

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction to Special Issue: Hip Hop, Critical Pedagogy, and Radical Education in a Time of Crisis

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"DO THE REAL HARLEM SHAKE" HARLEM, NYC, PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS TINSON

"Hip-Hop [can] use . . . a binding formula or philosophy. In the time since its creation, its subtending parts have each gone off along their own vectors, some more or less prosperously, but all at great deficit to the potency of others. The question, then, remains, much as it does in the study of the heavens, whether hip-hop is, in fact, a closed universe—bound to recollapse, ultimately, in a fireball akin to its birth—or an open one, destined to expand forever, until it is cold, dark, and dead."¹

Depending on whom you ask, Hip Hop is in perpetual crisis. Those who are concerned about Hip Hop's fate, mainly artists and fans of the culture, and those who teach and write about it, are in constant debate and dialogue about its traditions, its rituals, its political potential and, in a word, its power. This special edition of *Radical Teacher* is our attempt to look specifically at one aspect of Hip Hop—its function in the realm of critical education. This places us squarely in the largely disregarded "Fifth Element" of Hip Hop²: Knowledge, or a concern for the vast array of understanding that fuels Hip Hop culture and its practitioners around the world. We are concerned with what is known about Hip Hop and equally, perhaps more specifically, how it becomes known. Accordingly, we ascribe to Hip Hop a form of critical education at the intersection of and inseparable from political engagement. In this sense, we view Hip Hop as an apt modality of critical pedagogy, demonstrating and reflecting on Hip Hop's ability to "read the world."³

Hip Hop's seemingly continuous state of crisis requires frequent accounting of its engagement with the social, political, and cultural climate that surrounds it. While we seek to amplify "media assassin" Harry Allen's call for a "binding philosophy" of Hip Hop, none seems on the horizon. The urgency of his statement, however, is a clarion call for artists, practitioners, educators, and activists to take seriously the meaning, stakes, and desires of Hip Hop, considering its persistent resonance amongst youth and its expansive global recognition. Allen's statement also carries a sense of ethical responsibility put to practitioners of Hip Hop culture, suggesting it is their duty to craft such a unifying philosophy. And yet, Hip Hop Studies remains as variegated as Hip Hop itself, making Allen's statement all the more potent, and no less prescient. Though varied by the particular strengths and outlooks of a given instructor, and honed by student demand for an educational experience centered on their life experiences, Hip Hop has gained recognition in the realm of critical pedagogy. Regardless, if the direction where Hip Hop is headed matters to us at all, some assessment of its current status is long overdue. In this introduction, we highlight some of the issues that emerge in contemporary explorations into Hip Hop's burgeoning impact on community organizing, teaching, and institution building. Collectively, the essays and syllabi in this special issue of *Radical Teacher* represent our attempt to examine current pedagogical practices driven by Hip Hop, signaling its reach into traditional educational settings, while identifying

emergent limitations in its trajectory. We make no claims of exhausting every angle of Hip Hop-based instruction. A single issue, no matter how ambitious, could not accomplish that. However, we do intend for scholars, practitioners, and students whose work is influenced by Hip Hop to join with us in thinking critically about the ethical styles it proffers, the consequences of its academic code switching, and the impact of its pedagogical power moves.

Hip Hop and the Color of Crisis

Among several notable events that have recently captured national attention, two particular incidents pinpoint Hip Hop's current engagement with political struggle and critical education: the murder of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer George Zimmerman, and the renewed bounty on Assata Shakur. From San Francisco to New York, supporters calling for justice for Trayvon expressed anger and frustration and took to the streets just hours after the jury announced its not guilty verdict on the evening of Saturday, July 13th. Though Zimmerman was technically being tried for murder, the case felt like the latest prominent example of blackness on trial. For many, it was further evidence of the lack of value associated with Black life in the United States. As expected, pundits weighed in from all corners. Some echoed President Obama's initial statement on the verdict: "We are a nation of laws, and a jury has spoken."⁴ Yet, for those who marched in protest, the verdict, followed by the president's statement, was another thumb in the eye.

In the intervening months between the reluctant arrest of George Zimmerman and through the disingenuous effort to prosecute him, Hip Hop artists and activists utilized what skills and resources they could to express their profound dissatisfaction. Yasiin Bey (Mos Def), dead prez, and Mike Flo joined forces to produce "Made You Die," a moving tribute and rallying cry in honor of Trayvon. This and other cases motivated the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) to compile the study "Operation Ghetto Storm," an expansion of two earlier reports, "Trayvon Martin is ALL of US!" and "Every 36 Hours." These studies documented the frequency of Black people's death at the hands of police or other self-deputized entities in the first half of 2012. According to the report, there were over 300 such deaths last year.⁵ Inspired by that study, over a dozen emcees and producers came together to produce an accompanying CD entitled "Every 36 Hours: The War on Afrikans in America," which featured songs by Jasiri X, Immortal Technique, Zayd Malik, and The Outlawz, among others. Despite the demands for justice that have ensued throughout and beyond the radical Hip Hop community since the murder of Trayvon on February 26, 2012, there was no justice for him. He was effectively killed twice.⁶

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While the Martin killing and Zimmerman acquittal sent shockwaves through activist circles and dominated national news, it unintentionally eclipsed an equally significant event. In May of this year, the FBI doubled the bounty on the head of former Black Liberation Army member Assata Shakur from \$1 million to \$2 million.⁷ Shakur, granted political asylum by the Cuban government since her escape from prison in 1973, was also the first woman placed atop the FBI's newly established Most Wanted Terrorist list.⁸ This action was taken under the direction of Eric Holder, the first Black U.S. Attorney General, Aaron Ford, the African American head of New Jersey FBI, and with the tacit approval of the first Black U.S. president, now in his second term.

Assata's importance to the Hip Hop community is indisputable. Her connection to Hip Hop extends from her participation in a range of black radical political activity to her familial ties to slain emcee Tupac Shakur. Artists such as Mos Def and Common have spoken out and dedicated verses and full-length tracks to Assata's case.⁹ Since the 1990s, MXGM has been instrumental in highlighting the state sanctioned violence directed toward Assata Shakur, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and dozens of other political prisoners throughout the U.S. MXGM members range in age and experience; however, much of its constituency is made up of the Hip Hop generation. Their Black August celebrations directly engaged the politics of imprisonment and collected proceeds were dedicated to political prisoners and their families. More than concerts, these celebrations were the culmination of month-long activities commemorating the struggle for racial justice in the United States and beyond.¹⁰ For many in Hip Hop, MXGM is their preferred method of social activism, despite renewed calls for civic participation exclusively through the vote.

For the more political-minded of the Hip Hop world, Assata is a living deity of resistance. She has earned a sacred space in the hearts and minds of many who have felt trapped under the weight of state repression. Her case is a fitting point of departure for any serious discussion of black radicalism, as she represents a direct link between black liberation politics, radical education, and Hip Hop activism. Her career is emblematic of radical Afrodiasporic traditions of protest and demands for social transformation in the face of state violence. How can self-styled Hip Hop activists learn from Assata's example? In our view, if the term "Hip Hop activism" possesses any value, it is located in its ability to consistently and publicly critique the state and create platforms of resistance against conditions of oppression. In this sense, Hip Hop activism, informed by histories of cultural and political struggle, may be said to follow in the tradition of Civil Rights and Black Liberation protest movements. These movements consistently critiqued power and vocalized dissent on behalf of the downtrodden and disenfranchised. So long as the neoliberal tide of global capital continues to produce stark forms of inequality, it is unfavorable for Hip Hop activists to side with those who wield state power. This view may be at odds with a music and aesthetic climate that is indifferent, if not hostile, to a consistent expression of Hip Hop politics. Most of the emcees and intellectuals that do

engage Hip Hop in their work make few explicit political demands. As such, their definition of politics typically reverts to established political lines. On the other hand, self-described Hip Hop radicals—those who explicitly position themselves and their work in a tradition of anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-oppression activities—advance a political view not beholden to either Democrats or Republicans. In our view, Hip Hop Studies lie at the intersection of politics and education, and thus play a unique role in reviving political education inside and outside of the classroom. School and college educators who oppose what Pauline Lipman calls the neoliberalization of education¹¹ have to act strategically to transform these spaces into sites of growth, inspiration, and critical knowing and find ways to incorporate radical histories in their pedagogy.

Hip Hop, Popular Culture, and Critical Education

In an educational environment preoccupied with transferrable skills into a labor market that can at best be described as flimsy, scholars of all kinds, but especially those who use Hip Hop culture as their lens of critical inquiry, are challenged to get students to think about society beyond mere job prospects. Despite the strictures of the Department of Education's *Race to the Top*¹² hovering ominously over public education, Hip Hop scholars do have an advantage. Over the past decades, Hip Hop culture has been impacted by such issues as urbanization, gentrification, police brutality, prison expansion, education cuts, electoral politics, immigration debates, fights for LGBTQ rights, and the onset of the hyper-individual technological age. Hip Hop scholarship and teaching is well positioned to weigh the effects of these issues on Hip Hop and larger society, which requires an engagement with the social issues that contributed to Hip Hop's origins and its continuing relevance as a cultural force and premier form of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Hip Hop, like all popular culture, has to wrestle with its contradictions. For one, Hip Hop scholarship and activism is mired in the trap of taking its cues from the mainstream profit-driven world of entertainment. The tension between what is available through mass communication and what should be made available is at the center of all engagement with Hip Hop culture. Voices critical of the mainstream, globalized, corporatist definition and distribution of Hip Hop culture are rarely heard with any amount of frequency. While specific practitioners of Hip Hop culture take on the challenge of advancing radical media democracy,¹³ these efforts are unable to compete with multinational media corporations. Though outfits such as Davey D's Hard Knock Radio, Jared Ball's Vox Union, our own TRGGR Media Collective, and past shows such as Pacifica's Divine Forces Radio persist in providing a broad, historically rooted Hip Hop and informed social commentary through radio and internet, these efforts—largely conducted on a volunteer basis—are far from achieving a critical mass. This is compounded by the fact that few educators at any level consistently produce radio and internet media for public consumption, which ironically includes professors who teach and write about Hip Hop.

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In accordance with Hip Hop's global appeal, universities and colleges are increasing their utilization of faculty resources in expanding their curricular offerings to include elements of Hip Hop culture. However, it remains to be seen if these resources can be used to advance increased opportunities for local communities. Hip Hop courses that open up spaces for broad community participation may be a critical factor in the development of this field. Through such an approach, Hip Hop might facilitate the use of university space in the service of broader community needs. These are issues that challenge the neat integration of Hip Hop into classrooms at all levels. The ability of both scholars and practitioners to creatively and critically address such questions will have an impact on the relevance and expansion of Hip Hop Studies in the coming decades.

A series of interlocking questions emerges when contemplating the reach of Hip Hop into the academy, including: Who should teach Hip Hop and how should it be taught? Are professional practitioners and Hip Hop pioneers best equipped to teach Hip Hop Studies? Can teachers of common subjects, such as history, math, science, and philosophy, learn to teach Hip Hop? Is the teaching of gender, race, ethnicity, sex, and region critical to the teaching of Hip Hop? Should Hip Hop Studies have a community based learning component? There are no obvious answers to these questions, but they are no less critical to Hip Hop's ongoing engagement with education and social justice.

Though the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and class combine to produce certain social outcomes, we argue that the salience of race in Hip Hop-based education requires particular attention in our current moment. Although we are not promoting an essentialist view that Hip Hop can and should only be taught by people of color, specifically African Americans and Latin@s, we do recognize the obvious limitations in Hip Hop only being taught in the United States by white professors and educators who have not been marginalized in the history of the academy or the teaching profession. The best Hip Hop scholarship embraces questions of privilege, racial discrimination, social isolation, and cultural fetish as interwoven with an engagement of deejaying, emceeing, b-boying, graffiti writing, fashion, and education. Critical Hip Hop Studies, like critical education in general, confronts these issues with attention to complexity and nuance. Considering the "rap industrial complex"¹⁴ and popular media landscape already rife with white male media

ownership, it is perhaps understandable that there would be strong apprehension and uneasiness towards Hip Hop being taught in academic institutions where faculty are also overwhelmingly white. Our point is that whiteness in Hip Hop Studies must be interrogated as much as questions of essentialized blackness.¹⁵ It is important here to note the inherent limitations in the well-circulated aphorism that "Hip Hop transcends race." While many of its practitioners and enthusiasts are not Black or Latin@, the ownership class of Hip Hop—record labels, recording studios, publishing outlets, distribution companies, etc.—remains overwhelmingly white and male. This is hardly transcending race.

It should be evident at this stage of Hip Hop's evolution that blackness, whiteness, as well as ethnic and gendered constructions of Asian American, Latin@, and Muslim identities do not all possess equal stakes in discussions and public reception of Hip Hop culture. The easy inclusivity of Hip Hop might suggest otherwise. Yet, we cannot emphasize enough that Hip Hop emerged out of African diasporic cultural traditions and it proceeds that the descendants of those traditions have the most at stake in any Hip Hop-based social discourse. White scholars who have taken up teaching Hip Hop in their classrooms are most successful when they appreciate the fullness of a cultural form that grew from a complex set of African diasporic cultural practices and beliefs that confront and clash with an array of socioeconomic factors, not when they can assert the Beastie Boys, Eminem, or Macklemore as racially transcendent artists. This requires an engagement with the histories, practices, and beliefs that emanate from and are germane to Africana and Latin@ communities today, including their discomfort with "experts" of the culture and encounters that define their daily life experiences.

Regardless, as the articles in this collection demonstrate, anyone professing an ability to teach any aspect of Hip Hop must "show and prove." They must demonstrate either a mastery over form, i.e. one or more of the performative aspects of Hip Hop culture, or they must reveal a mastery over the knowledge of Hip Hop culture, its histories, the plethora of philosophical ideas that contributed to it, from the influence of the Nation of Islam, Five Percenters, and even Christianity, to Afrika Bambaataa's articulation of Knowledge of Self, while keeping abreast of its current manifestations. Equally important, scholars invested in teaching Hip Hop should be deeply familiar with the body of literature on the subject and possess an awareness of Hip Hop's political engagement. Yet, the latter is arguably the most underrepresented aspect in Hip Hop Studies.

Hip Hop in the Contested Academy¹⁶

Hip Hop Studies reveals Hip Hop culture as a form of critical social inquiry, in that it urges a multipronged and agile investigation into raced, gendered, and classed social and political structures around the world. As a form of *transdisciplinarity* (working across existing disciplines) or even *undisciplinarity* (intentionally defying existing disciplinary boundaries) Hip Hop Studies practitioners and teachers are required to be conversant in a range of

cultural, social, and political issues. In this sense, Hip Hop Studies is not as concerned with methodology as with fluency in Hip Hop's multiple forms of articulation.

Recently, scholars Travis Gosa and Erik Neilson have commented on the impact and status of Hip Hop's growing frequency on college and university curricula throughout the country. Though they arrive at different conclusions, the authors largely agree that the academy has become a home of sorts for Hip Hop in the past few years. In two *Huffington Post* on-line articles, Erik Neilson has argued favorably for Hip Hop's presence in the academy arguing that the university and college space has not been given enough credit for Hip Hop's expansion into the mainstream. To prove his point, in one piece, Neilson drops a list of emcees, producers and pioneering contributors who attended college at some point along their rise to mainstream notoriety. In the second article he imagines universities as "vital partners" in the celebration and deep understanding of Hip Hop Culture.¹⁷

For his part, Travis Gosa is skeptical about Hip Hop's presence in the academy.¹⁸ While he applauds the increasing interest in Hip Hop Studies, he questions the intentions of universities who are receptive to Hip Hop Studies at a time when institutions of higher education are increasingly hostile or indifferent to the educational needs of Black males, many of whom identify strongly with Hip Hop. Considering what can only be called hostility towards Black Studies being felt across the country from Cornell to Temple to CSU Long Beach, Gosa's point is well taken. Black Studies is suffering and Ethnic Studies is being absorbed by traditional fields of study or merged with Cultural Studies or American Studies at a given university or college. And in Arizona, Mexican American Studies has been completely banned from public high schools.¹⁹ In this climate, Hip Hop Studies can at best only be the latest gold mine to help stave off declining student enrollments.

Nielson can argue that the university deserves more credit than it has received thus far, especially since, with exceptions, there are very few consistent independent institutional spaces rooted in Hip Hop culture. A few examples stand out: the Trinity College Hip Hop International Festival recently held its eighth conference, and Ohio State hosts an annual Hip Hop Literacies conference. In terms of Hip Hop's preservation of history and knowledge of the culture there is The Hip Hop Archive at Harvard University, which recently recognized the emcee Nasir "Nas" Jones with a fellowship in his honor²⁰, and Cornell University houses its own Hip Hop Collection. Hip Hop Studies in the academy largely depends on individual faculty members who feel adequately experienced or compelled enough to engage with their students and colleagues about Hip Hop. Institutions such as NYU, Cornell, Harvard, and the University of Arizona seem to have provided resources devoted to either preserving or cataloguing Hip Hop's sociocultural history.

At New York University's Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, independent media producer Martha Diaz has helped to establish the Hip Hop Educational Center, which has documented and indexed a range of Hip Hop based

educational approaches, organizations, and institutions. Beginning in 2010, it is arguably the most elaborate program currently in the academy specifically dedicated to Hip Hop-based instructional practice. Its website states that the organization "was formed to fully promulgate and explore the potential of Hip-Hop pedagogy." And further, its mission is "to cultivate and support Hip-Hop scholars, teaching artists, cultural workers and activists, and social entrepreneurs to professionalize the field of Hip-Hop Education and inform the larger education sector."²¹ Though promising, it remains to be seen how successful their efforts will be in influencing social and educational policy throughout the New York City public school system or elsewhere. For instance, can this and similar organizations influence policymakers' views on standardized testing, school closings, budget cuts, and police in schools? While influencing contemporary social policy may be one of several important goals of Hip Hop-based education, the creation of repositories of Hip Hop knowledge represents yet another form of strategic institutionalization.

Cornell University is home to The Cornell Hip Hop Collection, whose stated mission "is to collect and make accessible the historical artifacts of Hip Hop culture and to ensure their preservation for future generations."²² Since 2008, Harvard University has housed The Hip Hop Archive, though it was originally founded in 2002. It describes its work as facilitating "the pursuit of knowledge, art, culture and responsible leadership through Hip Hop . . . our commitment [is] to build and support intellectually challenging and innovative scholarship that both reflects the rigor and achievement of performance in Hip hop and transforms our thinking and our lives."²³ The University of Arizona has developed a minor in Hip Hop Culture, within the department of Africana Studies,²⁴ and CSU Dominguez Hills is developing a shared Hip Hop minor between that university's Africana Studies and Music departments. While universities are devoting resources to these institutionalized sites for Hip Hop, whether those resources are sufficient is another question. Within the functioning of the academy, perhaps this form of legitimization makes sense, but it should not go unquestioned and without close scrutiny. Are there any costs associated with this form of legitimization?

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Though these few examples are promising, both Neilson and Gosa fail to acknowledge that such collections and institutes depend on the university or college's willingness to house them. Though there are plenty of spaces to discuss and debate issues related to Hip Hop culture, as Harry Allen reminds us, there is very little that links them in common effort beyond their claim to Hip Hop. Producers of Hip Hop culture lack widespread institutional

credibility and presence, just as Hip Hop intellectuals yearn for institutional autonomy and support to expand their work. How do Hip Hop scholars address this sense of institutional nomadism? Hip Hop culture, its practitioners, and its critics-from-within cannot depend or rely solely on institutional support, the conference format, the publishing industrial complex, or the college panel and honorarium as substitutes for genuine movement building, or stand to merely view such moves as some kind of natural progression.

At this stage, scholars whose lens of critical social inquiry is Hip Hop and who possess academic privilege have a particular duty to reflect the multifariousness and breadth of Hip Hop experience, from the popular to the political. So long as there are academics and educators with a sincere interest in Hip Hop, it goes without saying that Hip Hop culture will have a presence in university spaces, even if marginal, transient, and ultimately insecure. But this limited presence remains driven by the intellectual tastes of specific faculty members and educators. All this makes the idea of Hip Hop in the academy—by itself—a necessarily unstable vehicle for substantial transformative activity, even as it offers up classroom space for critical engagement with a wide array of social structures.

Will Hip Hop Studies have the transformative impact on American higher education in the way that Ethnic Studies has for the past four decades? When Ethnic Studies emerged as a force on college campuses throughout the United States it filled an expansive vacuum. The history, experiences, culture, and literature of people of color were identifiably absent from academic spaces prior to the emergence of Ethnic Studies. Upon their arrival, Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, and Asian American Studies challenged the very structure of the academy. What political or structural vacuum does Hip Hop Studies fill? What challenge does it pose to the university structure? How does it force a rethinking of the way the university functions? These seem to be questions that Hip Hop Studies will do well to wrestle with in the coming decades.

Hip Hop's emergence as a cultural social force was anticipated by the arrival of Black Studies as an educational and political social movement. This might be reason enough to state that an engagement with the history, legacy, presence, and overall health of Black Studies and Ethnic Studies is requisite for any serious engagement with Hip Hop culture and studies. But, what is Hip Hop's relationship to Black Studies and Ethnic Studies? As a direct outgrowth of the social struggles waged by communities besieged by domestic warfare, institutional racism, depletion of social welfare resources, and shaken by military intervention in Viet Nam, Black and Ethnic Studies emerged to provide context and critical insights from people of color urging a reimagining of American history and social structures in the process. Though Hip Hop Studies seem to follow the same trajectory as Black Studies, it is unlikely that it, independently, will have a similar institutional legacy. It is unclear whether it will constitute a challenge to the structure of the academy in the way that Black and Ethnic Studies have even in the

face of budget cuts and the reinstatement of more or less traditional academic hierarchies. Moreover, discourses of postracialism, hyper-technological independence, and sporadic political engagement have encouraged distance from Black Studies' roots for many students. Can Hip Hop Studies assist in bolstering the institutional legacy of Black and Ethnic Studies? If scholars fail in taking up this challenge, Hip Hop Studies may merely be the latest pretext for uprooting such legacies.

Despite these challenges, it is important to highlight some of the effective strategies that have emerged in recent years. An excellent example of a Hip Hop Studies curriculum focused on music is the Hip Hop Education Literacy Project (H.E.L.P.). Based in Washington D.C., the H.E.L.P. program was designed to address a range of issues related to the achievement gap by creating alternative ways to engage students to read and improve literacy skills. Gabriel "Asheru" Benn, the original developer of the H.E.L.P. program, is also an established emcee, educator, and activist. Through his own life experiences and career, Asheru has been able to bridge methods of his own work and use music to create a platform for young folks who have been failed by traditional public schooling. Co-designed by a team of educators and artists, H.E.L.P. offers 60 lesson plans that place a familiar Hip Hop song under analytical scrutiny, extrapolating the range of interpretation of sociocultural vocabulary, exploring the use of grammar, syntax, and sentence structure in the process. This approach, which combines a number of related activities that vary in complexity depending on the class level, are designed to align with National Reading Standards. In the process H.E.L.P. encourages youth to consider a variety of strategies that allow them to engage their preexisting cultural competence and conscious understanding of the world around them. Through the development of their voice and a critique of oppressive conditions included in their own narratives, the young folks in the program strengthen their vocabulary, grammar, literacy skills, and build academic resilience.

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Utilizing similar strategies to those found in the H.E.L.P. program, *Conscious Women Rock the Page* is a curriculum workbook developed by three award-winning activists and novelists, Sophia "Black Artemis" Quintero, Elisha "E-Fierce" Miranda, and Jennifer "J-Love" Calderon, who joined forces with social justice educator Marcella Runell Hall. Their workbook explicitly engages questions of gender and sexuality, and approaches violence, patriarchy and racism as interlocking oppressions. The lessons therein are grounded on conscientious resistance to oppressive conditions, be they inside or outside of school classrooms, and provide strategies on how to cultivate a liberatory life practice. By providing an intersectional approach to their lesson plans, *Conscious Women Rock the*

Page deepens existing Hip Hop educational models and allows for facilitation of issues around social injustice that can cater to a broad community of 6-12 graders.

Lastly, we recognize the effective Hip Hop-based approaches developed by Dr. Dave Stovall, Associate Professor of Educational Policy Studies and African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Stovall has been active in working with students and educators at the Social Justice High School in the Lawndale/Little Village High School in Chicago for well over a decade. He has published a number of articles based on his instructional experience that considers the significance and ethics of utilizing Hip Hop and Critical Pedagogy that intersect with issues ranging from the school-to-prison pipeline and gang violence to issues of gender inequality. In his work, Stovall provides a bridge from an institution of higher learning to a secondary school and utilizes personal testimony and critical reflection on his experiences as a man of color, a resident of Chicago, and a scholar to bridge multiple platforms of education.

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These are but a few examples of solid work being done that merges Hip Hop and critical pedagogy with educational social justice imperatives. Legitimizing Hip Hop Studies in the academy, though necessary, cannot replace actual social movement, especially when Hip Hop Studies emerged absent from a broad based social movement militantly demanding institutional reform. Hip Hop scholars, artists and critics are not unified on many topics whether the issues include entrepreneurialism and commercialism, unified political ideology, or academic sanctioning. However, for Hip Hop to remain a relevant sociocultural and political force, it would appear that Hip Hop Studies must negotiate, interrogate, and challenge the restructuring of institutions of higher education away from radical student activism and sustained community engagement.

Toward Hip Hop and Critical Pedagogy

As we have outlined here, Hip Hop as critical pedagogy faces numerous challenges, including adaptability to ongoing political struggle, institutional legitimacy, and pedagogical innovation. As scholar-activists of color who are of African, Native, and Puerto Rican ancestry, we have long viewed ourselves as life participants who identify with Hip Hop culture beyond the infrastructure of a capitalist system for which the active process of cultivation and liberation of black and brown communities does not register. At the same time, we recognize the privilege and responsibility we possess as scholars and activists, and view efforts to close the distance between those inside and outside the academy critical to all dialogue and debate that emerge in Hip Hop Studies.

In assembling this collection of essays we selected scholars whose work employs a critical interrogation of Hip Hop while viewing the culture as offering various strategic lines of critical inquiry into an array of interlocking social conditions. This issue situates Hip Hop Studies at the center of an active process of critical and reflexive teaching, learning, and research. In this sense, the work of critical pedagogy is always changing, shifting, responding to and drawing from new contexts and adapting to new social and political environments. As these studies in teaching strategy demonstrate, Hip Hop Studies continues to represent the mobilizing of critical knowledge derived from the lived experiences of predominately Black, Brown, and urban communities that reflect political desires and projects of liberation, but necessarily takes stock of the impact of this knowledge outside of those communities with equal force. Mirroring the expansive capacity of Hip Hop, these scholars' areas of emphasis and expertise vary greatly. However, these authors are linked through their rigorous interrogation of questions of institutional privilege while appreciating the potential for transformational activity in educational settings.

In this collection, Steven Netcoh's perceptive essay is chiefly concerned with the ethics of teaching Hip Hop to white "colorblind" youth through an explicitly anti-racist lens. In Todd Craig's reimagining of the use of citations, the Hip Hop deejay reemerges as a bibliophile, while Andrew Hafner's article locates Hip Hop squarely in the hopes and dreams of immigrant Latin@ youth trying to make meaning of their changing world. Antero Garcia's insightful essay imagines pop culture icon Kanye West as a critical pedagogue. Rounding out the essays, Jared Ball's essay comments on the imperatives and impediments of radical Hip Hop scholarship and activism from classroom to community. Finally, we have included two syllabi that demonstrate possible approaches to Hip Hop Studies: Sarah Hentges' course "Hip Hop: Art, Culture and Politics," and another by Priscilla Page and Djola Branner focused on a critical engagement with Hip Hop Theater.

Our hope with this special issue is to encourage a discussion that would appreciate the challenges and potential dangers of Hip Hop's institutionalization. We aim to mobilize contemporary debates about the role of this U.S. urban-originated, now globally-situated, embodied cultural knowledge in educational spaces. As an on-going dialogue, we recognize what may be perceived as gaps in this current collection of essays. Admittedly, we may have included a discussion of sexuality, gendered constructions, and specifically queer remapping(s) of Hip Hop pedagogical space. Considering the expansive reach of Hip Hop's current phase, we may have done more with what James Spady, et al., have termed the "Global Cipa."²⁵ And finally, voices of contemporary youth practitioners who are imaginatively challenging traditional understandings of educational relevance are essential to marking Hip Hop's next generational milestone. With those shortcomings in tow, we have assembled an issue sure to open new lines of inquiry into Hip Hop's pedagogical possibility. In so doing, we are confident that these efforts will acquaint a new readership with *Radical Teacher* and with the voices herein, while connecting longtime readers of the journal to

new threads of radical possibility. It is our intention to raise a different series of critical questions and take stances that may seem unpopular. We make no apology for our position, and challenge other scholar-activists to share in the effort to amplify the narratives of those who do not have the luxury of considering such scholarship in the broad-based struggle for social justice. Above all, these studies reflect the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetic in the political. In this sense, the spaces in the academy where Hip Hop Studies occur constitute sites of everyday struggle. Effectively, Hip Hop Studies becomes the lens through which new sites of contestation are marked. As contested space, the college, university, or school classroom are remade into sites of resistance, where students and faculty consciously engage with legacies of social and political power, oppression, and resilience. In this way, Hip Hop as critical pedagogy forces us to read and write the world (albeit in spray paint), while working towards the creation of the liberated future we all seek.

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Notes

- ¹ Harry Allen, "Dreams of a Final Theory," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, edited by Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), 7-9.
- ² Hip Hop Culture is made up of five elements: deejaying, break dancing, emceeing (rapping), graffiti writing, and knowledge. These elements are certified by two of the pioneering organizations in Hip Hop: The Universal Zulu Nation and the Rock Steady Crew, and are accepted by practitioners around the world.
- ³ Paulo Friere and Donald Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (New York: Praeger, 1987).
- ⁴ Gregory Korte, "Obama 'A Jury has Spoken' in Zimmerman Case" *USA Today*, July 14, 2013. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/07/14/obama-trayvon-martin-zimmerman-verdict-statement/2516137/>. Accessed on July 23, 2013.
- ⁵ Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, "Operation Ghetto Storm: 2012 Annual Report on the Extrajudicial Killings of 313 Black People by Police, Security Guards and Vigilantes," April 2013.
- ⁶ At the time of this writing, it was reported that the Department of Justice is considering reviewing the Zimmerman case with the possibility of charging Zimmerman with violating Trayvon Martin's civil rights. The NAACP has reported that it has obtained over 300,000 signatures for its petition demanding DOJ intervention into the case.
- ⁷ Christopher Maag, "New Push to Capture Woman in '73 Killing of State Trooper," *New York Times*, May 2, 2013. Accessed on July 15, 2013.
- ⁸ <http://www.fbi.gov/newark/>. Accessed on July 25, 2013.
- ⁹ Ironically, Common, one of the president's favorite Hip Hop artists, drew the ire of many on the right when he accepted Obama's invitation to perform at the White House. Common has been an outspoken critic of the justice system and has advocated for the release of numerous political prisoners. See Janeé Desmond-Harris, "Common White House Invitation Sparks Conservative Outrage," *TheRoot.com*, May 10, 2011. <http://www.theroot.com/buzz/commons-white-house-invitation-sparks-conservative-outrage> Accessed on August 6, 2013.
- ¹⁰ Black August emerged as a month of solidarity with the incarcerated in California prisons in the 1970s. Specifically, it honors the lives of George and Jonathan Jackson, Ruchell Magee, James McClain, William Christmas, Khutari Gauden, and other slain, deceased, or current political prisoners. MXGM has taken up this effort from the 1990s to the present. In honor of Black August, individuals are encouraged to engage in intensive political education, fasting, and meditation throughout the month.
- ¹¹ Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
- ¹² The ARRA provides \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas: adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy; building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction; recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and turning around our lowest achieving schools. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>. Accessed on July 14, 2013.
- ¹³ Though our use of this term is in line with Kellner and Share who

argue that "Media education should be connected with education for democracy where students are encouraged to become informed and media literate participants in their societies," we want to expand this concept to directly connect it with the political desires of people of color who have long advocated for deep rooted structural social transformation. See Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, "Critical Media Education and Radical Democracy," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Education*, edited by Michael W. Apple, Wayne Au, and Luis Armando Gandin (New York: Routledge, 2009), 281-295.

¹⁴ To our knowledge, Rosa Clemente was the first to use this term on the "Beyond the Beats: Towards a Radical Analysis of the State of Hip-Hop" panel at the National Conference on Media Reform in Boston, MA, 2011.

¹⁵ George Yancy, ed., *White on White/Black on Black* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

¹⁶ We use this term to describe the contentiousness that perpetually hovers above certain fields of study in the academy. It is meant to mark the tension between tradition areas of study and relatively new ones such as Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, Queer Studies, etc. These fields intersect in important ways with traditional fields, yet they also push the boundaries of traditional epistemologies and canons.

¹⁷ Erik Nielson, "Where Would Hip Hop be Without Colleges and Universities?" *Huffington Post* on-line, April 12, 2013, accessed June 6, 2013. Nielson, "High Stakes for Hip Hop Studies," *Huffington Post* on-line, April 29, 2013, accessed April 30, 2013.

¹⁸ Travis Gosa, "Colleges Love Hip Hop, But Do They Love Black Men Too?" *Chronicle of Higher Education* on-line, February 15, 2013. Accessed April 30, 2013.

¹⁹ Julian Kunnie, "Apartheid in Arizona? HB2281 and Arizona's Denial of Human Rights of People of Color," *The Black Scholar* 40, No. 4 (Winter, 2010): 16-26.

²⁰ Gerrick D. Kennedy, "Harvard University Announces Nas Fellowship," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2013. Accessed July 17, 2013.

²¹ <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/hiphopeducation/>. Accessed on July 8, 2013.

²² <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/hiphop/>. Accessed on July 8, 2013.

²³ <http://dubois.fas.harvard.edu/hiphop-archive-harvard-university>. Accessed on July 8, 2013.

²⁴ <http://www.arizona.edu/features/ua-introduces-nation%E2%80%99s-first-hip-hop-minor>. Accessed on July 9, 2013.

²⁵ James G. Spady, H. Samy Alim, and Samir Meghelli, eds., *Global Capha: Hip Hop Culture and Consciousness* (np.: Black History Museum Press, 2006).



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