



# CHESS IS JIU-JITSU FOR THE MIND



BY **ADISA BANJOKO**  
EDITED BY JAKE PAINE

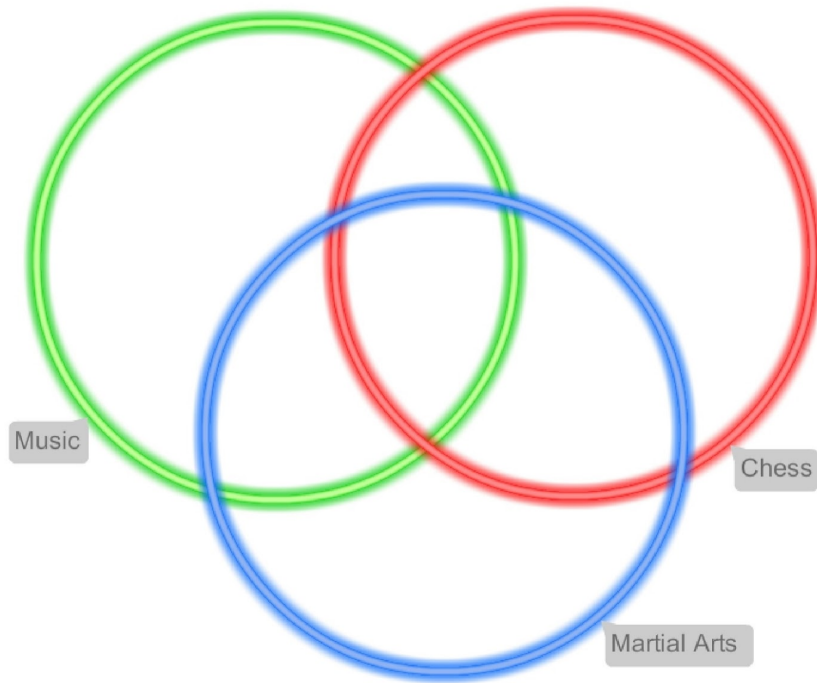
*This book was not made for the average chess player. It was made for the  
average human being. - Adisa Banjoko*



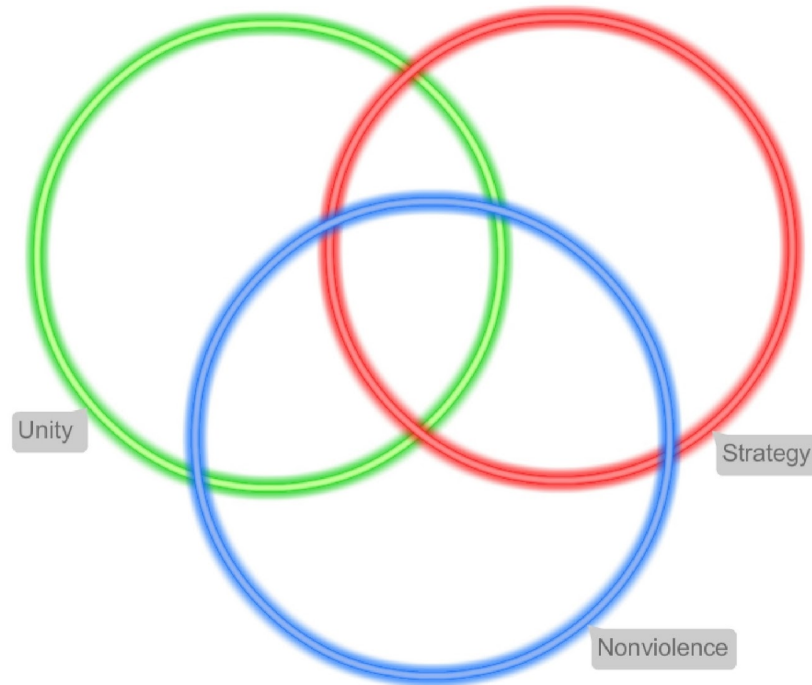
*HHCF Founder, Adisa Banjoko and Dir. of Outreach RZA at St. Louis Chess Club*

Welcome to the sampler for *Chess is Jiu-Jitsu for the Mind*. This book will cover the thematic connections between Hip-Hop, chess, martial arts and life. My hope is that this book will inform and entertain you. Mostly though, my wish is that you discover the beauty and power of yourself and others with this book. I founded the Hip-Hop Chess Federation in 2006 to “fuse

logic and the arts, to unite minds and hearts.”



Through WGM Jen Shahade I was contacted about three years ago by Susan Barrett (who was then Director) of the World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) in St. Louis to showcase the ideas of how the history of martial arts and chess converged. It opened October 9th 2014 in an exhibition called *Living Like Kings: The Unexpected Collision of Chess and Hip-Hop Culture*. It was an honor for me to teach my years of knowledge and research with the curating team at the WCHOF. The exhibit sparked a new national discussion on these themes and how they can help young people academically and socially.



I was working on this book before I started working with the WCHOF. Since the discussion seems to be more and more on the rise, I wanted to share some of our methodologies and philosophies before it drops (tentatively scheduled for April 2015). Be clear that these ideas are not meant to be immutable laws or commandments. They are meant to be a guide to deeper understanding of yourself and the world we live in. I want you to discover the power of your own mind and honor the potential in all of humanity. Use one, or some of them as you find they work for you. Enjoy and feel free to send me direct feedback at [bishop@hiphopchessfederation.org](mailto:bishop@hiphopchessfederation.org)

Chess is Jiu-Jitsu for the Mind is a book with 4 sections:

Section 1: The Educational Benefits of Chess.

Section 2: The History and Educational Benefits of Hip-Hop.

Section 3: The History and Educational Benefits of Jiu-Jitsu.

Section 4: The Fusion. It is about the fusion of the disciplines as well as interviews I have done on the subject. What I have shared below are a few pieces from those sections.

Before I go, please check out my podcast produced by the eternally gifted Mike Relm [www.bishopchronicles.com](http://www.bishopchronicles.com) and visit [www.hiphopchessfederation.org](http://www.hiphopchessfederation.org) to *DONATE* :) and

learn more about what we do.

I want to thank Blayne Barlow of CTRL Industries for putting this cover together. Be sure to visit [www.ctrlindustries.com](http://www.ctrlindustries.com) for the dope jiu jitsu inspired gear. Can't thank Jake Paine enough for being patient with my madness and editing.

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COMING SOON!!! DJ Rob Flow [www.djrobflow.com](http://www.djrobflow.com) will be dropping HHCF's Street Games Vol. 2 Hosted by Grandmaster Maurice Ashley and Eugene Brown (Life of a King) .

It is now time to enter....



**Reframing the Cultural Edge of Chess**



March 1st, 2013 I was able to present at the Harvard Graduate School of Education on the fusion of Hip-Hop, chess and martial arts and their connections to the broader American culture (specifically as it relates to Hip-Hop and urban youth).

When I was done, a Latino student came up to me and said that he really enjoyed Hip-Hop and martial arts. However, he felt deeply that at the end of the day, chess was “a White man’s game.” Feeling that the art belonged to old White men, he felt puzzled, if not embarrassed to his own growing interests.

I hear this perspective often from Black and Brown kids, and from all over the country. I believe it is a false barrier on many levels. It is false because chess really is a game of the world. Nobody can claim a monopoly on how it developed, who made innovations that matter most, etc. This makes chess a great game for not only including, but unifying Black and Brown kids. Sadly, many of them don’t have a cultural frame of reference for themselves and so they dismiss chess—if not belittle it.

This is a huge reason that I push the history of rappers celebrating and applying the teachings

that come from playing the game of chess so much. Not just because it's true, but because it gives teenagers and young adults a Black and Brown cultural reference that feels authentic- because it is. .

So many times I have to tell the young men (young men like the student at Harvard) about how chess has its roots in India, about how it came into Africa via the Arabs (through trading and military campaigns). I explain how the Africans from the North West coast brought the game with them when they conquered Spain in 700 AM. How those Muslim men and women became the cornerstone of what evolved into the European renaissance.

David Shenk's The Immortal Game and Marilyn Yalom's Birth of the Chess Queen show how were it not for dedicated African and Arab Muslim scholarship and preservation of the game, the rest of the world may never have known it existed.

Soon European Jews and Christians learned the game. Over time, the role of the queen developed primarily because of the political freedom Christian women exercised in politics and war. European queens gradually became more active in managing the kingdoms. The queen was not part of the game of chess in the beginning. It was the king and his general or Vizer.

The chess piece was not very powerful in the beginning. But over time, you see her piece rise in power on the board almost exactly in step with the queens of Europe taking more leadership on in the areas they ruled.

This is a huge thing for young girls to know. I mention this to young women as often as I can. They need to be reminded of their leadership potential. They need to see how they can change even a super "manly" game like chess and end up being the strongest piece on the board.

So Hindus created it, Muslim Arabs and Africans innovated it, European Christians and Jews innovated it even more. China falls in love with the game. The game comes to America, and we all start to play here. Chess is one of the few true games the entire planet plays.

In June of 2014 the city of San Jose had awarded HHCF the Safe Summer Initiative Grant. We made some posters for our Live The Game chess camps at Ocala Middle School San Jose. Our camp was located on the East side of San Jose aka Shark City. They have a massive problem with gang violence and teen homicides these days.

I made posters of Jose Raul Capablanca, the Cuban, then I made posters of rap lyrics connected to chess with photos of Jay Z, 2Pac, and Lauryn Hill. Today I'm going to go make some posters of Latina champions in chess. I put these posters by the window where the chess tables are and we got more new kids to come in and learn to play that we had all last week.

These young people may not know about Moorish Spain or Benjamin Franklin's first writings on "The Morals of Chess." They may not know about Capablanca, how Fidel Castro and Che were players.

Nevertheless, starting them off with Hip-Hop references gives them a contemporary glance at an ancient game. A game that can truly change their academic ability and cultural connectivity to a global community.

Chess like many things has often been reframed culturally to reflect the White male perspective and history with the game. The simple truth is that I don't do any of what I do to uproot White men from chess or deny any authentic influence and achievements Europeans have made with the game. However, their perspective and history is not the only perspective or history that matters. It is not the only perspective in chess that matters.

Cultural authenticity is one of the most important things we can have as individuals and groups. Cultural truth, is one of the most important truths any of us can have. I never lie about the connections between Hip-Hop and chess, or martial arts and music- whatever. As a young adult, who was full of passion and militance I fell for both White lies and Black lies in search of the truth. The truth is beyond one color and some truths exist on an individual level that another person cannot see, feel or experience.

The African Islamic introduction of the game to European countries like Spain, Italy and France matter. The Jewish and Christian impact and innovations on the game matter. The women of the world who love and mastered this game matter. Black and Latino kids matter. All life is sacred. The second we lie about that, all things fall apart.

The HHCF has a mission to help all people, irrespective of their background. We look for kids who are suffering at the bottom. This has us working with mostly Black and Latino teens. At other times we are working with Asian or White youth. Sometimes upper class parents bring their kids to me to help them grow through mentoring via chess or personal training.

The kids must know what whatever they are, and wherever they are, that people who look like them, pray like them and eat like them play chess and have a great place in it. They need to know that they can have a great place in it to and once learning have kind of a duty to pass that wisdom on.

However we will never be able to attract kids from non-White backgrounds to the game of kings by force feeding them black & white photos of White men in suits, sporting monocles. Let's choose instead to teach them a history of chess that starts where they are. So if I have to tell them about Tupac, Capablanca, RZA and the Wu-Tang Clan or Latino rappers like Conejo (even if his lyrics are not the most positive overall) I will do it. Because at least then we start with something they can relate to. If they are White I talk about Carlsen or Eminem. If

they are Indian I tell them about Annand. If they are Black I tell them about Maurice Ashley. If they are girls I tell them about Jen Shahade, Claudia Munoz and Phiona Mutesi. I tell them about people in the neighborhood they live in who love the game. It gets them inspired.

Cultural authenticity is the secret truth about how Hip-Hop Chess Federation connects to kids in communities that most traditional educators and most traditional chess clubs fail to use. I don't need the White man not to exist in chess. I just need their rightful existence and influence in chess not to push *my rightful existence off the board or downplay the contributions of my people.*

In the garden of truth, the weeds of falsehood have overtaken many truths about the beauty and power of this game. I take it on as a personal duty to yank those weeds out and replace them with seeds of truth, brotherhood, sisterhood and a shared beauty of our global collective brilliance.

### **A Philosophical Approach to Chess and Life**



Some of these elements were written above. But this is the cornerstone of what we cover for HHCF Level One Teacher Certifications. The idea here is to get the you clear on the basic understanding of chess. You must know how pawns, rooks, knights, bishops, kings and queens move. You need to know how to castle and know the value of the pieces. Only after that, can any of these deeper lessons resonate with you you or any young person you might seek to mentor through the game.

### The Chessboard & The Open Mind

The chessboard by itself, is a beautiful pattern of opposites. It rejects no one. It accepts the rich and the poor alike. It invited all races, cultures, genders and faiths. through all times Once the pieces are set upon it, there is an unspoken tension of unactualized potential that lays not only in the game, but in each of our own minds. The chessboard asks that you bring your best ideas and plans to the game. “Abandon your fear of losing and dare to learn!” it demands. If you bring less than your best, that’s ok. You can always come back. I suggest you do so often.

### Unity in Diversity

Chess gives you a diverse team to accomplish your goals with. Kings, queens, bishops, knights, rooks and pawns all move differently. Each has their own specific way of thinking and moving. Yet the game guarantees them victory *only if they work together*. If you send a knight in to do a bishop’s job, you will usually lose. But if the knight supports a bishop who is supported by a rook—they are a force of nature. Many games end with king supported by a pawn to a queen can rise on the opposite side of the board. Many times in life, you must think about the people around you. If your team all thinks like you, you will all fall victims to the same kind of mistakes. In your life, try to have a diverse team of independent thinkers who work together and make different kinds of sacrifices for common goals.

### Safety Position Finish

This theme was introduced to my by my jiu jitsu instructor Alan “Gumby” Marques. It illustrates the three phases of combat. As he stated many times, this formula has applications on and off the mat as well. After watching a ton of fights, a ton of chess matches and a ton of business ventures go right and wrong I agree. On the mat, first you don’t allow yourself to be in a disadvantageous position. You get safe. Then you improve positional dominance until a chokehold or armlock, etc. is the only thing left (checkmate). In chess, first your get your king safe (often castling early), then your improve your position until you finish or checkmate the other king.

I see now that in the heat of combat, if one misses the true priority- you lose. If you try to

finish your opponent in jiu jitsu, but your position gave them space to move- they escape! They scramble to a new position and its like the fight almost restarted. In chess, if you try to checkmate someone, but you have miscalculated the squares your team are attacking—the king escapes, or captures a valuable piece! It can trigger a reversal of positional strength in the process. On real battlefields, on the mat and on the chessboard misunderstanding the priority of safety, position and finish is deadly. Train yourself to be aware.

3PA>1NT

Three positive actions are greater than one negative thought. I write it like a mathematical equation. I created it as a method of off stress reduction and tracking my short term goal setting. This is a formula that is proven not only to help you reframe how to deal with problems in your life. But it can also make you a proactive thinker who deals with issues head on. It keeps you in control of your emotional state as well.

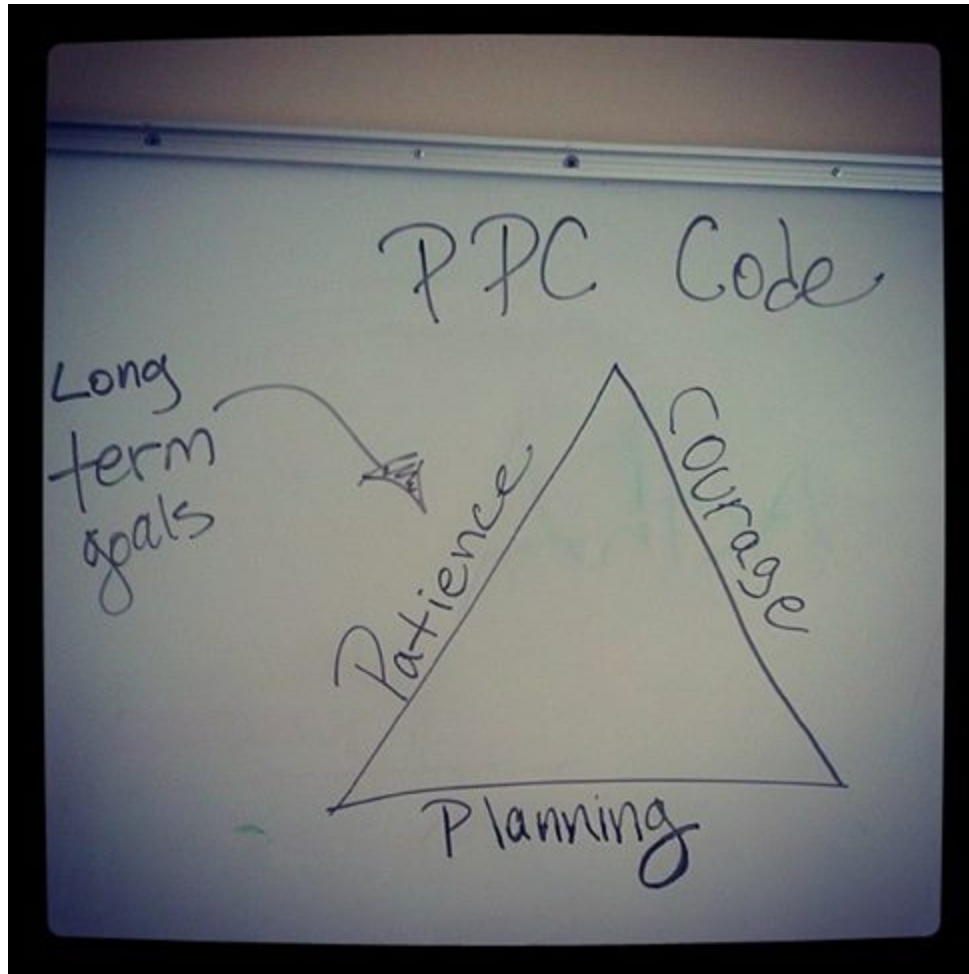
Let's say you have a algebra test in three weeks. You know its going to be hard, and you could get a very average grade of you don't do well. The problem is, you really don't have a solid grasp of what's on the test. Its keeping you up at night. What three things could you do?

First you could ask a friend you trust to help you. Second you could go online and look up video lessons on the formulas you are not understanding. Third you could dedicate at least one extra hour to studying that subject.

The next day, you might do three different things. Or, if these are working you may stick with them. By the time the test comes, you will have a whole new psychological and actual approach. Because you have put the time in, and taken consistent measurable steps to do better—you will.

They say it takes 21 days to make a habit. Once you lock this in, three things won't be enough. You will do 7 or 10 things. Soon, any problem that approaches your world will be met with immediate action. Don't ever feel like you can't have a choice in how things happen. To whatever degree you can control a thing, do it to your maximum advantage.

PPC code



The PPC Code is the method HHCF members use to track long term goals. It has 3 elements really. Planning is the at the base of the triangle. Patience is on the left. Courage is on the right. Success is in the center.

The breakdown is simple. Without a plan, there is nothing you can expect to achieve or keep very long. Once in a while you see people without plans luck up on some money, or stumble into a new position at work. But they cannot maintain it without a plan. Patience is often visualized as a person standing in line waiting for a sandwich, or a new pair of shoes. That is not what we are speaking to. Members of the HHCF see patience as the implementation of  $3PA > 1NT$  over a course of years. Its doing your homework on time and consistently. Its shooting hoops in the rain even when no one else will come with you. Its studying chess positions by yourself after class is over. Courage is needed because many people are afraid of success. They say they want to sing, until they get a shot to open for Beyonce- they duck the opportunity. They say they can fight the top contenders, but then the chance comes to do battle, they talk their way out of it. Or worse, they fight with half a heart, afraid to see what they are truly made of. They say they want to start on the football team, until the quarterback gets hurt- then they crumble and give excuses. You must have the courage to seize the

opportunity when it shows itself. It may never come again. Abandon your ego's false fears and enter the situation with full conviction of your abilities that got you to this point. Trust in that history of 3PA>1NT and in the work it took for the moment to arrive in your life. Give all of your mental, physical and spiritual energy in the situation. Be present and own the moment.

### Pawn to Queen Threat Assessment (arrange your priorities)

I lost a game recently against my friend Jahi. The position was essentially even. I made a move to improve my position. It was a mistake. I needed to be focused on king safety. It cost me the game.

Measuring the priority is what we call Pawn to King Threat Assessment. Do you really see things as they are- or do you *just think* you do?

In life, its the same. For kids, a fellow teammate yelling at them during a game seems like a big deal. But its a pawn issue. Simple, you can either focus on the game and ignore them. Or you can tell them you did not like how they spoke to you and try and find a better way of communicating with you because you are working together to win. But if you yell back, things escalate to a physical confrontation and you both get kicked off the team (or cost the game an easy win), thats a queen problem.

If you are at work, having a micromanaging jerk hovering over you all day is a problem. But its a pawn issue. Missing the Team Leader's deadline because you didn't not do all your research- is a queen problem.

Mistaking the priority in your day to day life, be it in education or business is always a sure death sentence. Take time and have the clarity of mind to make the right decisions. I'm not going to get too preachy here, but, staying sober and away from drugs is key in having the ability to assess things properly. I'm not going to make a moral plea to you. I'm not going to tell you about the downfall of addiction and pain of prison. Because you know these things and if you don't you can look them up. Bottom line is that it drugs and alcohol ruin one's ability to see straight. For that reason alone, leave them out of your life.

### Poisoned Pawn

In chess there is a tactic called the poisoned pawn. Basically, your opponent offers you a pawn. You quickly zoom in with your queen and take it. It's a free pawn, no harm in that right? Wrong. Now that your queen is out there, she gets chased around the board, hunted and killed. In the chase your lack of development leads to your loss. All of this could have been avoided if you just left the pawn alone and focused on complete positional development.

You don't have to take everything people offer you. Its a simple reality. But our egos greed

create illusions that lead to our demise.

For young people the poisoned pawn in life might be taking or dealing drugs, consumption of alcohol, smoking cigarettes and quick money schemes (stealing phones, cars, robbing other youngsters on the bus and related jacking). It makes sense at the time, but soon after, juvenile hall or unexpected extreme retaliation quickly makes you realize how foolish it was.

For adults, it can come in the corporate world as a “promotion.” You were doing hard work and deserved it. A huge pay raise and a new title- who doesn’t want that. You are now the VP of Operations in Southeast Asia. However, what your superiors and executive board realized last month was that due to sluggish sales, that whole section will be laid off inside 6 months. Before you know it, the pink slip is on your desk and you are being escorted out the building with your family photos and productivity awards.

I’ve personally seen that happen twice, but heard of it happen at least 20-30 times. Think carefully before you jump into any easy money and opportunities.

### Blocking Your Blessings

Shortly after starting HHCF I saw an interesting game between my friends K9 and Dlabrie. After a few moves my friend K9 had Dlabrie surrounded by knights, bishops and pawns with rooks lurking in the shadows to reinforce the bum rush. I patted DLabrie on the shoulders and said “Its almost over homey, maybe you will get him next game.” I returned about ten minutes later to see K9 checkmated.

I was totally in shock. I ran the play back a few moves to look at the position. After further positional observation we concluded that even though K9’s squad was on the attack- *it was uncoordinated*. The knights and bishops were not helping one another. The pawns were preventing advancement of the rooks. “I was in my own way,” K9 chuckled.

“How many times do you think you do that in your own life ?”

It was not an accusation but something I was asking myself, out loud.

In Hip-Hop we often talk about haters. People who talk bad about us or try to keep us getting a promotion at the job. In the rap game, they plot against us so we don’t get the exposure we had hoped for. These kinds of people are real, but often their impact is really insignificant if our focus and work ethic is on point.

If we say we want to be top level MC’s but waste time in the studio smoking and joking with the girlies when we should be recording- what’s the likely outcome going to be? If we never practice how to properly hold the mic, master our breath control on stage etc., what should we expect? If we way we want to be on the basketball team but spend more time on the Xbox

than shooting free throws and drilling lay ups, who can we blame?

To paraphrase The Buddha, no hater can do more damage than an undisciplined mind.

I always felt that the use of The Matrix has been a much overused allegory. However, if you recall, when the character Neo did not think he could go from building to building- he fell on his face. Once he realized the limits he placed on his own mind were the main things holding him back, he went farther than Morpheus. No sentinel could get with him because he was clear on his abilities. More often than not, *as long as you believe they can stop you, they will.*

When Muhammad Ali fought George Foreman at The Rumble in the Jungle, almost all of his previous supporters (including people in his training camp and his wife) really thought he was going to lose. Ali created a strategy *only he knew*, and kept it a secret until he did it, winning the fight. Ali always believed he had the ability to do it and that faith in himself. What they could not see in him did not matter. What he saw in himself and worked to manifest was more important.

Today, once I believe in my head and heart someone is an enemy, I do not speak of them. I don't talk about them to other people. I do not concern myself on any level with their well being or downfall. I work on myself. I build with my team. I focus on my tasks and let the results be whatever they are.

"Go hard in the paint" with no regard to their existence and watch yourself rise above them.

## Chess Clock

In the HHCF methodology, the chess clock represents death, the finality of life. This is not meant to be morbid, but a solid reminder of the limits of time on your existence. It represent the precious nature of opportunity and abilities. If you play chess on the clock, you go for a set period of time. If neither of you checkmate the other, whoever runs out of time first, loses.

In truth, time is an illusion. The clock is nothing more than man's crude attempt to track infinity. We will never be able to do that. All we can do is try to measure our time on this earth in a way that makes sense to us.

The one who lost time on the board may have figured out the exact way to beat their opponent. But if they ran out of time, it does not matter. Prisons and hospital beds are packed with people who waited too long to take accomplishing their goals serious. Then something happened that really set them back. Now there is no more time.

Take advantage of right now. It's the only moment you are sure of. Embrace now. Because one day, your heart will stop. I hope when that moment comes, you are at happy with the time you spent here and took in as much of the beauty and opportunities you could.

## Pawn Structure

Pawn Structure and paying attention to details. Pawns are my favorite pieces on the board many times. There are more pawns than any other piece. While seeming insignificant and easy to throw away for beginners, real players know kings live and die because of brave pawns. The know queens are reborn when that last pawn makes it to the other side of the board.

Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and indeed many of the leaders of the future are not be born into the power they attain. They are everyday folks who decided to step in and do some heavy lifting for the unknown and unborn people they will never know. That is the essence of the pawn sacrifice.

Pawns are most dangerous when they work together. Connecting along the same angle they made what's called a pawn chain. They broke governments and forced empires to honor them. It did not happen overnight, but it happened.

Through the weakest pieces working together, no queen, no bishop no king dare attempt attacking one of them. For if one pawn falls, the one behind it will surely destroy whoever took out their friend. If you feel weak, if you don't have the power or resources alone to accomplish a task, find someone like you with similar aspirations. Work together. Find another like you two and add another and another. Your unity will prove unbreakable to any who try to destroy the global Hip-Hop community were formed by people with very little who stood strong against those much more rich and powerful- but who eventually knelt to the will masses. You are never alone. You just need to stay moving forward and connect to those like you. Good luck in your journey.

## Embrace the Battle: How Your Enemies Improve You

A few paragraphs back we talked about haters. They exist. Enemies are real. You should know that there are people who do not want you to succeed. Jealousy, envy, greed, the quest for power are all real elements of the human being. But so is the ability to master them.

Strategic historian and philosopher Robert Greene tells us that Enemy comes from a latin root word, Inimicus: "not a friend". Everybody is not your friend and thats ok. But others actively seek your demise. This is ok to, but, they must be dealt with.

I don't mean dealt with like gangsters. There is no need to clash with every person who seeks to contend with you. One of the best lessons Bruce Lee ever taught was on Enter the Dragon when he taught the art of "fighting without fighting" to a bully on a boat.

Understand that just as much as your enemy reveals about themselves when they attack you,

they reveal about you as you respond. If they say you are a savage, what good does it to to out do them in savagery to prove them wrong? If in your clash with them you are cowardly and underhanded, if you are cruel to them after your victory and arrogant with in your winnings, you just told the world more about yourself than your opponent.

Our enemies purify our true selves. In ju jitsu and chess, people are taught the proper etiquette of shaking hands before and after a match. This is because while there should be “emotional content” as Bruce Lee put it, there should never be hatred or raw emotion spilling all over the mat or the board.

In Karate and Judo they have an age-old tradition of bowing. While many Americans and other Western people often downplay its necessity as a sign of weakness or corny tradition, there is a deep wisdom in it. Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo taught that your bow to thank your opponent for improving you. Without them, nothing you accomplish it possible. You can shadowbox, run solo drills and do chess puzzles alone. But it’s not until the opponent is truly before you that you find your true limits, and abilities.

When your opponent approaches, don’t be angry. Give thanks for having someone to improve you. Step in and do your work.

#### Who Controls Your Illusion of Options?

This point is, perhaps, the most important of all we share. If you don’t understand this element of the HHCF’s teachings, everything else in this book and possibly in your life will surely elude you.

Chess is about options. A chess player is constantly looking for stronger, more dynamic moves and combinations to checkmate the king. Jiu Jitsu is about options. What physical web can we weave around our opponent to mislead and trap them? What are they attempting to do to us that we can reverse into a victory only we can see? Hip-Hop is about options. What new rhyme flow, scratch pattern, dance move, design scheme or lettering can we develop? What new noise or rhythm can we inset into the mix to give us an edge? The infinite hunt for options are why the three are interconnected forever.

Unfortunately, today many youth are told who they can be before they are ever given a chance to actualize their potential. We might be called “stupid”, “not college material”, “too short”, “too tall”, “too fat” “thuggish”, “crazy”, “ugly” “too pretty” the list goes on. Sometimes, sadly this is told to us by people who love us. But they do not see the totality of all that we can be. Sometimes they think they are protecting us when they tell us these things because they do it from fear of us being hurt. Other times, it is indeed done with sinister intent. Some believe that your rise only highlights their failure to rise. They focus only on the symbols of victory you have, and not on the tireless sacrifices you made to get there. Why? Only they know. The why in this equations does not matter.

Often these negative frameworks are reinforced by negativity pushed through most of the mainstream media outlets. Corporate radio, TV and websites promote largely negative images, especially where Black and Latino males and females are concerned. You are either invisible, as if you don't exist at all or the images are largely negative.

This has an impact on your sense of purpose and potential on an almost molecular level. I've seen kids who wanted to be scientists, buckle to peer pressure of gangs. Not just because the gangs were all over their area. But they knew no Latino scientists. So, they were told they did not exist and they believed the idea and chose the streets.

This is why we always push students to do research on whatever contributions have been made by people of their own race, religion and culture to the planet. It helps them see the history of the thing they love and hopefully inspires a passion to go create new history in it. I often tell kids, "Don't just read history, make history."

Abandon any limits anyone attempts to put on your identity and ability. Work harder, read more, train harder. In very simple terms, we teach that one's identity is the sum of ones actions, and what is most consistently studied. If you say you love playing the guitar but most of your time is spent away from your guitar and studying the greats, as the youngsters would say "You ain't about that life!"

Do your homework. Go buy books on the things you love. Take in the knowledge. Put that into action and show your wisdom. Practice hardest when there is no one to show out for. When there is no one to get applause from. Only then will you have the understanding it takes to go be the great thing this earth needs you to be. Don't let anyone control your illusion of options. They are virtually infinite.

People use to say man could never cross large bodies of water, fly, get into outer space, see one another in real time across computers, perform blood or heart transplants, and so many other things. All of it was accomplished by dedicated men and women who knew better. Stand up and be one of those who who studied, suffered on a lonely path and sacrificed much to be legends and helpers of humanity today. I am one of them. You are one of them. We are all here together. All life is sacred.

I believed a lot of the negative identities heaped upon me. I am still healing from much of it. Yet each day, little by little, I prove them wrong and reveal a better version of myself to the world. I'm asking you to do the same thing. Be well, believe and go be all of who you are with no reservations, fears or apologies.

### **Calculating Hip-Hop Science**



“Can we talk about the top 1% and the bottom 99? Or the wise 5% and the deaf, dumb and blind 85? Or how the circle 7 and the 120 saved our lives?”

- *Come to the Hills*, Amir Sulaiman

A few weeks ago I walked into the Ocala Youth Center in San Jose after passing out fliers for our free Hip-Hop Chess program. I was sweating like a runaway slave under the summer sun, but I was happy. You might think walking between Crip, Norteno and Sureno gang turfs trying to teach kids about chess would not work or be fun. But its a "beautiful struggle."

Our non-profit was awarded the Safe Summer Initiative Grant provided by the City of San Jose through the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force. Through that, we were been able to teach the game of kings to underserved kids in Eastside San Jose. Because of the shimmer of silicon chips is so often in the news, it's easy to forget the gang wars and turf battles. The BG's (baby gangsters) respect my efforts and let us do our work without any hassles. They knew my intentions. I appreciated that. When we first opened up at Ocala Middle School, five kids walked in. Two weeks later we were getting just under fifty.

One of my favorite kids is a teenage girl who learns freestyle wrestling from her dad, loves rap and heavy metal, and has a passion for singing in her spare time. “Where did chess come from?” she asked me one day between moves. I smiled and spoke to her like an uncle talking to his favorite niece.

“Chess came to America essentially because the Moors brought the game with them when they conquered Spain on 700 AD. If they don’t bring the game to Spain, Europe never gets it. If Europe never gets it, Benjamin Franklin never learns it. If he does not learn it, and come to America, *we never get it*. Today Maurice Ashley stands as the first Black Grand Master. Cuba had a World Champion, Jose Raul Capablanca, a true icon for Latinos around the world. The beauty of the sport and art of chess is something all cultures have connected through. If you think chess is a game only by and for old rich White people, then you have lost your place in the history of chess. I’m here today to help you find it and do something with it.” I also remind my students about Black female chess champion Rochelle Ballantyne (seen in the documentary Brooklyn Castles) now at Stanford University and on rising female champion Diamond Shakoor.

She is immersed in the conversation. I told her that opening with pawns, knights and bishops to control the center of the board, was no different than keeping your head up, elbows tight and low center of gravity heading to the middle of the mat to meet your opponent in wrestling. I knew then that the history of chess, when framed through an authentic cultural lens, gets students immediately engaged. I had an instant flashback to one of my discussions on this topic with a former colleague who served as a mathematics teacher.

Working as a security guard at John O’Connell High School in San Francisco, I learned a lot about American public schools. Compared to the average American parent I’ve had an uncommon level of access to teachers and students unfettered for several years. These experiences helped me configure my non-profit, the Hip-Hop Chess Federation to help teachers and students find new ways to achieve academic greatness.

One of the first things I learned was the gross lack of cultural connectivity to math and science. It all started while talking with a White female teacher at the school who was concerned about not reaching a certain group of Black and Latino males. They were regularly in trouble in her class. These kids were very disruptive and she called me to her room many times to wrangle mayhem out the classroom.

After hearing her legitimate grievances with these youngsters I asked her “Have you ever thought about teaching math from a cultural perspective?”

“What do you mean” she asked?

“For instance, the book *Blacks in Science* by Dr. Ivan Van Sertima talks about how the Mayans invented the concept of the zero *before the people of India did*. I find this fascinating because there is no historical account of them having any contact with one another. Now, I believe things that that would really excite kids from Mexico and El Salvador (we have a large Latino population). Maybe if you talked to your Black students about Imhotep, architect of the first step pyramid in Kemet (commonly called Egypt) you would be able to make math not just another subject, but an extension of their culture. That makes it more than just homework, it makes it part of a tradition to uphold.”

She looked at me with the most serious eyes on Earth and said “But I don’t know any of that stuff. I can’t teach that.” The horror in her response was that she said it as if she was incapable of reading the same book I just referenced. I realized a millisecond later her response was ploy to evade taking the time to do homework on her own to get connectivity to her pupils. As if by virtue of her college degree, she no longer needed to read these kinds of things to qualify her as a teacher. She continues to struggle with Black and Latino students.

Looking at the dismal state of Black and Latino achievements in mathematics, can make any half sane parent cringe. Bloomberg recently reported “The achievement gap between black and white students has remained steady at about 30 points in math from 2005 to 2013.” One could google for hours the low numbers in Black and Latino math and science deficiencies. Diverseeducation.com quoted Dr. Sylvia Hurtado, Professor and Director of the Higher Education Research at UCLA in 2011 stating “It is very disturbing to see more pronounced gaps at basic science proficiency in 12th grade, and that so few Black and Hispanic students are proficient at the most basic level.”

Almost everytime I turn around I see people trying to promote STEM (Science, Technology Engineering, and Mathematics). It serves as the latest buzzword in academia. As exciting as it appears, I find this an offense to Black, Latino and other non-White people. This is simply because the bulk of STEM approaches are culturally sterile, sleepy hollow methodologies that frankly don’t inspire inner city minds. But it does not have to be this way.

My belief is that the future is not in STEM but STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art [underline emphasis mine] and Mathematics. The element of art instantly alters the effectiveness of teaching the others. It’s also closer to the ancient traditions of many in the global diaspora.

The unmatched classic *Who Is God* Rakim paints images of the Black men and women’s past “Life was life, and love was love/ We went according by the laws of the world above/ They showed us physically, we could reach infinity/ But mentally through the centuries we lost our identity.” This is the the most succinct explanation of our academic failure in American education I have ever heard from a rapper (or anyone really).

Look around. *Most ancient Black and Brown civilizations never separated their art from mathematics, science and engineering.* They are the inventors and curators of STEAM. These ancestors painted pyramids, decorated lunar and solar calendars. Kemetic craftsmen engraved towering pillars in their houses of worship adorned with hieroglyphics. The architects of the Ottoman empire emblazoned geometric calligraphy in their masjids. Nevertheless, most non-White children believe their people have no historical bond with science, math and engineering. Yet we know better, and so do most American teachers. Clearly a type of cultural and ethnic cleansing inside education has been taking place.

I think many astronomy students would love to know that the Kaaba in Mecca, built by Prophet Abraham is perfectly aligned with the star Canopus. “The four corners of the Kaaba roughly point toward the four cardinal directions of the compass.<sup>[1]</sup> Its major (long) axis is aligned with the rising of the star Canopus toward which its southern wall is directed, while its minor axis (its east-west facades) roughly align with the sunrise of summer solstice and the sunset of winter solstice.”

Any class of Algebra that does not start with the Persian mathematician Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (a scholar at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad), dishonors all the work in the classroom that follow it. The words algebra and algorithm, are born from his name. He was from Baghdad. In *People of the Book*, Zachary Karabell quotes the intellectual achievements of that city by one person who walked its street stating “Baghdad thrived as few cities ever have, or ever will.” One of the greatest mathematicians of Baghdad, Ibn Yaḥyā al-Maghribī al-Samaw’ā was the son of a Moroccan Rabbi who wrote several books on algebra and was also a respected scholar of medicine.

In the book *Golden Age of the Moor*, Edited by Dr. Van Sertima, it highlights how Africans and Arabs “made algebra an exact science and developed in considerably and laid the foundation of analytical geometry; they were indisputably the plane and spherical trigonometry which, properly speaking did not exist among the Greeks.” In *The Immortal Game*, David Shenk highlights how the Moors used the chessboard as an abacus for mathematical calculations. Andalusian architecture in Spain today is a living testament to centuries of African and Arab science, technology, engineering, art and math.

What the Moors built, was on the shoulders of the Kemetic (Egyptian) ancestors. On the topic of African contributions to physics, John Pappademos wrote “The few papyri which have survived, show that they (the Egyptians) could compute the areas and volumes of abstract geometric figures....To the Egyptians we owe the idea of letting a symbol represent an unknown quantity in algebra.”

Like the Moors, when Hip-Hop was in its “golden age” (1988-1993) it heavily promoted the importance of mathematics. This was mainly done by the 5% Nation of Gods and Earths, a branch of the Nation of Islam. Artists like Poor Righteous Teachers, Rakim, Wu-Tang Clan, Brand Nubian, Jay Z and many others have been affiliated with the organization. For them,

understanding of mathematics has many practical and spiritual importance. Their symbol is the number 7 inside a circle and star. They teach their own “supreme alphabet”, “supreme mathematics” and “120 degrees” of knowledge. Hip-Hop spread these ideas across the world.

One of the fastest growing movements in teaching science is Science Genius. It is spearheaded by Dr. Chris Emdin who works closely with Wu-Tang Clan’s GZA (heavily influenced by the 5%) to host youth rap battles about science. It’s impressive to see.

As a young adult in the early 1990’s I cannot allow the effort and accurate scholarship of Dr. Van Sertima, Dr. John Henrik Clarke, Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan, Dr. Runoko Rashidi and others to be buried under online searches. Our contemporary educators need to be informed and trained on this wisdom and encouraged to teach it to all American youth. To fail to do this, is not just a crime against the Black, Latino, Arab and Persian contributions to STEAM that are the foundation of everything we say want our children to study. It is a crime against all American youth as a whole. Because the current culture of mathematics reinforces Eurocentric superiority in STEM, it robs them of the truth! Today’s Black academics have a duty to demand more books with these truths be made part of public school curriculum. Virtually all cultures have had a hand in the evolution of how we learn and apply math. Eurocentric based math classes dishonor STEM’s founders and innovators as well their newest students. I am not in favor of Black or White supremacist teaching methods. I’m an advocate of the truth for the benefit of all. At the same time I understand that the enemies of my ancestors had no vested interest in ensuring their children knew the truth about my people. In these ways the American school system is functioning as it should in its failure to properly educate kids.

I submit to all administrators and teachers in American public, charter and private schools that teaching science, technology, engineering and math minus an artistic element undercuts the potential of student engagement from day one. The global diaspora has never separated their art from their cultural relationship to mathematics and science. Our culturally barren methods now used to teach math and science only alienate and marginalize American minds. This renders them incapable of moving full STEAM ahead in the future. We must do better.

### **Chess and the Art of Business**



About a year June 14th 2013 I gave a short keynote speech to a group of 300 high schoolers interested in entrepreneurship at San Jose City Hall. Not long after it dropped one of my friends at the Guild Agency suggest I begin a series of articles expanding on the connections between chess, business and military strategy. This is the first of many more articles on the subject.

When teaching the HHCF Life Strategies program to teens I always highlight the fact that rappers like RZA, Jay Z, 50 Cent and Will Smith love the game of chess. I remind them that these guys are not consumed with chess mastery as much as using the game to master their emotions and stay focused on options. I teach them how concepts like “divide and conquer” and “win first, then seek battle” can apply to almost any team sport or business endeavor. Ideas from Sun Tzu and Niccolo Machiavelli work on the chessboard as well as the boardroom.

The connection between chess and business is not new, but it’s also not very often explored deeply. Like many other aspects of the world chess touches, it sits on the sidelines of the American consciousness.

The streets where Rap music sprang from, are a minefield of death. Cheap new drugs like crack, krocodil and meth swallow souls whole, daily. The con game from the era of Iceberg Slim has evolved to the digital landscape. The warrior monks of Shaolin, *The Art of War* and Taoist works of classic sages gave Wu-Tang Clan battle strategies for the stage and boardroom. If those books are not just read, but internalized and actualized 20 years of Hip-Hop doesn't happen.

While Tupac Shakur was incarcerated he was introduced to *The Prince* by Machiavelli. This book supercharged his work ethic. It sharpened his already courageous heart. Without The Prince, rap music has a huge hole in its heart. Military strategy and chess drive the streets and the dope game and Hip-Hop.

In 2005, *The Harvard Business Review* interviewed chess icon Garry Kasparov about his thoughts on business and chess. Anatoly Karpov put out a great book a few years ago called [Chess and the Art of Negotiation](#). It's a great look at how the psychology of combat plays a role in business decision making. The main thing to consider here is that one not need be a Grandmaster or Master to understand and use these ideas for your own business. You only need to play consistently and pay attention to the reasons behind your losses and victories.

Here are some thoughts I had about how chess and business are alike, specifically to the chess pieces on the board.

### **King=CEO:**

You are the king. The king creates the vision for the entire company. This is where the core ideas, values and purpose arise. Kings have the lion's share of the ideas and inspiration but very little of the ability to actualise everything in its totality. This is the person who essentially creates the brand. But brand building is the root of so much else that needs to be actualized. This is why the other pieces on his team are so important. Without a king there is nothing to fight for, he is priceless.

### **Queen= Investors/Board of Directors:**

The queen is the defender of the Kings vision and economic model for maximum profit. They survey all the terrain ahead and map out the grand strategy for actualizing the kings vision. The queen destroys all opposition without reservation. The queen represents the quiet feminine power that is felt before it is seen. Her subtly does not make her any less deadly. A king without a queen is always doomed. A CEO without his board and investors support, influence and resources is also doomed.

## **Bishops = Business Development**

These are the people who understand and live the brand's philosophy and use angles of differentiation and positioning to gain advantages for the company. They are the key evangelists for the brand. They know their lane and stay strong in it.

## **Knights = Outside Sales**

These guys jump directly into the fog of war to go head up with the competition, and do battle in the name of their king. You have to respect them because of their fearless devotion to the brand's mission. Their work in the field makes them indispensable as a resource for information for Bishops and queens. They move in unorthodox ways at times, but always work well with Bishops and Knights.

## **Rooks= Inside sales / IT**

From a digital perspective, IT is the backbone of any technological edge you have. They build the infrastructure of everything your company functions as. Inside sales take the vision of the product directly to other industry leaders. It's their job to look forward and hit people straight up with the value of the company. Philosophically, the rook also symbolizes those of in depth knowledge of the product and purpose.

## **Pawns= The daily workers that make the entire operation happen:**

This word pawn often gets overused to represent the simple underling. This is a huge mistake. Pawns outnumber every other piece on the board. Their unity always spells disaster for the opposing team. Their ability to work together is the root of victory for the king's empire.

I recently took a survey of my students to see which chess piece they felt most embodied their psychology and many of them chose pawns. I found this shocking at first, but their reasoning was deeper than you might think. They chose pawns because they moved straight, protected one another as a unit and never looked back. This to them meant that they saw themselves as morally upright and detached from victories or losses from the past. This is something to reflect on indeed.

## **How Hip-Hop Teaches Non-Violence**



*Nim One performing his song 13th Disciple at HHCF Grand Opening w/ DJ Don Mega*

As the anniversary of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. approaches, I cannot help but thank God for my parents. Long before it was a legal holiday, my parents took me out of school on his birthday. My mom and dad were strategic in their rebellion against the American school system.

That was how they honored his life, *before* the nation had the sense to do the same. We did not BBQ. I did not sleep in on Dr. King's birthday. I read about Black history, my duty to learn from it and seek better for our people. I was taught to celebrate his life by respecting all life. I never met another kid who had parents that took such an approach to Dr. King's birthday. I realize now that my parents were nonviolent revolutionaries. Today, with my own children I am working to pick up the torch they gave me in my youth. Hip-Hop music, has helped keep me stay in tune with the mission of Dr. King along the way.

Despite passing long before the seeds of Hip-Hop had began to bloom, *rap music itself is an act nonviolence*. Many might immediately take offense to this or laugh. However if you look at even some of the most violent rap you can think of, it is still just a song. Any rapper who

rhymes about killing, could have picked up a gun. Instead they chose to pick up a pen. I'm not defending the content of murderous rap. What I am saying is that they chose to write an angry poem, instead of using their feeling to commit a violent act. That's choosing nonviolence! Dr. King spoke directly to the importance of education. In the era of Hip-Hop's "Golden Age" knowledge was a duty for most rappers. Public Enemy, Rakim, Ice Cube and many others laid a clear foundation for promoting non-violence in Hip-Hop.

Songs like Ice-T's *The Hunted Child* and Ice Cube's *Colorblind* illustrated in graphic detail about the consequence of violence on the streets. While embraced as a classics within the Hip-Hop community, mainstream media hardly acknowledge its existence. Even today rappers like Game and Nas will make songs in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and it gets almost no recognition by Black or White media outlets. So, they must be doing it for more than the money? They get zero reward for speaking about peace, and only hit the charts when they sing of murdering their own. We should applaud their courage and accept their sincerity. In recent years songs like *I Know I Can* by Nas, Sabac Red's *The Commitment* and T-KASH's *Peace To My Enemies* motivate young people to live better.

Dr. King took the power of God's love to the streets. Hip-Hop music comes from the streets. This means that it will not always say things that are fun or easy to digest. But it will always be honest. Songs like Sticky Fingaz *Oh My God*, Kanye West's *Jesus Walks* and Rakim's *Who Is God?* are brilliant illustrations of some of the spiritual aspirations circulating within the Hip-Hop community. The RZA from Wu-Tang Clan made an amazing song about love for The Creator called *Sunshine* on the album *8 Diagrams*. Rapper Killer Mike wrote inspiring verses about spiritual redemption with *God In The Building*. Many of these songs may not be in the Top 40. But they keep the people on the streets motivated to embrace God. I don't believe Dr. King would want it any other way. Let us remember he died on the way to protect the rights of sanitation workers in Memphis.

While many have taken on Dr. King's mission of nonviolence, his crusade against poverty has been largely ignored. Poverty knows no color. The empty stomach of a child in Oakland does not hurt any less than the stomach of a child in Chechnya. A Mexican mother without food, worries no less than a White mom in Minnesota. Until I worked at a high school in San Francisco, I had not true understanding of poverty. This opened my eyes to the wisdom of Martin Luther King Jr., almost more than anything else.

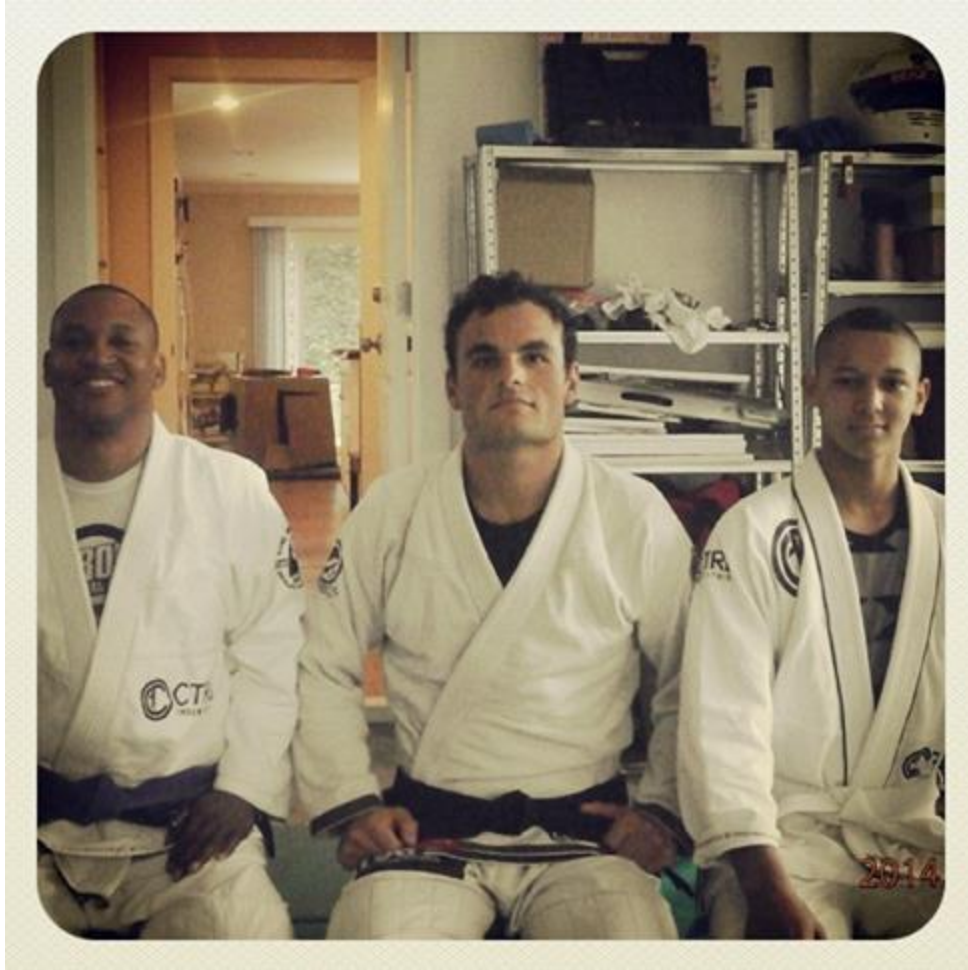
I have learned that starving student cannot study. I have seen "underground railroads" of food emerge in response. Many teachers argue against kids attitudes in class. Others see food in the classroom a nuisance. I understand how frustrating it can be for a dedicated teacher to endure it. Kids appear to be disruptive in class, but they can't hear the math lesson over the rumble in their stomach. I've watched kids walk down hallways in shoes with soles that literally are about to peel off the bottom of their foot and be mocked by others. I've seen kids walk around in clothes they've outgrown due to a growth spurt. So their growth is a silent curse as their parents cannot afford new clothes. I'm not talking only about just Black children.

I see this as global burden. Poverty is an oppressive demon and in many cases is the root of why violence happens and why we (humans) excuse it many times. One might be able to argue that the bulk of the violence in Hip-Hop is in direct proportion to the initial state of poverty it's performers existed in.

The impact of poverty on the heart and mind can be seen in the music of artists like Apathy's *Check to Check*, or Vinnie Paz's *Keep Movin ' On* . They leave deep impressions about the reality of poverty. In an Occupy Wall St. era, their lyrics sting with searing precision. In his time, Dr. King's words had the same effect.

I love Jazz, Blues and Rock. I love Gospel and all other forms of Black music from the African diaspora. But nothing has pushed nonviolence as consistently and as bold as rap music. It is a fact we cannot deny. This fact does not undo much of the violence and sexism and celebration of materialism in Hip-Hop. Yet it was Bid Daddy Kane, Biz Markie and Kool G Rap that reminded me to *Erase Racism*. What the subculture of Hip-Hop has achieved, I will not allow to be denied. I thank Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for his sacrifice every time I hear a rapper embrace peace. Happy birthday Dr. King. Those who love Hip-Hop continue to keep your message alive.

### **How Martial Arts Promote Nonviolence**



*HHCF Founder Adisa Banjoko, Metamoris Founder Ralek Gracie and Yin Dumela*

Americans have been fascinated by martial arts since the mid 1970's to 1980's. A Chinese man from San Francisco, California named Lee Jun-fan would change the entire planet with his films. We came to know him by the name Bruce Lee.

Movies like *The Big Boss*, *Fist of Fury* and *Way of the Dragon* altered the U.S. film industry and the minds of American people forever. His movies brought a new idea to what it meant to fight, and what it meant to be a fighter. Bruce Lee spoke differently, he talked of the importance of self knowledge, and fearless free expression. These were not things American folks usually accepted with the idea of combat.

Around the same time, the Shaw Brothers began to make their own films like *36 Chambers of Shaolin*, *Five Deadly Venoms* and *One-Armed Swordsman* hypnotized the American masses. They instilled a new idea of what violence, honor, respect, discipline, humility and human character meant.

This fascination with martial arts culture took an even bigger turn when the TV Show Kung-Fu aired. It was not the best TV show ever made. There were many racist undertones in the

show from time to time. However, some of the conversations between the original Master Po and his students totally broke the mold on how America saw race and martial arts.

Additionally, these films and TV shows introduced a new idea of how to practice nonviolence to Americans from all walks of life. These films had an effect music as well. Rap music from artists such as Wu-Tang Clan, Dilated Peoples, Andre Nickatina, Mix Master Mike of the Beastie Boys, One Be Lo and many others have paid much homage to the impact of the movies and the philosophies learned from them.

The work of Bruce Lee, The Shaw Brothers, Jackie Chan, Jet Li and other films of the time helped teach Whites and Blacks alike the power of peace. To seek peace not just outside ourselves, but more importantly the one we all seek inside ourselves.

Unfortunately the biggest mistake we make in the West is to think that someone who loves to study boxing, kung-fu, wrestling or jiu-jitsu loves to fight. We think somewhere internally they enjoy hurting other people.

Now take a look at Buddhist monks. They are known globally as one of the most peaceful people on the planet. But they are also known for having a long tradition of cultivating self defense techniques. It is precisely because they have extensive knowledge of how to break bones and choke people, that they choose not to.

Let me be clear. When someone lashes out at a woman and swings wildly at her, it is proof that they've lost emotional control.

That act is *completely different* from the woman being swung on to tactically evade the fist coming at her. If she decides it is necessary to isolate her attackers arm, and break it so she can be safe, that is non-violence. She has created no violence in a space where violence was prevalent. Buddhism teaches non-violence without question. Still Buddhists were taught that to observe injustice going on and do nothing made one worse than "devils."

Martial arts films are the only movies in existence that consistently show women of clear mind and action fully capable of defending themselves. In America we look at women who can fight as "manly" and unattractive. Martial arts encourage women to learn self defense to cultivate and preserve their beauty and spirit. At the same time, we learn that violence is never to be taken lightly. That seemingly casually aggressive situations can turn deadly fast.

The roots of what motivated the attacker and the response from the woman who was attacked came from two different places. The attack came from rage or a desire for power. The response the woman gave was rooted in self preservation and a desire for peace. Jet Li was recently explaining the meaning of martial arts to CulturePulp :

"In Chinese writing, *wushu* comes from two words: one is "stop" and one is "war." "Stop-war."

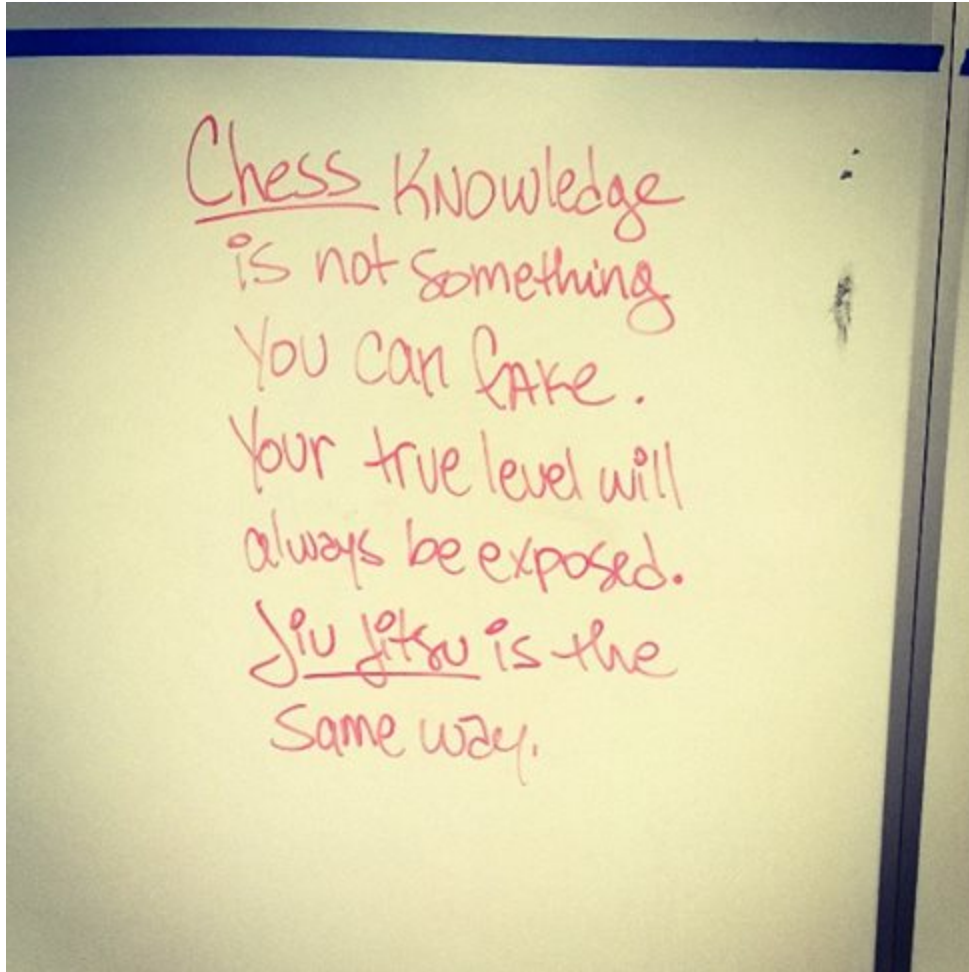
In most action films, people focus on the “war.” Fighting, fighting, fighting. Violence against violence. Nobody talks about the “stop.” *[laughs]*

Today MMA (mixed martial arts) is taking over the world. The sport proves humanity has evolved to a place where martial artists can test their skills safely and make a great living at it. It is also important to acknowledge that many of the fighters you see in the UFC and Strikeforce almost never get caught up with the law. They are often far too focused on their physical and mental well being to run the streets trying to hurt people for the sake of their ego.

Now we see bullying as a long ignored social epidemic. We see crimes against women and young girls as a global cancer. Our children are also horribly out of shape. Teen obesity and disease from poor health are common among our kids. It is not the parents, educators or politicians who are helping America solve this issue. It is a family of martial artists, named the Gracie's. Two brothers, Renner and Ryon Gracie, created Bullyproof and Women Empowered for children and adult women in need of realistic ways to protect themselves. Their cousin Kyra Gracie is respected around the world for her accomplishments. Beyond the self defense techniques, the students are taught about the *psychology of an attacker* so they can use “verbal jiu jitsu” to evade a confrontation altogether.

Today we see many of today's blockbuster movies for kids like Kung Fu Panda and Jaden Smith's Karate Kid introducing young people to the ideas of self discipline, inner peace and learning the power of not fighting. In these ways, the martial arts fused with film and music have helped preserve the legacy of nonviolence laid down in America by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

## **A Technical Flow**



On the mat I battle cats, the same way I'll take your back/ A strategized a plan of attack-  
Kalhi A Technical Flow

## zug-zwang

[tsook-tsvahng] A noun

*In chess a situation in which a player is limited to moves that cost pieces or have a damaging positional effect.*

For many years people have discussed the connections between chess and martial arts. I've been a casual student of chess and jiu jitsu for a while and I have seen many overlapping themes. My earliest memory of the correlation is watching Rickson and Royler Gracie play chess before one of Rickson's matches in the movie *Choke*. In recent years we have seen the emergence of the Checkmat team (known for being very aggressive and strategic in competition) and recently an instagram photo of champions Roger and Kyra Gracie playing chess in their gi's popped up on the net. If that was not

enough, jiu jitsu clothing brand CTRL Industries has dropped a limited edition set of gi's named after chess pieces. "The Rook" and "The Knight" have gained a lot of internet buzz among jiu jitsu players online. Little by little the connections seem deeper and more authentic.

In his book *Black Belt Techniques*, Jean Jacques Machado wrote "As in a game of chess, you don't simply concentrate on taking one piece; all your moves contribute to an overall plan. An advanced student already has engraved in his mind a set of positions, along with the natural reactions that these positions will induce in his opponent."

I train at Heroes Martial Arts in San Jose, CA. It's a very cool school. I don't say that from a place of arrogance. We have some tough dudes there. Some world champions, some national champions and some unknown, ridiculously rugged folks on that mat.

Our head instructor Alan "Gumby" Marques is pretty amazing. He's a quiet dude. Very deep intellectually and technically. He never says or does anything more than he needs to. I don't say that lightly, to suggest he's lazy.

On the contrary he's got a serious work ethic. One so big that when his instructor Ralph "The Pitbull" Gracie handed him a black belt...it was the one on Ralph's waist, that he handed to Gumby.

On your first day of class at Heroes, you'll be taught the essence of what Gumby thinks jiu jitsu is about, and life: Safety, Position, Finish.

That's it.

Sounds so simple but it's so complex.

Essentially Gumby feels your first job in any conflict is safety. Get yourself safe from whatever is coming at you. After that, do what you must to improve your position. It can be a quick substantial movement, or it can be in incremental inches. Once you have achieved the best possible position, end the conflict by finishing them. In jiu jitsu, it would be a submission hold ( a choke, armlock, wristlock, kneelock, footlock etc.). On the chessboard, its checkmate in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Gumby believes that this method is what's best on the mat, in the boardroom, on the chessboard and life. No matter your conflict, you can use the "filter" of safety, position, finish to assess, re-evaluate and elevate your situation with great clarity of mind and

purpose. Its so beautiful, I believe it shines brightly in the shadow of military minds like Sun Tzu and Machiavelli.

So much of what we learn about jiu jitsu is related to the chess theme known as Zugzwang. I first learned of this going through the Chessmaster game in the Josh Waitzkin academy. For those unfamiliar with the term, Zugzwang means to put your opponent in positions that force them to make positionally or materially worse position again and again until there is nothing left.

In jiu jitsu, one of the most ideal positions is called The Mount. I'm not really sure who "discovered" the immense value this position, but Carlos and Helio Gracie (founders of the Gracie Jiu Jitsu system) created an entire methodology based on its importance. From this position you are pinning your opponent with your hips, and arms (kind of like the skirmishes you might have gotten into with your older brother or sister. Once there you can change the pressure on the chest and the belly. You can threaten the neck with chokes or torque the shoulder. Or, you can just smother your opponent with clean movements until panic sets in and they move right into another position called The Back Mount which essentially assured almost no effective defensive responses. At that point a choke called "The Lion Killer" is applied and the match is over.

This video of Helio Gracie's grandsons Renner and Ralek Gracie is a clear illustration of zugzwang elements within the jiu jitsu methodology.

I caught up with Josh Waitzkin, the American chess icon and Black Belt in jiu jitsu under Marcelo Garcia . I asked him about zugzwang. He told me "A lot of heavy guard passes play on this principle. Fabio Gurgel [legendary BJJ fighter and coach] embodies it hugely. In chess, the dynamics of "opposition" with king and pawn vs king are the easiest way to help people understand it. Adding "King and pawn vs pawn positions are mutual zugzwang."

Rey Diogo Black Belt Oliver Reich says he sees the connected themes of zugzwang and jiu jitsu as well. "When guard passing leads to positional control, guiding their opponent into chained submission attacks- its almost identical to zugzwang."

As much as I love chess, I'm nowhere near a master level of playing. I needed to talk to someone who could help me drill down a bit on the concept. I called Dr. Daaim Shabazz, founder of the chess news and culture website The Chess Drum to ask him his thoughts on zugzwang.

“Seeing zugzwang emerge in a chess game takes quite a bit of understanding and experience” said Dr. Shabazz. “Many world-class players can see certain patterns emerging that restrict an opponent’s options. It may be capturing control of squares or restricting the opponents ability to execute their own plans. In jiu jitsu you have many of these scenarios where submissions are set up because the opponent no longer has any viable options to escape. “

“Thus it is not the submission itself that is the focus, but the way it is set up. In chess, it is similar. The process of restricting an opponent until they cannot move any pieces is an intricate one and one that totally demoralizes the other player. Usually when the player is suffocating, they will try to break free all of a sudden. In chess, as well as jiu jitsu, this is a mistake since that person leaves themselves exposed while trying a sudden tactic or escape. However, in chess it is also easy lose concentration and allow an opponent to escape from your vice grip and turn the tables. Sun Tzu taught that you should always provide an opening for an opponent so that they will not fight so ferociously. However, in zugzwang, the opening also leads to an immediate loss.”

To share a clearer idea of how this plays out positionally in chess, Dr. Shabazz gave a great example.

“I recall former World Champion Garry Kasparov playing the computer Deep Blue (developed by IBM) in 1996. In this game, Kasparov developed a lasting space advantage with a simple opening called the Reti. In those days, you could play positionally and watch the computers go astray because they lacked deep positional understanding. Slowly, but surely, Kasparov continued to grab more and more space from the computer. It is like being in a dominant position in a grappling sport. He then closed the position giving the computer fewer options, but appeared to give the computer a way out by sacrificing a pawn. However, this sacrifice gave Kasparov an even tighter grip on the position. In the final position, the Deep Blue team resigned since the computer had absolutely no moves, yet many pieces were still on the board! “

Of the many similarities between chess and martial arts, specifically jiu jitsu I find this to be the most profound. Zugzwang is always masking itself. On the board a seemingly silly blunder by your opponent incites you to quickly snatch up a knight, only to find the horror of a discovered check. Prepositioned pawns and bishops cut the board off, giving the king little room to breath. Its almost as if your opponent is saying “I am everywhere.” That discovered check soon walks the king slowly to the gallows- zugzwang.

Daaim trains in Capoeira but his understanding of chess and jiu jitsu methodologies

make him sound like a seasoned guy on the mat. “The ability to create a zugzwang takes positional understanding, knowledge of opponent’s tendencies and excellent planning. These skills are developed by a depth in the understanding of the middlegame where advantages are lost or gained. This is also where one’s wealth of experience comes in. Again zugzwang maneuvers are rare in chess and often occur in the endgame, but when they do occur in the middlegame, they are instructive since it usually shows complete mastery over an opponent.”

The first step in developing zugzwang is really just doing one move checkmate chess puzzles that help you see the reality of the situation for what it is. This is clearly a benefit of chess that helps martial artists as well as average citizens. Once the reality of the situation is clear, you can then observe and innovate on the potential future in the game, a jiu jitsu match or your life in general.

RZA from Wu-Tang Clan is one of Hip-Hop’s most talked about chess players. He writes about the many connections between chess and life in his book, *The Wu-Manual*. I’ve played him and lost twice. Most recently we played at the Rock The Bells tour when it came to The Bay Area. The thing I noticed about his game this: He sees a greater potential threat in your moves *before* you do. He slowly cuts them off. By the time you realize what could have happened, you’re immobile. It’s almost like for him zugzwang is in play from the first move. Reminds me of rolling with my instructor, Gumby. It’s impressive.

The clarity of mind that comes from doing one move checkmate puzzles is how I try to cultivate my eye for zugzwang. I get the most fun reading Eric Schillers *One Move Checkmates* or *Play Like A Girl*, by Jen Shahade. A few times a year or so I test my “chessvision” with those books. Another great one is the *Chessmaster* video game puzzles. You think you see all the entries and exits that are blocked for the king and it’s not there. You try to move the bishop when it’s the rook that gets it done. You over think the position and try to smash with the queen when it’s the pawn that lands the final blow. That last scenario is so crucial to understand. It’s why my instructors personal way of always using exactly the right amount of effort for any job is so mind blowing. The Confucian teachers from the Ming dynasty had a quote that resonates with me when I think of those situations. “To go too far, is just as bad as not going far enough.” Focused effort, the right tools for the job, proper planning- zugzwang.



Thank you for taking the time to read this sampler. All of the images used here belong to Hip-Hop Chess Federation Inc. *Chess is Jiu-Jitsu for the Mind* formally drops this in April 2015. For now visit [www.hiphopchessfederation.org](http://www.hiphopchessfederation.org) for more on our organization and the book. You can also follow us on Twitter @hiphopchess and on Instagram @realhiphopchess. If you would like your school to be certified to teach HHCF Level One Teaching Certifications or get your child enrolled in one of our classes email [contact@hiphopchessfederation.org](mailto:contact@hiphopchessfederation.org).