

Introduction: the interdisciplinary world of hip-hop studies

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It has been more than forty years since DJ Kool Herc threw his first party, the universally agreed “big bang” moment for the birth of hip-hop music (August 11, 1973). It has now been more than thirty-five years since the first commercial recordings of hip-hop. Hip-hop icons have now been inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, including Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (2007), Run-D.M.C. (2009), Beastie Boys (2012), and Public Enemy (2013). Harvard and Cornell Universities have important and extensive hip-hop archives and hip-hop artists such as 9th Wonder and Afrika Bambaataa, respectively, are visiting professors for those institutions. 2Pac’s “Dear Mama,” Public Enemy’s *Fear of a Black Planet*, De La Soul’s *3 Feet High and Rising*, Sugarhill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight” and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message” have all been enshrined in the Library of Congress National Recording Registry. *The Grove Dictionary of American Music* now includes entries on “beat-making,” “A Tribe Called Quest,” “Dr. Dre,” “Ruthless Records,” and many other hip-hop artists and labels. The Smithsonian Institution holds a turntable used by Grandmaster Flash, a boombox used by Fab 5 Freddy and a customized jacket worn by breaker Crazy Legs among their collections. There are now graffiti museums, hip-hop tours of the Bronx, and most countries around the world have some, if not more than one form of hip-hop in their own vernacular and related dialects.

In light of all this (and more), I hope there is no need to convince readers that hip-hop has been a powerful force globally. More so, it has been a positive force for many, if at times a problematic force. Hip-hop has influenced other styles of music, grassroots movements, political campaigns, protests, and has become at best an inspiration and empowering force, and at worst a promotion and glorification of poisonous ideas and behavior within societies (e.g. gang crime, homophobia, misogyny). And while such interpretations are often up to the situatedness of the listener/viewer, hip-hop has acted as stump, lectern, pulpit, and site of debate in ways that other opportunities to discuss African American cultures have not (or have simply been nonexistent). Not to mention that hip-hop originally existed, and still exists, as a party accompaniment, a soundtrack to dance, and a force for pleasure. The twin pillars of the DJ and the producer have also innovated new styles,

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utilizing old sounds to new ends, and transforming previous influences in the delicate balance between novelty and tradition. Most countries around the world now include some indigenous hip-hop, and it is fascinating to see how the regional variants take the form in new directions.

I also hope I don't need to convince readers that hip-hop should be studied, written about, and celebrated in the academic sphere. It is safe to say that hip-hop scholarship is now entering a new and exciting generation of thought. Books like David Toop's *The Rap Attack* from 1984 were crucial to painting the picture of the new style emerging from New York beginning to captivate the mainstream. Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* took the conversation to another level, as did Adam Krims's *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000). Murray Forman's *The 'Hood Comes First* (2002) emphasized the importance of space and place, and Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005) revisited the early days of hip-hop with the attention to detail and passion that only a "hip-hop head" could offer and spoke to a broad audience. His history, and timeline of hip-hop, is still the definitive and authoritative account of the first thirty years. Joseph Schloss has written the books on sampling (*Making Beats*) and breakdancing (*Foundation*), Felicia Miyakawa has discussed Islamic elements in hip-hop (*Five Percenter Rap*), and most recently Mark Katz has written an important history of the hip-hop DJ (*Groove Music*). In terms of edited collections on hip-hop, one stands out above the rest: Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal's *That's the Joint!* now in its second edition (2011). This collection is intended to complement, rather than replace, the other. I hope that this volume continues and extends the conversation that both acknowledges the foundational ideas of hip-hop scholarship and takes it in new directions. Like many hip-hop practitioners do, hip-hop scholars acknowledge their roots, giving an important nod to those forefathers and foremothers while taking the form in new directions. The contributors to this volume are at the forefront of new ideas, new books, new ways of studying how hip-hop has intersected with the cultural practices and objects around us.

For a number of reasons, hip-hop studies has become one of the most interdisciplinary fields in existence. This volume alone has contributors working in ethnomusicology, music theory, sociology, political science, anthropology, theater studies, dance, visual arts, freelance journalism, film studies, African American studies ("on and on, till the break of dawn"). Despite our varied disciplinary backgrounds, hip-hop becomes our connecting point, and it then becomes a discussion point for matters like method and discipline – their perspective on hip-hop has helped me to question my own, defending some of the tenets of my discipline and in other cases becoming more open minded about them. Never wanting to exclude any voices, the book is intended as a multidisciplinary conversation

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which at once broadens hip-hop studies while making implicit statements about the disciplines and backgrounds we come from.

While the volume covers a wide range of topics and geographical regions, it cannot be comprehensive in terms of regions covered or in terms of disciplinary foci. Because of this, there will inevitably be omissions in the eyes of some readers, but I have intended many of the articles to be a starting point for wider discussions. Where appropriate, the chapters have a ‘further reading’ section to direct the reader to additional information about the topic. Hip-hop is a dialogue, a conversation, both with itself and outside forces, and this book is no different. I would recommend that any scholar interested in hip-hop consult the canonical literature I have previously mentioned, but that this book can be used as the starting point into hip-hop studies or can act as a fresh volume for those already immersed in the subject. For those looking for a comprehensive timeline of hip-hop history, one could do no better than the timeline compiled by Jeff Chang for Kugelberg’s *Born in the Bronx* (2007), which is a primarily photographic collection of hip-hop’s early history in the 1970s and early 1980s. Like a rapper’s flow, this book is intended to be part of a wider conversation with the hip-hop nation, and an inclusive one at that.

Part I of the book is subtitled “Elements,” a reference to the original “four elements” of hip-hop culture: MCing (Alice Price-Styles in Chapter 1), breakin’ (Imani Kai Johnson in Chapter 2), graffiti (Ivor Miller in Chapter 3), and DJing (Kjetil Falkenberg Hansen in Chapter 4). There are multiple candidates for the “fifth element” of hip-hop. It seems appropriate here for Travis Gosa in Chapter 5 to select Afrika Bambaataa’s candidate for the fifth element: knowledge (others have said fashion, beatboxing, or theater, or see Mike D’Errico’s Chapter 22 for beatmaking as the fifth element). Two other elements remain in this section: religion and theater. Religion has been an ever-present element in hip-hop culture, and Christina Zanfagna’s chapter (Chapter 6) discusses holy hip-hop as an important element part of the ever-present sacred and profane in arts of the Black diaspora. Groups like the Five Percenters have influenced hip-hop, and hip-hop has now influenced the style of worship, and is being used to perform religion. Nicole Hodges Persley’s chapter (Chapter 7) acknowledges that hip-hop always has an element of theatricality, and proceeds to outline developments and innovations in hip-hop theater, including musical theater, contemporary dance, and hybrids such as “choreopoetry” (spoken word with hip-hop inflected contemporary dance).

The second part of the book looks at ways of studying various components to hip-hop music and culture. Oliver Kautny focuses on new ways of analyzing flow, by moving beyond a semantic analysis of the lyrics and engaging with rhythmic placement, syllabic emphasis, and pitch

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to create a more multidimensional analysis. Kyle Adams comes from a music theory background, and discusses the problems of hip-hop musical analysis. He provides a useful tool to analyze flow based on George List's "The Boundaries of Speech and Song," adapted to rap flow (y-axis: staccato and legato spectrum; x-axis: sharp to dull consonants spectrum) to show the connection between types of flow and affect. Chapters 8 and 9 adopt the terminology "beat" and "flow," where the flow includes the rap and its delivery and the beat includes all other elements on the track.

Chris Tabron's chapter (Chapter 10) investigates hip-hop production at a specific moment in time, 1989–1999. He uses Tony Maserati's work on Mary J. Blige's *My Life* as a primary case study, using ethnographic methods to investigate "how technology informs listening practices." It is not a potted history of hip-hop production (I'd look to Oliver Wang's article on "beat-making" on *Oxford Music Online* for that),¹ but a case study of a producer's work on a canonical album. Something that Tabron's chapter shows, among other things, about the process and politics of music production, is that R&B and hip-hop production in the 1990s were closer than their fan discourses would suggest.

Anthony Kwame Harrison's (mis)recognition as a member of the Hieroglyphics in the open mic scene of the Haight/Ashbury area of San Francisco provides a fascinating study of race and freestyle hip-hop (Chapter 11). The chapter marries the auto-ethnography of Harrison's fieldwork with theory from cultural anthropology, sociology, and hip-hop studies to create a fascinating case study of scenes and race.

Chapters 12 and 13 explore hip-hop archetypes from two different, but related spheres. Geoff Harkness's Chapter 12 discusses hip-hop film over the past thirty years, as a cinematic subgenre, and describes a number of stereotypical characters from such films (e.g. "Skilled Sincerists," "Wannabes," etc.). In Chapter 13, Regina Bradley discusses hip-hop and gender, extending some of the archetypes we encounter in the work of Cheryl Keyes ("fly girl," "sista with attitude," "queen mother," and "lesbian")² by adding male archetypes as well ("philosopher king," "playa/pimp," etc.). Outlining and extending the work of Mark Anthony Neal, Imani Perry, Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, and others, Bradley expounds on the complicated space of gender politics and sexuality in mainstream US rap.

In Chapter 14, political scientist Christopher Deis engages with a number of questions, including "How do we define politics?" If hip-hop is political, how does it fit in the broader contexts of politics and "the political?" In Chapter 15, I discuss the analytical and legal implications of digital sampling and other cases of musical borrowing. Through a close reading of Xzibit's "Symphony in X Major" (2002), I put the analytical tools discussed in the chapter to work and ask questions related to the implications of re-using

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sounds with previous cultural associations while firmly acknowledging that intertextuality is one of the most, if not *the* most, defining features of hip-hop music and culture.

Part III includes a number of case studies which discuss some of the previous themes in more detail. Chapter 16 investigates the subgenre of “nerdcore” hip-hop, including useful interviews with some of the defining names in the genre (MC Lars, MC Frontalot, mc chris). Here, Amanda Sewell discusses nerdcore as an outlet for non-stereotypical (i.e. US mainstream) rappers to boast and rap about topics important to them. The chapter looks at fandom, race, and homophobia through a nerdcore lens and puts the music on the academic map. In Chapter 17, Adam Haupt looks at competing representations of black masculinity in three US films of the 1990s (*Boyz N the Hood*, *Do the Right Thing*, and *Slam*), and how hip-hop music plays a crucial role in all three.

Given that much of Parts I and II focus on the US mainstream, I wanted to find a careful balance between US and non-US examples in Part III. In recruiting authors for Part III, it became clear to me that the number of scholars working on hip-hop around the world could fill more than one entire volume, but I resisted the temptation to separate the book as I rarely see US and non-US hip-hop sharing space in the same volume. It is interesting to see shared themes emerge from two seemingly disparate case studies: to use one example, the answer song “Roxanne, Roxanne” mentioned in my Chapter 15 could be compared with other answer songs in other locales, such as in Japanese hip-hop (Chapter 18). Or the bragging and boasting found in wider African American culture can be found in both Price-Styles’s reading of Gang Starr (Chapter 1), Noriko Manabe’s account of boasting in Japanese hip-hop (Chapter 18), and in Sewell’s chapter on “nerdcore” hip-hop (Chapter 16). It is also fascinating to trace a concept which originated in Africa such as the griot or storyteller, as it follows a lineage down to the origins of the hip-hop MC (Chapter 1), explained in the context of Senegal and Senegalese hip-hop (Chapter 21) by Neff.

One of the running themes of the book is geography, and rather than devote its own chapter to the topic, the theme runs throughout the book. It is always worth asking “where is this happening?” or “wherefrom have these artists come?” The historiography of mainstream US hip-hop is intertwined with geography: born in the Bronx, followed by continued East Coast dominance in the 1980s, with a shift to the West Coast in the 1990s, followed by the South in the late 1990s.

Another shared theme within some of the case studies is the ethnic and racial mixing in postcolonial cultures that use hip-hop as a voice for the voiceless. Much has been written about this in the context of Palestinian hip-hop,³ and in this volume authors discuss using hip-hop either for

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political purposes (against the Japanese nuclear reactor in Chapter 18), or as a resistant identity (Turkish-German hip-hop's use of the resistance vernaculars of stylized Turkish-German in Chapter 23).

The presence of an (often disenfranchised) minority is something that needs more cross-cultural academic attention: in addition to the Turkish-German case, there are South American immigrants practicing hip-hop in Italy, or North Africans in France who rap in a mix of Arabic and French, or those from Cape Verde who use the dialect in Lisbon hip-hop, or the use of Chiac in Canada (e.g. the group Radio Radio), or Mexican in Southern Californian hip-hop. One can observe the polyethnicity of global hip-hop groups in the front and back cover photos of this book – of the French b-boy crews Phase T (founded in 1998) and the Vagabond Crew, respectively, performing in London at the Breakin' Convention in 2010 and 2011.

As Deis acknowledges in his chapter on politics (Chapter 14), hip-hop is often discussed as giving voice to the voiceless, empowering marginalized communities “disadvantaged by unequal arrangements of power” (Deis, Chapter 14). But while at once themes emerge which start to create links or narratives which hinge on a reduced notion of identity (“marginal” vs “dominant,” or an empowered community vs. a ghettoized one), the situation is often more complex at a closer look. A number of hip-hop groups are polyglot, multiracial, and polystylistic.⁴ For example, Manabe cites those in the Japanese hip-hop scene who are Korean, quarter-Trinidadian, half-Finnish, half-Filipino, quarter-Chinese, half-Caucasian American, half-Ghanian, and half-African American. Such is the nature of a postcolonial globe.

The routes and immigration of groups of people have a direct effect on the sounds of the music, and while we should be careful not to overstate the case, hip-hop becomes a political voice for some groups, as well as an outlet to create new hybrids from local and more mainstream forms (and, as Manabe shows us in Chapter 18, the working classes outside of Tokyo are starting to emerge on the rap scene). Nowadays, I only have to look at the use of hip-hop among the youth in the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 or Turkish protests in 2013 to see how powerful hip-hop can be. As the late Biggie Smalls rapped in 1994, “You never thought that hip-hop would take it this far.”

In addition to geographies of place, there are also geographies of space, as Chapter 19 points to a particular record store in London (Deal Real Records) which became an important venue for the interactions of MCs, DJs, and audiences in the UK hip-hop scene. In Chapter 21, Ali Colleen Neff discusses the hip-hop scene in Dakar, Senegal, at the intersections of African practices and the arts of the Black diaspora. In many ways, hip-hop

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in Africa becomes a homecoming of the diaspora, but she also acknowledges the 1980s' Senegalese immigration to New York City, and US artists like Akon who come from a Senegalese background.

While Tabron discussed the linkage of 1990s' rap producer and DJ in Chapter 10, D'Errico discusses the next decade's rejection of the title "DJ" for beatmakers of "experimental hip-hop" in Chapter 22. "Post-turntable" artists such as MF Doom, Madlib, J Dilla, and Flying Lotus are the subject of both criticism and praise as an "alternative" to more mainstream hip-hop forms. As jazz rap was given "alternative," high art status within hip-hop,⁵ it seems as if these artists working within instrumental hip-hop have grasped the torch. Without feeling that they have to pay dues to the turntablist tradition, these experimentalist beatmakers are using the Akai MPC sampler as a musical instrument, Ableton on the iPad, or live coding at shows. D'Errico argues convincingly that "beatmaking" should be considered the fifth element of hip-hop.

In the spirit of Darius Brubeck's article "1959: the beginning of beyond" for *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz* which looked at the four seminal albums of that year (Dave Brubeck's *Time Out*, John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*, Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*),⁶ I asked Loren Kajikawa to choose what he saw as the most important year in hip-hop. He picked 1988, which is argued for extremely convincingly in Chapter 24, a year which heralds a "golden age" in the genre. The chapter also raises important questions about historiography, canon, and influence.

In the final case study, Chapter 25, Michael Jeffries discusses the intersection of Barack Obama, the hip-hop generation(s), Black masculinity, and US politics more broadly. One could point to the street artist Shepard Fairey's "hope" poster for the Obama 2008 presidential campaign, or the fact that two-thirds of 18–29-year-olds voted for Obama in 2008, or that a number of prominent hip-hop artists promoted his candidacy, and celebrated his election win. Not to mention Obama's strategic engagement with hip-hop which "established a new political location for hip-hop," according to Jeffries. What his chapter reminds us, as do the others, is how powerful hip-hop culture is. Yes, it's a party music. Yes, in certain instances it is used for commercial profit. Yes, it can be political, and religious, and offensive. It can be empowering. It can be exclusionary. It can be pleasurable. Something this big cannot be reduced to a single affect, or a single purpose, or subject to a single verdict.

In May 2014, when I was cooped up in my house and office finishing the editing for this book, I went to the Breakin' Convention as it toured through my locale of Bristol, England. Breakin' Convention is an annual festival of hip-hop dancing and theater hosted by Jonzi D (see Chapter 7) and Sadler's Wells Theatre. Numerous groups performed, from London, France,

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Swindon, Bristol, and elsewhere. The most awe-inspiring group was ILL-Abilities, an international crew of breakdancers with various disabilities, and use breakdancing to express themselves. No one can put into words how powerful their show was, so I won't even try, but it reminded me what this book is about. The whole event blew me away, with impromptu breakdancing in the foyer of Bristol's Colston Hall (named after Edward Colston, as it was formerly the boys' school that he founded in 1707). Colston was heavily involved in the transatlantic slave trade, and it was extremely powerful to see such a positive product come from the forced migration of African-based people in a space named after a man associated with such atrocities. That's taking something abominable and turning it into something positive. That's hip-hop.

Notes

1 Oliver Wang, "Beat-making," in Charles Hiroshi Garrett (ed.), *Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd edn. (Oxford University Press, 2013). Available at www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2218626 (accessed June 1, 2014).

2 Cheryl L. Keyes, "Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance," *The Journal of American Folklore* 113 (2000): 255–269.

3 Amal Equeig, "Louder than the Blue ID: Palestinian Hip-Hop in Israel," in Rhoda Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair (eds.), *Displaced at Home: Ethnicity and Gender among Palestinians in Israel* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), pp. 53–74; Ela Greenberg, "'The King of the Streets': Hip-Hop and the Reclaiming of Masculinity in Jerusalem's Shu'afat Refugee Camp," in Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (eds.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, 2nd edn. (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 370–381; David McDonald, "Imaginations of Exile and Emergence in Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Hip Hop," *The Drama Review* 57/3 (2013): 69–87; Sunaina Maria and Magid Shihade, "Hip Hop from '48 Palestine: Youth, Music, and the Present Absent," *Social Text* 30/3 (2012): 1–26; Joseph Massad, "Palestine Put to Music," in Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg (eds.), *Palestine, Israel and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 175–201. My sincere thanks to Polly Withers for her work which brought these references to my attention.

4 Curse Ov Dialect, for example, is a hip-hop band from Australia, which was formed in 1994. They use ethnic samples and sometimes sing in Turkish or Indian. They use folk costumes on stage and declaim a multiculturalist message; three of them from origins other than Australia. My thanks to Tony Mitchell for bringing this up on an International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) listserv discussion on global hip-hop.

5 See Justin A. Williams, "The Construction of Jazz Rap as High Art in Hip-Hop Music," *Journal of Musicology* 27/4 (2010): 435–459.

6 Darius Brubeck, "1959: the beginning of beyond," in Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 177–201.

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PART I

Elements

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