

Global Hip Hop Studies  
Volume 1 Number 1

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## EDITORIAL

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# Enter the cipher: Welcome to *GHHS*

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Global Hip Hop Studies (GHHS)*. By no means the first scholarly journal of its kind (think of *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* and *Words, Beats & Life*, for example), *GHHS* reaches out to hip hop heads, artists, activists and scholars both in and beyond the United States in order to embrace that fact that hip hop is a manifestly global and intercultural phenomenon that takes many creative and critical forms.<sup>1</sup> Here – in print and online – you will see a mix of scholarly articles, reviews, dialogues, interviews, op eds and reflections by a posse of scholars, artists and activists (them heads from different locales). As we write in our mission statement, viewable online and in the front of the print edition of each issue: ‘*GHHS* is a peer-reviewed, rigorous and community-responsive academic journal that publishes research on contemporary as well as historical issues and debates surrounding hip hop music and culture around the world, twice annually’.

In the design of the journal’s sections, we have attempted to reflect hip hop’s own multi-disciplinary and glocal ethos. For starters, each issue will feature an artefact from an element of hip hop’s visual culture on the cover

1. Indeed, Travis Harris recently tackled this global diversity in his wide-ranging article ‘Can it be bigger than hip hop? From global hip hop studies to hip hop’.

and follow that featured image up with a space for more full colour images and commentary from artists and/or scholars that we are calling the 'Show & Prove' section. From there, you will see our feature articles: long-form scholarly investigations into hip hop in all its cultural richness and global diversity, from the street to the studio. We have a dedicated section for book reviews and another dedicated space for media and event reviews, understanding that hip hop happens on the page, on wax and in live community – in the cipher. Indeed, another section – called 'In the Cipher' – will be reserved specifically for artist-centred pieces, interviews, artist statements, poetry and any other format that will continue to help us keep the dialogue open and fresh, privileging the perspectives of practitioners themselves as the vital force of hip hop knowledge and practice. Finally, in the planning discussions with our amazing Editorial and Advisory Boards, we came up with the idea of holding down a dedicated space for curating archival holdings and discussions about the fast-changing world of hip hop archives – a section we are calling 'Dive in the Archive'. As the journal continues to find its legs, we fully expect to augment those offerings, developing new critically minded structures, spaces and approaches to presenting and investigating hip hop culture – we trust that you, our community of readers, will help us in this quest.

### **'THINKIN' OF A MASTER PLAN'**

The seeds for this journal were sown when a range of global hip hop scholars met at a hip hop symposium organized by Heike Raphael-Hernandez (Mainz, Germany) and Eva Kimminich (Potsdam, Germany) in 2013. In fact, this is where four of our editors – Griff Rollefson, Adam Haupt, Murray Forman and Sina Nitzsche – met in person for the first time (along with board members Andreana Clay, Tommy DeFrantz and Kendra Salois). By 2014, the collaborations were underway: Haupt guest lectured for Rollefson's 'Planet Rap' course at Cambridge and convened a hip hop stream at the African Studies Association UK at Sussex University. With these and other developments, a global network of young hip hop scholars was fast taking shape by the time a cohort of hip hop scholars participated in Richard Bramwell and James Butterworth's mega hip hop conference, *It Ain't Where You're From*, at Cambridge University in 2016 (ironically, just as the Brexit referendum rocked the world). In 2017, Rollefson's *Flip the Script* was making waves on a serious postcolonial tip, and Nitzsche was getting the European HipHop Studies Network off the ground. By 2018, Haupt, Quentin Williams and H. Samy Alim had published a double issue on hip hop activism for *Journal of World Popular Music* (5.1 and 5.2) as well as an edited volume, *Neva Again* in 2019 (Haupt, Williams, Alim and Emile Lester Jansen, eds), which brought the voices of South African hip hop artists, activists and scholars together. Haupt and former Brasse vannie Kaap b-boy Bradley Lodewyk (aka King Voue [Folds]) co-produced an EP for *Neva Again*, thanks to funding from Alim – a first of its kind down South... or North. All signs indicated that the time for a global journal on hip hop had come.

When, in 2019, Rollefson's global hip hop knowledge mapping initiative, 'CIPHER: Hip Hop Interpellation', was funded by the European Research Council, things got real very quickly. Before long, plans to get the journal going were coming to fruition, thanks to the conceptualizing work of our Editorial Board, seed funding from this European Union grant and the enthusiasm of our publisher, Intellect – a high-quality cultural studies imprint that had been

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urging Murray to pitch a journal for years. Indeed, before we proceed further, big ups to the team at Intellect who helped us get this party started – especially James Campbell, who gave us a tour of Bristol’s influential graf scene during Justin Williams’s *EUHHSN 2019* conference and Faith Newcombe, who assuaged our concerns and shepherded this issue to production through the depths of this social and culturally uncanny time around the very real threat of the still-raging global pandemic, COVID-19.

As the name *Global Hip Hop Studies* suggests, a central aim of this journal is to inspire, curate and publish hip hop scholarship that breaks the North/South binary relationship of neocolonial power that is so often replicated in scholarship. Scholars from the Global North are in a position of power with access to relatively abundant research funds from Europe and North America and the ability to set research agendas, thanks to racialized inequalities that were generated by colonization and sustained by neo-liberal economic policies that reinforce cultural, linguistic and media imperialism in engagements between subjects from the Global North and South – often despite the best intentions of participants. As the contents of this inaugural issue suggest, *GHHS* aims to publish scholarship, reviews, interviews and other alternative format pieces that look to push the limits. The journal encourages submissions from *all* hip hop’s diverse geographic and disciplinary perspectives – from the South Bronx to the Southern Hemisphere and from the classic four elements (DJing/turntablism, MCing/rapping, graffiti/street art and b-boy/b-girl dance), the under-examined realms of hip hop fashion, education, politics, economics, identity formation, hip hop nation language, beatboxing and beyond. In short, *GHHS* is a hip hop cipher that aims to examine and expand the ‘fifth element’, *knowledge*, and its intersections with all the culture’s material, embodied and conceptual forms.

As our diverse collection of Editorial and Advisory Board members suggests (please take a minute to peruse those lists in this volume and at the *GHHS* website), we have begun our attempt at remixing things. Our Editorial team comes from South Africa, Ireland, the United States, Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom and France. Similarly, our Editorial Board stretches even farther across the globe – and we are dedicated to further expanding that coverage with scholars, artists and activists in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Likewise, we have also seen a diverse geographic and disciplinary range of scholars contributing work for consideration for both the first and second issues. This is an important point to make in face of the fact that in parts of Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States and, more recently, India and Brazil, we see nation-states taking a turn to the right by attempting to reassert national boundaries along ethnonationalist lines in ways that Benedict Anderson (author of *Imagined Communities*) would find troubling.

It is also an important point to make as we write this introduction to the first issue during a global pandemic and at a time of global rupture, as communities around the world militate for the dismantling of structures of white privilege – foremost among them the line from plantation ‘overseer’ to police ‘officer’ that KRS-One framed for us so clearly on ‘Sound of da Police’ (KRS-One 1993). To keep the global spread of COVID-19 in check, borders are being policed ever more heavily, and the movement of people is being restricted. Of course, even before COVID-19, racial stereotypes and ethnonationalist logic shaped the discourses of political leaders and influential media outlets. We are seeing the same being done in discursive practices on the spread of this virus as ethnic and national communities are targeted and

stigmatized by emboldened fear-mongers and bigots. These are dangerous times, but through global artistic, activist and scholarly initiatives, such as *GHHS*, we can work to ensure that counter-hegemonic voices continue to be heard, particularly those that articulate a politics of love and an ethics of care in a divided and deeply unequal world. That is not to say that we are above raging against the machine of white supremacy, or that we did not enjoy seeing the statue of slave trader Edward Colston being tossed into Bristol harbour. Indeed, if the people flooding the streets at present under the banner of Black Lives Matter are any indication, we are potentially on the cusp of real global change. *GHHS* looks to take that work of radical social justice forward in every way it can.

Apropos of this point, one of the guiding principles of this journal is to extend access to the communities who created this culture and continue to breathe life into it around the world. As we write in our mission statement:

Centred around the truly global collection of established scholars on its advisory board, *GHHS* privileges the insights of people of colour and supports and encourages those of all marginalized, subordinated and disenfranchised global citizens who are engaged in manifesting progressive political and social change and expanded intellectual vistas. *GHHS's* proactive distribution model provides journal access to the under-resourced communities who created the culture, thus aiming at nothing less than a refiguration of the university knowledge trade.

While we will ask universities and well-endowed institutions to pay for access to this journal, our publisher has agreed to extend free online access to under-funded public libraries and institutions around the world. Through Intellect's participation in the EIFL initiative (Electronic Information for Libraries), this journal will be open access in developing and transition economies across the world. Well aware of the unequal access to information in the overdeveloped world, however, free online access to *GHHS* will also be offered to institutions in need via a simple application process. Please talk to your local educators and librarians about this initiative and e-mail the editors to start the process.

## THE FOUNDATION

Contributors to this first issue of *GHHS* engage with creative and political agency in ways that seek to build community across ethnonationalist, nationalist and digital divides. For example, in the first 'Show & Prove' section, Christopher Vito illustrates how barbershops and hip hop culture are inextricably linked in the Filipino-American community in San Diego. Here, we do not see single-issue politics at play, but a wide-ranging and inclusive solidarity and an intersectional practice. The barber shop upon which Vito focuses embraces the LGBTQ community which it sees as integral to the cut (pun intended). In essence, at the nexus of hip hop and barber culture, this FilAm community expresses a solidarity in style and substance with its African American brothers and sisters – the space it opens up is a commons, a resource that is common to all for sharing and through which it constitutes a sense of community in a national context that continues to be homophobic, transphobic, misogynist and racist.

Likewise, in this issue's first article, Jaspal Naveel Singh and Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan's work on DIY studios in South Delhi, India, points to the kinds

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of creative and political agency that subjects from the Global South are able to exercise. Through a collaborative ethnographic investigation, they demonstrate with participant observers' nuance the contrasting and competing values that feature in hip hop: on the one hand, the individualist hustle and, on the other hand, collectivity through which knowledge, lyrical and production skills are transferred in a rhizomatic manner. To echo Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire*, the very means that assist Empire to expand its ideological and commercial reach can be used to challenge it (Hardt and Negri 2000; Haupt 2008). In this landmark contribution to hip hop studies on the subcontinent hip hop is – in the Gramscian sense – a cultural battleground, a 'war of position' (Lipsitz 1994).

In her article centring on Houston rapper Megan Thee Stallion, Kyesha Jennings makes a crucial contribution to this issue by drawing attention to the ways in which women are able to employ user-generated content and social media platforms to challenge hegemonic gender scripts in hip hop, thereby exercising agency in the ways in which they represent themselves. In this regard, she offers the concept of:

a digital hip-hop feminist sensibility (DHHFS) [...] as an encouragement towards a particular epistemology of self that is performed in digital spaces and embodies a hip-hop feminist ethos where participants co-opt pleasure politics for the purposes of celebrating behavior that are often demeaned by broader culture.

(49)

In drawing critical attention to the ways in which women in hip hop are represented, she not only clears a space for women to represent themselves on their own terms, she also pushes for a commons that is truly common, that is truly diverse and rich. In essence, Jennings presents a new method for making sense of the ways in which not only artists, but their fans take up their work and use social media to represent themselves on their own terms – beyond the confines of hegemonic race and gender ideologies.

In this regard, Dave Hook – the scholar and MC known as Solareye – unpacks the place of hypermasculinity in hip hop culture through an autoethnographic and uniquely autoanalytical musical and lyrical investigation of his own personal and artistic maturation process. Focusing on his own 'growing up' *in and through* hip hop in Scotland, he models performative ways forward for young men in the culture whose toxicities marginalize women, alienate companions and also do themselves a disservice. With searing analytical insights that only an artist and trained analyst could offer, Hook narrates some of his own grown-ass structural poetic devices and musical settings, showing a way forward from macho and self-destructive hip hop infantilism to third eye maturity. As De La's Posdnous might put it, 'fuck being hard, Solareye is complicated!'

This focus on hip hop's masculinities are further explored by Alexandra Boutros in her unpacking the politics of authenticity via a highly nuanced intersectional analysis of the ways in which Drake both is represented and represents himself. Here, some of the complexities and contradictions relating to his class position (started from which 'bottom?'), his bi-racial identity (and complicated claims to blackness) and the presentation of his masculinity (as a 'nice guy' who nonetheless fails to do right by women) is tied to perceptions of race and his middle class upbringing and identity as Canadian (as opposed

to being a US artist). The article allows us to reflect on the extent to which blackness and class identities potentially reinforce essentialist thinking about race and gender.

Alex de Lacey rounds out this inaugural collection of *GHHS* articles with an investigation into the rise of Australian grime – an iconically British break-beat culture. De Lacey makes the case for the claim that Australians have localized the genre after its uptake via social media platforms, such as YouTube, and the migrations of British artists to Australia. The account of grime in the United Kingdom and Australia as well as lad rap allows us to think critically about the ways in which neo-liberal economics shaped the lived experiences of working class subjects, be it in Australia or the United Kingdom – a reality not unlike that of US hip hop heads negotiating systemic racism during the ascendancy of Reaganomics in the 1980s. Here, de Lacey points to specificities and idiosyncrasies of Australian grime to counter arguments about cultural imperialism, thereby making the case for creative agency as well as transnational resonances and common struggles.

In our first 'In the Cipher' section, Elloit Cardozo's interview with Smokey the Ghost from Bangalore, India explores the politics of authenticity in Indian hip hop. The interview offers another chance to understand the fast-changing terrain of South Asian hip hop and allows us to think about some of the commonalities faced by hip hop artists globally. These include the tightrope that artists walk between developing their artistic voice, on the one hand, and seeking external validation from the market on the other hand. Here – as in the work by Singh and Dattatreya, Boutros, DeLacey, Hook and Jennings – we see a foundational tension between the will of hip hop heads to use the art form to self-actualize and exercise creative and political agency on one end, and the neo-liberal political economy in which hip hop, in its commodity form, operates on the other end. As is the case with Jennings's exploration of black women's agency on social media or Australian grime artists' ability to develop an art form that both pays homage to UK grime and find their own voice, Smokey the Ghost's insights point to the pitfalls that precondition Indian artists' ability to exercise agency and maintain their artistic integrity at the same time.

In our first 'Dive in the Archive' section, curator of rare books and manuscripts at Cornell University Library, Katherine Reagan, introduces us to the fast-growing field of hip hop archives and takes us deep into the Cornell Hip Hop Collection. Detailing the emergence of such archives and the growing need for such collections to support and augment university curricula, Reagan tracks the early players that saw the value of hip hop photographs and material artefacts. As she correctly notes, these collections help nuance often oversimplified stories and will provide much needed evidence for scholars to better understand the roots and 'evolution' (to cite one hugely popular contemporary rendering) of hip hop culture and all its world-changing cultural, ideological, spiritual, commercial and political valences.

Our Book Reviews editors have compiled a wonderfully diverse snapshot of recent hip hop scholarship. Ranging from close musicological and visual analyses to legal and diplomatic ramifications of the culture, these four books – while just a small sampling – show the breadth of hip hop scholarship in terms of global significance and interdisciplinary relevance. Murray Forman offers a well-informed perspective on Mark Katz's new book *Build*, about his complex work as Director of the US State Department's globe-trotting hip hop ambassadors programme, Next Level. Sina Nitzsche contributes an insightful

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look into the first compendium of graffiti studies in her review of the *Routledge Companion of Graffiti and Street Art* – an understudied element of the culture that *GHHS* will work to give a more appropriate platform. In his review of Erik Nielson and Andrea L. Dennis's *Rap on Trial*, Salman Rana tackles some of the most important issues confronting the future of hip hop and/as racial profiling in this #BlackLivesMatter moment. Taking us back a few years to consider an important 2015 text, in her review of Loren Kajikawa's *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*, Tamar Faber illustrates the importance of musical sound in analyses of hip hop music and considers the impact of our framing work as scholars.

Similarly, our Media & Event Reviews Editors have served up an artistically satisfying range of pieces. Indeed, they have stretched the remit of this section to recognize that just as hip hop scholarship lives not only in books, hip hop lives not only on wax and online, but in our memories, in the popular press, in recording studios and in the global 'hoods that give the culture its vital essence. Just as the Book Reviews section spans more years than the standard academic journal, *GHHS*'s first review starts with a review of 2016's landmark *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* in the form of a review-essay-slash-love-letter to a crew that might be as close as we can get to the heart of hip hop – A Tribe Called Quest. That beautifully rendered piece is followed by an equally evocative piece by Regina N. Bradley that refigures the album review format, instead offering something of a *preview* of the album *Fire in Little Africa* through fieldwork in a Tulsa recording studio that is haunted by living histories of racial terror – a terror that these Oklahoma artists look to exorcise. Fittingly, *GHHS* 1.1 ends on the other side of the globe with Warrick Moses's nuanced historical and postcolonial analysis of an anticolonial album by Cape Town's YoungstaCPT, offering a nuanced account of how gangsta stylings often belie the truly disruptive and gruelling politically conscious work of emancipation undertaken by hip hop artists around the world – indeed, 'things take time'.

Our thanks to all of the authors for bringing such a satisfying diversity to this first issue. We look forward to working with you all in the future. What's more, we look forward to building our global networks of hip hop knowledge production through you and the authors yet to be published in *GHHS*. If you are reading this, please know that your voice is needed for this journal to be a success. Please submit to calls on the website or e-mail the coordinating editors or section editors with ideas. Indeed, a special shout out goes to our Editorial Board and section editors for bringing *GHHS* 1.1 together during this difficult time. On the Editorial Board, we need to thank Murray Forman, Sina Nitzsche, Karim Hammou and Bettina Love; thanks to Kendra Salois and Quentin Williams, our Book Reviews Editors; to Justin D. Burton and Monique Charles, our Media & Event Reviews Editors; to Amy Coddington and Mark V. Campbell, our 'Dive in the Archive' Editors; and to Adam 'Project Cee' de Paor-Evans, our 'In the Cipher' Editor.

## ENTER THE CIPHER

Depending on which theoretical toolkit you prefer, you might say that *GHHS* is a decolonial project that is meant to implode the centre/margin periphery while trying to leverage off the resources that have been accumulated by the Global North both during the colonial era and with the onset of neo-liberal economics and the university's complicity in an unfair and fraught knowledge trade. The journal's ability to flip these scripts will depend on the uptake of

this platform by authors, peer-reviewers (thanks to all of you on our Advisory Board and beyond) and readers looking to expand their knowledge of hip hop in and beyond the United States. The journal is premised on the Editorial Team's dedication to presenting research that is generated from the ground up on terms laid down by participants who have historically been at the margins of scholarly knowledge production. To be sure, this journal's adherence to the English language hegemony is part of that too-often unidirectional and asymmetrical flow of scholarly knowledge. But, as we suggest, this journal aims to always be a work in progress, looking not to codify but always to press onward. As such, we look forward to publishing bi- and multi-lingual issues and special themed issues in the future. What else? Let us know.

The success of this journal will also depend on the extent to which it will pursue principles of open scholarship in order to ensure the widest dissemination of knowledge possible to address disparities in knowledge production. In order for *GHHS* to become a true cipher, it aims to contribute to a knowledge commons beyond the 'ivory tower' to benefit publics beyond scholarly contexts, beyond the North/South divide, beyond race/gender/class divides, beyond the digital divide. Please join us and help us make this happen. Again, we encourage ideas to make *GHHS* better – to show and prove. Let's grow this. Help us build a global hip hop knowledge commons. Enter the cipher...

Peace,  
Adam and Griff

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