Introduction

RICHARD BRAMWELL AND ALEX DE LACEY

On Sunday, June 25, 2023, Busta Rhymes received a lifetime achievement award at the 23rd BET Awards held in Los Angeles, California. After a fiery rendition of M.O.P. classic 'Ante Up', East Flatbush's finest worked through the classics, bringing along a star-studded line-up of guests that included Massachusetts-born BIA – for the single 'Beach Ball' – and fast-rising Coi Leray for their track 'Players'. Halfway through, the music cuts, and the cameras focus on Busta, clad in his gleaming white suit. '*Be clear, we be celebrating Hip Hop 50*' said Busta. '*[but] Kool Herc, the founding father of hip-hop, he's a bloodclaat Jamaican. Make sure you know that. So as much as we going to represent hip-hop tonight, we're going to represent this dancehall culture. All Caribbean people haffi get up, haffi tun up*.' The LED wall behind the performers suddenly lights up, with twenty-foot-tall graphics of bassbins and tweeters doused in red, yellow and green, widely recognised as the colours of Rastafari. Dexta Daps launches himself onto the stage to perform 'Shabba Madda Pot', before dancehall royalty Super Cat, Cutty Ranks, the 'Queen of the Dancehall' Spice and man-of-the-moment Skillibeng take to the stage.

Although only afforded ten minutes to acknowledge this heritage, Busta's honouring of the Caribbean points to the myriad intersections and overlaps between Caribbean and African-American cultural practice: a timely reminder that origin stories, while useful and important, often smooth over the complex and multifaceted histories that result in approaches to practice today.

Aims of the Volume

As we write this introduction, Hip Hop 50 celebrations are in full swing across the United States and the world. The Yankee stadium was turned inside out by a star-studded cast on August 11, 2023; *Men's Health* magazine ran a feature with 50 Cent and Method Man to celebrate; while KRS-ONE could be seen sidling up to controversial New York mayor Eric Adams to launch the '5X5 Block Party Series', celebrating five decades of rap across the

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five boroughs, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, the Bronx and Harlem.[1] At this important juncture in the history of hip-hop, this volume calls for both a deepening and a widening of our gaze. First, it calls for a deepening, through a focus on rap – a distinct component of hip-hop – to appreciate the rich history of this culture. Second, it calls for a widening, to bring into focus the global significance of this verbal art form. Rap has travelled far from hip-hop's origins in deindustrialised New York, to Europe, Asia, Oceania, Africa and beyond. While this oral form made an important contribution to the culture fashioned by African-American, Latin-American, and Caribbean youths, during the 1970s, hip-hop itself has become a multi-billion-dollar world-wide industry and plays a significant role in cultural diplomacy, with figures such as Toni Blackman acting as hip-hop ambassador to the US State Department, and Def Jam mogul Russell Simmons working as a Goodwill Ambassador to the UN since 2009. These global developments highlight the importance of a musical culture that remains vitally important and relevant to the lives of people across the planet.

Our call for an acknowledgement of the significance of global rap does not diminish the importance of hip-hop's other elements, breakdancing, DJing and graffiti. All of them deserve recognition, both in their own right and as fundamental components of hip-hop culture. Nor does it devalue the organic ties that hip-hop has to the communities from which it emerged. In this volume we attempt to provide space for a consideration of the distinctive contribution that rap has made to contemporary culture, both within hip-hop and beyond it. Rap has become more and more ubiquitous as the decades pass. Rap music is a mainstream commercial genre. Recordings are used in film, television and video-game soundtracks and rap artists have become ambassadors for organisations such as the US State Department, the British Council and numerous charities. Alongside this mainstream recognition, rap is deeply embedded in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens and denizens. It forms a vibrant aspect of many youth cultures, and the performance, circulation and viewing of rap songs and music videos via social media, radio and television plays an influential role in the social and cultural development of young people across the globe.

Reflecting its social, political and cultural importance, rap has become a common topic for study in university courses. There is a plethora of scholarly works on rap, which approach this verbal art form from a variety of perspectives. This volume provides an introduction to global rap. It begins with a cultural history, before exploring some of the key disciplinary approaches to the study of rap. We then highlight how rap is used beyond academia, in areas such as public health, the criminal justice system and

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education. Finally the book turns to the varied contexts in which rap is produced, circulated, received and interpreted. Throughout the book the distinct influences of the national, transnational, or diasporic contexts for rap culture and those who participate in it are shown to be vitally apparent. Busta Rhymes's call for recognition of dancehall is prudent, but this story should encompass the full spectrum of rap as a verbal art. While the *Companion* opens with a consideration of rap's history as an oral practice and the shaping of emcee culture through the sound system, it closes with an examination of mediated performances of rap on television and social media, as well as within the recording industry in contrasting contexts.

In closing the collection with these divergent arenas (including Germany, China, India, Tanzania and the United States), we hope to make the case for a continuation of the conversation around rap in a global context: the ways in which transnational, translocal and glocal versionings of this practice fold in autochthonous elements, *alongside* received histories of practice (be it of hip-hop or rap more generally), while remaining contingent on particular social and political contexts. In Sheng Zou's chapter on talent shows in China, he makes clear that it is quite simply impossible to offer a comprehensive history of rap's emergence in the country, owing to varying underground tributaries across multiple cities. Instead, Zou prefers to see this history as rhizomatic, with a proliferation domestically through different nodes at different points in time. While we are not here to engage in ahistorical revisionism, we might extend this provocation to August 11, 1973, and – in particular – question what uncritical lionising of particular moments, and moreover people, entails.

In a provocative piece for the Wall Street Journal a week ahead of the fabled anniversary, Dan Charnas – author of *The Big Payback* and *Dilla Time* – refers to the inaugural party in the Bronx as 'engendered [with] embellishments, emphasising one figure ... erasing those who came before and after'.[2] He goes on to highlight DJ Hollywood's parties in Harlem back in 1968 where he talked over records. Charnas also notes that many of the innovations attributed to Herc cannot be fully validated, with DJ Rob Swift quoted as saying that the 'merry-go round technique' attributed to Herc might have more accurately been credited to Grandmaster Flash. Elsewhere, Arusha Quershi's vital intervention *Flip The Script: How Women Came to Rule Hip Hop* (2021) strongly advocates for the women who get written out of rap histories in favour of their male counterparts: from Debbie D of the Juice Crew to Pebblee Poo of the Herculoids and Lisa Lee of the Universal Zulu Nation.[3]

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The strategy of centring particular individuals in the writing of the cultural history of rap inevitably marginalises others within those narratives. More pertinently, the centring of these key figures can, unfortunately, mean that serious wrongdoings are erased or overlooked in a bid to maintain the mysticism around these formative moments. Afrika Bambaataa, a celebrated figure within hip-hop culture, was appointed to a visiting scholarship at Cornell University, in 2012. To our knowledge, no scholarly work on hip-hop has addressed the multiple allegations that he has faced since 2016, regarding sexual abuse and trafficking of young men dating back to the 1990s.[4] The Zulu Nation, which was founded by Bambaataa, holds particular weight in the global rap community. Notably in France, where the Zulu Nation's activities stretch back as far as 1982, with their visit to Paris with assistance from rock personalities Bernard Zekri and Jean Karakos. While Bambaataa stepped down from the organisation following the first wave of allegations in 2016, the Universal Hip Hop Museum in the Bronx has since come under fire for its executive director Rocky Bucano's alleged ties to the Zulu Nation. A 2023 protest organised by the advocacy organisation 'Hip Hop Stands with Survivors' pushed back against public funding of the venture, with co-founder Leila Wills citing the 're-traumatizing [of] survivors'.[5] The risks of lionising key figures is not limited to those seen to pioneer the form at its outset. Russell Simmons has faced multiple allegations of sexual assault. A $10 million lawsuit against Simmons raised in 2018 was eventually dropped because it fell outside the statute of limitations, as it related to a case from 1988.[6] At the time of writing, Simmons remains in his role for the UN. A great deal of hip-hop scholarship highlights the agency of those who are marginalised within wider society. However, the silence regarding these hidden histories within (academic) accounts of hip-hop raises questions about hip-hop studies and the position that scholars take in relation to those that have been marginalised, exploited or abused within hip-hop.

These concerns, as with this volume's scope, are of course not limited to rap in a North American context. A number of this *Companion*'s chapters – notably de Lacey and James – explore grime music, the hybrid of dancehall, ragga, hip-hop and UK garage that emerged from the United Kingdom at the turn of the millennium. Its key figures include Wiley, Dizzee Rascal and Skepta. In recent years, grime's 'godfather' Wiley has been criticised strongly for a string of antisemitic tweets, one of which likened Jewish people to the Ku Klux Klan.[7] Notably for this volume's consideration of key moments, twentieth-anniversary celebrations of Dizzee Rascal's landmark album *Boy in Da Corner* have eclipsed his domestic violence conviction, in

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April 2022, which resulted from a violent confrontation with his ex-partner.[8] Of course, denying Bambaataa's contributions to hip-hop or minimising Dizzee Rascal's to grime would be ahistorical, but choosing to speak about their role in the histories of rap and grime without reckoning with such serious allegations risks placing figures who have caused significant harm in positions where they are beyond criticism.

We hope that by highlighting the breadth and complexity of the history of this verbal art form as well as the significance of its global proliferation, this volume will make a critical intervention in how rap is studied. Thus, we call to exercise a level of caution when celebrating foundational figures. Rather than be beholden to origin narratives, we must interrogate and uncover why a history is remembered in a particular way, and what mythologised histories afford and omit.

We are, though, living in a vibrant time of rap scholarship, and this volume is, of course, not without important forebears. After the pioneering first wave of writers who took dancehall, reggae, and rap seriously – from Greg Tate to Joan Morgan; Paul Gilroy to Carolyn Cooper – we now have a welter of tools and compendiums that chronicle hip-hop, and oral poetics more broadly. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal's *That's the Joint*, originally published in 2004, celebrated its third edition in 2023, with Southern hip-hop expert Regina N. Bradley joining the editorial team. Tony Mitchell's turn-of-the-millennium collection *Global Noise* remains pertinent, convincingly arguing for an understanding of rap practice outside of the United States, while *Reggaeton (Refiguring American Music)* from Wayne Marshall, Raquel Z. Rivera and Deborah Pacini Hernandez looks at the enormously popular musical hybrid that leans on Caribbean aesthetics and is read through a Latin-American lens. In more recent times, Justin Williams's *Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop* acts as a substantial contribution, one which saw importance in having 'US and non-US hip-hop sharing space in the same volume'[9], with chapters from Noriko Manabe on Japanese rap, and Ali Colleen Neff on Senegal. The *Companion to Global Rap*, however, offers a considered move from the US / non-US binary to an understanding and appreciation of craft which is predicated on exchange, simultaneity, intertwined colonial histories, and the fundamentally polysemous and flexible method of oral poetics shared among many communities and cultures worldwide.

Beginning with 'Historical and Cultural Perspectives', Part I offers two interventions from contrasting positions. Paroma Ghose's extensive history tracks developments from the enforced movement of people under seventeenth-century chattel slavery through to the emergence of hip-hop

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in the United States, before attending to global manifestations, with a particular focus on France, the second biggest rap market in the world. After mapping out the emergence of the French underground rap scene during the 1980s, Ghose shows how legislation designed to ensure that radio stations broadcast a substantial proportion of French language material invigorated the French rap music scene. As this scene grew, increasing numbers of rappers used their position to draw attention to racism and inequality in French society. Ghose indicates how prominent politicians have used political and legal means to censure rappers (a theme which is picked up by Karim Hammou and Marie Sonnette-Manouguian in Chapter 7) before exploring some of the characteristics that distinguish French rap. French rappers can, perhaps, be seen to articulate a future in which their complex identities and France's history are recognised by the Republic.

In Chapter 2, Dancehall expert Marvin Sparks speaks to the fundamental importance of the sound system, as a vessel for public communion, musical alchemy and its capacity to disseminate the words and wisdom of vital deejays such as King Stitt and U-Roy. Leaning upon American-imported jukeboxes and Japanese technologies, Jamaican sounds flourished throughout the 70s – almost concurrently with innovations from Kool Herc and others – resulting in a heyday for both Jamaican and British deejays in the 1980s with Yellowman, Super Cat, and Sister Nancy flying the flag for Kingston, with Saxon Sound's Tippa Irie, Maxi Priest, and Smiley Culture pioneering styles and sounds in South London. Travel back and forth between the Caribbean, the United States and the United Kingdom, by sound-system owners and entrepreneurs, rappers, and deejays, alongside the use of technology to produce innovations, such as toasting, dubplates and riddims, played an important role in the development of emcee culture. Sparks shows, through his cultural history of the sound system, how global rap has been fostered through innovation, circulation and exchange. (Malcolm James, in Chapter 16, returns us to the significance of technology in shaping rap music cultures through a focus on music videos.) The two contrasting perspectives on the history of global rap in these chapters highlight the importance of the movement of people, technologies and cultural practices around the world to the formation of both dancehall and hip-hop. We suggest that an understanding of the complex circuits through which global rap historically developed is crucial for an appreciation of the significance of contemporary rap cultures.

Part II of the *Companion* addresses key disciplinary approaches that have contributed to the field of global rap studies. Rap music's vitality and

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political punch has often been met with resistance from above. Karim Hammou (author of *Une Histoire de Rap En France*) and Marie Sonnette-Manouguian outline how sociology can bring into focus the social relationships which give meaning to rap as a cultural practice. In their examination of French hip-hop culture, Hammou and Sonnette-Manouguian develop further insights into the political issues introduced by Ghose, highlighting the power relations at play in French popular music culture. After critically interrogating the association between rap and postcolonial minorities in France, they address the criminalisation of rappers by politicians, through prosecution in the courts, calls for censorship in parliament, and far-right media campaigns, which construe rap as a threat to the state.

These issues regarding power and culture can also be seen at work in the United Kingdom. In Chapter 10, Lambros Fatsis adopts a criminological lens through which to engage with the use of rap in court. He examines the use of ancillary orders imposed by courts to regulate the social relations and cultural production of UK drill artists as well as the use of lyrics and music videos as evidence criminal trials. Fatsis's critique of the strategies adopted by the police and prosecutors, in the use of rap as evidence, draws attention to how the generic conventions employed in drill music to elicit emotional responses from the audience can be misinterpreted within court proceedings. Fatsis argues forcefully against attempts to use rap as a record of actual events or as evidence of character, highlighting the lack of literacy that judges and prosecutors possess in relation to the drill genre. The fact that courts continue to admit the use of rap as evidence in this way, raises questions about the status of lyrics and music videos, and perhaps the importance of attending to the features that constitute rap as a verbal art form.

In contrast to the focus on social, political, legal and cultural issues raised by Fatsis, Hammou, Sonnette-Manouguian, Ghose and Sparks, Bramwell argues for an orientation towards the literary value of rap lyrics. Through a focus on Stockwell soundman Roots Manuva, Richard Bramwell suggests that the study of poetry would be enriched by embracing the oral poetics of rap. Through a close analysis of rap lyrics, Bramwell draws attention to Roots Manuva's literary inventiveness. The dominance of cultural studies has perhaps left the formal qualities produced within emcee cultures underappreciated in academic debates. Indeed in Chapter 5, Max Ryynänen and Petteri Enroth look outside this dominant gaze towards elaborate – yet often forgotten – aesthetic approaches to rap, from as early as 1984 by Finnish philosopher Esa Sironen (notably

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published in the same year as David Toop's lauded *Rap Attack*). In their historical overview of the aesthetics of rap, Ryynänen and Enroth tantalisingly point towards the numerous 'rap-like practices' that can be found in oral poetic forms across the globe, before turning to rap as a modern phenomenon. In its sound system–enabled form, rap could be seen as not just a new style of music, but a new art form. After showing how David Toop constructed an aesthetic history of rap, they examine Richard Shusterman's substantial contribution to philosophical aesthetics, through his work on rap. In a departure from Kantian aesthetics, Shusterman adopted an engaged approach to the aesthetic experience of rap, through listening and dance. Ryynänen and Enroth highlight how insights from philosophical aesthetics have been lost in recent academic debates on rap, and argue that rap and hip-hop call for and deserve serious consideration as art. They conclude their contribution to this volume with an indication of how the study of rap could be advanced through environmental aesthetics and phenomenological approaches.

Part III departs from a focus on disciplinary considerations, turning towards the 'Applications for Rap' outside academia. In addition to the study of the genre, rap itself can be mobilised for educational and therapeutic purposes. Indeed, there has been a concerted effort across educational initiatives (both within formal schooling and outside) and wellbeing, towards greater integration. Three chapters in this volume look to how rap can be employed to facilitate a better tomorrow.

Hip-hop education's changing face is addressed by Patrick Turner. Historically the role of rap in the classroom has been nostalgic and secessionist, trying to cling to core values of hip-hop without necessarily engaging pragmatically with practice in its current form. The UK-based initiative Roadworks, however, seeks to meet young people 'where they are', using drill as a means to evocatively engage with their experiences – however troubling they may be – as a means to actually deal with trauma, rather than require the genre to act as restorative balm. Turner documents participants' experiences, which resulted in the recording of a drill song, noting how a deliberate attempt to leave moralising at the door allows a bridge to be made between the quotidian and the classroom, helping us to 'learn about the world through music'.

Rap's role in settler colonial states was first chronicled at length in the 1990s, one example being Ian Maxwell's examination of practice on Sydney's westside.[10] Dianne Rodger explores the benefits of applied hip-hop for young First Nations people in Kaurna Yerta, with a focus on the therapeutic affordances of self-expression. While the more institutional

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work can replicate existing power relationships between First Nations people and non-indigenous stakeholders, Rodger focuses on hip-hop workshops in Adelaide, presenting conversations with mentors on the program, many of whom are artists in their own right, such as MCs Eskatology and Social Change. The capacity to equip young people with skills to work through their emotions is acknowledged, with an appreciation of the particular importance for indigenous peoples whose everyday existence is entangled with political and social violence from above.

Akeem Sule and Becky Inkster also attend to the therapeutic capacity of rap, calling for more pertinent interventions in healthcare. Rather than be relegated to secondary and tertiary interventions, they see hip-hop as central to wellbeing, calling for primary, preventative work that is culturally relevant and increasingly relatable, owing to rap's position on the world stage. Rappers are 'street epidemiologists' chronicling everyday woes that are pronounced – and exacerbated – by proximity to the carceral system, over-policing, housing troubles and other ailments. Their work, on many occasions, has had a tangible benefit on public health: Logic's partnership with the Suicide Prevention Hotline in the United States saw a noted increase in calls to the line from those in need; and in keeping with Turner's notion of appreciation rap as a challenging, multivalent form, Angel Haze's retelling of childhood sexual abuse on 'Cleaning out My Closet', while upsetting for some, can help others process their own trauma.

Sule and Inkster also note that we can learn about societal change and the zeitgeist through paying close attention to artists' subject matter. In a similar manner to the method adopted by Gilbers in Chapter 4, their examination of how rappers changed tack following the 2008 global financial crisis – away from glossy materialism to a more muted engagement with 'bling' – demonstrates how public health trends (and impending crises) can be caught early by listening to artists working at street level.

Part IV of the *Companion* turns towards contrasting contexts in which global rap has flourished. Sina A. Nitzsche and Laura Spilker, in Chapter 14, adopt an intersectional approach to the analysis of race, class, gender and nationality in German hip-hop. By situating their analysis of SXTN's music video, 'Ich bin Schwarz', within the context of the global circulation of US hip-hop culture, Nitzsche and Spilker show how US-American understandings of race are received and reinterpreted within the German hip-hop scene. They argue that Nura's performance of female sexuality addresses racial stereotypes and expands our understanding of black womanhood. Through a focus on the black body and bodily

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functions, rappers Juju and Nura can be seen to mock symbols of white supremacy and German nationalism.

Complexities around language are explored by Elloit Cardozo and Jaspal Singh (Chapter 17), who examine rap in India, and how decisions on whether to use English or not have multiple implications in a multilingual society. They place these contemporary questions firmly within the historical context of British colonial rule and the Indian independence movement. English, Cardozo and Singh argue, can be thought of as both a language of *decolonisation* – a lingua franca, a levelling of the playing field / upward mobility – as well as a sign of 'psychological conquest'; the colonial past rearing its head once again. Cardozo and Singh's genealogy of rap in India highlights that artists' negotiation of language is indicative of how the means by which you deliver your experiences are never neutral. They show how rapping in any of India's languages, including Hindi, English, Kannada, Punjabi, or combining multiple languages in rap lyrics, are influenced by aesthetic, political, and biographical considerations. Their contribution concludes with an examination of the politics of rapping in English. Whereas Manmeet Kaur uses English to position herself as a cosmopolitan woman capable of moving between India's patriarchal structures and her international connections across the world, Sumeet Samos draws on a combination of languages (including English) to draw attention to caste-based atrocities. The broad range of issues that Indian rappers are concerned with, has produced a complex, multilingual environment, in which these artists articulate their present conditions and negotiate transformative relations with the global rap community.

Alex Perullo, whose contribution opens the section, explores the Tanzanian music recording industry, with a focus on award shows. Perullo charts the growth of the Tanzanian music industry, from a post-independence cultural landscape that was strictly government-controlled and subject to state censorship towards an environment in which freedom of expression is more widely practised. This transition did not take place smoothly and Perullo shows how appropriate the metaphor of 'army' was in the characterisation of young Tanzanian rap fans. While rappers in a number of African countries entered formal politics, the struggle within Tanzania's cultural economy also led to artists being imprisoned. The censoring of lyrics and criminalisation of musical expression, that Perullo describes in Chapter 13, recalls the criminalisation of rap in France, Britain and the United States described by Ghose, Hammou, Sonnette-Manouguian, and Fatsis. However, Perullo also shows how rap has now

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gained recognition at the highest levels of Tanzanian politics, as vital to the country's social, cultural, and economic wellbeing.

Rap's relationship with the state is also explored in Sheng Zou's chapter on *The Rap of China*. TV has been fundamental to rap and its dissemination within an (increasingly) global audience. While terrestrial presentations of rap – and rappers – in the United States have shifted from music-focused products such as *Yo MTV Raps!* to hip-hop–adjacent reality and lifestyle shows, such as *Pimp My Ride* and *Snoop Dogg's Father Hood*, talent shows have become a promising ground in East Asia for new artists and budding stars. Yet, this platform comes with its own particular set of complications. After the ferocious success of the television series *The Rap of China*, rap music faces an identity crisis, with its 'televisual remediation' coming into conflict with authenticity narratives, favouring 'sanitization, domestication, and commercialization'. Sheng Zhou argues that this 'precarious cultural formation' has resulted in grassroots, mainstream and state coming together in complex ways, with television reinforcing dominant values regarding masculinity, nationality and decorum while stifling innovative practice.

Perhaps more amorphous and flexible in its representations of practice is social media. Malcolm James's chapter on drill music videos firstly explores how notoriety in its predecessor grime really came post-YouTube when legendary moments – once restricted to out-of-print DVDs – became accessible to the wider populace. To listen to heralded grime station DejaVu FM in the 2000s you had to be within the radius of its east London transmitters, otherwise your best hope was that a friend had taped the 'set' so you could listen back. In the genre's much-chronicled 'second wave' during the 2010s (with luminaries such as Stormzy, Skepta and Lady Leshurr taking center stage), YouTube – and social media more generally – became du jour. Soon, channels such as Mixtape Madness and PressPlay began incubating what would become known as UK Drill: a hybrid of grime and sounds from Chicago's South Side. Rather than address its complex alignments with criminality (explored by Fatsis in Chapter 10), James argues for drill as a cultural form, his particular theoretical gambit being that drill music videos are contradictory and multivalent. Drill functions as an 'alternative', as per Raymond Williams's definition, in that it is generative and vital, sitting outside simple binaries of oppression and resistance. These visual representations are chromatic: they're 'austere and opulent', boastful. They depict council estates without eschewing glamour, with artists such as 67 and Harlem Spartans maximising the medium in effect of language, affect and style.

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These strategies are remarkably successful. Indeed, having an affinity with apps such as Instagram and TikTok is almost a pre-requisite for success for drill artists. In Chapter 15, Jabari Evans looks at how societal fears around rap are turned on their heads by innovative 'cloutchasing' strategies of young drillers on Chicago's South Side. Through aggrandising their proximity to violence, with social media posts that refer to guns and illicit drugs, these artists leverage a level of authenticity while also building notoriety through a 'shock factor'. Employing strategies not too dissimilar to NWA in the 1980s, artists play the fearmongers at their own game, consequently elevating their status in the scene.

As hip-hop studies continues to move forward as an interdisciplinary field, with the genre itself becoming ever more present in society, perhaps the most pressing question one could pose is, 'What is it to study rap?' What tools do we have at our disposal to make sense of and contextualise this form? These questions are attended to by two chapters in the volume that anchor the 'Approaches to Rap' section.

Steven Gilbers addresses linguistic approaches to rap, and the (understandable) fascination with linguistic innovations within the genre. He notes at the outset that artists have always been self-aware and reflexive regarding phonology, ethnolects, and their own positionality in relation to their craft, but sociolinguistic research over the last two decades has done its best to catch up. With a special focus on 2Pac's deployment of African-American English (AAE), Gilbers maps how the artist altered his approach to rap as he moved westwards: born on the East Coast, the rapper came of age in the Bay Area before moving to Los Angeles. This final move, before his fateful death, saw him adopt a more West Coast lilt as part of dialect acquisition through immersion in the City of Angels.

J. Griffith Rollefson's searing chapter, entitled 'Beats, Rhymes and Life', argues for the pre-eminence of the sonic and its intersection with the social. The chapter reckons with the conservativist 'white racial frame' of musicology, and how we might employ the tools of musicology without falling into unhelpful habits. There exists a crisis of representation, wherein etic methods get imposed on a form that resists such an approach. With the academic theorising of 'flow' for example, an analytical prioritising of virtuosity and technicality, shown through either staff notation or computational methods, can get us close, but we remain distant from truly capturing – as Kjell Oddekalv asks – what makes this 'shit dope'? As Paul Gilroy famously wrote, music *is* music, and its physical enactment, social context and setting all build into its vitality. Thus, when we study rap, it's important to not forget all of the components that make it what it is. de

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Lacey, in particular, in this volume spends time addressing creative process, looking at communal creation of new music in grime, with a focus on DJing as well as the craft of MCs as part of a unified whole (see Chapter 8).

What these chapters have at their centre, though, is an acknowledgement of community and lived experience. Rollefson asks us to foreground the intimate relationship between the sonic and social; meanwhile Gilbers points us to how language in rap – often positioned under the umbrella of H. Samy Alim's 'Hip Hop Nation Language' – is co-constituted by both an imagined community of 'heads' and on-the-ground experience.

As our field continues to move forward, then, it's important not to lose sight of the practice of scholarship in relation to these realities. In both our theoretical and empirical endeavours, we enter into communion with artists, their work, and their lives. Rap's status as a global force therefore demands appreciation of myriad cultural contexts, approaches to performance, and means by which this art form is sustained. This volume's goal, then, is to introduce the tools, approaches, and perspectives through which to get to grips with this vital area of artistic practice.

Notes

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