assigned the lead in matters of personal consumption to showcase the family’s new class culture, as Italians who are successful Americans. The younger generation seems to be in a more privileged position to consume than traditional parents who are primarily defined by labor and who have been brought up in a scarcity culture.

Goomba's identity politics projected Italian-American ethnicity into wider public/media discourse. He coined the phrase "Staten Italy" to underscore the critical mass of Italian Americans in Staten Island, implying a turf claim to an entire borough and prompting a new subcultural phrasing among callers: "I'm from Staten Italy, fuggedaboutit!" While his Italo-centric world view could be casual and extemporaneous, it could also be premeditated as with the annual "Meatball Contest" celebrating Columbus Day with a trip to Italy as a prize. This foregrounds an ethnic heritage in the form of a "quasi-folk culture" centered on the family rather than a classical culture managed by elites (Gans, 1974). It also had to be fitted to American pop culture grammar and meanings so that as soon as a 2004 finalist credited her "Grandma Giovanna" for her meatball recipe there was a segue to the recording artist Prince's dance song "Party Like It's 1999." WKTU's radio personalities, then, are ethnic entrepreneurs as well as style arbiters, who use the vernacular language of pop culture to celebrate the ascendance of Italian Americans in a pop culture space. This occasionally turned toward a more traditional ethnicity as when Joe Causi rhapsodized about his Sicilian heritage, such as the virtues of the island's olive oil. This musing invariably bent toward his other heritage, the disco scene:

"The Sicilians are better. Sicily is a beautiful island full of music and culture. Where do you think I got this beat from?"

While ethnicity is trivialized by the commercial media culture this is the price paid by mainstream validation. However, representing ethnicity for the public discourse is not necessarily a concession to a trivialization.

MOBILIZING ETHNIC CAPITAL TO "JOCKEY FOR POWER"

It would appear, then, that the meaningful symbolism of Guido is transacted across an ethnic boundary rather than unilaterally imposed from the outside. It is immediately located in youth culture transactions where groups "jockey for power" (Thornton, 1995:133). Guido is an identity symbol constructed in the competition for status based on access to scarce resources. Italian ethnicity is invoked to set themselves off from others within the city's youth scene.

Italians Rule!!!

Italians Rock, the Rest Jock. We Already Dominate NYCz Clubz, Barz, Caféz, and Organized Crime. [ItalChat]

As the glue of an "imagined community" in ItalChat, ethnicity was a prerequisite for subcultural authenticity and was accumulated as "subcultural capital" (Thornton, 1995). In other words, distinction was conferred by Italian ancestry as well by association with youth styles like freestyle music. Substantial effort was invested in creating stylized presentations of Italianness. One extemporaneous exchange revealed a competitive edge in the course of conforming to the norms of the group:

100% Italian

100% here as well

100 Italian (born in Italy)

110% Italian

I am the Italianest [sic]

The construction of ethnicity in ItalChat was further essentialized by its ascriptive character. That is, being Italian was constructed as something fixed and given not as a "social construct." In one version, Italian ethnicity was naturalized or biological: "The initiation

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to be Italian is to be born one.” Another portrayed it as God-given and ineffable:

The best thing that God could have given me is being Italian.
Don't try to be Italian. It's a gift. And I'm blessed with it.

A verse that surfaced in a number of personal web pages conveyed a mystical sense of purity and solidarity based on biological uniqueness:

Italian Pride is in My Mind.
Italian Blood is My Kind.
My Italian pride I will not hide.
My Italian race I will never disgrace.
Italian Love is all around.
My fellow Italians never let me down.
Show your pride.

The construction of an essentialist, biological ethnicity was conveyed by the hijacking of the anagram F.B.I., which was made to signify “Full-Blooded Italian.”¹²

Themes of a “constructed primordialism” (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998) created a distinction that was blatantly invidious:

If you ain't Italian I'm sorry.
Everyone is equal but Italians are better.
If its not made in Italy it sucks.

¹² This insider meaning is tacitly performed by the Pro Wrestling character “Little Guido” who styles himself as the leader of “Full Blooded Italians,” a persona reinforced by appearances at wrestling shows with the unabashedly ethnocentric “Goomba Johnny.” Considering that the F.B.I., not the mass media, was the major target of the Italian-American Civil Rights League which recruited support from the city's Italian-American neighborhoods in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the hijacking of this symbol of Federal law enforcement authority had oppositional significance. It also suggests that a current of ethnic resentment has lingered in the vernacular Italian-American neighborhood culture after all these years. The safe space of ItalChat generated a “hidden transcript” (Scott, 1992) that crudely critiqued relations of power that have negatively privileged Italian ethnicity in this society.

An "essentialized" Italian ethnicity was a warning to jealous "wannabes" and "fake Italians." This sleight of hand reversed the historical dilemma of cultural inferiority accorded Italians in this society. Italian Americans were defined as possessing desirable "cultural capital." It was others, "wannabes" and "fakes," who were stigmatized by a "lack" of cultural capital. The construction of an "essential" ascriptive ethnicity allows Italians to "traffic in their own honor" (J. Hall, 1992) and corner the market on "distinction." A primordial connection to Italian ethnicity made them "special" apart from consumption style while youth culture others were lacking regardless of how stylish they were.¹³

A "discourse of ethnicity" was a "rhetorical strategy" (Maira, 2002) that imparted practical advantages to Italian Americans. Being Italian legitimated access to the chat room and its store of social capital. This entailed the opportunity to chat and present to subcultural insiders. It also mediated connections to local relationships and scenes, perhaps most importantly prospective dates. Since Internet chat is a "writing culture," a discourse of ethnic distinction was more transparent than what typically occurs off-line. Owing to the sparseness of visual cues and the relative anonymity of cyberspace, subcultural credentials were requested on demand and in writing:

Is everyone Italian in here?
If you're not Italian get out.

¹³ Frith (1981: 195) attributes a preoccupation with distinction to a "transitional" and "marginal" social position that cause contemporary youth to "seek a sense of autonomy and status and self-esteem to balance against their time of insignificance. Hence the role of peer groups (something between the family and society) and their symbols of pride and self-assertion, membership and exclusion." This "insignificance" is more acute when youth are stigmatized for a "negatively privileged ethnicity" (J. Hall, 1992). This can explain why so much symbolic work is invested in creating ethnic distinction within youth culture practice.

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Youth subcultures typically disparage one another in the effort to capitalize on a privileged style in the competition for scarce rewards. At the same time, Guido is remarkable for the vilification by youth culture others. This has become part of a wider public discourse with the rise of the Internet as a youth culture space. Thus, an interactive “urban dictionary” allows a visitor to submit a “definition” of “guido” and to vote on the appropriateness of other submissions. According to the most widely accepted “definition,” a “guido”

Can be found nightly at mainstream dance clubs they read about online (S[ound] F[actory], Webster Hall, etc.). ..Guido cars usually have a boomin’ system through which cheesy music like freestyle, commercial club/trance and hip-hop (anything KTU plays) is loudly blasted. [http://www.urbandictionary.com, accessed 1/6/05]

The passage from which this is excerpted expresses antipathy for Guido on the level of youth culture style. It avoids ethnic disparagement and, in fact, points out that the Guido is “not necessarily of Italian descent.” However, the denigration of Guido can not easily be separated from the denigration of Italian ethnicity and the possibility that embedded ethnic prejudice is being activated.

A stupid Italian American who slicks back his hair with various amounts of goo, wears tight-fitting tank-tops, only does upper body workouts, blasts stupid nigger and club music from his car, wears gold chains outside of his shirt, and speaks like a f----g moron” [http://www.urbandictionary.com, accessed 4/13/04]

Sliding further in the direction of ethnic prejudice, a post on local club industry message board linked the denigration of style to historic insults:

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100% Italian w/a Heavy Duty Ginzo attitude
Black slick-backed hair w/lots of gel in it
Lots of muscles, usually shown off wearing a tight shirt
Starts fights on any fleeting moment
Have a Cadillac or some Mafia style Ginny car
Hang out on 86th St in Brooklyn
[<http://www.clubnyc.com>, accessed 2/27/99]

An extended treatise on the subject of “Guido” in a “punk” web-zine invoked a historic ethnic slur to discredit a youth category that is perceived as hostile to alternative youth subcultures like “punk.”

Define a guido. A Guido is one of the lowest forms of life currently co-inhabiting our planet...a young wop who rides atop whatever trend is hot, drives a cool car...beats up everyone and anyone that is in anyway out of the ordinary...” (<http://www.stain.com>, accessed 2/28/00)

However, antipathy for Guido manages to vacate the realm of youth culture competition altogether. A 1998 posting on the Club NYC web site tapped into a theme of ambiguous “whiteness” to discredit Italian ethnicity:

All Italians from Sicily are part Black. Since the island was invaded and there [sic] women were raped by Africans thats [sic] why they are so dark. Get it? [<http://www.clubnyc.com>, accessed 5/3/99]

A web site appeared in 2005 that sought to exterminate Guido as a presence on Long Island. The elaborate production of *Get Off Our Island* was more than a satire on subcultural style. The “Guido phenomenon” was characterized as a “surge of materialism and hedonism” largely identified with “Italian-American youth” that threatened the “moral values” of a “historic” community. With

assurances that “this is not a *racist* website” [italics provided], the site promotes “the Resistance” to the Plague that spreads across the Island.”¹⁴

Guidos responded to online “flaming” in ItalChat and elsewhere on the Internet. When a thread appeared on the *Club NYC* message board in 1998 that condemned the presence of Guido in Manhattan club culture, the response was quick and certain:

We need more Guidos in the New York clubs!

Guidos are back in style.

Subcultural skirmishing reverberated on local radio stations identified with rival youth subcultures. In one instance, the morning drive-time personalities on Z100 FM radio in New York City (3/20/03) delineated a caricature of “Guido” that featured “tank tops,” “a tan that comes in a can,” and sexual impotence resulting from the use of “[ste]roids” for bodybuilding. An attempt to emasculate Guido is evident in the line, “Guidos in the club on the phone, they don’t tell you that they live at home,” a reference that seems to mock an ethnic pattern of family cohesion. This jab at Guido may have been inspired by ratings competition with “Goomba Johnny” on WKTU’s morning show. Meanwhile, Goomba had to cultivate importance among an Italian-American constituency to hold on to the privileged position of a “drive-time” radio show by drawing an ethnic boundary against Latino radio personalities. An egregiously biased comment was reportedly heard on classic rock station, WAXQ FM, during the morning “drive time” on 6.26.02: “Italians are niggers that have lost their memories.”¹⁵ While this remark does not explicitly mention Guido, an implicit reference can be assumed since the station is

¹⁴ See www.getoffourisland.com. A website that attacks NJGuido restricts its attack to subcultural style. See www.thephatphree.com. Yet another disparages Guido as homosexual. See www.lee hotti.com.

¹⁵ H-ITAM message board, accessed 7/12/02.

another media outpost of local youth culture. The racial ambiguity of Guidos was a dominant motif in the deviance profile elaborated in response to the Bensonhurst incident and reflects a persistent undercurrent or hidden agenda in the popular culture that denies unambiguous whiteness to Italian Americans, a ploy that makes their ethnicity even more deviant. This conversation about Italian-American racial identity in the popular culture was joined on WKTU when Joe Causi embraced a nonwhite ethnicity. Noting the geographical proximity of Southern Italy and especially Sicily to Africa, Causi summarily declared that "Sicilians are dark meat." He added that biological mixing was accompanied by cultural mixing which enhanced the group's musical inheritance and "rhythm," a narrative that strengthens his authenticity as an impresario of urban dance music culture but is problematic for an Italian-American claim to whiteness.

GUIDO AS AN ETHNIC ROUTE

The sociological literature frames Italian-American ethnicity as a residual traditional culture or a "symbolic ethnicity" that is compatible with the expressive individualism of middle class adults (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 270-271; Macionis, 2005: 303). However, this does not exhaust the range of Italian American ethnicities including novel, hybrid social forms like ethnic neighborhoods and youth subcultures. It overlooks the complex factors preserving a bounded Italian-American identity and group life. In New York City, with some 600,000 persons of Italian ancestry in 2000, being Italian-American continues to be "mobilized" in relation to complex "interests" and "institutions."

The possibility of new Italian American ethnicities can be gleaned from a "transactional" perspective which recognizes that "pre-existing cultural forms" can be put to "new uses" (Nagel, 1998:69). Guido is a "youth formation" that uses ethnicity to symbolize identity for a youth culture agenda. However, it is also

an "ethnic formation" within local youth culture. This complex development is a product of Italian-American neighborhood culture, which is itself a hybrid communal form (Tricarico, 1984). The youth subculture delineates a particular subject position within the wider ethnic group formed by intersections with age, class, and gender at a particular historical juncture in articulation with local circumstances. These intersections impart "postmodern sensibilities" to urban ethnic youth as well as a postmodern cast to ethnicity transacted "outside of the communities and traditions that initially gave them shape and meaning" (Lipsitz, 1994: 134-135).

Youth culture practice is noteworthy as a construction site for ethnicity and assimilation because it is an opening to the mainstream culture. When the opportunity to consume arrived, Italian-American youth turned to commercial popular culture to construct an identity and life-styles. In contradistinction to parents who are more likely to be defined by labor and a scarcity culture, they "bought into" youth style markets shaped by the mass media (Lipsitz, 1994). Commercial youth culture promises "strategic empowerment" through fun and pleasure pursued in peer group settings (Grossberg, 1997). A focus on "hedonistic consumption" suggests a strategy to "escape class" typical among youth subcultures (Thornton, 1995). Like Hip Hop, however, Guido "escape" to an elevated consumption style in the name of ethnicity.

Symbolic work that joins being Italian to new class culture signifiers has registered with the mainstream media and significant youth others. It is notable for negative evaluations linking style and ethnicity. In the mass media, this has been joined to Mafia narratives in representations of an arriviste class culture in films like *Married to the Mob* and the HBO series *The Sopranos*. A *New York Times* media critic was impressed by Mafia-arriviste consumption styles on display in the Gottis' "sprawling, deliciously vulgar Long Island estate" where the main "house is filled with

marble, leopard-skin throw pillows and oil portraits and framed photographs of John Gotti" (Stanley, 2004). *Gotti* reflects stereotypes held by significant youth others of Guidos as "spoiled" by consumption: "Their hardworking parents spoil them rotten because they grew up in poverty and now they live vicariously through their sons and daughters." Resentment for a higher consumption status is exacerbated by the perception of invidious status claims, like the social snobbery attributed to "a Guido fraternity" on an upstate college campus:

They act toward others with prejudice, superiority and a lack of respect. They think they are better than the rest. One of the lines they use to refer to people is 'They aren't worthy'. Instead of saying "They're not cool,' they say "They're not worthy'. I mean that in itself says how much they put other people down. [Daniel, 21, 2003]

When a privileged Italian ethnicity is the banner for status claims, ethnic prejudice against Italian Americans is a return volley to put arriviste Italian Americans back in their place. In this scenario, a "turn to ethnicity" is also "strategic empowerment" including a defense against negative distinction. Ethnic honor is "subcultural capital" (Thornton, 1995) that links with style and, thus, doubly privileges an ethnic youth subculture. Since this takes place against the backdrop of a "negatively privileged ethnicity," the symbolic work of an Italian-American youth subculture may be viewed as a specialized strategy in "the struggle for recognition and respect" waged by minority immigrant populations in this society (Lipsitz, 1994:121).

A youth culture strategy maps an orientation to ethnic "routes" rather than "roots." Notwithstanding consumption as the featured component of a new ethnic script, Guido can not be dismissed as simply mainstream or assimilationist. This apparent contradiction may be illuminated by Lipsitz's concept of "bifocali-

ty" which captures the "duality" of being "unable to exercise simple assimilation or complete separation" (Lipsitz, 1994b:135). The upshot is ambivalence and contradiction of Guido youth "at one and the same time calling attention to ethnic differences and demonstrating how they might be transcended" (Ibid: 119). However, the concept of "bi-focality" may be an oversimplification because it acknowledges only two cultures. In New York City the creation of distinctive ethnic boundaries is not solely referenced to the "mainstream culture" but to other ethnic groups and local subcultures (e.g., gays, artists, bohemians). A more sophisticated rendering is offered by the concept of "new ethnicities" as "a development of late modern societies" that "fuse aspects of the popular" with "an imagined traditional culture and the vernacular knowledges of the local urban/regional settings" (Bennett, 2000:29; also see Sansone, 1995:125).

While the "new ethnicities" concept usefully points to a "hybrid" culture, the notion of "bi-focality" makes it possible to consider the weighted and variable influence of constituent elements. Like other contemporary youth subcultures, Guido continues to mutate further in the direction of "a particular style of leisure-oriented consumption" focused on "things that give immediate pleasure and little lasting use" (Ogersby, 2001). Fusion with commercial popular culture tends to "trivialize" ethnicity with its penchant for "fictional narratives" (Lipsitz, 1994b). Where Guido initially staked a claim to consumption, it increasingly becomes fused with the commodity. Thus, an Internet site for *Guidoland* (<http://www.guidoland.com>, accessed 5/5/02) owned by "Yo Frankie Productions" merchandises Guido as a life-style consummately performed by neighborhood Italian Americans but that can be consumed across the ethnic boundary.

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Being a Guido or a Guidette is less about ethnicity and more a way of life. Whether you’re African-American, Irish, Jewish, Asian, Latino or any other ethnicity, you can be a Guido!

The organization *New Jersey Guido* (<http://www.njguido.com>, accessed 5/5/05) likewise sublimates Italian ethnicity within a sub-cultural ideology of hedonistic consumption: “Basically we want to show off the crazy ass New Jersey scene.” A “party” identity can be realized through the consumption of club culture facilitated by the sale of merchandise on the *NJGuido* web site. The organization portrays an “evolved form of Guido” as a “sophisticated” urban life style defined by “youth, beauty and flash” (Copeland, 2003). While ethnicity is irrelevant to the party, there is muted nostalgia for the close-knit Italian-American family that used to share a summer cottage at the Jersey shore before the peer group “party” evolved into *NJGuido*.

Nostalgia plays a bigger role in the marketing of classic Guido. This is the provenance of Guido entertainers and is aimed at Italian Americans who have aged out of dance culture into parenthood and the suburban diaspora. Guido nostalgia wraps around the musings by “Brooklyn’s Own Joe Causi” and in his “oldies” shows featuring performances by 1970s “disco divas.” It is also the staple of “Guido comics” known as “The HayaDoin’ Boys” whose web site presents an insider parody of a local subculture in the 1980s titled “You Know You’re a Guido If...,” for example,

You owned or drive a Mustang/IROC/Trans Am.

You cried when Hot 97 turned to all rap.

That the very same items circulate under the heading “You Know You’re Italian If...” suggests a merging of ethnic and youth culture experience that earmarks a “new ethnicity.”

These *organic* Guidos are marketing themselves before someone else does. It was not surprising when Guido was distilled as an urban designer brand for men in 2003, although the designers of *Guido New York* are not organic Guidos and articulate an ambivalent relationship to the underlying youth subculture:

The word Guido comes with many associations. Though there is a historical stereotype that may be perceived as negative, we have re-contextualized and appropriated the word, not the stereotype. [www.guidonewyork.com, accessed 5/7/06]

While it will likely not be as momentous as the organic Hip Hop fashion companies *FUBU* and *Rocawear*, *New York Guido* aspires to market an ethnic youth style like "Cholo" as an alternative version of the "inner city vibe" (LaFerla, 2003). The 2004 line featured one of the Gotti boys as a runway model, exploiting a mediated connection to affluent Italian-American youth "growing up" outside the neighborhood culture.

The commodification of an arriviste Guido may have little appeal for youth embedded in residual Italian-American neighborhoods. Youth in declining outer borough areas like Bensonhurst continue to fashion subcultural styles that are a response to "structural problems" (Brake, 1985). Guido continues to express a sense of turf honor although "consumer desire" may provide compensation for the loss of neighborhood turf to both new immigrant populations and urban elites. Asserting a Guido identity may offer a "magical recovery" of authentic ethnic community to individuals who are "marginal" to the suburban Italian-American diaspora as well as new urban life-styles shaped by the global economy. The marginalization of these youth was generalized as an ethnic problem in ItalChat that issued in a siege mentality: "To be Italian is to be loved by some, hated by many, respected by all, and harmed by none." Ideologies of ethnic and turf honor may

also be a backlash to mainstream moral panic, especially among disaffected males lacking the economic and cultural capital to adjust to the continued erosion of defended Italian-American neighborhoods. This backlash is given expression by gangsta idioms, suggesting many Italian-American youth are also vulnerable to "an oppositional culture associated with urban youth of color" (Lee, 2005:9). A stylized gangsta code, originally developed as the voice of ghetto Black youth, lends an even angrier tone to Guido disaffection. A web page biography included an epic story of marginality and paranoia titled "Da True Life of a Guido," depicting a moral world in which there are "fellow Guidz" and "enimiez" are everywhere "Guidos always watch each others backz."

The erosion of traditional culture has perhaps left a bigger opening for gangsta. Eroded ethnic culture is unable to buffer more "dangerous and problematic" aspects of "assimilation into urban youth culture" and "Americanization" (Lee, 2005: 9). Stylized manifestations of a street code may be an expressive vehicle for the failure to realize consumer desire coupled with the corrosion of ethnic communal traditions. Rather than become black, a gangsta pose perhaps suggests a slide toward "cultureless" or "post-ethnic" whites. An "escape" from ethnicity could be read in mass media representations of Italian-American youth in the 2005 Howard Beach incident as "white." This may have been an artifact of the charge of a "hate crime" which hinged on the use of a racial epithet (O'Donnell and Rashbaum, 2005). From a broader view, the latest Howard Beach incident contributed to the confused narrative of Italian Americans in the city. The representation of Nicholas Minucci, the chief protagonist, in the press, which was generalized to other local youth, reiterated themes of gangsta street culture: "varnished luxury" combined with "unemployment" and a disposition to "violence" (Ibid.). While identified as "white" in press accounts, their style profile "darkened" them in the eyes of a mainstream audience. In contrast to Bensonhurst, these Howard

Beach youth were not identified as Guido and the violence was not generalized as Italian-American trait. However, implicit signifiers of urban Italian-American deviance were near at hand in the report of Minucci's "friendship with the children of Victoria Gotti" and appeared on the TV show (Santora and Rashbaum, 2005). Like gangsta, Guido's connection to ethnic street culture keeps it from being just a media concoction.

The ethnic "routes" taken by Guido are incompatible with the symbolic ethnicity of Italian-American elites. Guido spins an "exclusionary politics of identity" rather than "collective self-affirmation which still allows for alliances with others" (Bloul, 1998: 7). It is also identified with a low brow consumption style that reworks the "culture war" between "alt' Italiani" (high Italians) and "bass' Italiani" (low Italians). This is apparent in D'Acerno's contempt for "the tacky world of vulgar consumerism" displayed in the gangster movie spectacle that can easily be read in his portrayal of Guido (D'Acerno, 1999:647). *Growing Up Gotti* is perhaps his worst nightmare, depicting the corrosion of traditional ethnic family culture by a culture of narcissism fueled by hedonistic consumption with no interest in historical memory except to embellish the persona of the deceased patriarch.

D'Acerno (1999) happens to accord "guido" recognition in his "encyclopedia" of Italian-American popular culture. He actually advances a formal definition of "guido" as a "pejorative" term "projected onto Italian-American men since the 1970s" as "a dominant mass media stereotype" (689). This corroborates the view of "Guido" as a category of prejudice imposed from outside the boundary that justifies an anti-defamation strategy. On the other hand, he recognizes "guido" as a "style" performed by "lower class" Italian-American men. While D'Acerno is on the verge of acknowledging a youth subculture, he is unable to accord "agency" hence, the small case in "guido." Guido youth are reduced to

ciphers of popular culture, presumably including the very mass media images that disparage them and their ethnicity.

When D'Acierno intimates that "guido style" can be generalized to a "lower class" Italian-American taste culture, an even bigger problem arises for elite identity politics because Guido begins to look more like an "ethnic category" than a "youth category." A precedent here is found in work by Matute-Bianchi (1986: 207) that reports "variations in forms of ethnic identification and consciousness among various groups of Mexican-descent people in the United States." She lists among these new variations in Mexican identity three youth subcultures in "*Cholos, Low Riders, Homeboy*" (italics in the original). Similarly, Guido seems to refer to a particular way of being Italian American, performed at a particular place and time, and with a certain "look" and "sound." It is an identification *rooted* in lower class Italian-American neighborhood culture but *routed* by a "rising class" consumption culture. Its variable meaning can be recognized on both sides of the ethnic boundary and used for different agendas. Mass media representations of Guido life-styles may be most significant for the development of this new ethnic category.

Italian-American intellectual and political elites cannot pretend that Guido is a figment of the media imaginary. The 1989 Bensonhurst incident occasioned a moral crisis for Italian-American elites who were unable or unwilling to commensurately respond to mainstream media representations of deviant youth.¹⁶ The failure to own Guido denies a story that Italian Americans

¹⁶ The 1997 Paramount (Viacom) film titled *Kiss Me, Guido* by Tony Vitale purports to challenge the "stereotype" that derides "Guidos" as "stupid" and "unrefined" Italian Americans (Weinraub, 1997). Vitale "owns" Guido personally claiming that he was himself a "Guido" as "a teenager" in the Bronx although the character of "Guido" in the film is not situated in the urban youth subculture, unlike the 1988 film *Spike of Bensonhurst* which did not invoke the name Guido. However, the film may have unwittingly solidified a stereotypical portrait especially for audiences without direct experience of Italian-American life in New York City. This may explain why the "Guido" name was expunged from the title of a spin-off CBS TV sitcom in 2001 called "Some of My Best Friends." It probably also rankled with Italian-American anti-defamation media "watch dogs."

narrate about themselves as a specifically Italian-American story. This is counterproductive as an anti-defamation strategy because it allows the story to be owned in ways that are framed by ethnic prejudice. Ironically, the story of Guido has become a story that insults Italian Americans as an ethnic group.

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