Between New York and Paris:
Hip Hop and the Transnational Politics of Race, Culture, and Citizenship

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2012
ABSTRACT

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Forging connections across the fields of American, French, and African diaspora history, this dissertation examines the emergence of the Hip Hop cultural movement in New York City's African American and Latino neighborhoods in the 1970s and its globalization to a postcolonial France. Drawing on previously untapped archival sources in the U.S. and France, as well as dozens of original, in-depth oral histories with key figures (including musicians, journalists, dancers, visual artists, deejays, and businesspeople), *Between New York and Paris* uncovers the roots and routes of this trans-Atlantic history. Organized around a series of transnational encounters, the study traces how Hip Hop's various cultural practices—rapping, deejaying, graffiti, breakdancing—traveled first from New York's outer boroughs to the downtown Manhattan arts scene at the turn of the 1980s, and then spread to and became rooted in the disproportionately immigrant, working-class suburbs of France.

This dissertation argues that the globalization of this (African)American cultural movement radically altered the terrain on which postcolonial Afro-French youth's national and diasporic membership was lived, contested, policed, and performed. Over the course of the last quarter of the twentieth century, as France was becoming home to the largest African-descended population in Europe as well as the second largest market for the production and consumption of Rap music in the world (behind only the United States),
Hip Hop fostered a deep, transnational engagement—both by the movement's adherents and its critics—with the meanings of (African)Americanness and Frenchness, of citizenship and belonging, and of diaspora and democracy.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is about—and also the product of—meaningful trans-Atlantic collaboration. Innumerable people in France and the United States gave generously of their time, shared their histories, and provided encouragement and critical feedback, thereby making this project possible. I take great pleasure in being able to acknowledge them here, as only one small expression of my profound debt of gratitude. Of course, all shortcomings of this work are my own.

As supervisor of my dissertation, Professor Eric Foner—more than any other person—helped shepherd the project to completion. Over the course of my graduate career, I learned a great deal from him about what it means to be a historian and dedicated teacher. For this (and much more), I am deeply grateful. My dissertation committee members—Professors Lisa Tiersten, Mamadou Diouf, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Lynn Garafola—are also due immeasurable thanks for agreeing to oversee this project and providing such insightful feedback. Many other Columbia faculty members were of help at key moments throughout the process, but especially: Professors Elizabeth Blackmar, Mary Marshall Clarke, Victoria de Grazia, Ronald Grele, Kenneth Jackson, Samuel Roberts, and the late Manning Marable. My fellow Columbia PhD students were a source of support and are deserving of many thanks: Kellie Carter-Jackson, Jenna Alden, Amy Offner, Megan Doherty, Valerie Paley, Ansley Erickson, Elizabeth Hinton, Megan French, Zaheer Ali, Russell Rickford, Amanda Alexander, Kevin Etienne-Cummings, and the rest of the BHM crew. Crucial assistance also came from administrators Dean Beatrice Terrien-Somerville, Sharon Gamble, and Sharee Nash.
In many ways, this project first took on life in the 4th floor "Afro-American Seminar Room" in Van Pelt-Dietrich Library at the University of Pennsylvania, where as an undergraduate I encountered the Philly Marvelous incarnate (North Philly, to be exact): James G. Spady. From our very first conversations, the seeds for this project (and many others) were already being planted. Since then, he has been a steadfast intellectual comrade. No truer model exists of an engaged scholar, critic, and thinker. Always on point, always on time. Infinite respect! H. Samy Alim has also been a constant source of support and inspiration, first in pushing forward the work that Spady laid out, and then in trailblazing new ground all his own. Thanks for being a sounding board for many of the ideas herein, a true supporter, and a N.A.N. like no other! Dave White is also owed many, many thanks for his genuine camaraderie, visual artistic genius, and endless Philly hospitality. Much props and thanks are due all the rest of the Umum crew, in Philly and across the globe.

Also in Philadelphia was a community of scholars that—in one way or another and at one time or another—supported, inspired, and encouraged my work. At the University of Pennsylvania was: Professors Camille Z. Charles, Lee Cassanelli, Guthrie Ramsey, Tukufu Zuberi, and Lydie Moudileno. And the staff and fellow students of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) program deserve special note for having made doctoral studies a viable pursuit: Vice Provost Valarie Swain-Cade McCoullum, Dr. Herman Beavers, Pat Ravenell, Susan Peterson-Pace (RIP), Madeleine Lopez, Chad Williams, Erica Armstrong Dunbar, and Elizabeth Todd-Breland. Also while an undergraduate (and nearly every year since then), I participated in Syracuse University's
"Paris Noir: Literature, Art, and Contemporary Life in Diaspora" summer program (first as student, then as teacher). Professor Janis Mayes has been the intellectual force behind that program, and in addition, an unwavering supporter of my work. Like the many other students who have been fortunate enough to participate in the discussions over which she has held court at the historic Café de Flore, I am forever grateful for her commitment to engaging and making sense of the "Paris Noir" world.

The staff of many libraries and archives were indispensable to this dissertation, and they are due many thanks: Columbia University Libraries, New York University Libraries, the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, Northeastern University Libraries, the Bibliothèque de Sciences-Po, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Ecomusée du Val de Bièvre, the Musée Bossuet de Meaux, the Comité d'Histoire du Ministère de la Culture, the Centre des Archives Contemporaines in Fontainebleau, the Musée Social in Paris, the Archives of Génériques, les Archives Municipales de Saint-Ouen, and the Archives de l'Université de Paris VIII-Saint-Denis. My research in these archives and libraries was made possible by support from the Social Science Research Council, Mellon Mays Fellowship Program, Columbia University's Department of History and Office of Minority Affairs, the Centre des Amériques at Sciences Po (the Institut d'Études Politiques), the Northeast Consortium for Faculty Diversity, and Northeastern University. While a Visiting Dissertation Scholar at Sciences Po, I benefited from Professor Emmanuelle Loyer's guidance, and while at Northeastern University, Professors Laura Frader, Emmett Price III, and Murray Forman were generous colleagues.
In France, but especially in Paris and Seine-Saint-Denis, so many people lent their support and humbly shared their stories. They are the subjects of this history, but also the active movers and shakers/shapers of our contemporary world. And although there are simply too many to name, some deserve special recognition: Solo (Souleymane Dicko), DJ Dee Nasty (Daniel Bigeault), Bernard Zekri, Sidney Duteil, Sophie Bramly, Laurence Toutou, Bernard Loupias, Elisabeth D. Inandiak, DJ Chabin, Daniel Fourneuf, Lucien "Papalu," Franck II Louise (Franck Begué), Olivier Cachin, DJ Fab, Awer (RIP), Teddy Esposito, SEAR (Stéphane Begoc), TEX (Christophe Lacroix), Antoine "Wave" Garnier (RIP), Hamé of La Rumeur, and David Dufresne. In New York, Afrika Bambaataa, Fab Five Freddy, Futura 2000, Michael Holman, and many others shared their recollections of the early days of Hip Hop and of the cultural movement's first moments overseas. They have my utmost respect and gratitude.

Finally, none of this would have been possible without the support of family and friends. I owe everything to my grandparents, parents, sister, and extended family, who helped shape my view of the world, my commitment to education and social justice, and my belief in the power of the arts. Thank you all for your unconditional love and support. My friends have been an equally important sustaining force throughout what has seemed (to both me and them) a never-ending journey. Now that the end is here, I must thank: Lionel Anderson, Phil Beasley-Murray, Alex Breland, cousin Fayçal Dib, Robeson Taj Frazier, Peter Hopkins, Thierry Kehou, Cristen Mills, Arinze Onugha, Murtala Sacko, Maboula Soumahoro, Karen Thornton, and last, but certainly not least, Mirenda Watkins.
Introduction
The Roots and Routes of Global Hip Hop
"It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you."1

– James Baldwin, in "The American Dream and the American Negro"

"Here [in France], society is made so you fit into one space. You cannot really create a space for yourself. That's what I did with Hip Hop. But before there was any Hip Hop, for me, growing up, it was like, 'Yo, what the heck am I gonna do in this world? Because what they're offering me is either to be a streetsweeper or to be a mechanic or being a plumber, and I have better things to offer than just that.' But [France] made it so that me, my [Malian] parents, or anybody like me or my parents, understands that we have to stay in that little gap that was made for us... That's what I felt, really. And it was hard to deal with. But [in a way], Hip Hop came and saved me."2

– Souleymane Dicko a.k.a. "Solo," pioneer Afro-French Hip Hop dancer and founder of the seminal French rap group Assassin

Speaking to a university-wide assembly at Atlanta University in 1938, distinguished African American intellectual Mercer Cook offered some reflections on France's "race question" after having just returned from one of his many trips there. He explained, "The younger generation in France is becoming increasingly race conscious. Difficult economic conditions and more frequent literary and personal contacts with American Negroes are giving the younger group a different view on the race problem. It is interesting to hear some of them recite—in English which sounds much like French—verses by Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown and Richard Wright... These younger Negroes


are developing a solidarity unknown to their elders." Cook had not only witnessed first-hand but also participated in these very cultural exchanges between African Americans and Afro-French in the early and middle part of the twentieth century. These encounters played a critical role in the building of Afrodiasporic linkages across the Atlantic, forming part of a flourishing "black internationalism" that stretched across decades.

A half-century later—in the mid- to late-1980s—Mercer Cook's analysis of French racial dynamics rang even truer, except that Afro-French youth were no longer reciting Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown and Richard Wright, but instead, the verses of African American Hip Hop artists like Public Enemy, Rakim, and X-Clan. Hip Hop began arriving in France just as the first wave of France's post-colonial minority youth populations began to make public demands for equal rights and recognition. Unlike the small, largely well-

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educated Afro-French minority that was the core of the Négritude movement of the 1930s, Afro-French populations numbered in the hundreds of thousands by the time of Hip Hop's arrival, and they were disproportionately born and raised in the segregated, working-class suburbs of the metropole. Coming of age together in communities across France, children and grandchildren of former colonial subjects (from places as diverse as Mali, Martinique, Algeria, and Senegal) faced the troubling dilemma of a second-class citizenship in which they were theoretically equal before the law with every other French person, but in reality were second-class citizens by nearly every index of social mobility, life chances, and economic and educational opportunity. In this context, where the predominant, universalist understandings of French citizenship also precluded all public expression of group ties except to that of the nation, Hip Hop provided postcolonial youth with a transnational frame for cultural and political engagement. Afro-French youth's embrace of

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6 See, for example: the massive 1983 "March for Equality and Against Racism" ("Marche Pour L'Égalité et Contre le Racisme"), the widely publicized political debates about the "integration" of second-generation post-colonial immigrant youth, and the emergence of a cadre of explicitly "post-colonial" writers and intellectuals.

7 For population numbers, see: Michael Alexander, *Cities and Labour Immigration* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 121-125.

this (African)American cultural movement disrupted the historically exclusionary French conception of national membership that, as Joan Scott has argued, presupposes assimilation to a singular, mythic "French" culture.10

* * * *

The Hip Hop cultural movement, a movement that emerged in the early- to mid-1970s in New York City, had become global in only a decade’s time. While some of the first Hip Hop cultural expressions could be seen in parks, in community centers, and emblazoned on the sides of subway cars throughout the five boroughs in 1974,11 by 1984


French television was proclaiming: "Hip Hop is arriving from New York, a movement born in the street... It's taking off in France: in the subway, in the parking lots. Hip Hop is everywhere!"12 Indeed, within another decade’s time, youth in France had created their own "French" iteration of the cultural idiom, and the country emerged as the second largest market in the world for the production and consumption of Hip Hop, behind only the United States.13

The rich scholarly literature on the globalization of American culture—and especially the literature on the impact of American culture in Europe—has failed to pay sufficient attention to the centrality of African Americans and African American culture to these processes (in one case, even characterizing these transnational relations as forming a "White Atlantic").14 The one exception has been studies of Jazz music's reception in France.15 But even those studies which have focused on African Americans and African American culture, have done so at the expense of Afro-Europeans in general and Afro-French in particular, at least in the post-World War II period (when there actually began to

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12 Narrator from the debut episode of the world's first television show about Hip Hop and which was created, produced and broadcast in France, entitled "H.I.P. H.O.P." Aired on 14 January 1984. TF1. L'INA (L'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel). Translated from the French.


be a significant population of Afro-descendants in the French metropole). As a result, as Tyler Stovall has noted, there is a historiographical and analytical void where the history of the interrelationships between African Americans and Afro-French is concerned. No work to date has substantively engaged—and certainly not from a transnational perspective—the intersections of African American and Afro-French social, cultural, and political history in the second-half of the twentieth century.

At the same time, despite a growing body of (largely anthropological and sociological) work on "global Hip Hop," no attempt has been made to actually trace how Hip Hop became global. Instead, these studies have taken the foreign Hip Hop scenes as their points of departure. In broadening our historical scope to include an examination of

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Hip Hop's history in the U.S. (particularly its spread from New York's outer boroughs to the downtown Manhattan arts scene), we are able to follow how Hip Hop comes to be understood and is exported abroad, just as we can track the very routes of its transnational circulation (e.g. through concert tours, human travel/interaction, film and television, and sound recordings). Retracing the roots and routes of this trans-Atlantic Hip Hop history, this study forges connections across the fields of American, French, and African Diaspora history by drawing on a wide range of previously untapped archival collections in both the U.S. and France, as well as dozens of original, in-depth oral histories with key figures (including musicians, journalists, dancers, visual artists, deejays, and businesspeople), sound and video recordings, and an array of periodicals (both French and American).
Chapter 1
Uptown Comes Downtown, Paris Comes to New York
Elisabeth Danière arrived in New York City for only the second time in March of 1981. Unlike during her visit of several years prior, she was no longer a student, but still young enough to be one. At twenty-one years old and as one of the youngest practicing journalists in France, Danière had been sent there by Jean-François Bizot, the French countercultural guru and editor of *Actuel* magazine. He had given her an important assignment: to explore the cultural world of Black youth in New York City in the new post-Black Power, Reaganite era. She arrived to discover a city still reeling from the economic crises of the 1970s, with widespread deindustrialization, residential racial segregation, and a seemingly uninspired music and arts scene. But Danière eventually stumbled upon a unique development in the city's otherwise segregated nightlife: the emergence of a vibrant cultural movement—Hip Hop—among African Americans and Latinos of the outer boroughs that was just beginning to penetrate the largely white downtown Manhattan arts scene. In her short time in New York, she met, interviewed, and spent time with graffiti artist Fab Five Freddy and some of the city's other talented Hip Hop artists, a feat that few American journalists could claim at that time. Her impressions

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19 Elisabeth Danière, video interview with author (Internet/Skype), 24 and 25 June 2012.

20 On Jean-François Bizot and his importance, see: Chris Warne, "Bringing Counterculture to France: *Actuel* Magazine and the Legacy of May '68," *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 15, no. 3 (August 2007), 309-324.

of this cultural movement and the surrounding city became the subject of one of the first substantive articles in any language about the burgeoning Hip Hop scene. It appeared in *Actuel* magazine under the title, "Good Evening, White People! Rock is Finished! Rap Is Here!"\(^{22}\)

Elisabeth Danière both wrote about and became part of a unique moment in the history of Hip Hop. Although the constituent elements of the cultural movement—including rapping, deejaying, graffiti, and various dance forms—emerged at the turn of the 1970s, they remained largely unknown to the vast majority of Americans, and even New Yorkers, since the young people practicing these forms were in the racially and spatially segregated corners of the city, far from the view of the mainstream media and entertainment industries. However, by the turn of the 1980s, Hip Hop began to make its way into public consciousness, as small Black-owned record labels released some of the very first Rap records, journalists for progressive local newspapers like *The Village Voice* and *The East Village Eye* began publishing stories about graffiti and breakdancing, and graffiti began to be noticed by the larger art world. Not long after her arrival from France, as Danière discovered this vibrant movement, she documented its slow but steady arrival onto the downtown Manhattan arts scene. The resulting unprecedented articles in *Actuel* played a critical role in the globalization of Hip Hop, as enthusiasts across France learned of the social and cultural background of a music they enjoyed but about which they still knew very little.

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Danière was only one among a growing community of French travelers and expatriates who spent time, lived in, documented, analyzed, invigorated, and exported the vibrant cultural life of New York City in the 1970s and early 1980s. They included photographers, journalists, musicians, entrepreneurs, fashion designers, and intellectuals, such as Bernard Zekri, Sophie Bramly, Serge Bramly, Maripol, Jean Karakos, Laurence Touitou, Jean Touitou, Nathalie Le Guaye, Emmanuel de Buretel, Bettina Rheims, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Morali, Martine Barrat, Marc Cerrone, and many others. A few of them—Elisabeth Danière included—became central to Hip Hop's globalization, as they provided some of its first foreign media coverage, recorded and released some of the early Rap records, and organized the first international Hip Hop concert tour. This remarkable convergence—of Hip Hop's arrival onto the downtown Manhattan arts scene from the outer boroughs, with a stream of temporary French visitors to New York City—resulted in a growing international awareness of Hip Hop. By the end of 1982, Hip Hop was no longer merely a hyperlocal phenomenon unique to New York neighborhoods. It was slowly being introduced to a global audience.

As central as this French cohort was to Hip Hop's initial globalization, they remain absent from the historiography of Hip Hop and even from the large body of literature on what scholars have termed 'global hip hop.' Hip Hop historiography, like much American historical scholarship, has been shaped by what Thomas Bender describes as the "unitary

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logic of national history." This has resulted in a historiography that both circumscribes and reifies Hip Hop as solely an American story, thereby rendering invisible the critical role of this French cadre (and other non-Americans), despite abundant evidence to the contrary. This chapter traces not only how Hip Hop first spread from the margins to the center of the New York arts worlds, but also demonstrates the centrality of French participants in Hip Hop's early globalization. This process was not the product—in both senses of the word—of a purely American commercial endeavor (as most scholars have posited), but instead the outcome of meaningful collaborations between French arts enthusiasts, aspiring Hip Hop artists, and a broader network of transnationally-linked cultural and political circles.

**And Then There Was "Hip Hop"**

Bronx resident Joseph Saddler vividly recalled a new music scene that was developing in his neighborhood in the early 1970s, just as he reached adolescence: "There was this guy Clive Campbell, who went by the name of Kool Herc, that used to play music. And the word went around—just word of mouth—that this guy was coming out in the park, that you had to go see this guy. This guy would bring his setup outside to what was called a block party. And he'd have these huge speakers, this huge, huge setup. And he'd be playing this particular type of music that they weren't playing on the radio."25

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Saddler soon followed suit, building his own sound system, developing his DJ skills, and eventually taking on the name "Grandmaster Flash." Saddler and his peers were at the origins of a cultural development unique to African American neighborhoods of the Bronx, Harlem, Queens, and Brooklyn in the 1970s. They would organize block parties that came to dominate public (cultural and physical) space. Many public housing complexes and street blocks had multiple DJ crews who were known, at any one time, to set up their equipment on the street corner, in a park, a public school auditorium, or in a community center and play music. But a small wave of young DJs began using new techniques and playing a wider array of music that included Funk, Soul, Latin Jazz, and Rock. Instead of playing entire songs, these DJs would play only particular sections of songs that they called "the get down part," "the breakdown," and eventually just the "break." These "breaks" were the parts of the songs that were most percussive and that contained the most danceable beats, often times (but not always) occupying the bridge section of the song structure. Mixing from one record to next, or sometimes repeating the very same "break" beat continuously using two turntables side by side, these DJs provided the context for the development of new dance forms, the practitioners of which they called "breakers," "break boys/girls," or "b-boys/girls." These dancers had several styles that included rocking or

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uprocking (vertical "breaking"), floor moves (horizontal "breaking"), and recombinations of popular social dances such as the Hustle and the Bus Stop.\textsuperscript{27}

As the young DJs played their music, they would often shout simple phrases to the crowd, like "A one-two, y'all," or "Yes, yes y'all,"\textsuperscript{28} which eventually evolved into rhymed exclamations. This style was not unlike that of some of the contemporary Black radio disc jockeys of an older generation such as Jocko Henderson, Frankie Crocker, and Wolfman Jack who introduced themselves and the songs they were playing with rhyming phrases. Anthropologist John Szwed notes that these disc jockeys' rhyming "routines became so popular that they were used as greetings on the street:

\begin{verbatim}
Be, bebop
This is your jock
Back on the scene
With a record machine
 Saying 'Hoo-popsie-doo'
How do you do?\textsuperscript{29}
\end{verbatim}

In time, the young street and club DJs, such as Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash, passed on this responsibility by appointing an MC (Master of Ceremonies) to shout rhyming

\begin{verbatim}
Be, bebop
This is your jock
Back on the scene
With a record machine
 Saying 'Hoo-popsie-doo'
How do you do?\textsuperscript{29}
\end{verbatim}


phrases intermittently over the music being played. As these MCs developed their style, what began as short rhymes turned into extended rhymed narratives, lasting many minutes and aligning rhythmically with the beat of the playing music. This style of rhyming became known as "rapping," and thus served as the verbal foundation for rap music.

Many (although by no means all) of these same youth who were DJing, breakdancing, and more generally taking part in this cultural community, had also created a "new expressive practice... built around spectacularly calligraphied names and initials—signatures—written with spray paint and ink markers on the public walls and subways."30 Although the culture-creators themselves referred to the practice as "writing," the wider public labeled it "graffiti," "since it resembled the age-old practice."31 In everyday terms, these various cultural practices—graffiti, breakdancing, deejaying, rapping—did not necessarily form an organic, cohesive movement of any kind. The dancing, deejaying, and rapping were tied together by often occurring in the same physical and cultural spaces, in a kind of symbiotic relationship with one another (since the dancers relied on the deejays for the music, and the deejays relied on the rappers as entertaining accompaniment and for helping animate the crowd). Graffiti, although also practiced by some of these same deejays, dancers, and rappers, occurred in a fundamentally separate cultural space, whether in the dead of night in subway train yards, on subway trains and in subway stations, or on public walls outdoors in plain view.


31 Ibid., 3.
Not until the turn of the 1980s did the word "Hip Hop" begin to be used to describe this collection of cultural practices. As an umbrella term, "Hip Hop" was a way of explaining and schematizing the many related elements of the culture, especially as practitioners sought to describe their art to the outside world and as journalists discovered these phenomena. In this context, with the arrival of these cultural practices onto the downtown Manhattan arts scenes, "Hip Hop" eventually became the chosen designation for the youth cultural movement from uptown and the outer boroughs. A former Black Spades gang member-turned-deejay named Afrika Bambaataa who founded the Zulu Nation—a Hip Hop-centered organization established to re-direct the energies of the gang scene toward creative expression—began calling these various cultural practices "Hip Hop," borrowing the term from such DJs as Love Bug Starski and DJ Hollywood who were known to shout phrases like "and the hip-hop, you don't stop!" to their dancing crowds.32 Hip Hop music was not recorded and released by an official record label until 1979 (although audio-cassettes of recorded performances had been circulating in a thriving, local market that straddled both the formal and informal economies).33 With the release of "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugar Hill Gang in the fall of 1979, recorded and distributed by Sugar Hill Records, rap music entered the global cultural economy on a mass scale. The record sold several million copies, hitting the charts in countries around the world and


finding an especially receptive market in Europe.\textsuperscript{34} Even as the song found success, the cultural movement of Hip Hop remained in the background, garnering almost no interest from the mainstream media.

The one element that had caught peoples' attention—and slowly but surely the attention of the fine art world—was graffiti. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, graffiti-influenced artists like Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Kenny Scharf were on the rise to fame. But to most New Yorkers, the graffiti scrawlings were a nuisance, in addition to being a prosecutable crime. The city spent millions of dollars each year in an attempt to clean the subway system and prevent further vandalism.\textsuperscript{35} Unlike rapping, deejaying, and breakdancing, which could easily be ignored, ubiquitous "tags" and floor-to-ceiling spraypainted murals on the sides of trains confronted millions of commuters each day. These were only the most visible signs of a citywide community of thousands of graffiti writers who sought to leave their mark on the city.\textsuperscript{36} In Brooklyn, one young graffiti writer sought to make his name not only from writing on the subway trains, but also by seeking wider recognition of graffiti as part of a long-standing art tradition that stretched back through the Pop Art movement, the Surrealists, the Dadaists, and beyond. Frederick Leroy

\textsuperscript{34} Although there were at least two prior Hip Hop records, including Sweet Tea's "Vicious Rap" and the Fatback Band's "King Tim III," the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" was the first to make any meaningful impact. See: Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, \textit{Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey} (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 237-241. For background on the success of "Rapper's Delight," see: Dan Charnas, \textit{The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-Hop} (New York: New American Library, 2010), 43.


Brathwaite had grand ambitions, but he was only a small-time writer whose "BULL 99" tag could be found in his Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood and around Coney Island, where he went to high school. As he slowly made inroads into the downtown Manhattan arts scene however, his outsized goals began to seem more plausible.

**Frederick Leroy Brathwaite and the Conquest of the Downtown Arts Scene**

Long before Brathwaite understood the richness of his family history, he was being molded by an intellectually and culturally fertile world. Growing up in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brathwaite was at the center of what, in the decades after World War II, had become home to one of the largest concentrations of African Americans anywhere in the United States. This one neighborhood produced its share of important black intellectuals, artists, and athletes. But it was a special circle of black Brooklynites, whose social club was locally known as "the Chessmen" (for their love of that game), that animated the lively household in which Fred Brathwaite was raised. He explained, "My earliest recollections were [of] jazz being played all the time in the house, along with fiery discussions about everything affecting us as [black] people." His father, Frederick Delacey Brathwaite, was an accountant, activist, and occasional concert

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37 According to Ruth Bryant Mitchell, during the 1950s, "the black population swelled Bedford-Stuyvesant's five square miles into the second largest concentration of blacks in the nation (second only to Chicago's South Side)." See: Ruth Bryant Mitchell, "Changes in Bedford-Stuyvesant," *The Crisis* (January 1977), 12.


39 Fred Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with Willard Jenkins, 2011.
promoter, whose close friends included jazz drummers Max Roach and Willie Jones, jazz pianist Randy Weston, visual artist Jimmy Gittens, semi-pro basketball player Lefty Morris, and jazz enthusiast, photographer, and nightclub MC Jimmy Morton, among others.\textsuperscript{40} Second-generation Garveyite Randy Weston once described Brathwaite as their circle's "international advisor," and as someone "who was always dapper and quick to inform us about things like Mao's philosophies."\textsuperscript{41} The global perspective and sharp sense of style were both qualities that Fred Leroy inherited from his father.

But these qualities extended further back in the Brathwaite family line. Fred Leroy's grandfather, Frederick Theopholis Brathwaite, knew the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood before it became "the heart of the Central Brooklyn ghetto and the borough's largest neighborhood."\textsuperscript{42} As a Barbadian immigrant in the early part of the twentieth century, Frederick Theopholis experienced the depth of the everyday and institutional racism faced by blacks in 1920s and '30s New York City.\textsuperscript{43} In time, he was moved to join the burgeoning organization of his fellow Caribbean immigrant Marcus Garvey: the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey's program of global black unity and economic self-sufficiency resonated with him, as it did with scores of others across North America.


America, South and Central America, the Caribbean, and beyond.\textsuperscript{44} Brathwaite rose through the ranks of the UNIA to become President of its East Brooklyn Division. Eventually, when Brooklyn Barbadians saw the need for a local, equitable, and community-run financial institution, they organized a Garvey-influenced organization, the Paragon Progressive Community Association, of which Brathwaite became a member as well.\textsuperscript{45} This Association spawned the Paragon Federal Credit Union, which grew to be an important black-owned and operated financial institution that provided loans to black families looking to purchase a home, as well as for their "educational, medical, hospital and dental expenses; purchases of fuel, clothing for the family, furniture, household appliances, automobiles, radios and a variety of other useful things necessary for their comfort and convenience."\textsuperscript{46} Although begun with an initial investment of only $225,


\textsuperscript{45} See his appearance to speak on behalf of the Paragon Progressive Federal Credit Union at a tribute for Harlem activist Richard B. Moore, alongside such figures as scholar/journalist J.A. Rogers, Cyril V. Briggs (founder of the African Blood Brotherhood), and many others, in: "Richard B. Moore Given Testimonial," \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, 18 September 1943, 9-A.

Paragon Federal Credit Union had 1,117 members and provided more than $200,000 in loans within four years. And when Paragon dissolved forty years later, it had more than $15 million in assets and had provided more than $75 million in loans to its clients. Frederick Theophilus Brathwaite had a long and distinguished career as a Brooklyn activist.

When the third Frederick in the family line—his grandson, Fred Leroy Brathwaite—was coming of age in late 1960s and '70s, the social and political context of Bedford-Stuyvesant had radically changed, even if the residential segregation and discrimination persisted. By the time he had finished high school, Fred Leroy Brathwaite had a restlessness about him, a sense that he had to make something of himself and his art. As he delved further into the practice of graffiti, his ambitions grew. While a student at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, Brathwaite began reading art history and found clear connections between the emergence and aesthetic of graffiti and that of other art movements of the twentieth century: "I was spending my nights in the library. I was blown away by the Dada movement which wanted to bring art to the streets and by the Futurists who were building sculptures that captured movement and which made noise." But, it was Andy Warhol and the Pop Art movement that—in Brathwaite's estimation—were graffiti's most immediate forbears. He explained, "I realized through studying art, looking at art books if you will, it clicked that there was a connection. I thought there was a


47 Wilder, A Covenant With Color, 183.

connection between Pop Art, in terms of their inspiration, and what was going on with some aspects of graffiti, particularly that we were influenced by comic books, popular culture, advertising, etc.\textsuperscript{49}

For Brathwaite, this graffiti scene—of which he had been a part and which was related to the cultural practices of rapping, deejaying, and breakdancing—was not unlike other art movements, and therefore deserved recognition as such. But this would be a hard sell, particularly since graffiti was so despised by the city government and transportation authorities, along with a large swath of the New York City public. Brathwaite was nonetheless convinced that graffiti and Hip Hop spoke powerfully to the realities of the day, much like the Pop artists in their time and the Punk movement of that moment in the mid- to late-1970s: "I liked the way that the Pop Artists, particularly Warhol, were really in sync with their time and involved with, you know, Velvet Underground, Lou Reed, the Rolling Stones. All this intermingling of culture, and you could see the results of a lot of that intermingling in the pop culture at large. So that registered [with me]. And I felt like, 'Wow, that was obviously a visual art that coincided with the sensibilities of that period.' And I felt like what was going on with [graffiti and Hip Hop] was something similar. At the same time, I began to see this Punk movement getting headlines with what the Sex Pistols were doing, The Clash, The Ramones in New York. You know, there was something that felt really interesting, radical, and subversive."\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{49} Fred Leroy Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with author, 23 November 2010, New York, NY.

\textsuperscript{50} Fred Leroy Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with author.
Unlike his father's and grandfather's generations, who were forced to build independent institutions in the face of a stubbornly racist society, Fred Leroy Brathwaite was convinced of the necessity and possibility of gaining recognition from historically myopic establishments. Even though Brathwaite was too young to have been deeply involved in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, his exposure to a rich activist tradition still left him with a movement-centered outlook. Emboldened by his newfound understanding of graffiti and Hip Hop as forming a kind of art movement, he set out on a journey to have his work validated by the historically insular and Eurocentric fine art world. First he would have to convince the de facto stewards of the downtown Manhattan arts scene, where Punk and New Wave were the reigning cultural phenomena. One such steward was also one of Brathwaite's muses while he a student at Medgar Evers College: Andy Warhol associate Glenn O'Brien, who first edited and then was a columnist for Warhol's Interview magazine. Brathwaite recalled: "I was reading Glenn O'Brien's column in Interview magazine where he would write about everything from Punk Rock to Reggae to Funk to Disco, very intelligently... He only showcased and highlighted music that he liked, which was, of course, a very interesting, broad spectrum. I was an avid reader and got the idea to reach out to him to invite him to be a guest on my college radio show. So when he came to Brooklyn, we interviewed him, talked about different Reggae at the time and stuff... And I talked about these other ideas that I was developing, like that graffiti art should be considered art. And he was like, 'Oh wow, that's interesting.' He told me that in a
few months he was going to start a public access TV show—which would later be called 'Glenn O'Brien's TV Party'—and he asked me to come down and be a part of that.”

As promised, Brathwaite was invited to take part in Glenn O'Brien's new venture, a public access TV show which aired once a week, beginning in December 1978, on Manhattan's Channel J from 12:30am to 1:30am. "Glenn O'Brien's TV Party" billed itself as "The World's Most Interesting Television Program" and was described by Soho News as "an unpremediated [sic.] assault of spontaneous outrage, indulgent tedium, purposeful mindlessness and mindful purposelessness." Brathwaite became a regular contributor to the zany show, both as a cameraman (since he was interested in learning the craft) and as an on-camera personality. This opened up new possibilities for him, as he was still on his mission to proselytize the notion that graffiti and Hip Hop represented a cultural movement all their own. O'Brien was at the very center of the downtown art and music scenes, and now Brathwaite was, too: "From being a part of that show, I began to meet a whole host of key players on the downtown scene: music, art, culture—mostly people that Glenn wrote about. So, that kind of plugged me in on the scene... So, I'm kind of plugged in with this major, New Wave intelligentsia crew... This is where I meet Jean-Michel Basquiat as well, and a whole host of all the hottest [groups, like] Talking Heads, The Clash, basically the who's who [of the scene].” These would eventually become Brathwaite's converts.

51 Fred Leroy Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with author.
53 Fred Leroy Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with author.
Within a matter of months of frequent trips to Manhattan from his parents' home in Bedford-Stuyvesant to be part of the downtown scene, Brathwaite was making headway in his mission. He had become a regular at all the most "happening" nightclubs and galleries—including the Mudd Club, Club 57, CBGB's, Max's Kansas City, the Peppermint Lounge, and more—and was close friends with Chris Stein and Debbie Harry (of the New Wave music group "Blondie"), Jean-Michel Basquiat (then still an aspiring artist most known for his "Samo" scrawlings), filmmaker Charlie Ahearn, and Keith Haring (still a student at the School of Visual Arts), among others. Being at the center of these art and music worlds, Brathwaite could really envision "what this [Hip Hop thing] could be" and

54 Photograph by author.
found among his new peers "a sensibility that might be open to my ideas that [graffiti and Hip Hop] could and should be looked at as art... I was a person that was trying to make these links and step into that lane." Opportunities slowly, but surely began presenting themselves to Brathwaite, and he made sure to seize every one.

After being featured in a *Village Voice* article about graffiti, Brathwaite was invited by Claudio Bruni to exhibit at La Galleria Medusa in Rome, the first such show of his career and the first international show to feature graffiti art. Shortly thereafter, Keith Haring organized a one-night art opening at one of their regular hangouts, Club 57, and asked Brathwaite if he could hire one of the uptown deejays he often spoke of for the special event. In what was the first downtown nightclub performance of a Bronx-based Hip Hop artist, Brathwaite invited deejay Afrika Bambaataa to spin records. Art dealer and gallery owner Tony Shafrazi, for whom Keith Haring worked while a student, fondly remembered the show: "One day, Keith handed me a little announcement of an exhibition he had put together. I thought, 'Here is this twenty-one-year-old coming to help me in my gallery, and at the same time organizing exhibitions of his own!' So, it was something called *The Club 57 Invitational*, which was an extraordinary assemblage of downtown art—as lively as it could be." This was followed by another show, this time co-curated by Brathwaite and fellow graffiti writer Leonard McGurr (who went by the name "Futura 2000") at the Mudd Club. Brathwaite described the impetus and vision for the exhibition:

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55 Fred Leroy Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with author.

56 Ibid.

"This was a show called 'Beyond Words.' It was [subtitled] 'Graffiti-based, -rooted, and -inspired work' to show that this expanding milieu which can include Keith Haring and other people that weren't really New York graffiti style, but they were connected with the sensibility. I wanted to show that this thing was broadening as I was making inroads and connections with other people. And then I got a whole host of rap artists to come and perform." The show included such artists and photographers as Kenny Scharf, Alan Vega, Henry Chalfant, Martha Cooper, John Sex, Keith Haring, Tseng Kwong Chi, Iggy Pop, Lady Pink, and many others, and began to bring wider attention to the graffiti and Hip Hop movements. In describing that historical moment and milieu, Brathwaite recalled meeting a French expatriate with whom he would ultimately help change the course of Hip Hop history: "Somewhere in that mix—working on developing myself as an artist, working on making connections, figuring out how to do this and do that, getting some additional exposure—in that whole mix of me now being plugged into that downtown scene, I meet Bernard Zekri... And he lives in this big apartment on 2nd Ave and like 12th Street, on the top floor... He was a New York representative of Actuel magazine, and whenever other writers—or, it seemed like a whole litany of French people that they were connected


59 See the original flyer for the exhibition that listed many of the participating artists, reproduced in: Cooper, Hip Hop Files, 144.
with—whenever these people would come, they would crash at a room in his house, a huge
apartment.”

**Actuel Magazine and Transatlantic Countercultural Connections**

Little did Brathwaite—and others—know, but Bernard Zekri was claiming to be a
New York representative of *Actuel* magazine for some time before he had an official
position. He was informally connected to the founder and some of the staff, but for Zekri,
claiming affiliation was a way to build credibility in the downtown New York scene. For
most New Yorkers at the time, the name *Actuel* didn't carry much weight, but the idea of a
hip, Paris-based French magazine did. And those New Yorkers who did know of *Actuel*
were likely in awe of its deep connections to American counterculture since the late 1960s.

*Actuel* magazine was a product of the transnational cultural ferment of that
tumultuous era, when African American activists and musicians found receptive audiences
across the world with penetrating calls for justice and captivating new sounds. The first
incarnation of *Actuel* was as an avant-garde jazz magazine founded in 1967 by intermittent
drummer and record producer Claude Delcloo. It was then bought by record store owner
and entrepreneur Jean Georgakarakos, who turned it into an organ of his newly established

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60 Fred Leroy Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with author.

Free Jazz record label, BYG (thereafter BYG-Actuel). Although Georgakarakos gained notoriety with his record label, which recorded many of the most musically and politically radical Jazz musicians (particularly during and after the July-August 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algeria), his magazine struggled. A year later, Jean-François Bizot, then a journalist for the French newspaper L'Express, bought the magazine from Georgakarakos for a symbolic one French franc, and transformed it into his vision of a globally-minded countercultural revue. Bizot had a voracious appetite for newspapers, magazines, music, and any other cultural or information source. On a trip to the United States while still with l'Express newspaper, he discovered and was inspired by a wide range of that era's movements and figures, including the Beat poets, Rock music, the Black Panther Party, the Women's Liberation Movement, the New Journalism, and especially the flourishing underground press. He was astounded by the sheer range of topics covered in these underground newspapers, as well as their avant-garde style of presentation. In his


eyes, they were advocating for an entirely new vision of the world and, at the very same time, documenting this world-in-the-making in serious, but creative ways.

Upon his return to France, Bizot launched *Actuel* magazine. He sought to make concrete connections with the 'underground' counterculture of the United States, and joined the burgeoning Underground Press Syndicate (UPS). The UPS allowed all member publications to freely reprint articles and political cartoons from one another, making for a meaningful exchange of information across the U.S. and Europe. Bizot recalled: "The Underground Press Syndicate helped us enormously: it was more than just a press agency. You could get a hold of first-hand eyewitness news there, often superbly written, as well as poems, manifestos, collages, the latest news on censorship, and an abundance of illustrations by underground giants such as Robert Crumb, Ron Cobb, Spain Rodriguez, Clay Wilson, Jay Lynch, Martin Sharp and Greg Irons. They were a big factor in the succes of *Actuel*."65 Staff writer Frédéric Joignot described the inspiration for, and content and character of *Actuel* magazine over the years: "Our models were the reporters of the American 'new journalism'—Hunter Thompson, Tom Wolfe, the investigators of *Rolling Stone* magazine that stayed on assignment for long periods—who wrote interminable articles, probed the witnesses of an event, collected more on-site anecdotes, told their story in the first person... It was about documenting our epoch in the moment, by highlighting the new personalities, whether heroes or scum, artists or scientific researchers, anonymous people or rising stars. To narrate without ideology, without that manipulation of

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commentary that characterized the French press at the time.” Bizot successfully ran the magazine from 1970 until 1975, when they decided to cease production. They relaunched it in 1979, with a renewed sense of purpose and a sharper, hipper, higher-quality magazine.

In the late 1970s in the French city of Dijon, Bernard Zekri, an Algerian-born, French-raised bookstore manager, had been successfully selling back issues of the first incarnation of Actuel magazine. In his store, Les Doigts Dans La Tête, one found not only countercultural revues like Actuel, but also the literature of the Situationists and other radical French movements, as well as the newest Free Jazz records coming from America. On a chance trip to New York, he met an aspiring rock band, whom he convinced he could manage and help find fame in France. When they decided to follow him back to France, he contacted the head of Actuel, eventually convincing Jean-François Bizot to feature them in an upcoming issue. Bizot then connected Zekri with the head of Celluloid Records and former Actuel owner, Jean Georgakarakos (by that point working under the shortened name, Karakos), who agreed to release a four-song EP for the group. Frustrated with the group's limited success however, Zekri again took off for New York, once and for all. Almost immediately, he fell into the thriving downtown arts scene.


Bernard Zekri moved in with Nathalie Le Guay, the French girlfriend of one the members of the Rock group he had been managing, who lived on Avenue D in the far East Village. Largely inadvertently, Zekri was joining a small but influential community of French expatriates who had taken up residence in Manhattan or who were frequent visitors. Over the course of the 1970s, the city became home to many thriving cultural scenes. Journalist Bernard Loupias and fellow French jazz enthusiasts were major followers and documenters of the Loft Jazz scene, as only one such example. He remembered the heavy concentration of performance spaces downtown: "I spent all my nights at Rivbea, on Greene Street. On the other side of the street, you had Rashied Ali, Rashied's Alley. On the same street, you had Joe Lee Wilson with his own place. I remember also, Barry Altschul was living on the first floor and giving drumming teaching to these students... From '72 to '79, every summer I went there... I knew the people [living] here [in Paris], like [American jazz musician] Noah Howard. He was not a very good player, but he was a good guy. And he introduced us to this whole scene, and we had badges to get in for free, take pictures, interviews." Loupias made these frequent trips with a group of French friends and colleagues which often included record producer Daniel Richard, photographer Thierry

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New York City drew journalists, photographers, aspiring fashion designers, musicians, and artists, not only from France, but from across the United States and the rest of the world. As dance historian Lynn Garafola has noted about New York City in the 1970s: "for artists and optimists, it was an international mecca, a hive of creativity."\(^{70}\) Jean-Michel Basquiat's biographer Phoebe Hoban described the scene: "A new Bohemia was in the making, a wild nexus of music, fashion, and art that created a distinctive downtown aesthetic. Punk and the subsequent New Wave movements that quickly took over were a welcome antidote to the sterile Conceptual and Mimimalist art that had numbed the arts scene during the post-Pop decade, boring both critics and collectors."\(^{71}\) And this new arts scene was expanding further south and east into the East Village and Lower East Side.\(^{72}\) *Art in America* crassly depicted it as a "unique blend of poverty, punk rock, drugs, arson, Hell's Angels, winos, prostitutes and dilapidated housing that adds up to an adventurous avant-garde setting of considerable cachet."\(^{73}\)

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\(^{73}\) Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick, "Slouching Toward Avenue D," *Art in America*, vol. 72, no. 6 (Summer 1984), 135.
Bernard Zekri found odd jobs to make ends meet in the neighborhood, but eventually worked his way up to Floor Manager in a posh wine bar just beneath famed art dealer Leo Castelli's Soho gallery. In a couple of months and with a bit more money in his pockets, Zekri was slowly becoming a regular in the most sought-after downtown nightclubs. Whereas he could barely gain entrance to most of the clubs when he first arrived in the city, he was now known by the doormen and many of the scene's key figures. Among these figures were a slew of New York-based, French expatriates: fashion designer Maripol, who was art director for Italian designer Fiorucci and was in the midst of filming *New York Beat*, a feature film that starred a young Jean-Michel Basquiat; aspiring fashion designer Jean Touitou and his younger architect sister, Laurence, were hired to design and launch French designer Agnes B.'s flagship New York store; Sophie Bramly, a young French photographer working as a correspondent for French photo agency Gamma and the French magazine, *Paris Match*; Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, journalist for the French newspaper *Libération*; and scores more. Another French expat who arrived in New York about six months after Zekri was Jean Karakos (he had permanently changed his last name from Georgakarakos by that time), the one-time owner of *Actuel* magazine, former *BYG* jazz record label owner, and founder of the relatively new record label *Celluloid* (which

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74 For background on Leo Castelli, see: Annie Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010).

75 The film, which was directed by Maripol's then-husband, Italian photographer Edo Bertoglio, and written and produced by Glenn O'Brien, was never released as intended because the financing fell through. Twenty years later, Maripol post-produced the footage, getting actor/performer Saul Williams to narrate (since the dialogue audio had been lost), and it was finally premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and released under the title, *Downtown 81* (Zietgeist Films, 2000). For more on Maripol, see: *Bande à part: New York Underground 60's 70's 80's* (Paris: Édition du Collectionneur, 2005), 187.
had released the short album by the Rock band Zekri lured to France just a short time prior). Karakos recalled: "One day, Bernard said to me, 'I'm leaving for New York.' And then the summer of 1980, I called him: 'Hello, I'm here.' 'You came to spend a week in New York?' I said to him, 'No, I came here for good, I moved, I'm with my wife, my son, my dog, and the furniture is on its way." Zekri quickly got used to a stream of French compatriots coming to New York, although usually just as visitors, unlike the newly arrived and permanently settled Karakos. But one source of French visitors was most frequent: "The people of Actuel [magazine], every time they would come to America to try to do a story, I would connect them [with whoever they needed]."  

Paris and Uptown Converge Downtown

In first few months of 1981, Jean-François Bizot was planning a new issue of Actuel that would address "the future": it was the turn of the 1980s, a major French election was coming, and Bizot and his team were curious what awaited them in the years ahead. After Socialist François Mitterand ascended to the presidency in May 1981, Bizot placed the title "Qu'Attendez Vous de l'Avenir?" ("What Are You Expecting of the Future?") on the cover of the June 1981 issue of the magazine. The opening editorial began: "History took everyone by surprise, and its wheel keeps turning. It's seriously shaking things up. After twenty-three years as the opposition, having power is as perplexing as an unknown planet... All this leads us to an issue that we've planned to do on

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77 Bernard Zekri, interview with author, 10 August 2009, Paris, France.
'time.' It took 10 years of stubbornness and the same old strategy for the socialists to successfully wear down the Right and the Communist Party. But the moment is paradoxical: in one week, all the certainties and the whole ideology of the Socialist Party have fallen by the wayside in the face of reality." Uncertainty about the country's political future and curiosity about the global landscape drove Bizot to send his youngest staff writer to New York with a special assignment, since as the Editorial noted in closing: "Unfortunately for us, time machines aren't yet available."79

In his usual mode of forward-thinking reporting, Bizot dispatched the young Elisabeth Danière—known to all only by her nom de plume, "Elisabeth D."—to New York City to uncover the lives and lore of Black youth, who had been largely absent from the French media since the demise of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. As she would later put it, "I had gone to do a rather ambitious story on 'Where are young black Americans today?' And, more specifically, young blacks in New York. The reality is that we weren't hearing anything about them since the Black Panthers, since the Black revolt."80 Danière hadn't the slightest idea what awaited her in New York City, but she went with an open mind and, of course, resided at Bernard Zekri's downtown apartment.

The city that Elisabeth Danière discovered upon her arrival did not resemble the image of America projected by President Ronald Reagan, who famously accepted his party's nomination the previous year by promising to build "a new consensus with all those


79 Ibid.

across the land who share a community of values embodied in these words: family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom." On the contrary, Danière was taken aback to find stark residential segregation, intergenerational tensions between the young and old African American musicians she interviewed, and a deeply segregated city nightlife. After a night out at the downtown clubs, she remarked: "I am observing all these young New Yorkers who just finished their night at the rock clubs in the area: only Whites... They don't have any black friends? And yet, there's no shortage of Blacks: Harlem to the north, Brooklyn to the southwest, the Bronx to the northeast. There are millions in New York. But Freddie B. is the only one that I've seen around in these New Wave rock circles. He lives in Brooklyn but has knocked down the doors of white Manhattan. Thanks to his subway graffiti, he was able to break into the white avant-garde as the young painter from the black ghettos." The "Freddie B." to which Danière referred was Fred Leroy Brathwaite who had, as his very presence in that milieu made clear, broken the color barrier of the downtown arts world. He, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and aspiring filmmaker, musician, and impresario Michael Holman were among the only young Black men on the scene. Brathwaite later noted that there "were not many like us—young, black, from Brooklyn and about to change the game." He added, "Being black and dealing with race in America was an obvious aspect of [my and Basquiat's] relationship. Taxis not picking us up, people looking at us and

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83 Michael Holman, interview with author, 21 June 2010, New York, NY.
assuming we were criminals or threatening... Because skin color was a day-to-day reality...
Jean and I would sometimes discuss how at various events and parties we would realize, 'Oh shit, we're the only black people here.'”

As it turned out, Danière only made a connection with Brathwaite towards the end of her trip. After settling into the city, she "started to do my research: meeting the daughters of Malcolm X, there was a concert of Prince in Manhattan—that was his first concert in Manhattan, I think—so, I went there and interviewed him... But, it was not very... I thought, 'I'm not getting to the point.'" After being dissatisfied with what she had found so far, she asked Zekri if he had any leads: "[Bernard] told me, 'Well, you know, there is a very interesting music, something new happening in the Bronx. It's called rap music.' He hadn't been there [to the Bronx], but he gave me [Fred Brathwaite's] number. I went to see Freddy at his studio, it was in Manhattan." Brathwaite shared the studio with fellow graffiti artist Futura 2000. Elisabeth D. recalled: "I remember very clearly... He was doing a painting. And I came into the studio and he didn't turn around. So, I just talked: 'I heard that there is a new music. And I would be interested in going there.' Without looking at me, he said, 'How much do you pay — to take you there?' I said, 'Oh, I'm sorry, I never pay. If you are interested to share it, you share it. But if not, never mind.' Silence. He

84 Fab Five Freddy (Fred Leroy Brathwaite), in Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Studio of the Street (Milan: Charta, 2007), 45-47.

85 Elisabeth Danière, video interview with author (Internet/Skype), 24 June 2012.

86 Elisabeth Danière, video interview with author.
started to paint again. And suddenly, he turned to me with a big smile and said, 'Okay, I'll take you there for nothing!' And that's how we became very good friends."\(^{87}\)

Brathwaite happened to be in the midst of production for a feature film he and filmmaker Charlie Ahearn were working on called "Wild Style."\(^{88}\) The film centered on the New York Hip Hop scene, so he decided to take Danière to the clubs where they had been scouting locations in the Bronx, where the best deejays and rappers could be found. She mused, "I realized that segregation in New York was far more severe than I had ever imagined... 'You're crazy! You're not gonna go hang out there! You don't know what you're risking!' That's what all my white friends were saying to me. But how did they know since they'd never even been?"\(^{89}\) One night, Danière and Brathwaite took the long subway ride from Brathwaite's parents' home in Brooklyn to the Gun Hill Road station in the Bronx, and walked toward the flashing lights on the small sign for the "T-Connection" nightclub.\(^{90}\) As they walked in, Danière was mesmerized by what she witnessed: young people with a totally different style of dress ("the guys are wearing huge blue basketball sneakers with fat, bright white laces, and a baseball hat worn backwards"); emcee Busy Bee Starski rapping, followed by a rapid succession of other rappers, each passing the microphone onto

\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) "Wild Style," which premiered in 1982, would go on to become a cult classic since it was the first such film to feature the nascent New York Hip Hop scene, including many of the city's most talented rappers, deejays, graffiti writers, and breakdancers. For more on "Wild Style," see: Charlie Ahearn, *Wild Style: The Sampler* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2007).


\(^{90}\) The "T-Connection" would later be recognized as a historically important club for its trailblazing role in featuring the best Hip Hop artists from around the Bronx. See: *Yes, Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip Hop's First Decade*, eds. Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002).
the next; deejay Afrika Bambaataa playing music on the turntables. Brathwaite explained the broader cultural phenomenon to Danièle: "Thousands of black adolescents, in nightclubs, in community centers, in high school parties, decided to get rid of disco and finally make their own music to have a good time and dance to. Kind of like the punks when they rejected the rock establishment. But the young Blacks don't have the means to buy instruments or produce records. So they start scratching records, a disco beat here and a funk rhythm there." Brathwaite continued, "The rappers become their own promoters [when they play their cassettes on their boomboxes] in the streets, on the subway, or the parks... Even if passers-by don't want to listen, they're obligated to hear it. It's like graffiti, which they're forced to see [on the trains, walls, and elsewhere]. With rap, as with graffiti, Blacks from New York's ghettos finally have a voice and have forced it upon the city."  

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91 Elisabeth D., "Bonsoir Les Blancs!", 102.

92 Ibid.
Before her stay in New York was over, Brathwaite had taken Danière to numerous New Wave clubs and Hip Hop sites around the city, as well as to a party at the midtown apartment of Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf. She had interviewed several Hip Hop artists, Free Jazz musicians like Sonny Sharrock, Joseph and Byron Bowie, and still emerging Funk musician Prince. After returning to Paris, where Danière would write her feature article about Black youth in New York City, one thing stood out in her mind and ultimately became the focus of the piece: this new cultural movement around rap music, set against the backdrop of the segregated city and nightlife. But she initially faced resistance from the editorial team at Actuel: "When I returned to Paris and listened to some [rap] records, I

93 Photograph courtesy of Elisabeth D. Inandiak.
showed them to the people of *Actuel*. They said, 'What? This is not music.' I said, 'I'm telling you, this is amazing what's happening. Believe me.' So, they gave me the chance. They said, 'Okay, just write what you want.' But they were very skeptical at the beginning... They were reluctant. But we were a magazine of tolerance, so we had to explore all the fields. And if someone would bring something very strange that they were not so convinced about, they would still be given the space to write about it." Skeptical as they may have been—and understandably so, since almost nothing had before appeared in print about the cultural movement, either in English or in French—Danière's article ended up as an eight-page spread in the June 1981 issue, featuring large color photos. The title read, "Good Evening, White People! Rock is Finished! Rap Is Here!" The subheading explained, "For the past year, the Funk rhythm has infiltrated all of Rock. But, during this same time, young Blacks from the ghetto were creating a totally new music: rap. This summer, rap is going to invade our nightclubs. What is going on in the minds of these young Blacks who never knew the black revolts? Hmmm. We went to go find out." At the end of the article, as a nod to the slowly growing interest in Hip Hop and the rapidly growing fame of Fab Five Freddy, Elisabeth Danière noted: "As I am writing these final lines, I learned that Freddie B. just began renting a studio apartment in Manhattan. He only returns to Brooklyn on Sundays, to say hello to his parents."  

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94 Elisabeth Danière, video interview with author.  
95 Elisabeth D., "Bonsoir Les Blancs!", 96-103, 177.  
96 Ibid., 97.  
97 Ibid., 177.
In one of the first lengthy articles about Hip Hop to appear in any language, Danière captured a fleeting moment, when Hip Hop was still unknown to a large public. But she predicted the music's imminent success. This was an insight that spoke powerfully to Jean-François Bizot's idea for a "future"-themed June 1981 issue of *Actuel*. Within months of the article's release, a tiny nightclub called *Negril*—just a few steps from Bernard Zekri's apartment—instituted a weekly Hip Hop party. Begun by a recent British arrival to New York named Ruza Blue (whom Fab Five Freddy nicknamed "Kool Lady Blue," a moniker she kept) and Basquiat-collaborator Michael Holman, the parties featured the first regular downtown appearances of Harlem and Bronx-based deejays, breakdancers, and graffiti artists. After outgrowing the small nightclub, Kool Lady Blue and Fab Five Freddy found a space they thought might suit their growing crowds: The Roxy, a massive roller skating disco on the far West Side at 18th Street. Kool Lady Blue dubbed the new weekly party "Wheels of Steel" (after the popular Hip Hop term for the two turntables on which deejays spun their records) and it quickly found success. Brooklyn-based graffiti artist KANO reminisced: "The Roxy was my spot! Mainly, it was a skating rink, but on Fridays and Saturdays, it became a Hip Hop club. Then it started building up and a lot of famous people came... I was always there, sometimes I even slept at the Roxy. More and more, it became a second home for me. I loved it because back in the days, everybody was there. It was like a family thing."98

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Advertisement for Kool Lady Blue's "Wheels of Steel Nites" weekly party at The Roxy, featuring Harlem rap group "The Crash Crew"99

Hip Hop dancer Frosty Freeze, of the Rock Steady Crew, thought the Roxy parties encapsulated a broader moment where uptown and downtown were meeting for the first time: "Everybody from uptown, the DJs, everything, started playing downtown. The downtown scene connected with the uptown scene. Everything was still going on up there,

but people were coming downtown more, to Manhattan."\(^{100}\) And Bronx-based deejay Afrika Bambaataa credited several people with this increasing convergence of worlds: "Hip Hop came from uptown to downtown through [my organization] the Zulu Nation, Ruza Blue [a.k.a. "Kool Lady Blue"], Michael Holman, as well as Fab 5 Freddy."\(^{101}\) Dancer and graffiti artist DOZE, added: "Those people brought uptown downtown."\(^{102}\)

Not only were downtown and uptown meeting, but Paris and New York were meeting as well. Among the regular attendees of the Roxy Hip Hop parties were members of the growing French expatriate community. Bernard Zekri was an avid Roxy-goer, and he brought architect Laurence Touitou and photographer Sophie Bramly there for the first time. Neither Touitou nor Bramly could believe what they were seeing and hearing. They were in awe of the music, the breakdancing, the style. Eventually, Zekri, Touitou, and Bramly became close friends with the core members of the Hip Hop community, who would often hang out at their large loft apartments in Manhattan. Record label owner Jean Karakos also attended the Roxy parties, but the phenomenon of Zekri's apartment intrigued him most: "Little by little, I noticed that all the rappers of New York would pass by Zekri's apartment. You could go any time of day or night and non-stop there were five or six rappers, it was their meeting point. And [Zekri] could go to the South Bronx whenever he


wanted, all alone, and nothing would happen to him... Because it was the order of Afrika Bambaataa and [Grandmixer] DST: 'Don't mess with Bernard.'"  

**Celluloid Records and the New York City Rap Tour**

By September of 1982, Celluloid Records owner Jean Karakos and Bernard Zekri were hatching a plan to try to take Hip Hop global. They were witnesses to rap music's growing success, the increasing interest in breakdancing and graffiti art, and the popularity of the downtown parties. Chi Chi Valenti, a staple promoter, host, and partyer on the downtown arts scene, observed in the *Village Voice*: "By late 1982, Fridays had become a required stop for visiting journalists and Eurotrash—to be in New York and miss the Roxy was unthinkable. More than anything the Roxy embodied a certain vision of what New York could be—a multiracial center of a world culture, running on a current of flaming, uncompromised youth." Zekri believed that Hip Hop could actually become a "world culture," that it could catch on not just in downtown New York, but in downtown Paris and beyond. He started promoting a plan to lead a European tour of New York City Hip Hop artists: "I thought, 'We should go to France, and we should go to Europe. Let's put together some kind of tour.'" Kool Lady Blue, the Roxy party promoter and manager of breakdance group the Rock Steady Crew, wasn't convinced of its feasibility. He recalled,

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105 Bernard Zekri, interview with author.
"Blue thought that it was not going to happen, you know. She thought the shit was crazy."\(^{106}\)

Zekri knew he would have to draw on all his connections on both sides of the Atlantic if this tour were ever take place. He made two trips to France, each time reaching out to people and institutions he thought might be supportive. Finally, he convinced three sponsors willing to put their media and financial support behind the idea of bringing this new, burgeoning cultural movement to France: French radio station *Europe 1*, their subsidiary record label *AZ Records*, and the massive French retail chain *FNAC*.\(^{107}\) They agreed to finance the tour, but on one condition: Zekri and Karakos had to release a group of five 12" singles—in advance of the tour—to generate interest from fans and the press. Through a joint deal between AZ Records and Karakos's Celluloid Records, they would record and release the Hip Hop sound. First on Zekri's agenda: "I thought, 'I'm gonna write a French song so [rap] is gonna work in France.'" But he knew he couldn't rap the lyrics himself, so he asked the first person that came to mind: "I convinced Fab 5 Freddy, who wasn't even really a rapper at the time: 'We're gonna do something in French and it's gonna be a smash!"" Fab 5 Freddy said of his agreeing to record, "The paintings wasn't movin' too fast. It wasn't like I was trying to launch a career as a rapper. I was just tryin' to get the rent

\(^{106}\) Bernard Zekri, interview with author.

Zekri wrote a rap song with French lyrics that told the story of a private detective who was the object of every woman's desire, while Fab 5 Freddy recited those lyrics and then added his own English verses on the second half of the song. Zekri explains, "My [American] girlfriend [who spoke some French] helped him pronounce everything correctly, but at the end of the night we weren't happy with the result... So we recorded [my girlfriend] on side B of the record and she became 'B-Side.'" This recording turned into the 12" single "Change the Beat" and was released by Celluloid Records shortly thereafter, with Fab 5 Freddy on side A (with the "Male Version"), and B-Side on side B of the record (with the "Female Version").

Zekri had four more records to produce. Graffiti artist Futura 2000, who was living with him at the time, had already recorded a song with the punk group The Clash just a few months prior. Since the song had never been released, Celluloid Records added it to their catalogue under the name, "The Escapades of Futura 2000." Zekri then recruited graffiti artist Phase II to record a song, which became "The Roxy," an homage to New York City's most popular Hip Hop nightclub. For Celluloid's fourth record, Zekri got another friend, deejay Grandmixer DST, to record a song with his crew the Infinity Rappers (that song was called "The Grandmixer Cuts It Up"). For the fifth and final record, Zekri and Karakos were at a loss. They needed a song quickly. Zekri decided to call on another friend: "I was friends with Bernard Fowler, who had nothing to do with Rap music. And he was the singer of the New York City Peech Band. They were playing his song at the [mythic]..."
Garage [nightclub], 'Don't make me wait, don't make me wait!' Fantastic song. A great singer... [He] had this song that he recorded, 'Do The Smurf.'\textsuperscript{110} That song, too, had not yet been released, so it became a Celluloid Records single under the name "Smurf For What It's Worth," and musician/singer Bernard Fowler and his partner became "The Smurfs."

Now that the required five records had been recorded, Zekri, Karakos, and their partner Kool Lady Blue had to decide what a Hip Hop tour would look like and who would participate. Since Fred Brathwaite and Afrika Bambaataa had been pushing the idea that these varied cultural practices—rapping, deejaying, breakdancing, and graffiti—formed a unified movement, Zekri and Karakos decided to gather the city's most talented artists and put them on the stage at the same time. Karakos recounted: "The concept Bernard and I had was, 'Everything happening at the same time': all the way in back have a large canvas as tall as the stage for the graffiti by Futura and Phase II, then the turntables of [Grandmixer] DST and [Afrika] Bambaataa, the rappers in front of them, and the breakdancers further in front of them."\textsuperscript{111} The organizers successfully booked more than twenty-five artists on the tour, including deejays Afrika Bambaata and Grandmixer DST; rappers Fab Five Freddy, Rammellzee, The Fearless Four, and the Infinity Rappers; graffiti artists Futura 2000, Dondi, and Phase II; the dance troupe Rock Steady Crew (which included Crazy Legs, Ken Swift, Frosty Freeze, and Mister Freeze); and the world champion double dutch (jump rope) troupe, The Fantastic Four Double Dutch Girls.

\textsuperscript{110} Bernard Zekri, interview with author.

(Deshone Adams, Adrienne Brown, Delores Brown, and Robin Oakes). Fab Five Freddy was adamant in explaining that such a stage show "was unprecedented. It was not even just unique, there was nothing like this that ever happened!" The most popular rap groups of the day, such as those signed to New Jersey-based Sugar Hill Records, sometimes went on concert tours in the tri-state area, and on a few occasions, to other parts of the country. However, dancers, deejays, graffiti artists, and rappers had never shared the stage at the same time or even on the same tour. And no such tour had ever gone overseas. This would be Hip Hop's first international exposure.

Few of the performers had even left the state of New York, and now they would be crossing the Atlantic. Passports had to be procured for many of the participants, and tutors had to be hired for all of the young performers who would be absent from school for the two-week tour. Fred Brathwaite remembered: "Most of these people—shit, including myself!—we still lived at home with our families. So, this is like, 'What? We're going to Europe?!!'... It was all brand new, for the most part, for all of us." In addition to the new foreign travel experience, the performers still had to grapple with the question of how to coordinate so many performers on the stage at the same time. Brathwaite recalled: "I remember talking to everybody one day right before we left. I think we might have had a meeting. And I said, 'Listen, no matter what we do up on that stage, it's going to look cool.' And what I even was thinking was, 'It's gonna look like theatre to people.' Because I said, like, 'If so-and-so is out rapping, and if somebody is in the back piecing [i.e. doing graffiti],

112 Fred Leroy Brathwaite ("Fab Five Freddy"), interview with author, 23 November 2010, New York, NY.

113 Ibid.
and the breakers come out and break, from the point of view of the audience, this is gonna
look like some mad interesting shit, you know what I mean? It's gonna look like, 'Wow!''
Brathwaite seemed sure of the tour's eventual success, but most of the rest of the tour
members were unconvinced, including the organizers, Zekri, Karakos, and Kool Lady
Blue.

In order to generate more publicity in France for this "New York City Rap Tour,"
Zekri asked Jean-François Bizot and Elisabeth Danière to run another article in Actuel
magazine about Hip Hop. Danière obliged, publishing an experimental piece that had
rhymed verses throughout, in homage to rap. Entitled "We Rappers, Kings of Swagger,"
the article profiled some of New York's rising Hip Hop stars, including those featured on
the upcoming tour. The subheading read, "In a sneak preview, Élizabeth [sic.] D. presents
all the heroes of New York rap in a play that parodies their language. You can see them in
France at the end of November. Watch out. Don't try to separate fiction from fact. In the
rap world, everything is about the gift of gab."114 The article ran with large, bright photos
of Afrika Bambaataa, Futura 2000, Grandmixer DST, Fab Five Freddy, Phase II, and
Grandmaster Flash. As Actuel had reached a circulation of almost 400,000 in the early
1980s, this was no small victory.115 Such substantive media coverage was a milestone for
the New York scene. Futura 2000 remembered getting a copy of the issue and being
impressed by the "great photos... It's in a foreign language, you can't read it, but it was just
cool to see our photos in a magazine... Simultaneous to this new idea of what we could do

114 Elisabeth D., "Nous Les Rappers, Les Rois de la Frime," Actuel, no. 37 (Novembre 1982), 132-
139.

in France and all this exposure we were getting in France, [Hip Hop] hadn't gotten to really getting written about yet [in the United States]. No one was on to it on that level yet. I mean, certainly not on as big a scale."

Through the efforts of Bernard Zekri, Jean Karakos, Elisabeth Danière, Kool Lady Blue, and a community of French and French expatriates, Hip Hop would be tested on a larger scale than had ever before been the case. On the upcoming New York City Rap Tour, the more than 25 artists were scheduled to perform in late November 1982 in cities across France, including Paris, Lyon, Mulhouse, and Belfort, as well as in London, England. Only a few months prior had Hip Hop begun to break down the color barrier of the downtown Manhattan arts scene. Now that the French expatriate community in New York crossed paths with Hip Hop and would be exporting it overseas, the cultural movement would be testing the barriers of language and nation.

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Chapter 2
"The First Steps on Planet Rap":
The 1982 New York City Rap Tour and
the Early Globalization of Hip Hop
"Is Europe ready for Hip Hop?" The day before embarking on what was the first-ever international tour of Hip Hop performers, a skeptical Afrika Bambaataa—deejay and *de facto* spiritual leader of New York City's Hip Hop community—had asked this question of Frenchman Bernard Zekri, the man most responsible for assembling the November 1982 traveling troupe. The words weighed heavily on Zekri, but he answered lightly and with enthusiasm, recalling, "I had bragged something about it being a triumph." In reality, Zekri hadn't the slightest idea what fate awaited this group of performers who were taking off for an unprecedented tour of France and England, but he projected confidence nonetheless.

Zekri had good reason for being optimistic, if cautiously so. On the one hand, Hip Hop had barely begun to receive coverage in the American press and was still essentially unknown by a mass public. And yet, a number of Hip Hop records had become runaway hits, some with surprising staying power on the American music charts—among them the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," Kurtis Blow's "Christmas Rappin'" and "The Breaks," and the crossover hit "Rapture" by New Wave band Blondie, among others. But Europe was uncharted territory. As in the United States, most of the European public

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119 Ibid.

knew only of the few bestselling Rap records and was largely unaware of the broader, New York-based cultural movement that was at their source: Hip Hop. But France seemed as good a destination as any for the tour. The country had been a haven for African American artists—writers, painters, musicians—for much of the twentieth century, and had a long-standing enthusiasm for African American music. Most recently, over the course of the 1970s, Free Jazz had experienced a flowering in Paris, with nightclubs and record labels showing considerable interest in the music. Now the flamboyant French expatriate community that had taken root in New York City at the turn of the 1980s was beginning to help globalize Rap music.

But, in real terms, the cultural movement of Hip Hop—and its everyday practitioners—had barely left the five boroughs of New York City. In most cases, Hip Hop had barely even left the specifically African American and Latino neighborhoods of the Bronx, Harlem, Brooklyn, and Queens. Yet, here were more than twenty-five young performers bringing Hip Hop overseas. These young performers—with the exception of only a few—had never been outside of the United States before and were now faced with the challenge of transposing on stage the dynamic practices of a culture constantly in

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motion. It was to be an experiment in mutual discovery. Young New Yorkers would be confronted with the foreign cultures of France and England, while their audiences would be confronted with Hip Hop and the young African American and Latino performers who were its creators and among its most talented practitioners.

Although the Tour did not turn out to be a financial success, it was by every measure a tremendous cultural achievement. It became a critical moment in the early globalization of Hip Hop, evidence that the cultural movement became transnational not only through the mass media, but through human interaction and the efforts of a small cadre of arts entrepreneurs. In fact, this November 1982 tour stands out as the earliest and most important moment of Hip Hop's arrival in France. It brought more than two dozen of New York City's most talented and most respected Hip Hop dancers, rappers, deejays, and graffiti writers to Paris and several other cities. The tour was accompanied by a flurry of media coverage that—along with the release of the Celluloid Records songs—turned it into a watershed for the cultural movement's globalization. While French enthusiasts of the music had listened to, collected, and played on the radio a range of records they knew to be "Rap" music, only with the arrival of the tour, its concerts and the surrounding media coverage did fans begin to understand this music as one part of a broader cultural movement. Witnessing live on stage Hip Hop's various cultural practices, a good number of audience members and television viewers were inspired to become practitioners themselves. Some eventually emerged as key figures in the cultural movement in France.

During the preparations for the tour, during the tour itself, and in its aftermath, a small cadre of French cultural workers—some of them expatriate arts entrepreneurs living
in New York City, and others practicing journalists in Paris—became the critical interpreters of Hip Hop for a broad French audience. Through television and radio appearances, numerous newspaper and magazine articles, and the recording and release of Hip Hop records, figures like Bernard Zekri, Elisabeth D., Bernard Loupias, Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, Philippe Conrath, Jean Karakos, and others fundamentally shaped French understandings of this cultural movement. They were central in disseminating information about Hip Hop's historical and social background, as well as its everyday dynamics in the local New York scene. However, what most captured spectators' attention was the absolutely unique dance, deejaying, spraypainting, and rapping abilities of the performers.

The sweeping changes in France's political and cultural landscape that had been catalyzed by President François Mitterand's election as president in 1981 also facilitated Hip Hop's arrival and dissemination in crucial ways. The denationalization of the radio airwaves—with the attendant rise of pirate radio stations and mounting inter-station competition—made it possible for Hip Hop to be heard on newly created radio stations and shows, just as the tour's co-sponsor Europe 1 sought to distinguish itself as a young and hip station on an increasingly crowded FM dial. The slow and circuitous but steady privatization of French television and radio—perhaps counterintuitively—represented a move toward democratization, even if only momentarily, as the unstable media context allowed for more experimentation in programming. This made for a context that was amenable to the arrival and dissemination of Hip Hop. And the sporadic, but limited anti-American sentiment in France throughout the 1980s—particularly with regard to perceived American cultural imperialism—did not have much impact on the early spread of Hip Hop
(although it would prove important later in the decade and into the 1990s). As historian Richard Kuisel has noted, extensive survey data shows that the 1980s was largely characterized by the French "public's general welcoming posture towards America, Americans, and American popular culture."\

Ultimately, the 1982 tour and the surrounding media coverage of Hip Hop laid the foundation for the creation of a nascent Hip Hop community in France. Hip Hop artists from New York City and aspiring artists in Paris cultivated new personal connections, just as enthusiasts from around the Paris region began to form a loose-knit network of cultural activists in their own city. The concert tour had a limited but indelible impact on the French cultural landscape.

**Hip Hop in the Newspaper**

"Beginning on Monday: Rap, Straight from New York" announced the front page of the prominent national French newspaper *Libération*. In conjunction with the organizers of the New York City Rap tour, *Libération* agreed to publish a weeklong series of articles exploring this emerging American cultural movement, both to educate its reading public and to publicize the upcoming concerts. This represented a historic first, as no such coverage of Hip Hop had yet appeared in the French newspapers, and only very few articles, mostly cursory, had been published in the local American press in the preceding year or two. Through coverage by *Libération* and other media outlets, French fans of the music, along with a broader reading public, were introduced to the social and cultural

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context in which Rap music was being created. In preparing their articles, French journalists who were living in New York City or had traveled there on assignment conducted interviews with Hip Hop's foremost practitioners, attended concerts at the most popular nightclubs, and visited the neighborhoods of the Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn that were home to the movement's creators. Although not without some inaccuracies, the media coverage nonetheless transformed mere fans of the music into increasingly knowledgeable participants in a movement that was on the verge of becoming transnational.

Announcement of a week-long series of articles about Hip Hop in *Libération* in anticipation of the New York City Rap tour, and the first such coverage of Hip Hop in a French newspaper.  

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On Monday, October 25, 1982, Libération posed a question on its front cover: "What is RAP?" ("Qu'est-ce que la RAP?"). In a brief subtitle, the newspaper explained that it would be featuring "the beginning of an investigation in New York about the first steps of this sneaker-wearing culture." Inaugurating "A Week in Rap" ("Une Semaine en Rap"), Libération featured two articles, one by Philippe Conrath, an intermittent record label owner and journalist who would eventually emerge as one of the foremost promoters of African music in France, and another by tour organizer and part-time journalist Bernard Zekri.

"THE FIRST STEPS ON PLANET RAP" read the huge lettering at the top of Philippe Conrath's article. In a subtitle above a half-page photo that showed Hip Hop icon Fab Five Freddy standing in front of a massive graffiti mural in New York City, Conrath explained: "They come from the Bronx, from Brooklyn, from the subway train depots, from the street. They are breakers, Dee Jays, Masters of Ceremony, graffiti painters, blacks, puerto ricans. One of them is French, and Africa [sic.] Bambaataa is their king." He continued, "All Hip Hoppers live to the rhythm of rap. A game. An escape. A way of being. Today, rappers are the kings of The Roxy, a nightclub in downtown Manhattan, their [art]work is shown in Soho, and Grand Master Flash is selling a million records. That's rap culture. Hip hop. Libération has the scoop. And for the whole week. Straight from New York."
Conrath went on to recount what he saw as the quintessential New York Hip Hop experience: an evening at The Roxy nightclub. He described in detail the various cultural practices that young black New Yorkers were showcasing that night, emphasizing the skilled, but improvisatory, do-it-yourself aesthetic of the deejaying, rapping, graffiti, and dancing. He ended the article by quoting the refrain of Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel's then-popular rap song "The Message"—"Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge/ I'm
trying not to lose my head/ It's a jungle, sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under”—and recounting what he saw as the core artistic impulse of Hip Hop, a youth movement thriving in the post-industrial city: "An art of stealing and reinterpretation, rappers pass their time taking the music of others or bombarding the walls, the subways, the billboards. An art of misery, too. When one doesn't have a dollar to buy an instrument, one is forced to make do with whatever is at hand. A record and a magic marker therefore become an instrument and a paint brush."127

In a second article on the following page, entitled "Hip + hop = rap," tour organizer and part-time New York resident Bernard Zekri charted the rise of Hip Hop in playful prose, interspersed with humorous rhymes and exaggerated descriptions. Retracing the cultural movement's path from a local street culture to nightclub phenomenon to record business success, he also peppered the article with names and places that while significant in Hip Hop arts circles were likely very mysterious to this French newspaper's readers. A kind of prelude to the coming weeklong series of articles introducing France to Hip Hop, Zekri used this first article to announce: "All these names mean nothing to you? Patience. Between now and Saturday, you will know it all!"128

The following day, journalist and theater critic Jean-Pierre Thibaudat penned an article about arguably the most important figure in the Hip Hop scene: Afrika Bambaataa. The self-styled king of the Bronx gang-turned-Hip Hop crew, the Zulu Nation, Afrika Bambaataa was also the Hip Hop deejay who gained a reputation as the 'Master of

Records' for his large and eclectic record collection. In subsequent articles appearing daily for the remainder of the week, Libération featured in-depth profiles of some of New York City's other significant Hip Hop figures, including deejays Grandmaster Flash and Grandmixer DST, French-born but Bronx-raised dancer Mister Freeze, concert promoter Kool Lady Blue, and graffiti artists Futura 2000, Fab Five Freddy, and Crash, among others.

The articles had an immediate impact. Word spread quickly among fans that Libération was printing first-hand accounts of Hip Hop at a time when access to information about the movement was limited. For many, the articles served as a series of revelations about this music to which they had already been obsessively listening but about which most still knew very little. Daniel Bigeault was a young but dedicated fan of African American music—especially Funk and more recently Rap—whose understanding of Hip Hop was transformed by reading the articles and then by attending the New York City Rap Tour. He had traveled to the United States in 1978 and 1979, each time returning with stacks of vinyl records that were still difficult to find in France. He was eventually offered a radio show at a small Paris-based station called Arc-en-Ciel and named his show "Funk à Billy," an ironic reworking of the name of a popular country music style called "Rockabilly" which Bigeault didn't particularly like. Within a few years, Daniel became

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known as "DJ Dee Nasty" and went on to release the first French Hip Hop album (in 1984). He was also the deejay most responsible for helping launch the careers of the first major wave of French rappers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Few Hip Hop artists in France can claim the stature and depth of knowledge of DJ Dee Nasty. But recalling the late 1982 period when he was still learning about the Hip Hop movement, Bigeault echoed the accounts of many young enthusiasts when he pointed to the importance of this series of articles that "were very, very well explained."\(^{131}\) He recounted, "In my head, when I saw [those articles], I made the connections between everything I had experienced, everything I had seen, and the reference points I had been missing... Afterwards, I understood what [Hip Hop] was all about."\(^{132}\)

**Futura Arrives in Paris**

Leonard McGurr—known by many as visual artist "Futura 2000"—was the only member of the tour group (aside from Fab Five Freddy) to have previously traveled to Europe as a professional artist and the only member to have performed there.\(^{133}\) The preceding year, Futura traveled with the iconic punk group The Clash across western Europe, designing their concert posters and eventually performing with them.\(^{134}\) Bernard

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\(^{131}\) Daniel Bigeault (a.k.a. DJ Dee Nasty), interview with author, 28 June 2005, Paris, France.

\(^{132}\) Ibid.


\(^{134}\) Futura 2000 (Leonard McGurr), interview with author.
Zekri and Jean Karakos thought that his international experience, along with the cultural caché of having been associated with The Clash, made Futura the perfect person to travel to France before the rest of the performers to do some promotional media appearances. Futura explained, "I was sent out two days in advance to more or less talk to the press about the group... I was just kind of giving people the 4-1-1 on who we were... because we were in the very beginning of explaining [to a broader audience what Hip Hop was all about]."

In November 1982, McGurr arrived at Orly airport just outside of Paris where the radio station co-sponsoring the concert tour, *Europe 1*, had sent a car to pick him up. He was driven to the radio station where he was greeted in English by one of the station's executives who was only the first of many to render his name in French: "Futura Deux Mille, how are you?" Futura must have struck his French hosts as someone straight out of the future—literally from the year "deux mille" (i.e. 2000). He strode through the radio station offices wearing a uniquely Hip Hop outfit, from head to toe, a sight likely never before seen in their workplace (or even in the Paris streets, for that matter): a sheepskin coat, a black Kangol hat, a pair of ski goggles, and sneakers with untied, thick shoelaces. He was introduced to Christine Carrié, one of the station's many on-air personalities, who recalled complimenting him on his shoes: "I said, 'Nice baskets,'" employing the French word for sneakers. "I couldn't even see his face. It was really weird for me. I didn't know

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135 Futura 2000 (Leonard McGurr), interview with author.

people were looking like that." Futura and Christine Carrié—known as "Cece" by friends and fans alike—were quickly drawn to one another. Within a few days, when the rest of the tour performers arrived in Paris and joined Futura at the radio station, he had already invited Carrié to dinner.

As part of his publicity run, Futura appeared with Bernard Zekri on the nationally broadcast television show, *Megahertz*. This was the brainchild of Christine Carrié's radio co-host on *Europe 1*, Alain Maneval, a pioneer in the field of pirate radio in France who had deep connections to the rock and punk worlds, evidenced by his friendship with Joe Strummer and the Sex Pistols, and eventually his role as press agent for Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Pink Floyd and many others. In 1978, after returning to France from a year in London where he worked as the press agent for the punk group The Heartbreakers, Maneval became host of a punk music radio show on *Europe 1* called "PO-GO." However, he didn't last very long. While on a chance weekend visit to the island of Brehat, Maneval witnessed the fallout of the infamous *Amoco Cadiz* oil spill. Upon his return to Paris, he used his radio show to call for a general boycott of Amoco. As it turned out, Amoco was the biggest sponsor of the radio station on which his show aired, and he was banned from the air, only able to return to *Europe 1* several years later. In the meantime, he continued building a reputation as a free-spirited, politically engaged radio personality at a time when

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137 Daly, "New York Love Stories for the '80s," 40.

138 Ibid.


pirate radio was flourishing but under attack from French state radio. He could be heard in Paris on Carbone 14, and then on Radio Cité Future in 1981, which launched the same day as the election of François Mitterrand.\footnote{Durand, "Portait Alain Maneval: Radio Gaga," 34-36.} Maneval was eventually offered a television show on the national channel TF1 which he turned into a music-centered program called Megahertz, a kind of younger, hipper, punk-oriented American Bandstand.

On the episode airing November 20, 1982, Alain Maneval walked out from behind the studio set's doors—which were adorned with the word "Megahertz" in bright pink letters—and greeted his viewers as Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel's "The Message" played in the background. Manéval exclaimed that his guests for the day included "the king of American punk funk: Rick James" and "another guest: his name is Futura 2000," the king of graffiti art. Maneval continued, "[Futura] also just made a record with The Clash. He'll be here with us live a little bit later.\footnote{Megahertz, 20 November 1982, Channel: TF1, Archives of the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (hereafter: INA).}"

The first guest to appear was actually Bernard Zekri, the organizer of the New York City Rap Tour. Sitting on red boxes facing one another at the center of the set, Maneval and Zekri discussed what exactly this new cultural movement was that Zekri sought to introduce to France. Maneval asked, "So, Bernard Zekri: leaving Dijon to go live in New York and participate in the explosion of Rap, what was that like?" Zekri replied, "Leaving Dijon and arriving in New York will make your head spin because things move much quicker there. And also, the people who rap tend to party a lot. It's something that is light-hearted, welcoming, and most of all, playful. They walk the streets of New York with
enormous radios—which they call 'ghetto blasters'—and play their music. And that's Rap. But it's a music that has an identity: it comes from New York. It's an urban culture." Zekri went on to explain the various cultural practices that comprise Hip Hop, including graffiti, dancing, rapping, and deejaying.

Maneval concluded by asking Zekri if "Rick James is a superstar in New York," to which Zekri responded, "Rick James is a superstar in New York and in all of America. He's the new sex symbol in the United States. He releases a hit song every two months." Then James appeared on the studio set wearing a tasseled leather jumpsuit and leopard-

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143 Bernard Zekri, on Megahertz, 20 November 1982, Channel: TF1, INA.

144 Ibid.
print boots, smoking a cigarette which he proceeded to flick to the ground, and jumped right into a dance-heavy, likely lip-synced rendition of his song, "69 Times." Maneval reappeared afterwards to announce forthcoming concerts across France by a variety of bands, coming last to "New York York City Rap: The rappers are coming! They'll be here the 22nd at the Bataclan, and Saturday the 27th for a 'Big Night of Rap' at Pantin. There will be DST, Fab Five Freddy, Futura, basically twenty-plus artists coming from New York City. The Rap Attack! You have just a few days to prepare yourselves!"

Wearing a blue tracksuit, large dark sunglasses, and a Kangol hat, Futura 2000 joined Maneval on the set. Maneval conducted a short interview with Futura in English, asking him when he began writing graffiti and how he met and developed a relationship with the punk band The Clash. In the eyes of much of the core audience of a show like Megahertz, Futura's relationship with The Clash was legitimizing. This audience, likely to have otherwise been skeptical of a new, young music coming from New York, was much more open to lending Hip Hop their ears knowing that The Clash had given it their stamp of approval. Alain Maneval knew this and therefore emphasized Futura 2000's connection to the group as a way of promoting the New York City Rap Tour.

The episode ended with a performance by Futura of his new record, "The Escapades of Futura 2000," released by Bernard Zekri and Jean Karakos through their Celluloid Records and AZ Records joint deal. With images of graffiti pieces painted by Futura flashing on the screen, he began rapping:

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\text{The idea is to let you know, that graffiti is rockin' and it's on the go}
\text{And there's a lot more to it if you check into it}
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\(^{145}\) For more on Rick James, see: "Interview with Rick James," in Meghelli et al., \textit{Tha Global Cipha}, 583-589.
But the problem is you're probably looking right through it
It started for me back in '72
I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do
I saw names everywhere: style, color, and flair
I knew my answer was there!\(^{146}\)

After Futura's performance, Alain Maneval re-took centerstage and announced: "So, you still have two days to prepare yourselves for the Rap Attack: November 22\(^{nd}\) at the Bataclan, the 26\(^{th}\) in Lyon at the Palais d'Hiver, and on the 27\(^{th}\) a 'Big Night of Rap' at Pantin. Futura 2000 will be on stage. There will be DST, Fab Five Freddy, the Double Dutch Girls, and the Rock Steady Crew. There's gonna be dancing and things are gonna get hot at the Rap Attack! Next Saturday, *Megahertz* will be back with a Rap Special!\(^{147}\)

**New York in Paris**

The other performers on the New York City Rap Tour arrived shortly after Futura. There were around twenty-five, including: deejays Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmixer DST; rappers Fab Five Freddy, Rammellzee, The Fearless Four, and the Infinity Rappers; graffiti artists Futura 2000, Dondi, and Phase II; the dance troupe Rock Steady Crew (which included Crazy Legs, Ken Swift, Frosty Freeze, and Mister Freeze); and the world champion double dutch (jump rope) troupe The Fantastic Four Double Dutch Girls (Deshone Adams, Adrienne Brown, Delores Brown, and Robin Oakes). They arrived at Orly Airport at 6:00 a.m., and were met by tour organizer Bernard Zekri and a chartered bus with a big "Europe 1" logo on its side. *New York Daily News* journalist David Hershkovits, who accompanied and reported on the tour, wrote that Fab Five Freddy pulled


\(^{147}\) *Megahertz*, 20 November 1982, Channel: *TF1*, INA.
out a black marker and tagged the side of the bus, with Dondi and Futura following suit. The outraged bus driver stepped in before others could leave their mark. He then took off for the hotel, but soon got lost. The young performers on the bus were to quickly learn their first lesson in French racial politics: Bernard Zekri recalled, "When we got to Paris, the funniest thing was, we took the bus and the driver got lost, he couldn't find the hotel. So, we start looking around, to find his way. And so, there was this Black guy, and [the driver] asked him the way [to the hotel]. And all the kids on the bus... They couldn't believe that there was a Black guy that spoke French." Zekri continued, chuckling as he remembered and imitated the surprised reaction of the young performers: "Black motherfucker is speaking French, man. Can you believe that?!?"^149

Like many Americans, the young performers were surprised to learn that France, rather than being a racially homogenous society, is home to a large community of African-descended peoples. They were learning these lessons at an early age, as almost all were teenagers and twenty-year olds. As a requirement for their participation on this concert tour, those still in school had to have tutors accompanying them on the trip, providing lessons for three hours a day. Deshone Adams, one of the Fantastic Four Double Dutch Girls, was keeping up on her Economics, English, and U.S. history homework, saying, "It doesn't make a difference where I do it as long as I get my work done."^150 Although she

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^149 Bernard Zekri, interview with author, 10 August 2009, Paris, France.

^150 Deshone Adams, quoted in Hershkovits, "London Rocks, Paris Burns, and the B-Boys Break a Leg."
had visited the Eiffel Tower and historic churches such as Notre Dame, as well as read "Act 3" of Hamlet while traveling, what really struck her by the end of the trip was—as she explained—"the way people look at me—they think I'm from Mars or something."151

As is true of any traveler's first international trip, the young performers learned their fair share of lessons over the course of the tour. Ultimately though, the true lesson-learners were the crowds and viewers of the tour across France who were introduced to a vibrant, new movement that would eventually transform their country's cultural landscape.

The Tour on Stage

Anticipation was building quickly in the days and weeks leading up to the opening dates. On the day of the first concert in Paris, journalist Bernard Loupias wrote in Le Matin's "Funk" section of concert listings: "Stop right there, the rappers are here!" In the brief announcement, Loupias encouraged readers to attend that night's concert—the first of two—in Paris. He went on: "At the Bataclan, tonight at 8:30pm, the first stop for these New York rap stars... We'll finally find out if this form of expression, so tied to the street culture of the New York ghettos, can pass muster, can break through the language barrier (which isn't so thin since rap is almost the equivalent of jive talk in the language of [17th-century French playwright] Molière). We'll be back with a report."152

151 Ibid.

Loupia was uniquely positioned to be able to cover the New York City Rap Tour. A long-time enthusiast of African American music, he traveled frequently to Manhattan with fellow French Jazz aficionados to partake in the city's 1970s downtown loft Jazz scene. While in New York in 1979, he recalled seeing Hip Hop performers: "I remember

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one weekend at Times Square I saw some breakers with their big radio. You know, the big [boom]boxes... One of them was dancing. The other one was rapping on the music.” Immediately, he recognized this as only the newest incarnation of a longer African American cultural tradition: "I said, 'Wow! A new generation!' Instantly. I heard there was no more conga drums, you know, it was electronic beats. But, in fact, the flow was the same kind of thing... It was so brilliant, so joyous. It brings some life to this area—you know, on Saturday night, everybody going to the movies. And the dancing was so crazy. Wow! And I began to buy cassettes from these guys... on 125th Street, on the other side of the street from the Apollo [Theatre].”

When Loupias covered the opening concert of the New York City Rap Tour for *Le Matin* on November 22, 1982, he was one of only a very few attendees with first-hand knowledge of the local New York movement. Taking the stage that evening in Paris, the two-dozen performers had little idea what to expect from the audience, just as most of the arriving crowd stood there in curious anticipation of the show. In an unending stream of performers vying for the spotlight—often occupying the stage simultaneously—Futura was joined by The Clash's Mick Jones to perform "The Escapades of Futura 2000," the members of the Rock Steady Crew took turns breakdancing before the crowd, Dondi and Futura painted canvases in the background, Phase II performed his song "The Roxy," Fab Five Freddy and Rammellzee went back and forth rhyming on the microphone and introducing the performers, and the Double Dutch girls acrobatically jumped rope.

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155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.
Throughout, Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmixer DST stood behind the turntables, providing the soundtrack for the evening. By all accounts, it was a sight to behold. Many of the audience members would remember the show decades later, even if they were totally bewildered by what they witnessed that night.

Bernard Zekri, the main organizer of the Tour, got the sense that many attendees were perplexed by what they were seeing and hearing: "The people that came: nobody understood what it was, because people were like, 'Where's the band? 'Who is playing?'"[^157]

Olivier Cachin, who was just beginning his journalistic career and would later become host of the first Hip Hop music video show in France (called "Rapline") and also a fastidious documenter of Hip Hop as editor-in-chief of various magazines in the 1990s, remembered being quite confused by the simultaneous and eclectic elements of the stage show: "I didn't understand shit, you know, because it was all mixed up... I'll take the image of the puzzle. You know, you see the different pieces. But, it's like, 'Okay, so it's a Black thing, but there's [white Punk guitarist] Mick Jones who introduced Futura 2000, who's a graffiti artist but he also makes Rap records, so he's got a Rap. And here comes Afrika Bambaataa, but he's a DJ.' So, you're like, 'Okay, I'm starting to get the big picture, but little by little.'"[^158]

According to Cachin, "Most people were as puzzled as I was, because it was like... There were probably a few people who knew [about Hip Hop] already. But, I didn't know them. Most of the crowd was curious people, what we call 'les branchés,' like plugged-in people."[^159]


very bad taste to enjoy a show."\textsuperscript{160} Le Monde captured that sentiment. Writing about the same concert at Bataclan, Alain Wais wrote: "Apparently, [Hip Hop] doesn't mean much when taken out of its context. Rap isn't made to be put on stage, but to be played in the nightclubs in the middle of an audience. At 8pm, people don't exactly want to dance, and if nobody participates, it all becomes boring."\textsuperscript{161}

There were, however, no shortage of early enthusiasts of Hip Hop, so captivated by what they saw and so eager to observe closely the skills of the performers that they went to both concerts in Paris. One such enthusiast was budding deejay Daniel Bigeault, who noted that the relatively small size of the venue of the first concert made for an intense performance. With vivid memories of the show, he later recalled: "On stage, there was everything. There was Futura 2000 and Phase II doing graffiti in the background. There was Fab Five Freddy and Rammellzee who were the Masters of Ceremony. There was the Rock Steady Crew dancing on stage, and sometimes they danced in the crowd, right in the middle of the audience. And there was DST and Bambaataa on the turntables. At [the venue] Bataclan, it was incredible. People had never seen anything like that in their lives. It was totally new, striking, fresh, incredible!"\textsuperscript{162} Daniel Fourneuf, another early enthusiast of Hip Hop who had already begun deejaying, remembered coming to a wholly new understanding of the movement after attending the concert. Fourneuf explained, "I became aware of [Rap] when Kurtis Blow released 'Deuce' [in 1981], and I liked it, but I didn't

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{162} Daniel "DJ Dee Nasty" Bigeault, interview with author, 28 June 2005, Paris, France.
know that there was a whole movement. I had just heard this style of record where a guy is rapping like that." He ultimately "discovered" and subsequently understood the whole of the cultural movement known as "Hip Hop" in attending the concert, describing the experience as "really a revelation." 

Also at the concert that night was Christine Carrié, the new French love interest of graffiti artist Futura 2000. Standing directly in front of the stage, she learned first-hand about the vocation of her "graffiti artist" admirer, just as she stood in awe of the other Hip Hop cultural practices on display. After the show, she met Futura at the venue's exit to walk him to the tour bus that was to take the performers to the airport for their London concert. Just before boarding the bus, Futura presented her with a gift: a white Levi's jacket on the back of which he had spraypainted "FUTURA 2000" in pink. They said their goodbyes knowing that he would be back in a few days for the second Paris concert, and Futura and the rest of the performers took off for the airport. Carrié walked off with her new—and certainly unique—jacket. As she remembered, "Nobody in France had this type of jacket at that time. Everybody was jealous."

After stopping in London to perform, the New York City Rap Tour continued on to Lyon, the second largest city in France and also Christine Carrié's hometown. The concert took place on Friday, November 26th, a cold and snowy night. Among the evening's special guests was Christine Carrié's mother, whom tour organizer Bernard Zekri introduced to

164 Ibid.
165 Christine Carrié, interview with Michael Daly, in Daly, "New York Love Stories for the '80," 41.
Futura. Little did Mrs. Carrié know that this New York graffiti artist would become her son-in-law in a few years' time. Like the audience at the Paris show, she was likely bewildered by his craft, to say nothing of the rest of the Hip Hop performers.

Also in the crowd that evening was Gareth Thomas, a British student of French language and literature at the University of Liverpool who was spending the year at the University of Lyon. He was an enthusiastic fan of African American music and a record collector, and spent many evenings in Lyon searching out nightclubs where he could hear the newest Funk records coming from America. That is how he eventually found his way to the Palais d'Hiver, the Lyon venue for the New York City Rap Tour. Unlike many French, he already had some familiarity with Rap music, having bought and enjoyed some of the earliest Hip Hop records while still in Britain. But, he too recalled being somewhat puzzled by the many elements on stage, and especially Futura who both painted and rapped that night: "I found the whole thing quite mysterious... I remember being a bit confused about Futura 2000... 'Is he a graffiti artist or is he a singer?' I just didn't know." Yet, the experience must have made an impression on him because after having "trudged back home [with] sneakers drenched [by the snow]," he wrote in his diary later that night that the concert was "very good."

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166 Ibid.


168 Ibid.

For Thomas, it was another night out at the club, albeit a good night. He had purchased what turned out to be the very first pressing of Fab Five Freddy's "Une Sale Histoire," the promotional record that Bernard Zekri and Jean Karakos released in anticipation of the tour and which ultimately became well-known under the name, "Change The Beat."

Last Show in Paris

The New York City Rap Tour returned for its second and final concert in Paris, receiving ample media coverage along the way. This time, the Tour appeared at the Hippodrome de Pantin, a former circus venue that was transformed into a concert hall which had hosted such legends as James Brown, Fela Kuti, Peter Tosh and Frank Zappa. Franck Begué, a young Frenchman in the majority immigrant, working-class suburb of Saint-Denis, was already a budding Hip Hop enthusiast, but was further intrigued by the television coverage he saw in the week leading up to the second concert. Aside from

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172 Photo courtesy of Gareth Thomas.
173 For background on the history of the unique venue, the Hippodrome de la Porte de Pantin, see: Pierre Fenouillet, Jean Richard et Son Cirque, ou, l'Histoire d'une Passion (Vieux-Boucau-les-Bains: Editions du Nez Rouge, 1998).
learning of the coming tour, the sounds and images resonated deeply with him: "I knew [the tour] was coming because I saw it on TV, on a show called *Megahertz*. It was a journalist [Alain] Manéval who was hosting... They showed the music video for [Grandmaster Flash's] *The Message.* And you can be sure, that was when I said, 'That's my life'... First, it was just the sounds. Then it was the ground, throwing yourself on the ground [as with breakdancing]... The aesthetic, the style."\(^{174}\) Begué strongly identified with what he saw and was eager to attend the upcoming concert. But Daniel Bigeault, who was returning for a second time to see the tour, noted that the change of venue ultimately resulted in a different experience: "At Pantin, there was nobody. Well, actually, it was just in a huge space. There were a couple hundred people in a venue that holds fifteen hundred people. So, Pantin wasn't that great [compared to the first concert]."\(^{175}\)

Franck Begué disagreed. He was transformed by his experience at the concert. He attended with the intention of absorbing as much as he could from the performers about how to breakdance, how to rap, and how to deejay—in a word, to learn about the cultural movement from Hip Hop's foremost practitioners. Begué had already begun deejaying, but only in a very rudimentary fashion. What puzzled him most about the craft was how these Hip Hop deejays were "scratching," that characteristically Hip Hop way of manipulating records back and forth on the turntables so as to create a rhythmic sound.\(^{176}\) The night of the concert, he went up to the front of the stage and observed the performers closely. He

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\(^{175}\) Daniel Bigeault (a.k.a. DJ Dee Nasty), interview with author, Paris, France, 28 June 2005.

\(^{176}\) For more about the practice of scratching, see: Mark Katz, *Groove Music*, 3-8.
recalled: "What really struck me [that night] was the DJ. I wanted to mix, but I was mixing the old way. I didn't understand what they were doing with the turntables... The first time I was listening to [Rap] records, what I thought to myself was, 'How are they making those rhythms?' I thought it was just by mixing the records... And when I saw them for the first time [at this concert], they were doing it with so much ease... That was the first time I had that shock." He continued, "I went over to the side of the stage, which was pretty high, and just watched. I watched them do it. And I said, 'Oh yeah, I get it!' I had finally understood [the technique]." Begué would go on to perfect the technique, becoming an early Hip Hop DJ in France, as well as one of the most respected Hip Hop dancers and choreographers.

Desdemone Bardin, a professor of language and linguistics at the University of Paris-VIII and a jazz photographer, was equally enthralled by the performance, noting: "If you'd been at the first American Hip Hop show in Paris at Pantin Arena in 1982, you would have understood immediately that Hip Hop was Total Art: acrobatic dancers; Double Dutchers jumping to an internal Rap beat; the MC, dressed all in black, delivering his rhymes on and off the beat; and the Graffiti artist spray-painting the Manhattan skyline onto a giant billboard display amidst the explosion of smoke bombs—a glimpse of the apocalypse." Her son, Sebastian Bardin-Greenberg, a bi-national Franco-American only eleven years old at the time, recalled: "I have memories of the whole setting because what was crazy about it is everything was going on at once, which was something I never saw in

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178 Desdemone Bardin, interview with James G. Spady, 9 February 2000, Brooklyn, NY.
the [United] States. Normally, you know, everything was like a separate activity: you might see breakdancers practicing in the yard, and cats bombing [i.e. doing graffiti], or a [rap] cipher starting on the side. But, never all of it together... [The concert] was like an hour-and-a-half of all Hip Hop activities put together.\textsuperscript{179}

Remembering the response of concert-goers and Hip Hop enthusiasts alike, he explained that most people were taken aback in "amazement... You know, like, 'What the fuck is this? Where are these cats coming from?' You know, I've heard some people say it was almost like UFOs came to Paris one day and brought this culture over, like, 'What's going on?'"\textsuperscript{180} Budding deejay and dancer Franck Begué described it in similar terms, exclaiming, "It was such a totally new planet, that it was... It was the promised land! That's what it was. It was a pure paradise... Before, life was boring. And when that [Tour] came, everything took off. That was a turning point for me."\textsuperscript{181}

**The Tour on TV**

Of course, the concerts in Paris and around the country could only reach a limited audience. The venues were small- to medium-sized ones, and although the Tour received ample media coverage, Hip Hop was still a new and unfamiliar enough phenomenon that it didn't attract overflow crowds. But among those who attended were a number of key enthusiasts—like Franck Begué, Daniel Fourneuf, and Daniel Bigeault—who were deeply

\textsuperscript{179} Sebastian Bardin-Greenberg, interview with author, 17 July 2003, Paris, France.

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{181} Franck Begué (a.k.a. Franck II Louise; a.k.a. Franck le Breaker Fou; a.k.a. Franck le Scratcheur Fou), interview with author, 2 October 2006, New York, NY.
influenced by what they saw and would go on to become crucial figures in the French and global Hip Hop scenes. This impact was amplified many-fold as concert footage was broadcast on Alain Maneval's French television show, Megahertz, bringing the sights and sounds of New York Hip Hop into homes across France. This proved decisive to the eventual influence of the 1982 New York City Rap Tour, as the television coverage reverberated far beyond the nightclubs and concert venues where the performers actually appeared.

"Today, I feel like an alien because for the past week I've been living on another planet: Planet Rap," explained TV host Alain Maneval on the French channel France 2. After serving as on-stage host for part of the New York City Rap Tour in France, Maneval was sharing with the French public his impressions of the New York street culture to which he had recently been introduced. But it was through his friend and fellow journalist Elisabeth D. that he had first heard of Hip Hop, as he narrated on his weekly TV show, Megahertz: "If I'm talking to you about Rap, it's because Elisabeth D., journalist at Actuel [magazine], hasn't stopped gabbing to me for the past two years about 'Rap' and her 'friends from New York.'" Turning to her as an in-studio guest, Maneval asked: "And I'm wondering a little about how you discovered these people already two years ago?"

Sitting on small boxes on the set of Megahertz, Elisabeth D. looked at Manéval and replied: "It was exactly the winter of 1980, so two years ago. I went to do an ambitious news report on 'Where are young black Americans today?' And more specifically, I was

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182 Alain Maneval, in opening monologue on his TV show "Megahertz," Channel: France 2, 27 November 1982, INA archives.

183 Ibid.
interested in young blacks in New York. It's true that we weren't hearing anything more about them since the Black Panthers, since the Black revolt. So, I went to Manhattan, where all the whites go, and I went to Rock clubs, looking for young blacks... To my surprise, I barely met any at all! Elisabeth D. eventually realized that to meet and write about "young Blacks" she would have to visit all the "ghettos, in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem." There, particularly in the Bronx, she encountered this vibrant and theretofore largely undiscovered cultural movement: Hip Hop.

On that episode of Megahertz, thanks to the efforts of Maneval and Elisabeth D., a wider French public, too, was discovering Hip Hop. The iconic horns of Johnny Pate's "Shaft in Africa" began booming through television sets across France. Footage from the New York City Rap Tour filled television screens. For the first time, French people—not including those lucky few who had been to one of the live concerts—witnessed the dynamic stage show of New York City's most talented Hip Hop artists, including dancers, deejays, rappers, graffiti artists, and double dutchers.

Sporting bright red Adidas track suits, the Rock Steady Crew breakdancers—Frosty Freeze, Crazy Legs, and Ken Swift—took turns astonishing the crowd with their acrobatic

184 Elisabeth D., during an appearance on the TV show "Megahertz," Channel: France 2, 27 November 1982, INA.

185 Ibid.

186 Johnny Pate's "Shaft in Africa" was a popular 'break' record, meaning that it was a popular record among early Hip Hop deejays for its particularly percussive and danceable sections that could be used as the soundtrack for the acrobatic moves of breakdancers. The song was later resuscitated in Hip Hop culture through the sampling of the opening horns by the group Public Enemy on their "Show 'Em What You Got" (1987), and then by artist Jay-Z on his "Show Me What You Got" (2006). For background on 'break records,' see: Joe Schloss, Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18-22.
moves. Their fourth member, Mister Freeze, appeared with white face paint, white gloves, white pants, a black shirt, a white bow-tie, and a black hat, in full tribute to mime culture. His unique style of dance combined mime-like movements with a largely California-based Hip Hop dance form called 'Electric Boogie.' The crowd was mesmerized. Meanwhile, Fab Five Freddy rapped along, exclaiming:

DST, let's show 'em some of that turntable technology.../ Grandmixer D./ DST to rock the house for the young ladies/ And I'm Fab Five Freddy in the house / And my mellow Rammellzee will turn it out/ The Rock Steady B-Boys is on the floor/ They were coolin' out with the moves galore/ Uh, a Rock Steady is down by law/ and Rock Steady B-Boys, down by law!

He continued,

Well, I chill so hard, they can't understand it/ Some people think I'm from another planet/ 'Cause the clothes I wear are on the casual side / So come on everybody, let's rock a little while/ One, two y'all/ And we don't quit, 'cause the music is some serious shit/ Like this y'all, in Paris, France/ Show me party people if you can dance/ So, just move to the funky beat/ You rock a microphone it's just so very unique/ Uh, like this y'all/ Uh, like that y'all/ Uh like this, it ain't the whack/ Uh, like this y'all/ Uh, like that y'all/ Uh just, just, just, just!... Check it out... So, Rammell, Rammell, my mellow, my man, just get on the mic and take command!!

Freddy was followed by fellow graffiti artist and rapper Rammellzee, whom filmmaker Tony Silver once referred to as "graffiti's visionary poet and shaman." In his signature rhythmic (and sometimes cryptic) rapping style, Rammellzee followed Freddy with:

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188 Transcribed from the footage that was shown on Megahertz, Channel: France 2, 27 November 1982, INA.

We be quick to hop the jump, jump/ To make you rock, to the serious funk/ Now spin on your knee cap, and break it with a stride/ Freeze, rock, and shake your high/ Now jam! A skip, a hop, a hippity-twip, with a rhythm hop to make you flip/ A now, jam-jam dippa-die dippa-dippa back-back, bust it out... Yeah! Groove-groove with the beat/ Just groove with the beat/ Just rock with the rhythm/ We're the kids you need! Yeah, Mister Freeze, skippin' and hoppin'!  

It was a veritable 'battering ram'—as Fab Five Freddy once described it—as Fab Five Freddy once described it of New York street art and music, breaking through barriers of nation, language, and culture; or, at the very least, a formidable attempt at doing so. In reflecting on the long-term impact of the concerts, tour organizer Bernard Zekri mused, "What's incredible is that a lot of people that came to that show became—[years] after that—rappers and famous and whatever. But, while we were doing it..." He trailed off. The reality was that the results were mixed. The Tour did not fare as well financially as the tour's sponsors—radio station *Europe 1*, AZ Records, and FNAC stores—had hoped. Zekri explained, "The radio station was really pissed off at me, because they thought I was a big liar and that I stole their money. They were not happy with me. I mean, everywhere we went [with the Tour] we kind of failed [financially]." But, by any measure of cultural impact in France and beyond, it was a massive success. This mattered little to those with financial stakes in the tour, but for the many concert attendees and television viewers, the experience was a seminal one.

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190 Transcribed from the footage that was shown on *Megahertz*, Channel: *France 2*, 27 November 1982, INA.


Many young people watching this Megahertz episode featuring exclusive footage of the Rap Tour were transformed. One was Souleymane Dicko whose parents immigrated to France in the 1960s from the West African country of Mali as students in search of better educational and economic opportunities. Dicko—or "Solo," as he is better known—was born in Paris, but grew up in the working-class outer-cities of Fontenay-sous-Bois and then Antony.193 Like many first-generation post-colonial French youth, Solo spent summers during his childhood in his parents' native country, where he stayed with his grandmother and other family members in and around the capital city of Bamako. Although, at times, he struggled—as many post-colonial youth did—to feel fully accepted either in his native France or his parents' Mali, he found refuge in African American music, especially Funk. With his neighborhood friends in Antony, Dicko would organize weekend parties—known in colloquial French as a 'boum' (pronounced 'BOOM')—at local community centers where they would play and dance to mainly African American R&B, Funk, and Soul. But, as Dicko recounted, his chance encounter with Hip Hop via the Megahertz television show redirected his interest toward this new cultural movement and ultimately changed the course of his life. He explained: "One day I saw [Hip Hop] on TV. They had a tour, you know, with [deejay Afrika] Bambaataa, [graffiti artist] Futura [2000]... And I saw that on TV and I saw the Rock Steady Crew [dancing] and I was like, 'What the fuck is this shit?!?! I gotta know how to dance like that. That's the new shit in America? I gotta know, I gotta know, I gotta know!'" That Saturday afternoon was a raucous one at his household. He remembered: "I just went nuts... It took me a long time to

realize exactly what it was, but from the moment I saw that stuff on that Saturday, I tried it... Once the show was over, I pushed all the furniture over. I was like, 'I saw the guy on his head, what was he doing on his head?' So, I tried to put myself on my head. And I didn't know how to do the footwork. You know, it happened too fast for me to [learn it]… But we had a party on that same Saturday night and I went to the party and told all my friends, 'Oh, I saw this shit on TV, man! Those guys were doing this, you know, like doing shit on the floor!'"¹⁹⁴ From that Saturday on, Dicko continued to learn and practice Hip Hop dance moves from whatever sources he could track down, whether music videos, second- or third-hand recordings of the tour footage, and magazine articles. In a matter of months, he became part of a growing network of Hip Hop enthusiasts in the Paris region and eventually became one of the earliest and most talented Hip Hop dancers in France.

In another working-class outer-city of Paris, Val d'Argenteuil, a young Italian immigrant named Teddy Esposito, too, was swept up in the fervor around the 1982 New York City Rap Tour. Esposito happened upon the very same episode of the Megahertz TV show, and his vivid recall of events of nearly three decades ago is evidence of their indelible impact. With characteristic detail and enthusiasm, he recounted: "I think it was on a Saturday afternoon. I was watching Star Trek, the reruns from the '60s. And at that time, I had one of those small TV sets. The screen was this big," explained Esposito as he measured out a very small size with his hands. "It was a long one, a little screen, with a little radio, and on top you had a cassette deck... And I was watching Star Trek, I was playing my records in my bedroom, right. The TV was on. No sound, right. And I

remember clearly, switching the channel, and the guy said, 'Soon we're going to show something exceptional from America.' And he showed bits and pieces of guys moving and shit. And I'm like, 'What the fuck is this?' So, I stop the records and I raise the volume. And spontaneously, I put a cassette in the [audio] cassette-deck. I was able to record the sound from the TV... Then the guy reintroduces what they're about to show. So I press 'Record.' And I'm like, 'What the fuck is this?'

Although Esposito was already a collector of Rap records, he was mystified by the deejaying technique of 'scratching' (also known as 'cutting') and had yet to discover breakdancing. On the TV show though, he saw Grandmixer DST's performance and the Rock Steady Crew's dance moves: "For the first time, I was able to see somebody cut records, because I had heard scratching records before, but I didn't understand how the hell they were doing it. I saw Grandmixer DST cutting, and Afrika Bambaataa was playing the drum machine. And then you had the Rock Steady Crew: Ken Swift, Crazy Legs, Mr. Freeze. Mr. Freeze was killin' it—killin' it! And then Phase 2 got on the mic with Fab Five Freddy." One rapper stood out above all for Esposito: "The guy that killed me was Rammellzee... I had spoken to him years after. We started hanging out in the late '80s when I moved to New York. And I even asked him, I said, 'Bro, you were killin' it on the mic. I didn't understand what the fuck you were saying, but somehow, you were better than the other guys.' He said, 'Bro, I used to breakdance.' He was a breakdancer back in the late '70s, early '80s. So, he said, 'The reason why I sounded good on the mic is because I had a different style and I was able to rhyme about what the guys were doing on the floor.'

Thirty years later, Esposito still listens to the vintage audio-cassette he recorded that Saturday afternoon in 1982. He was enthralled from the moment he began watching the *Megahertz* episode. In reflecting on the significance of the 1982 tour, Esposito noted that it was rare to have such a raw staging of a street culture so far outside of its everyday context, and that this was what made it such a powerful experiment: "There's nothing stronger than that, because it's really taking the guys from New York City—like [putting them in] a bubble—and putting them in Paris. That shit changed my life. I was blown away. Killed!" He added: "It's because of that concert that I immersed myself in Rap to the degree that I did... That concert completely transformed me. I was already passionate about [Hip Hop] music because I had been collecting records for two years. But, when I saw the enormous energy of that whole group of guys, I said, 'That's me.'"

Teddy Esposito, Souleymane Dicko, Franck Begué, Daniel Bigeault, and Daniel Fourneau, among many other young enthusiasts, were fundamentally shaped by their experiences watching—and ultimately learning from—the performers on the 1982 New York City Rap Tour. Not long afterwards, they came to form the core of the French contingent of a now increasingly transnational cultural movement. The Tour facilitated the transmission of cultural knowledge directly from New York City's youth to youth across France—those who attended the concerts, those who watched the footage on television, and those who read the many articles that appeared in the French press. In the Tour's aftermath, many French youth sought to deepen their knowledge of Hip Hop and to

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196 Ibid.

197 Ibid.

sharpen their newly acquired skills as dancers, deejays, rappers, and graffiti artists. They launched radio shows—some legal and others pirate—on the newly denationalized FM radio waves, they formed dancing crews that brought together youth from cities across the Paris region. Meeting sites emerged in Paris where enthusiasts exchanged information and ideas about Hip Hop, with dancers and rappers partaking in competitive stand-offs, and with youth sharing newly learned dance moves and rapping techniques. The Tour firmly planted the seeds of Hip Hop in France, and they were already beginning to sprout.

The New York City Rap Tour's performers were themselves transformed by their experience as part of the first international Hip Hop concert tour. Most had barely traveled across the borders of New York state; crossing the Atlantic Ocean as professional performers shaped their sense of self-worth and of their potential for artistic recognition and success. After returning to New York City, many found doors for the first time opening. They were presented with new opportunities as professional artists, whether dancers, graffiti writers, nightclub and radio deejays, or recording artists. As dancer Frosty Freeze remembered, "When we came back, that's when everything was happening so fast for us. We were young then, and we were enjoying that."\(^{199}\) This was true on an international scale as well, as the Tour allowed for them to begin building a transatlantic professional network that included fellow artists, tour promoters, journalists, and fans, and which would last for decades.

The Aftermath

The New York City Rap Tour found immediate resonances in the everyday lives of new Hip Hop converts across the Paris region. Daniel Bigeault described the flowering of interest in the aftermath of the Tour: "What really happened was that we all had the impression that [Hip Hop] was addressed directly to us, like it already belonged to us. From one day to the next, there was some TV coverage of the famous Tour on a show called Megahertz... And the next day, in housing projects around France, you had people dancing on cardboard, trying to do the same thing. It caught on immediately." Bigeault drew a correlation between his generation's embrace of Hip Hop and their search for a meaningful music: "It was almost like we all were waiting for something. Since Soul music, there hadn't been anything 'conscious': something positive, but political at the same time, and which belonged to us—the youth—whether Black, North African, or anyone that felt connected. It was pretty amazing how it took off."
Franck Begué—decked out in Hip Hop attire—breakdancing on linoleum in the parking lot of his housing project in Saint-Denis with a boombox in the background (1983)  

Franck Begué was one of these young devotees of Hip Hop. In his bedroom, along the wall behind his brand new set of turntables, he had hung two pages from the 1982 Actuel magazine article written by Elisabeth D. that featured large color pictures of Grandmaster Flash and Grandmixer DST, two of Hip Hop's "founding fathers." He recalled, "I hung it up on my wall. And I was just dreaming... I saw [Grandmixer] DST with his trophy, you know... I was looking at his turntables and just dreaming, dreaming, dreaming!" Right above the magazine clippings, Begué hung a postcard of New York's

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202 Photograph courtesy of Franck Begué.

Statue of Liberty that would overlook him daily as he practiced his scratching techniques on the turntables. Here was Hip Hop—and this piece of Americana—at the very core of this young man's everyday existence. Day in and day out, along with so many like-minded youth around Paris, he was helping birth a community—a transnational Hip Hop community—that was imagined and yet so real.

IMAGE NOT INCLUDED
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The record cover—which Franck Begué hung on his bedroom wall—of Grandmixer DST's 12" single released by Bernard Zekri and Jean Karakos in anticipation of the 1982 New York City Rap Tour
The photograph of Grandmixer DST that appeared in Actuel magazine and to which Franck Begué referred when he said, "I saw [Grandmixer] DST with his trophy, you know... I was looking at his turntables and just dreaming, dreaming!"

Franck Begué posing in his bedroom and makeshift Hip Hop studio where he hung records on his wall, just like Grandmixer DST (1983)
Begué began to notice and be noticed by other Hip Hop enthusiasts in the Paris region. Some kinds of Hip Hop attire—including baseball hats, tracksuits, particular kinds of sneakers—were so rare in France at that time that they became markers of one's status as an insider of the cultural movement. Within a short period, certain public spaces in Paris became key gathering sites for these Hip Hoppers, such as the esplanade at the foot of the Montparnasse tower (the tallest building in all of Paris), les Halles neighborhood in the center of the city, spots along the Champs Elysées Boulevard, and the famous Trocadéro esplanade overlooking the Eiffel Tower. This last site became the most popular because it had a steady stream of tourists from whom these aspiring Hip Hop dancers could earn pocket change as they displayed their recently acquired skills. Teddy Esposito, accompanied by friends from his working-class town thirty minutes northwest of Paris, would travel there and was able to build a network with fellow Hip Hop enthusiasts. He recalled, "We started hanging out at Trocadero, which is across from the Eiffel Tower... We started noticing other guys from Paris that dressed just like us, but we didn't know each other. They dressed like us, we dressed like them. I had a boombox, a radio, with the mirrors painted... We didn't know these guys, but somehow we started talking to them, and we find out that themselves, they were from the other ghettos around Paris. And somehow, we all got into the same kind of music. And the music was not televised. There was no video show... But somehow, collectively, we all connected to this culture called Hip Hop."\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{204} Teddy Esposito, interview with author, 9 February 2011, New York, NY.
Didier Morville, a French-Martinican youth living in the majority immigrant town of Saint-Denis who would later become famous as "Joey Starr"—one-half of the bestselling rap duo, NTM—also frequented these Hip Hop gatherings: "There were regular gatherings at Trocadéro. We never missed them... As soon as someone started dancing at Trocadéro, a circle would form around them. And if someone pushed up from behind us to see, we would say, 'Hey, what's your problem?!'... We dove head first into [Hip Hop]."205 Daniel Fourneuf, who had attended the NYC Rap Tour concert in Paris and was deeply inspired as a deejay after seeing Grandmixer DST, was eventually drawn into breakdancing. He spent many afternoons at the esplanade of the Montparnasse tower where youth from around the Paris region would rollerskate, play frisbee, and listen to music. But at one point, his friends' attention shifted, and therefore his as well: "The thing that really set it off for me: I used to go rollerskating at Montparnasse. And one day, I went there with my skates and my boombox in my arms—because we would skate but always with music playing—but all the guys were there without their skates. They were all there trying to do the moonwalk [dance]. So, I also just put my skates to the side. And, from then on, we would meet up all the time—without our skates—and that was that."206

**Hip Hop Hits The Radio**

This increasing interest in Hip Hop among youth found its first institutionalized presence in French cultural life on the denationalizing radio airwaves. Although an


unintended consequence of the fight for citizen access to the FM airwaves, Hip Hop began to be played on pirate radio stations that were part of a broader movement for freedom of speech, the right to access and disseminate information, and a more varied range of voices and perspectives on the radio dial.

From World War II until 1981—when Socialist candidate François Mitterand assumed the Presidency—French radio was closely controlled by the state, which maintained a monopoly over the few operating stations. The only other radio stations that could be heard by portions of the populace were transmitted from beyond the country's borders, such as *Europe 1, RTL (Radio Télévision Luxembourg)*, and *Radio-Monte-Carlo*. The first serious challenge to this state monopoly came in 1977 when a pirate station, *Radio Verte*, launched in Paris on a makeshift transmitter, thereby initiating a flowering of illegal local stations in its wake. These stations comprised a movement called the "*radios libres,*" literally 'free radios' (as in independent and pirate radio). They were initially largely left-wing and countercultural stations, but eventually included every possible ideological, musical, and religious tendency. By spring of 1978, there were around 80 such stations operating, and by September 1981—just as François Mitterand's administration began to dismantle the government monopoly—there were something like 400. At that time, the pioneering *Radio Verte* sought the financing and acumen of Jean-

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François Bizot—the founder and head of *Actuel* magazine, which was beginning to publish the first articles in French about Hip Hop—who transformed the station into *Radio Nova*, renaming it in homage to William Burroughs's novel, *Nova Express*.210

Among the many stations like *Radio Nova* were several that were home to the earliest Hip Hop radio shows in France.211 Daniel Bigeault, aspiring deejay and attendee of both New York City Rap Tour concerts in Paris, found opportunities to deejay and host shows—at various moments between 1982 and 1984, with his most famous show being "Funk à Billy"—on Paris-based stations *Arc-en-Ciel*, *Carbone 14*, and *RDH* (*Radio des Handicapés*).212 With his unique and funky playlists, he built loyal followings and a wide fanbase of Hip Hop devotees who would come to know him as DJ Dee Nasty, a name bestowed upon him by Afrika Bambaataa.213 Teddy Esposito, another Hip Hop enthusiast inspired by the November 1982 concert tour, recalled: "a few months after [the tour], I got

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213 Ibid.
a radio show... And on the radio show I would play a lot of Funk and Soul and Disco records, and then I had the Rap.\textsuperscript{214} Not far from where Esposito lived in Argenteuil—just northwest of Paris—a pirate radio station called \textit{Radio Ile-de-France} began operating out of an old, giant windmill. At only 16 years old, Esposito was encouraged to launch his own show using the many rare imported records from his growing collection. He was given a Wednesday afternoon time slot, since this was the day when French students were dismissed early from school and were more likely to be listening to the radio. Esposito would trek by foot every Wednesday with his heavy stack of records to the station. From there, he broadcast his show, which he had dubbed "Black Star Music." For its very first airing, he explained, "I told all my boys, 'Listen to me [on the radio], and do me a favor: call in so I look like I'm famous.' So, they called in and the owner [of the station] said he was happy.\textsuperscript{215} Eventually, Esposito and his multi-ethnic crew of neighborhood friends—which included North African, West African, and Caribbean-descended youth—were able to spread the word about the show at Hip Hop gathering sites around Paris. As he described: "We would take the train to Paris—when the weather was nice—and we would tell our boys about it. And then on Sundays, too, whenever we went to the [afternoon Hip Hop gatherings at] clubs, we said, 'Look, on Wednesdays, listen to the show'... And so, slowly but surely, it became popular." In due time, genuine listener phone calls replaced the simulated calls from his friends, with inquiries about the specific groups and record companies whose songs he was playing: "I started getting real phone calls from people asking me, 'What the hell are you playing?' I mean, I would have sequences of \textit{Celluloid}

\textsuperscript{214} Teddy Esposito, interview with author, 9 February 2011, New York, NY.

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
records, and then Sugar Hill, and then Enjoy, and then some weird shit from Detroit. Weird, obscure records.”

Although shows like Esposito's "Black Star Music" and Bigeault's "Funk à Billy" developed faithful audiences, their reach was ultimately limited by the relatively weak—and constantly policed—transmitters of their local pirate stations. Largely in response to the vibrant and youth-oriented pirate radio stations that were flourishing in the Paris region in the lead-up to Mitterand's 1981 victory, state-controlled Radio France launched its own new station to cater to young listeners: Radio 7. Inaugurated in June 1980, the station sought to win over a previously ignored demographic. And it was on this station that the most popular Hip Hop radio show would eventually air.

As Radio 7 was cobbled together its time slots and recruiting hosts and deejays, the station's Director of Programming, Marie-France Brière, sought a young, hip host for a show that would play "Black music": everything from African American to Caribbean to African music. For Brière, there was only one choice: a nightclub deejay named Sidney Duteil. Duteil—at that time, still only known to a select group of Paris nightclub insiders—came from a long line of musicians from the French Caribbean. In the early part of the twentieth century, Duteil's grandfather played trumpet in the Guadeloupe Philharmonic Orchestra. His father, born and raised in the largest city in Guadeloupe,

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Point-à-Pitre, played the drums and the saxophone, while his father's three brothers played the saxophone, drums, and banjo. The Duteils, although not part of the island's elite, grew to have a reputation across the French Caribbean as a family of musicians.\textsuperscript{219} They had all played in some of the best Jazz groups and orchestras in the region, and were widely known and respected.

In the early 1950s, Sidney Duteil's father moved to metropolitan France in hopes of joining the larger "jazz migration" mainly made up of African-American musicians who were looking for greater opportunities and to escape American racism.\textsuperscript{220} All the American Jazz greats toured Europe and many settled in France for varying lengths of time. The opportunities to play in clubs and earn a living—especially as a Black musician—were thought to be greater in France than either the U.S. or the Caribbean. Sidney's father found work in Pigalle, the notorious Paris neighborhood where musicians, hoodlums, and prostitutes lived and worked side-by-side.\textsuperscript{221} He played with European, African-American, and Cuban Jazz musicians, contributing to the music scene that made Paris one of the world's cultural capitals.

Sidney Duteil was born in 1955 in Argenteuil, the same working-class town just northwest of Paris where Teddy Esposito would many years later broadcast his radio show, "Black Star Music." Duteil grew up in a household steeped in African American musical


\textsuperscript{220} For more on this "black jazz migration," see: Rachel Gillett, "Crossing The Pond: Jazz, Race, and Gender in Interwar Paris," Ph.D. dissertation, Northeastern University, 2010.

culture, and his father and uncles taught him to play several instruments. During the 1970s, he played in various Soul and Funk bands, eventually picking up the skill of deejaying. Beginning in 1978, he was a resident deejay at L'Emaraude nightclub in Paris, one of the very few clubs in the region where African, African American, and Caribbean musics were played alongside one another. Duteil was the one person most responsible for this eclectic mix. In due time, the nightclub gained a certain renown for this lively and unique sound. As Marie-France Brière pondered the options for the deejay position for the station's "Black music" show, Duteil was her first choice.

Although he had no experience in radio, Duteil accepted her offer, initially attracted mainly by the idea of having full and free access to the massive record collection at the station's headquarters, Radio France. Sidney Duteil named his show "Rapper Dapper Snapper" after the Edwin Birdsong disco-funk tune of the same name, and held court every evening from 10pm until midnight, with freedom to program the music he wanted. As he discovered more and more Hip Hop records arriving from the United States, the new music quickly took centerstage alongside his usual fare of Funk, Disco, and Soul. "Rapper Dapper Snapper" drew a huge following, with fans far outside the station's reach—which stretched across the greater Paris region—collecting sought-after audio-cassette dubs of the show, which were often copied many times and circulated among a growing network of enthusiasts.222

As Duteil's show increasingly centered on Hip Hop, young people would show up at the station's headquarters with boomboxes and their breakdancing attire, and either have

impromptu gatherings outside the building or manage to make their way into the hallways. Among them were Franck Begué, Souleymane Dicko, and a host of others from around Paris and its surrounding working-class suburbs, many of whom had seen and been influenced by the 1982 New York City Rap Tour. As Hip Hop artists from New York City began to visit Paris in the aftermath of the tour—whether for concerts, gallery exhibitions, or promotional tours—they would inevitably join Duteil's show as guests. Duteil recalled one such time when Futura 2000 and dancer Mister Freeze appeared on his show, and the response was overwhelming: "I said on the radio, 'We're organizing a thing where Futura will do some graffiti. Everybody bring a white t-shirt'... That day, I said to myself, 'There'll probably be like 10 or 20 people who show up, like usual.' [Duteil makes a facial expression showing surprise] They ended up calling the police! There was like 200 or 300 young folks in the hallway of the building... They came into the hallway, and since the hallway of *Radio France* is pretty slippery, they began dancing everywhere. There was the music, there was FUTURA 2000 who was designing the kids' t-shirts, and it was like he was a superstar." Describing the scene that day, Duteil recalled: "Futura had on his gas mask, he was designing all these kids' t-shirts. And, right on the other side, Mister Freeze was teaching some young folks how to dance, showing them how to b-boy. I was playing records, talking on the radio. I was describing everything that was going on there. And more and more people kept showing up. As a result, the security guards called the head of the radio station who then called me: 'Sidney, you know, with the number of security guards we have, you can't have this many people coming here.' I said, 'But, there's nothing

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223 Ibid.
I can do! We're being invaded by this new culture that's taking over. It's crazy." Marie-France Brière arrived around midnight, only to find her radio station swamped with youth participating in this impromptu Hip Hop celebration. Duteil was surprised to learn that she was actually glad to see the throngs of excited young people: "She catches a glimpse of everything that's going on and is like, 'It's incredible, it's wonderful.' Everyone that sees what's going on, even the security guards, they're like, 'What is this? These kids are turning and flipping on their backs'... It was just like, 'What is going on?!?'" 

The overwhelming response to Duteil's radio show was evidence of the growing interest and investment in Hip Hop by French youth across the region. While the 1982 New York City Rap Tour had introduced a wider French public not only to Rap music, but to the many elements that comprise Hip Hop—graffiti art, deejaying, breakdancing, and beyond—the cultural movement found its most important ally in the denationalizing French radio airwaves. In that sense, the institutionalization of Hip Hop in French cultural life was an unintended consequence of the fight for the democratization of the French mass media. In the aftermath of the tour, over the course of 1982 and 1983, Hip Hop had slowly created a presence in radio.

The forward-thinking Marie-France Brière had been at the source of the newly launched Radio 7's success, and thanks in no small part to the popularity of Sidney Duteil's show, "Rapper Dapper Snapper." But she had bigger ambitions, and was soon hired as Director of Variety Programming at TF1, France's first and largest television station. There, she was charged with revamping the programming, and the first group she sought to

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224 Ibid.

225 Ibid.
win over was French youth. Facing serious competition from the newly rising *Antenne 2* channel, which surpassed TF1 in audience viewership for the first time in October 1981, Brière contemplated the unthinkable: Hip Hop on television.

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Chapter 3

Broadcasting Hip Hop, Remaking French Culture:
Hip Hop on the Small Screen and on the Paris Streets
In the aftermath of the "New York City Rap Tour," a network of dancers, deejays, graffiti artists, and enthusiasts came to form the core of the cultural movement in France. As these youth from Paris and the surrounding suburbs converged at informal meeting points around the city, they exchanged whatever news about Hip Hop that they were able to gather, practiced the newest dance moves they had learned, and formed dance and graffiti crews that sometimes drew members from all across the region. Despite this flurry of activity however, Hip Hop was garnering almost no attention from formal cultural institutions or the mass media. Local radio had been the sole outlet for this growing movement whose members remained a small minority, with the most committed probably numbering only in the hundreds. But all this would change in January of 1984.

Debuting on the afternoon of Sunday, January 15, 1984 on France's first and largest TV channel, TF1, was a weekly fourteen-minute show called "H.I.P. H.O.P." (pronounced "ash-ipé ash-opé" in French). Rather remarkably, this show—created, produced, and broadcast in France—was the first regularly and nationally broadcast Hip Hop show in the world, before any equivalent appeared in the country of Hip Hop's birth (the United States). Musician and deejay Sidney Duteil co-created and hosted the show, thereby becoming the first Black host in the history of French television (a fact that has since then gone nearly unremarked). This was of no small significance, as his debut took place soon after the historic "March for Equality and Against Racism" of November 1983 ("Marche Pour l'Égalité et Contre le Racisme") as well as the emergence in national politics of the racist, xenophobic National Front Party (FN). Most importantly, this show was to define

227 Later that same year (1984), two important Hip Hop shows were created in the U.S., one by Ralph McDaniels which aired on local New York TV and another by Michael Holman which only ever had one episode. Neither was a regularly, nationally broadcast show as was "H.I.P. H.O.P."
how Hip Hop came to be rooted along the social, racial, and spatial fault-lines in French society. The show communicated through visual, sonic, and ideological idioms—including the design of the set, the particular use of language by the host and participants, and the valorization of the *banlieues*—to foster a sense of community, shared purpose and fate, and a common set of cultural practices. A transnational Hip Hop community was being born. Evidence of this could be seen in the tremendous response to the show, with young people throughout France ritually gathering in front of their televisions every Sunday afternoon to watch. Immediately afterward, they flooded their neighborhood streets, attempting to replicate and expand upon the dance moves they had just witnessed.

The show both gave evidence of and tacitly articulated the connections between race and space in French Hip Hop by featuring a host, participants, and an audience disproportionately composed of non-white post-colonial populations, as well as by conveying images and ideas that emphasized the (sub)urban streets and housing projects as the locus of Hip Hop cultural practice. For once, it seemed, these populations and their neighborhoods were being celebrated. In this sense, the show also fundamentally expanded the sense of possibility for participation in French cultural life and French national identity for otherwise marginalized populations. "H.I.P. H.O.P." was symbolic of—and, in fact, helped to usher in—fundamental shifts in French society that had been underway since the beginning of the 1980s but which had been theretofore largely invisible.

Much of this was achieved by first cultivating and then drawing on French youth's collective cultural imagination that centered on Hip Hop's place of birth: not simply America at large, but New York City and its African American and Latino neighborhoods
in particular. Frequent references to New York, especially the Bronx, as well as frequent appearances by visiting American artists—including Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmixer DST, Herbie Hancock, and Break Machine, among many others—meant that French youth began to identify not only as members of a French Hip Hop community, but of a transnational one. Opportunities to watch and interact with such (African)American Hip Hop luminaries united disparate communities into one common Global Hip Hop Nation. In a sense, the show brought New York to Paris.

The mass dissemination of Hip Hop also meant that the leisure industries took a great interest in capitalizing on the movement's momentary popularity, if only for the one year during which the show existed. Hip Hop had created a captive audience, which for marketing purposes meant the opening up of a whole new market. Suddenly, Hip Hop appeared in advertisements for a wide array of products, including everything from clothing to yogurt. This very fact, along with the weariness of the show's producers in the face of what they considered the growing caricaturing of Hip Hop by much of the mass media, led to the decision to end the show. In December of 1984, the show's last episode aired. Almost in unison, the news media and the leisure industries also left Hip Hop behind. Without the television show, few thought Hip Hop would survive in France. The fad was pronounced dead. Journalist and cultural impresario Bernard Zekri, who arrived back in France from New York in early 1985, described it this way: "I returned to France in '85. Sidney's hip hop show was cancelled, trendy Paris was burying rap. That wasn't the case for the banlieue."²²⁸ Indeed, for the banlieues—the working-class, immigrant

suburbs—the television show represented only the beginning of the story of Hip Hop's profound impact.

From Hip Hop to "H.I.P. H.O.P."

By late 1983, Sidney Duteil was becoming something of a small-time celebrity in the Paris region because of his popular radio show and nightclub deejaying. When his former boss, Marie-France Brière, took over as a Programming Director at the TF1 television station, she contemplated what shows she could develop to reach a young demographic. Nearly immediately, she thought of the phenomenon that she had witnessed while working at Radio 7: the youth craze around Sidney Duteil's show and the new American cultural movement, Hip Hop. By all accounts, Brière is a straight-shooting, no-nonsense, cosmopolitan woman and she was not fazed by what would have given most French television executives serious pause: that such a show would feature a Black host and a working-class, multi-ethnic studio audience. But, Brière was not a run-of-the-mill TV executive. She spent much of her childhood in Argentina, the daughter of a ship captain and prima ballerina, and only moved to France at the age of ten. As a teenager, she was swept up in the burgeoning Yéyé movement.229 She went directly to the head of the radio station Europe 1 to demand that a show be created that catered directly to the young generation of French Yéyé and Rock 'n Roll fans. Her newly created radio show became a huge hit, and through it she met and befriended many Rock stars of the day, including the

Beatles. She carried this boldness with her throughout her career, emerging as a formidable force in the entertainment industry. She brought this same charisma, drive, and candor to her job at TF1.230

After having witnessed the enormous popularity of Duteil's radio show at Radio 7, Brière thought this new cultural movement would make for great television. Young people came from throughout the Paris region to participate in the taping of Duteil's radio show. They represented a new youth movement, a movement with its own styles of dress, its own dances, and its own music—for Brière, they recalled the Yé-Yé movement of two decades earlier of which she was herself a part. She called Duteil to see what he thought of the idea: "She said to me, 'So Sidney, what would you think of having your own TV show?' 'You mean, like what I do on the radio?' She said, 'Yeah, about that stuff you do on the floor [i.e. Hip Hop dance]. You would demonstrate that stuff on TV.'"231 Even though Duteil was excited by the idea, he was more stunned than anything else. He had never worked in television before, and no such Hip Hop show had ever existed, not even in the country of Hip Hop's birth—the United States. He was at a loss as to how to respond to the offer. He later explained, "But, how was I going to make a show out of that? There was no show like that, no model that I could follow." He knew he would need a team. He called his two closest connections to New York Hip Hop: Laurence Touitou and Sophie Bramly.

230 For background on Marie-France Brière's life and work, see her appearance on: "Ma Vie Est Une Aventure," France 3 – Limousin Poitou-Charentes, 11 September 2010.

After making many back-and-forth trips to New York since the turn of the 1980s, Touitou and Bramly had been key trans-Atlantic cultural intermediaries. They had befriended (and in Bramly's case, also documented in photographs) Hip Hop's foremost figures in New York—the pioneers of the movement. With each return to Paris, they brought the latest records and information, and Duteil—as the unofficial leader of the nascent Hip Hop scene in Paris—was their French beneficiary. Touitou and Bramly were bearers of Hip Hop culture, even sometimes bringing New York's Hip Hop stars, like Afrika Bambaataa or Futura 2000, to Duteil's radio station to appear on his show. Duteil, Touitou, and Bramly had become close friends. He knew that if he wanted to develop a successful Hip Hop TV show, they would have to help him. But Touitou was a full-time, practicing architect. Immersed in her job, she did not have much free time to devote to what would have seemed at that time, so early in the history of Hip Hop in France, a doomed venture (if only for lack of a receptive audience). Touitou recalled, "Sidney couldn't sleep. He called me. He said, '[Marie-France] wants me to do a TV show about this 'thing' that happened at the station," referring the throngs of young people that showed up at the radio headquarters for the taping of his shows. Duteil thought that Touitou was at least partly responsible for this massive response to his radio show and therefore should help him with this TV show. As Laurence explained, "Almost like, 'It's your fault. You're coming.' And me, I was still working in architecture. I had a lot of work."232 Sidney remembered, "I wrote some things down and then I called Laurence Touitou to tell her. I asked her if she wanted to develop the concept with me. Then we called Sophie Bramly,

and with the two of them we concocted something. We spent some sleepless nights working at their places to pull the project together.\textsuperscript{233}

In a matter of a few days, they had to get ready for a meeting with the executives at TF1 who were surely going to be skeptical about the idea. Duteil, Touitou, and Bramly prepared materials about the culture of Hip Hop, including photographs and sketches of Hip Hop scenes and of possible layouts for the show's set. And they persuaded New York graffiti legend Futura 2000—who had by that time been spending increasing amounts of time in Paris with his French fiancée, Cece—to produce small graffiti pieces to show the TV executives as examples of Hip Hop visual art, which might also serve well as background visuals for the show. The day of the big meeting, Laurence arrived at TF1's headquarters with bags in both hands, full of material for the presentation. Much as Afrika Bambaataa and Fab Five Freddy explained to the downtown Manhattan arts impresarios and journalists that Hip Hop was an entire movement, with its own dance, music, and visual arts, Duteil and Touitou sought to do the same for these executives. Sitting before them were TF1's president, Hervé Bourges, the young television director Gabriel Cotto, a few other TV executives and their assistants, and the one person who was in full support of the show: Marie-France Brière.

This was Sidney and Laurence's one moment to convince TF1 to accept their idea for a show. Sidney recounted, "Marie-France Brière introduces us. I explain the project. Laurence shows the designs, the photos, the art and culture of the Hip Hop movement."

But Laurence noted the skepticism on the executives' faces, and began to explain how this

cultural movement was not so alien, that it already had connections to French culture. Sidney recalled, "She was explaining how the smurf [i.e. a particular Hip Hop dance style] comes from the [French] mime [Marcel] Marceau."\(^{234}\) Marie-France interjected. Sidney described the scene: "In that meeting, the guys said to themselves that Marie-France is crazy. And what's more, a show hosted by a Black man was unthinkable. So Marie-France Brière said: 'Listen, you named me Director of Variety Programming, and this is my first show. Either this show gets made, or I give you back the keys to my office.'\(^{235}\)

The TF1 executives gave in. The show would appear in a prime time Sunday afternoon slot, right after the American series *Starsky & Hutch*. And Brière announced to Duteil and Touitou that the show would be debuting immediately. Touitou recalled, "She said, 'The show is next week!'"\(^{236}\) So, Duteil, Touitou, and Bramly got right to work. Meanwhile, Sylvie Faiveley, an old colleague of Sidney's at *Radio 7* during Marie-France's tenure there, was brought onto the production team for the new show: "I really liked having Marie-France Brière as a Programming Director [at the radio station] because she was pretty crazy, but in a good way. She was always doing a lot."\(^{237}\) But when Marie-France took a new job as Programming Director at TF1, Sylvie thought she might like to follow her there: "I set up a meeting with her and said, 'Listen, Marie-France, I've had an idea for a long time for a TV show for children about music.' And she said to me, 'Listen, your show doesn't really interest me. But, you came at the right time because I'm just in the

\(^{234}\) Ibid.

\(^{235}\) Ibid.

\(^{236}\) Laurence Touitou, interview with author, 15 August 2006, Paris, France.

midst of preparing a show with Sidney. It's also a show for kids about music. Well, I don't know too much about what it is exactly, but you'll figure it out.' And that's how I was hired. So, completely independently of what Sidney was doing, I had come with this idea for a music show for kids. It just so happened that it all came at the same time. And she was looking to hire a team, and she saw that I was enthusiastic about music and about kids. Plus, I got along well with Sidney."²³⁸

Creating and Representing "Hip Hop" Anew

The same teaching that had to be done in the TF1 boardroom, would also have to take place on the show itself since most of the French viewing audience knew little or nothing about Hip Hop. And since there was no model for what a Hip Hop TV show might look like, Sidney relied not only on his Paris-NY intermediaries, Laurence and Sophie, but also his budding relationship with the New York Hip Hop pioneers: "I ended up calling Fab 5 Freddy, calling [Afrika] Bambaataa.... I called them to ask if I could have a show about Hip Hop and if I could call it 'H-I-P H-O-P' because for me that name 'Hip Hop' was something that belonged to the United States. It was a name—for a culture—that I didn't just want to appropriate. I didn't want to appropriate Hip Hop Culture. I wanted to do it with them, the Americans. And Bambaataa said, 'No problem. I'll let you know what you should do.... On the TV show, you have to give lessons: the first Hip Hop courses in French.'"²³⁹


²³⁹ Sidney Duteil, interview in Meghelli et al., The Global Cipha, 285.
Afrika Bambaataa meant something very particular by his suggestion that Sidney "give lessons" on the new show. Bambaataa was raised in a household steeped in Black nationalist and diasporic political and musical cultures, and was early on inspired by the ideas of the Black Panther Party, the Nation of Islam, and the Ansaar Allah community. Although Bambaataa had been an influential member of the Black Spades, one of the largest and most prominent gangs in the Bronx, he eventually set out to create an informal organization whose aim was to redirect the energies of neighborhood youth and gang members into more constructive endeavors. At first called "The Bronx River Organization" (after his housing project, the Bronx River Houses), then simply "The Organization," and finally "The Zulu Nation," this organization became one of the principal forces in the burgeoning Hip Hop Cultural Movement in New York. Bambaataa and his crew—which included some of the city's most talented deejays, dancers, rappers, and graffiti artists—organized Hip Hop parties in parks, community centers, and nightclubs, and sought to spread a philosophy that came to be crystallized in a phrase that is still repeated among Hip Hop enthusiasts today: "Peace, Love, Unity, and Havin' Fun."

The Zulu Nation also developed something called the "Infinity Lessons" which official members were expected to learn and which drew on the format and message of the "Supreme Wisdom Lessons" of the Nation of Islam, the "120 Lessons" of the Nation of Gods and Earths, and the teachings of the Ansaar Allah community. These "Infinity

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Lessons," which evolved and expanded over time, described the Zulu Nation as "an organization of individuals in search of success, peace, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and the righteous way of life."\(^{242}\) It represented a kind of core moral philosophy for many in the global Hip Hop community, including those who claimed no official affiliation with the organization.

As Hip Hop began to spread beyond the five boroughs of New York City and beyond the borders of the United States, the Zulu Nation remained a critical organizing and ideological force. When Duteil called Bambaataa for advice about his new show, Bambaataa counseled him to help spread the Hip Hop nationalism at the heart of the Zulu Nation philosophy. Duteil explained: "Bambaataa just gave me the philosophy behind Hip Hop.... I wanted to maintain that same spirit in Hip Hop Culture. So, we began the Zulu Nation in France. When I was talking [on the TV show], I was also talking to mobilize those young [French] people. And Bambaataa was an enormous help in that work."\(^{243}\)


\(^{242}\) Photocopies of these lessons (translated into French) were circulating in France by the mid- to late-1980s. Reproduced in: Hugues Bazin, *La culture hip-hop* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1995), 78.

Between Brière's insistence that the show be used to teach Hip Hop dance to young French audiences and Afrika Bambaataa's encouragement to spread the Zulu Nation's philosophy of Hip Hop, the show was from the very beginning designed to be didactic, as well as entertaining and participatory. Duteil, Touitou, and Bramly wanted the show to be sincere and authentic in its presentation of the cultural movement's content and context. The cultural practices would be without meaning if presented in a vacuum. The team knew they had to capture the very particular environment in which Hip Hop was born and thrived: namely, the streets. Laurence, as a trained architect who had lived and worked in New York, knew intimately the urban spaces and built environment that were the setting for Hip Hop. And Sophie, as a photographer who had spent time in and documented the neighborhoods, nightclubs, and community centers where young Black New Yorkers spent their time, had a clear sense of the visual aesthetics of the cultural movement. Her photographs were some of the best of the early Hip Hop movement, so much so that they were shown at Hip Hop parties like those at the famous New York nightclub, The Roxy.244

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244 This ad for a party at The Roxy nightclub mentions the showing of "Slides by Sophie Bramley [sic.]" Reprinted in: Sophie Bramly, Olivier Carrié, Laurence Touitou, and Sidney, *Hip Hop Story* (Paris: Hachette Jeunesse, 1984), 21.
Duteil knew that both Touitou and Bramly "had a particular way of seeing New York [which could come] through in how we presented the show."\textsuperscript{245} Touitou explained, "It was a visual language that Sophie and I knew very well. We did the designs for the set, for the outfits, everything." Sophie Bramly added, "Basically, we put together a TV set that resembled a street."\textsuperscript{246} The set for the show included a range of large panels spray-painted

\textsuperscript{245} Sidney Duteil, interview in Meghelli et al., \textit{The Global Cipha}, 285.
by New York graffiti artist Futura 2000 which lined the circular perimeter. In the very middle, Laurence decided to place a huge circular piece of linoleum ("like I saw in New York," she recalled), that iconic accessory of Hip Hop streetdance that allows for quicker, slicker floor moves. When Hip Hop dancers wanted to practice or perform on the sidewalks or playgrounds of New York City, they sometimes placed a piece of linoleum on the ground to allow for easier spinning and to prevent from being scratched by the asphalt or concrete. Laurence wanted the ambiance of the show to resemble what she experienced in New York, at places like the Roxy nightclub: "I thought we were going to do like a little Roxy: DJ, MCs, and dancers." But Marie-France insisted that they "add a game element to that so that there could be a winner."247


Hip Hop Arrives on French TV

The opening sequence of "H.I.P. H.O.P." featuring the logo designed by Sophie Bramly. All images are courtesy of: Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (L'INA).

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248 All images are from: "H.I.P. H.O.P.", TF1, various episodes, 1984, l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (L'INA).
The show's opening sequence featuring host Sidney (1984)
An Air France plane pulls into a Paris airport terminal while Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "New York, New York" serves as the musical background. "New York/ New York/ Big city of dreams..." chants the group on this iconic rap song. The show's narrator announces: "Hip Hop is arriving from New York, a movement born in the street around a very, very big boombox. It's taking off in France: in the subway, in parking lots. Hip Hop is everywhere! Every Sunday, Hip Hop is here on Channel 1."249

So begins the debut episode of this historic weekly television show. With the background music rising to a climax, Duteil and his sidekicks—the three-man Hip Hop dance crew, the Paris City Breakers—walk to the middle of the airport hallway alongside New York graffiti artist Futura 2000. They form a semi-circle as Duteil begins rapping in French, decked out in a leather jacket, hat, and dark sunglasses. Futura goes to the middle and struts around with a big boombox in his arms. Following Futura, Duteil introduces the Paris City Breakers one by one, allowing each of the three members to show off their dance skills: first comes Franck le Breaker Fou ("Franck the Crazy Breaker"), then Willy, then Solo.

249 "H.I.P. H.O.P." Episode 1, TF1, 15 January 1984, INA. The narrator's voice was that of budding journalist Michel Denisot, who later became President of the Paris Saint-Germain soccer team and Director of Programming for major French TV channel "Canal+."
Sidney introduces the episode's new dance lesson in "La Leçon" (1984)

The narrator interjects, speaking directly to the viewing audience: "Excuse me, sir. If you want to be in the know, here's the first lesson. Watch Sidney closely!" In this next segment of the show, announced as "La Leçon" ("The Lesson"), Sidney introduces a new dance step to the viewers at home. Explicitly didactic in tone, "La Leçon" sought to transmit the newest American Hip Hop dance moves and dress styles to young, aspiring Hip Hoppers all across France. With the exception of this segment, which necessitated a decidedly slow pace, the show was otherwise fast-moving, passing from one scene to the next as if embodying the hectic speed of New York life and the rhythm of a Hip Hop beat.
Sidney with the live studio audience in a semi-circle (resembling a cipher), with a circle of linoleum in the middle. Futura 2000's canvases can be seen in the background. (1984)

The next segment of the show was introduced as "Le Défi" ("The Battle"). There are few cultural practices in Hip Hop as central as "the battle," a competitive stand-off between rappers or dancers.\textsuperscript{250} Battles often occur in the context of a cipher (also commonly spelled "cipha" or "cypher"), a circle of rappers or of dancers in which each takes a turn demonstrating his/her skills, attempting to outdo one another.\textsuperscript{251} Other times, battles occur between crews of dancers, in a kind of duel of dance teams. And these are, at times, impromptu and other times planned well in advance. For the show, Brière, Duteil,


\textsuperscript{251} For more on ciphers/ciphas, see: Meghelli et al., The Global Cipha, 5-8; Michael Newman, "Rap as literacy: A genre analysis of Hip-Hop ciphers," Text, volume 25, issue 3 (2005), 399-436; Imani Kai Johnson, "Dark Matter in B-Boying Cyphers: Hip Hop Dance Circles as Models of Cross-Racial Collaboration" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009), 4-5.
and Touitou decided to incorporate a planned battle between young participants who would have to write letters to the TV channel and participate in an audition before being chosen as one of the week's two contestants in the dance battle. For the taping of the show, the two selected contestants appeared alongside a crowd of young aspiring dancers who served as the live studio audience. Duteil allowed the contestants to introduce themselves, always being sure to ask which city or which town they were from, as well as where they practiced their dancing (sometimes inciting the crowd to exclaim "Yeahhhhh!" if the dancers responded that they practice in the street or in front of their housing project).

Fred "DJ Fred" Montabord in the foreground, deejaying and intermittently rapping short phrases in English while Sidney introduces the episode's breakdance contestants. (1984)

This debut episode featured two young contestants, Benoit Dubessy from the working-class suburb of Pantin, and Fernando Costa from Argenteuil, the same working-
class suburb where Sidney was raised. While Futura 2000 spray painted a canvas in the background and while the show's DJ played music, the dancers took two or three turns, each doing short improvised Hip Hop dance sequences beginning first with their rendition of the new dance move presented in the day's "Lesson." Afterwards, the Paris City Breakers served as the "Le Jury" ("The Jury"), deciding between the dancers. The announced winner was then presented with a gift-wrapped prize which included much sought-after pieces of Hip Hop apparel: a TF1 baseball hat, a Champion tracksuit, and Adidas shoes. In closing the show, Sidney announced: "Today, Benoit won. Next Sunday, it could be you! If you want to participate, write to us at: TF1 Hip Hop, 17 rue de l'Arrivée, 75015 Paris."

Sidney holds the microphone while the episode's breakdance contestants, Fabrice and Phillipe, introduce themselves to the viewing audience. (1984)
No one at TF1, including Duteil, Touitou, Bramly, and Brière, was quite sure how television audiences would respond to the new show, the first in the history of French television to feature a Black Frenchman as host, and one that centered on a strange, new American cultural movement. They hardly could have expected that within a matter of days, Hip Hop had invaded all corners of France.

Early Media Coverage of the Show

Only several days after the first episode aired, journalist Bernard Loupias, who has always had a knack for being attuned to the newest developments in the Afro-diasporic music scene, sought out Duteil for an interview. Loupias went to the radio headquarters where Duteil was still hosting his nightly radio show, and was taken aback by what he saw. In an article entitled "Sydney, Le Roi des Smurfeurs de Paname" ["Sydney, King of the Paris Breakdancers"] that appeared in the January 21-22 issue of the newspaper Le Matin, Loupias described the scene: "Tuesday night, at the radio headquarters, 8:30pm. Sydney is on the mic at Radio 7. He's rapping, and in French. He's in rare form. But he no longer has even a minute to himself. Fame. In less than a year, he's gone from the Émaurude, one of the best black nightclubs in Paris, to the radio and, since last Sunday, to TF-1 on TV. If the 'hip hop' movement, rap culture, explodes here—which is in the midst of happening—he will certainly be the number one spark that set it off!"

He continued, "I watch him working. Before him is a pile of records that he scatters around. He chooses one, runs into the control room, puts it on the turntable and scratches live. Like clockwork, back into the

Another freestyle rap over the introduction to the next record and he stretches out on his chair. He looks just like the gangsters of Rap who control the Bronx, like his friends DST, Fab Five Freddy, Futura 2000 and the others, with a leather hat, jeans, and basketball shoes.”

Sydney featured in a *Le Matin* newspaper article announcing his arrival on TV (1984)
Loupia had attended one of the November 1982 "New York City Rap Tour" concerts in Paris, and had seen how the French audience responded to that display of Hip Hop culture with equal parts amazement and bewilderment. Now, only 14 months later, what most struck Loupias was how deeply French youth had come to identify with the New York-born cultural movement and how quickly they had assimilated Hip Hop into their everyday cultural lives, down to the very nuances of dress, physical gestures, and linguistic practices. He included the following description in his article: "Sydney takes the mic again: 'Shout out to all the breaking crews of the 13th, 14th, and 15th [districts of Paris], of Antony, Saint-Denis, and elsewhere. And here's a new record that Gérald just brought us from New York.' Gérald, like dozens of other adolescents every night, has come to check out the studio. In the hallways, they practice [their breakdancing]. There's a crew from the 13th [district of Paris] and another one from Rueil-Malmaison. I watch them. They have the same look as their little brothers in the Bronx. Surprising. They breakdance like pros."

These French youth were clearly beginning to stake out their place in the transnational Hip Hop community. For Loupias, this was sure evidence that Hip Hop's influence was going to continue to expand at a rapid pace in France, and particularly in the working-class, multi-ethnic neighborhoods of Paris and its suburbs. And Duteil—through this radio show, but especially through the newly launched television show—would be the key figure in Hip Hop's dissemination. "The [television] show 'Hip Hop' has meaning: it's to say to others to do just as much as we are with [Hip Hop], to create groups, because breakdancing isn't meant to be done alone," Duteil explained to Bernard. "It's about sharing new moves and having a good time. I hope that we're going to spark something huge here
in France. Hip Hop is a positive, athletic, and non-violent movement that allows you to get
down to Funky music.”

Duteil and Loupias could not have been more accurate in their predictions about the
show's impact. There were signs almost immediately. Laurence Touitou, H.I.P. H.O.P.'s
co-creator and co-producer, recalled: "After two or three weeks, we had like bags of letters
from fans, from kids. All the letters came with [kids'] drawings of themselves dancing or of
Sidney." At the end of each episode, Sidney encouraged his viewers to write letters if
they were interested in appearing either as dance competitors or as studio audience
members, and kids began writing in droves. A portion of the letter-writers were invited to
weekly auditions where the show's staff decided who would compete as the next episode's
two dancers and who would appear as members of the studio audience. The demand for
Hip Hop far outweighed the fourteen minutes of airtime it was allotted each Sunday.

Caroline Rochman, a journalist at the mainstream French contemporary dance
magazine, Danser, was given an assignment to write about the new phenomenon that was
sweeping the country. At the outset of her article, she announced: "Amateurs of rock or
disco, you've been relegated to the title of 'has been.' All because, for several months now,
a movement from the Bronx, New York has been invading our nightclubs, our media, and
the street: Hip Hop." While visiting the TF1 offices one afternoon while working on the
article, Rochman witnessed a scene that was becoming all too familiar to H.I.P. H.O.P.'s
production staff:


256 Caroline Rochman, "Hip Hip Hop... Hourya!" Danser, No 11, Avril 1984, 20.
- 'Excuse me, ma'am, is Sidney here? We came to sign up for the battle...'
- 'But we told you to write,' replied the show's assistant.
- 'That's what we did, but we didn't receive a response yet, so my friend Karim and I came from Bobigny since it's school vacation... Wait, ma'am, we're gonna show you what we know how to do!'²⁵⁷

Rochman continued: "In ten seconds, the small office of the host was transformed into a dancefloor where the two kids spun, jumped, fluttered about. Laurence Touitou, co-producer of the show, is completely overwhelmed. All this for fifteen minutes which, every Sunday at 2:20pm, has been generating a real craze. From Bagneux or Sarcelles, from Saint-Denis or Paris's 20th arrondissement, two hundred and fifty letters arrive each day. Average age of the letter-writers: 14 years old."²⁵⁸

Witnessing the passion of these young French Hip Hoppers and hearing of the number of letters the TV station received, Rochman wondered what exactly this phenomenon was and where it came from. Laurence helped explain it to her: "But what exactly is Hip Hop? Hip Hop is neither dance, nor a fad, but a movement born in 1975 on the sidewalks of the Bronx, New York, 'by a bunch of very poor people who'd had enough and who wanted a way to escape from their ghetto.' Essentially, rather than fight in the street, this 'lost generation' of teenagers from 12 to 18 years old, tired of wasting their energy in useless gang wars, decided instead to do battle through their dancing."²⁵⁹ But, Rochman asked: "How could these dances have crossed the Atlantic?" Laurence replied,

²⁵⁷ Caroline Rochman, "Hip Hip Hop... Hourya!" Danser, No 11, Avril 1984, 20.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.
"It's very simple, all it took was five minutes of breakdancing in [the movie] *Flashdance* for everyone to go crazy... And then there was Sydney."\(^{260}\)

The Hollywood film *Flashdance* certainly helped ignite the craze, but Duteil came to be seen as the emblematic figurehead of Hip Hop in France, facilitating the spread of the cultural movement through his radio and TV shows. But it was the TV show in particular that was key, as it connected Duteil with a national, and eventually international, audience. Rochman described the program's impact: "Every sunday, thousands of kids are glued to their little TV screens to hear the famous opening phrase of their god! 'Hello, my brother and sisters, how are you doing?' They're all there, the brothers and sisters, Blacks, Mulattos, Whites, Asians, have come to cheer for their idol." Hip Hop was invading public and private spaces across the country: "It's impossible to deny that hip hop is flourishing everywhere: in the subway stations (Chatelet and Les Halles have become the veritable headquarters), in the train stations (take a look in front of Montparnasse), on the esplanade of Trocadéro or even in the nightclubs like the 'Bataclan' (an old gym in Paris's 19th district) or the 'Emaraude' [nightclub]."\(^{261}\) Rochman concluded, "if one judges by the manner in which television, fashion, the press, and advertising have—in record time—seized upon the acrobatic and rhythmic performances of youth that have suddenly begun to do Hip Hop dance, then Hip Hop dance has certainly become a social phenomenon."\(^{262}\)

\(^{260}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{261}\) Ibid.

\(^{262}\) Ibid., 20.
Measuring the Impact of "H.I.P. H.O.P."

In the weeks and months following the debut of "H.I.P. H.O.P.,” TF1's measurements of the public's response to the show confirmed Caroline Rochmann's conclusion: Hip Hop was no longer a marginal cultural movement. On the contrary, it was spreading far and wide, thanks in no small part to the television show. With new, sophisticated tools for measuring audience reception, television networks could better estimate the number of their viewers, as well as what percentage of the viewing public was tuning in for particular shows. In addition, each TV channel also maintained an accounting of viewers' responses to shows. TF1 did this through their "Service des Relations avec les Téléspectateurs" ["Viewer Relations Service"], which kept close track of the number and nature of telephone calls, letters, and suggestions received.

In 1981, the body responsible for managing audience reception studies in all of France, the C.E.O. (Centre d'Études d'Opinion, or in English, the Center for Opinion Studies), adopted a system known as Audimat that closely resembled the Nielsen system that had already been in use in the United States and the United Kingdom for more than twenty years.263 Using an electronic device installed in the homes of a sample representative of the larger French population (at that point in 1984, only 650 homes), Audimat determined the percentage of homes that were watching television and which channel was being watched. TF1 closely monitored these numbers, especially since they had been losing ground to their biggest competitor, the channel Antenne 2. In fact, TF1, the

first and largest French station, had been surpassed in the ratings by *Antenne 2* just the preceding year, 1983.\footnote{36\% for TF1, 47\% for Antenne 2, and 19\% for FR 3. Michel Souchon, "Petit écran, grand public: des nouvelles récentes," *Réseaux*, vol. 3, no. 11 (1985), 63.}

When "H.I.P. H.O.P." first aired in January 1984 and until it was moved to a Wednesday afternoon slot in September 1984, the show competed with a formidable grouping of shows called *Dimanche Martin* ("Sunday Martin," a play on the phrase "Dimanche Matin," meaning "Sunday Morning") in its time slot. *Dimanche Martin*, one of French television's most popular series, aired from Sunday morning until the afternoon on channel *Antenne 2* and featured long-time TV personality Jacques Martin.\footnote{Laurence Touitou, interview with author, 15 August 2006, Paris, France.} Despite this stiff competition, "H.I.P. H.O.P." ended up garnering in its first four months an average weekly audience of about 2 million homes, meaning possibly as many as 5 or 6 million viewers.\footnote{"Resultats Audimat: Apres-Midi du Dimanche, Janvier - Avril 1984," Archives Nationales, Centre des Archives Contemporaines (hereafter, CAC), Fontainebleau, France, versement 20060484, Article 14.} There is good reason to believe that these numbers might underestimate the viewing public, considering the unique phenomenon surrounding the show in which youth would gather in groups to watch it.

TF1's "Service des Relations avec les Téléspectateurs" ["Viewer Relations Service"], housed within their "Délégation aux Relations Publiques" ["Public Relations Commission"], also prepared confidential reports for the station's executives that detailed the public's response to the channel's shows. Among these reports were monthly "Synthèses des Réactions du Public" ["Viewer Response Summaries"] that included statistics showing the number of letters and telephone calls received per month (as
compared to the same month of the previous year), viewers' positive and negative responses to particular shows, and viewers' suggestions for improving the channel and its programming.

TF1's "Viewer Response Summaries" from the first few months of 1984 reveal that "H.I.P. H.O.P." drew a remarkable amount of attention from the public. Already within a month of its debut, the station received correspondence saying, "I'm crazy about this show," with at least one viewer asking that the channel feature "more black and Caribbean artists." The following month, TF1 recorded correspondence exclaiming, "I really love [the show] Hip Hop." Another wrote, "It's a very good show, but too short to learn to dance." By April 1984, the show had become such an essential part of so many young peoples' lives that the Viewer Relations Service reported widespread "displeasure over the cancelation of the April 8th show." It received viewer notes of "great," but "really too short." The show wasn't without its detractors, as evidenced by letters saying things like, "I'm against this stupidity" and "Those [bodily] contortions are grotesque." One correspondent claimed that the three-man Paris City Breakers dance crew, who chose the

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winner of the weekly dance battle, was actually a "rigged jury." But despite these few negative reactions, the profound attachment to the show that so many young people felt was captured by a single phrase from a viewer in a May 1984 letter: "I wait for this show every single Sunday."  

The production staff who worked on the set of "H.I.P. H.O.P." bore witness to this deep connection of young people to the show. Syvlie Faiveley, the show's Conseiller Artistique ["Artistic Advisor"], confronted huge turnouts at the auditions and tapings: "It was so successful with young audiences that we had to refuse entrance to people. And I have memories of those [kids] that would jump over the wall and onto the roof of the technician's truck which was parked in the courtyard of the VCF [Vidéo Communication France studio in order to get into the taping]. It left these dents on the truck." On one occasion, Faiveley was bombarded by young audience members eager to get their hands on the vinyl records she was passing out at the end of the taping of an episode. The experience remained with her for many years: "At the end of the show, since we had a table where we displayed vinyl records, the record labels let us give them out to the kids in the audience. And since [the kids] knew it, as soon as theme music began... they literally jumped all over me. And I was being carried around 10 centimeters off the ground, from one side to the other, and back around. And the security guard had to turn off the lights. And when the studio went dark, they let me go... They were so enthusiastic about the music that they...

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272 Ibid.


absolutely had to have the records. They all wanted one, but there definitely wasn't enough for everyone."275

**Impact in the Neighborhoods**

What the television channels and their system of measuring audience response could not capture in mere statistics was Hip Hop's deep and widespread rooting in the working-class, immigrant suburbs across France. Over the course of 1984, Duteil's television show—and by extension, the broader cultural movement of Hip Hop—became an increasingly integral part of the everyday culture of post-colonial French youth. Often caught between the culture of France (where they were "constantly accused...of being 'not French enough"276) and the culture of the native country of their parents, these youth were (re)creating spaces that melded the many elements of their cultural inheritances. Hip Hop was becoming as much a part of their everyday culture as, for instance, the French vernacular they spoke and the food that they ate. Cultural elements that were often otherwise considered "incompatible" with the singular, mythic "French culture" that many upheld as exemplary, in reality, seamlessly commingled (*See image below*).

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275 Ibid.

Duteil's show, "H.I.P. H.O.P.," both helped spread Hip Hop across France and reflected this changing cultural landscape. The show immediately began transforming the everyday worlds of youth across the country, in ways that were not easily quantifiable for the consumption of television executives concerned primarily with audience numbers. One would have had to be in the households, housing projects, and neighborhoods to witness the tremendous response of French youth.

Every Sunday afternoon at 2:20pm, youth around the country would ritually gather in front of the television to engage with the dynamic images, sounds, and styles presented on Sidney's show. For these fourteen minutes, which began just as the American series *Starsky & Hutch* was ending, young people watched intently and often even danced and

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rapped along with the show. As soon as the show ended, youth would then pour out into the streets where they attempted to imitate and build upon what they had seen and heard. And although the show aired for only a year, from January through December 1984, it is universally cited by Hip Hop artists and enthusiasts as having been their rite of passage into the Hip Hop cultural movement.278

John Deïdo, of the French Rap group "La Brigade," describes the phenomenon that emerged around the show, explaining how youth would gather in the streets, parks, and the local community centers. He remembers, "It was through TV [that I first discovered Hip Hop]. Sidney was the main person who brought Hip Hop and made it accessible to those of us—the young generation—who didn't have direct access to the movement. He kind of centralized the whole movement. We knew that the movement had already begun in the underground in France, but he was the person that brought it to TV. That meant that kids that were too young to go out on their own, realized that there was really something going on... When Sidney's show was about to begin, I would go straight home. And, as soon as the show ended, I went outside. Everyone would be out in the street where they were trying to replicate what was done on the show. We were breakdancing."279 K-Fear, also of the Rap group "La Brigade," remembers the same phenomenon: "For me, it was with Sidney that it all began. When that show first came out on T.V., basically, it was like a slap

278 See: José-Louis Bocquet and Philippe Pierre-Adolphe, *Rap Ta France* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 48-58. This is also evident in many of the more than 50 interviews conducted by the author with artists from all around France, as well as in informal conversations with hundreds of Hip Hoppers, many of whom attest to the centrality of the show to their own lives and career trajectories.

in the face. I asked my mom to buy me a tracksuit and the gloves and hat [Laughing]. As soon as the show finished, we went outside. At that time, everybody was taking part. The older guys in the projects were dancing, and us younger kids were dancing, too. We were all a part of it."

An older observer of the phenomenon noted: "On Sunday afternoons, there was a kind of absence of teenagers outside in the neighborhood, especially teenage boys, and then at the end of the show, there was almost a flood of them. They would come down the stairwells of the housing projects by the dozens to meet up in front of their buildings to show off the dance moves they saw on the show."281

This was the case in hundreds if not thousands of neighborhoods all around France. In a multi-ethnic working-class suburb of the city of Rouen in northwest France, a French boy of Algerian descent, Stéphane Méterfi, found himself swept up in the Hip Hop craze. With the assistance of sociologist Annick Madec, he recounted his experience of the impact of the television show on the everyday culture of his housing project and neighborhood: "A show arrived that forever changed the daily lives of young kids in the neighborhood... The effect was immediate. The youth latched onto these new role models who demonstrated that you could transform your rage into artistic expression. Very quickly, [the youth] made a habit of meeting up among friends every Sunday to watch the show. Gathered in the hallway of the building, in front of a TV borrowed from a tenant on the first floor, the youth of the housing project closely watched the movements of the


dancers, listening to this new music. Electric boogie, breakdancing, and rap became a part of neighborhood life.\textsuperscript{282} In Stéphane's case, the show brought a new focus to his life. Like so many other young people, he became committed to helping build a community around this new cultural movement. Sociologist Annick Madec described the changes Stéphane underwent, as well as others in his neighborhood:

Instead of being the drug dealers' look-out kid, like most of the youth were doing for their older counterparts, now he had another goal: collect cardboard throughout the week which could be used on Sundays to make a dance floor outside so that the older kids could copy the dancers seen on TV. Breakdancing had changed the ambiance in the neighborhood. The younger kids cheered on the older ones who no longer sought to fight with gangs of other housing projects over who stole the most cars. The gangs now fought by dancing, and by encouraging the dancers who battled through technical and artistic prowess. Youth began going around, organizing inter-neighborhood competitions. They all went into town, to Rouen, the day when Sydney hosted a competition with a grand prize of a vacation. The young kids began dancing like the older ones. In this [Hip Hop] movement, everyone could find their place as either a participant or spectator. Nobody was interested in trying to explain what the whole Hip Hop movement was about. Everyone just took part, plain and simple. Hip Hop style became rooted: basketball shoes, tracksuits, and hats had arrived in the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{283}

A little less than a hundred miles away, living in a working-class neighborhood in Saint-Ouen on the outskirts of Paris, young Rachid Santaki recounted how the show entered into the Sunday afternoon routine of his family and of many in his city: "My mother cooked, and then we ate while watching the American show Starsky and Hutch, the only two cops that I actually liked (and their red car with the white stripe across it, too). And [then], there was something new, something that really spoke to me... A show with French youth who danced... 'H.I.P. H.O.P.'... featured an unusual Black man who had an American style. On each show, he offered a dance course... It was my Sunday afternoon


\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 31.
routine. I would watch those guys, looking like some real Martians with their Adidas tracksuits, almost like astronauts. Their dancing was impressive... Everywhere in France, kids went crazy over Hip Hop... The majority of youth in the housing projects across France began breakdancing."

Entire housing projects, neighborhoods, and cities were transformed by the arrival of the Hip Hop cultural movement. Young people took over public spaces like building hallways, sidewalks, parking lots, malls, and subway stations with impromptu dance battles or practice sessions, with graffiti tags, and with music blasting from boomboxes and car stereos. French culture was in the midst of being refashioned by these post-colonial youth who had remarkably quickly assimilated Hip Hop cultural practices into their everyday lives. French social scientists Christian Bachmann and Luc Basier happened to document these very transformations while conducting an ethnographic study in the heart of one of the most notorious housing projects in the Paris outer-city of La Courneuve. As a sociologist and socio-linguist, respectively, Bachmann and Basier set out to conduct an ethnographic study in the tradition of the famous "Chicago School" of sociology, a school which had emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and which sought to study the everyday workings of urban communities. In this case, Bachmann and Basier spent two years as participant observers in the "cité des 4000" ("the housing project of 4000 residents"), the infamous housing complex of the town of La Courneuve where Sidney Duteil had lived, along with Scalp (of the Paris City Breakers), and a host of other early important Hip Hop artists (of course, this fact was not known by Bachmann and Basier, at least not when they

first embarked on their study). Without having a clear idea of what they would find in the course of their study, they ended up discovering the tremendous impact Hip Hop increasingly had on local youth culture over the course of the two years they carried out their fieldwork. This meant that Bachmann and Basier had a sustained, first-hand perspective on the arrival and absorption of Hip Hop in the French working-class, immigrant neighborhoods. They experienced, documented, and analyzed Hip Hop's early history in France in a way that few others had, not knowing the impact the cultural movement would have on French society in subsequent years.

Within months of beginning their study, Bachmann and Basier were astounded to discover the extent to which one cultural practice in particular—"le smurf" (Hip Hop dance)—and the broader cultural movement of Hip Hop, had come to dominate in the everyday cultural lives of so many young people (particularly young men) in the housing project and surrounding neighborhoods. Not only were these young people deeply committed to Hip Hop cultural practices, they often defined their worldviews through this "way of life." The results of Bachmann's and Basier's study appeared as an article in the December 1985 issue of the scholarly journal *Langage et Société* ("Language and Society") under the title, "Junior s'entraine très fort: ou le smurf comme mobilisation symbolique" ("'Junior practices intensely': or Hip Hop dance as symbolic mobilization").

Confronted with gross mischaracterizations in the media of the social and cultural realities of the working-class, immigrant communities which they had been studying, Bachmann and Basier sought to conduct what was really the first serious study of everyday (sub)urban

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youth culture in the 1980s. Having already studied the language practices of working-class, immigrant outer-city youth, they now explored the cultural patterns of these same communities by examining the development of a newly emerging cultural force: what they would discover to be Hip Hop. As they note in their article: "We had previously been asked what exactly an adolescent was doing when speaking 'verlan' [a vernacular French most often spoken by youth in the working-class, immigrant communities]. So we asked ourselves: if a Hip Hop dancer was doing something other than stupidly killing time—which could barely be considered an ethnological analysis—what was he doing then?"

In order to study this "cultural phenomenon unique to the public housing projects of the urban peripheries," they "attached particular importance to the observation of social interactions and the linguistic corpus." This was necessary to move beyond the assumptions, stereotypes, and generalizations that were at the heart of so much of public discourse on these communities. As Bachmann and Basier note, "The name [of the city] La Courneuve...is associated in the media as well as in everyday conversation with a litany of recurring themes: youth, immigrants, drugs, violence, delinquency, poverty... Of course, it would be absurd to want to paint a rosy picture of an economic and social reality that is not rosy at all. But nonetheless... our investigations uncovered other aspects of daily life in the

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287 Bachmann and Basier, "Junior s'entraine fort," 58.

288 Ibid., 57.
housing projects, whether economic or cultural, that had nothing at all to do with the
stereotypes."

Indeed, what they found was a growing, cultural community—around the Hip Hop
movement—that was "deeply tight-knit." Bachmann and Basier concluded that "Hip
Hop represents more than a temporary, territorial, and unstable investment [on behalf of
young people]. Its practice entails the mastery of complex codes and a set of demanding
communication rituals which tend to invade the everyday life of its adherents and which,
little by little, constructs for them a whole frame of reference. It is, all at once, a
representation of self, a path of initiation, and a set of communication rituals that one must
master."

In their article, the social scientists outlined the social, racial, and spatial contours
of the local Hip Hop community they came to know in La Courneuve and more
specifically in the housing project where they were doing their fieldwork. They noted the
disproportionate participation of postcolonial youth, especially of the working class, in the
Hip Hop movement. Although post-colonial immigrant youth made up only a small
proportion of the French population at large, they were often at the center of the cultural
movement, and certainly were among its most committed and most visible members.
Bachmann and Basier wrote: "In theory, every French person in France can be a part of
Hip Hop. In reality, it is mostly young people of West Indian or North African descent

289 Ibid.

290 Ibid., 63.

291 Ibid.
living in the public housing projects who are particularly drawn to this 'style.'\textsuperscript{292} They conjectured that part of the embrace of Hip Hop by these youth populations emerged from a sense of alienation—a rejection of sorts—from both their immigrant families and from French society.\textsuperscript{293} This was certainly true for some young people, particularly in regards to a sense of rejection by French society. In a political climate defined by a disdain for immigrants and an utter neglect of the working-class outer-cities, postcolonial French youth were often the easiest targets of reproach.

Although born in France, educated in French schools, and fluent in the national language, this generation of postcolonial youth faced the troubling dilemma of a kind of second-class citizenship in which they were theoretically equal before the law with every other French person, but in reality were second-class citizens by nearly every index of social mobility, life chances, and economic and educational opportunity.\textsuperscript{294} Souleymane "Solo" Dicko, one of the first Hip Hop dancers in France, captures perfectly the perspective of those who confronted this stark social reality. One of the original members of the pioneering dance crew, the Paris City Breakers, he was a regular contributor to Sidney's "H.I.P. H.O.P." television show as both judge of the weekly dance "battle" and as

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\item \textsuperscript{292} Ibid., 65.
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a participant in the weekly dance "lesson." When describing his experience growing up in the working-class Parisan outer-cities as the son of Malian immigrants, Dicko recounted: "Here [in France], society is made so you fit into one space. You cannot really create a space for yourself. That's what I did with Hip Hop. But, before there was any Hip Hop, for me, growing up, it was like, 'Yo, what the heck am I gonna do in this world? Because what they're offering me is either to be a fucking streetsweeper or to be a fucking mechanic or being a plumber, and I have better things to offer than that.' But, [France] made it so that me, my parents, or anybody like me or my parents, understands that we have to stay in that little gap that was made for us... That's what I felt, really. And it was hard to deal with. But, Hip Hop came and saved me." This sentiment rang true for many post-colonial youth living in the working-class outer cities who whole-heartedly embraced Hip Hop.

Since the cultural movement was in the midst of becoming deeply rooted in these immigrant outer-cities, Bachmann and Basier could not help but notice the unique ways in which Hip Hop was both occupying and transforming the use of public space. They described the relationship between young people, the built environment, and Hip Hop this way: "It all begins inside the public housing project, where they loudly occupy their strategic sites. When the weather's nice, their pieces of cardboard are laid out in the parking lot, sometimes using them even to spin on the roofs of cars. In winter, in the basements, they dismantle the electric lights and transform the sockets into electricity for their boomboxes. The groups mark their territory and graff their walls, inscribing their professions of faith: 'the 4,000 housing project is inhabited by the ZULUs / and by the

BREAKERS / and by the SMURFERS,' one can read near a hallway that serves as their meeting place." But Hip Hop also carried practitioners beyond the confines of the housing project: "The breakers hang out at the very close-by mall: a popular local attraction, a crossing point, and a public stage. There, they challenge other dancers from their housing project, as well as neighboring projects." Noting the various kinds of American- and Hip Hop-influenced names that dancing crews adopted ("Courneuve City Street Dance or C.C.S.D., Bosquet City Gang, Crazy Crew, Imperial Breakers," etc.), along with the close attachment that each crew maintained to their housing project, Bachmann and Basier explained that "some [dancers] become local celebrities. A new urban geography is drawn where what counts are the 'most respected projects,' those which are home to the best dancers." These dancers and other committed Hip Hoppers could be seen with specific elements of a material culture that helped define their membership in the cultural movement. Bachmann and Basier noted some of these "accessories" that, as they observed during their ethnographic fieldwork, were central to Hip Hop cultural practice: "The Hip Hop dancer has his accessories. The cardboard, which he carries with him and which can be used instantaneously as a dancefloor, allows him to dance on the concrete. The 'ghetto blaster'...which they take turns carrying when going somewhere as a group. The bigger, the better.... They decorate it, paint it, personalize it, record cassettes on it, either from records, or more often, from their favorite radio shows.... Lastly, the VCR and a collection of video

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296 Bachmann and Basier, "Junior s'entraîne fort," 64.

297 Ibid., 64-65.

298 Ibid., 65.
cassettes allow them, with careful use of the pause button, the possibility of training in a near-professional manner."^{299}

**Hip Hop, Hollywood, and Cannes**

As Bachmann and Basier noted, the advent of widespread availability in the early 1980s of video cassette recorders (VCRs) and audio cassette recorders played a critical role in the global dissemination of Hip Hop. Unauthorized recordings of Hip Hop songs, videos, and radio and television shows circulated across the world, allowing aspiring Hip Hoppers to study carefully the sounds, dance moves, styles and linguistic practices of the cultural movements' icons. In the case of most Hip Hop scenes around the globe, this was how the first generation of enthusiasts came to know the various cultural practices of the movement. In France, as well as other parts of Western Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, Sidney's television show was a key vehicle for this kind of transmission of cultural knowledge. But, it was only when Hollywood embraced Hip Hop that the cultural movement achieved a truly global presence in the visual mass media.

Even as Michael Holman—one of New York City's most enterprising Hip Hop promoters—and others fought (largely unsuccessfully) to find Hip Hop a home on American television, the cultural movement was quickly incorporated into the Hollywood machine. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in March 1984: "If there are any doubts that break dancing is a certifiable craze, one need only glance at Hollywood production charts to see how thoroughly this street dancing from the South Bronx has worked its way into

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^{299} Ibid., 64.
the American mainstream.\textsuperscript{300} Noting the recent presence of Hip Hop dance in film, the article continued: "Break dancing was featured prominently last year in the little-seen independent feature, 'Wild Style,' then given glossier treatment in the monster hit 'Flashdance.' Now it has been announced as an element in no less than seven motion pictures, and there are undoubtedly more on the drawing boards.\textsuperscript{301} Of the slew of 1984 and 1985 films that prominently featured Hip Hop (including one produced by Sidney Poitier which never found much of an audience), only two made a lasting impression on young audiences worldwide: \textit{Beat Street} (1984) and \textit{Breakin'} (1984).

These films focused on different local Hip Hop scenes, with \textit{Beat Street} revolving around New York dance, rap, and graffiti, and \textit{Breakin'} featuring California-based Hip Hop dance forms like Popping and Locking.\textsuperscript{302} Even as both fought to reach the market first (in hopes of being the first major film to be able to capitalize on the growing interest in breakdancing), they treated the subject matter quite differently. Whereas \textit{Breakin'} was the brainchild of two Israeli businessmen, cousins Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, who became known for their low-budget action films, \textit{Beat Street} was a personal project of long-time African American entertainer and Civil Rights activist Harry Belafonte. And while both films have been criticized for offering sanitized representations of Hip Hop, \textit{Beat Street} carried a greater degree of legitimacy, not only because of Belafonte's involvement but because of its on-site filming in New York's streets and Hip Hop clubs,


\textsuperscript{301} Ibid.

the involvement of some of Hip Hop's most respected dancers, deejays, and rappers, and its being inspired by a series of articles in *The East Village Eye* and *The Village Voice* by pioneering Hip Hop journalist Steven Hager.

The film also received greater exposure (if not more ticket sales) because of the media attention that co-producer Belafonte attracted, as it was the first project of its kind on which he had worked so closely. It also came at a key moment in his career. After having been a fixture on the music circuit for more than 30 summers, Belafonte decided to take a hiatus in order to contemplate the next phase of his life and career. Upon return home from a kind of eight-month farewell concert tour, he explained, "I paid my debts (to loyal impresarios around the world) and cleared the slate." He added, "I wanted to stop, take stock and re-evaluate things, and see what my re-evaluation would dictate... A lot was beginning to escape me. If you define life as seven cycles of 10 years, and you've used up five of them, you see the moments as more precious. If you've got options, you have to reflect and re-engage."303

When New York-based journalist Steven Hager brought Belafonte the basis for a screenplay about this newest African American and Latino youth culture called Hip Hop, he was convinced that this would be the perfect next project. Belafonte recalled: "I was lucky. One day, Steven Hager, an independent journalist who works for, among other papers, *The Village Voice*, came to see me at my office with some articles he had written over a period of four or five years about the Hip Hop movement, along with the foundation of a script. I read it all. He gave us an interesting angle to make a film. I called my friend

David Picker and we decided to produce Beat Street together." He further explained, "I was aware of the existence of the [Hip Hop] movement, but I obviously wasn't involved, I can't breakdance or rap! I went to the Bronx and talked with the kids. You know, if you're in the public eye and something new emerges on the cultural scene, you can appreciate it, love it, but you can't just impose yourself like that onto those who created it. The only thing I could do was make a film."304

What struck Belafonte most about Hip Hop and the youth who were its progenitors was the strong parallels between his own upbringing and theirs, along with their astounding resilience and creativity in the face of some of the most distressing social conditions in the country. As Hip Hop was often considered to have been born in the South Bronx, Harry felt connected to a cultural movement which thrived in the very same area where he spent part of his early life. He reflected on these connections:

I used to live in the South Bronx. We had weapons, and on the weekend we fought to keep control of our territory. We used guns, bats, Molotov cocktails; we were killing one another... What's important about these kids is that they decided themselves to stop all that and do something positive. They gave America the finger and told it go screw itself: no politicians, no sociologists, no organizations, no presidents. Because most presidents are the enemy of the people. Reagan cut all the social programs, all the programs that allowed the poorest families in those neighborhoods to hold on... These kids found another solution to not be stuck in that depressing situation; they created their own infrastructure. They weren't interested in the kind of dance people were doing in the discos, they created breakdancing; they invented rap, which carries a message of social protest; they couldn't hang paintings in the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] or at the Museum of Modern Art, so they painted subway trains, the walls of the city. Everyone had to see them! It's an extremely powerful art, a popular art.305


305 Ibid., 28.
The challenge he faced was capturing the dynamism of Hip Hop as a local, but quickly growing cultural movement, and at the same time, of weaving a compelling story. As one of the few African Americans with some influence in the film industry, Belafonte also felt a responsibility to represent young African Americans and Latinos in a positive light in a media landscape where they were most often stereotyped, when present at all. Referring to the material covered in the film, he remarked:

"We stayed away from stuff to get other stuff... You don't have to wake up blacks to the fact that there is crime and poverty and violence in the South Bronx; they live there. But I don't think you have to restate it for white audiences either; we've already done 'Fort Apache'...and people didn't like it anyway... So what is it you need to do? One of the things you can do is talk about the values that are there; the mothers who care about their kids and defend their kids, the kids themselves who want to be winners, not victims... I keep thinking of [the 1946 Italian film] Shoeshine and the way there are values in the toughest circumstances. And blacks are living in an even more hostile society than [filmmaker Vittorio] De Sica's people.

Although the film prominently featured Hip Hop dance, for Belafonte the true heroes were the community of young people who created and sustained the cultural movement: "This is not a film about break dancing... It's about the people who make up the hip-hop culture. It's not going to be a frivolous look at undulating bodies, but a look at the cultural phoenix that has risen out of the ashes of the South Bronx to replace the hopelessness, the drugs and the violence." Belafonte was also frank about his and his co-producer's profit-making aspirations, but insisted that their commitment to the film and its message was unwavering: "There is no doubt about our commercial intentions, but there is also no doubt that we have tried to be uncompromising in terms of the social-political power of the text." Belafonte believed strongly in the potential impact of Beat Street, and he ultimately quite accurately

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foresaw the kind of influence that it would have on young people worldwide: "Hopefully, this movie will say to denied, alienated people: 'We have prevailed—we are part of a movie that's going out into the world and people will have to hear us and to reflect.'"  

Harry Belafonte temporarily renaming New York's Broadway to "Beat Street"  
(Photo by Monroe Frederick, II)  

As part of the promotional tour for the film, Harry Belafonte and a group of Hip Hop dancers who were featured in the movie attended the Cannes International Film Festival.  

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307 Taylor, "Rapping and Breaking in 'Beat Street',' L22.  

Festival in southern France in May of 1984, just as the television show "H.I.P. H.O.P." was at its peak of popularity. What would otherwise have been a banal promotional tour for a Hollywood film became a key moment in the history of the globalization of Hip Hop. Belafonte was accompanied on the trip by the New York City Breakers and the Rock Steady Crew, two of the most talented and respected Hip Hop dance crews in New York. These dancers made important connections with emerging dance crews in France and the rest of Europe, educating the eager, aspiring Hip Hoppers about the dance forms and the broader cultural movement, and engaging with them in a kind of cultural exchange. These encounters, along with the in-person promotional and television appearances across western Europe, further ignited the already widespread interest in Hip Hop among young people.

Once again, French journalist Bernard Loupias was present to document the historic event. Before going to oversee a taping of Sidney Duteil's show in which Beat Street's Hip Hop dancers were to participate, Belafonte sat down with Loupias and shared his sense of connection to the subject matter of Beat Street: "I remember my childhood, it was very similar to theirs. We, too, were in gangs. In the streets of Harlem where I was born, it was the only way to survive; we weren't even twenty years old and we were living outside the law." He added, "The Bronx... my roots are there. My father died there, my brother died there, in a restaurant... My family was in the Numbers business. They were outlaws." Speaking about the lack of films capturing the experiences of African Americans, Belafonte ruminated: "America doesn't like to focus on the suffering of

310 Ibid., 28.
Blacks... When you're French, you can make a film with a French producer, French actors, people like Simone Signoret or Yves Montand and that provides a kind of typically French touch; it's the same thing in Italy, everywhere... But if you're Black in the United States, you face every roadblock when trying to make a film that reflects your experience.\textsuperscript{311}

Harry Belafonte, Hip Hop, and the Cannes Film Festival in \textit{Le Matin} newspaper (21 Mai 1984)

\textsuperscript{311} Ibid.
While Belafonte was speaking with Loupias, the Rock Steady Crew and New York City Breakers interacted with Sidney and the Paris City Breakers on the set of "H.I.P. H.O.P." The following weekend, in advance of Beat Street's release, exclusive clips of the film were played on "H.I.P. H.O.P." Young people were immediately captivated. Bruno Lopes, then living in the majority immigrant suburb of Saint-Denis (and who later became one of the most famous faces of French popular music as rapper "Kool Shen" with his group *N.T.M.*), vividly recalled that episode and how he quickly incorporated the specific dance moves he witnessed into his own breakdancing repertoire, particularly as he prepared for a dance battle with the television show's own "Paris City Breakers" dance crew (known as the "PCBs," for short):

It was in June '84. I had seen clips of [Beat Street] on TV... There was the Rock Steady Crew and New York City Breakers in an incredible battle. Exclusively on 'H.I.P. H.O.P.' they showed some clips from the film, which was coming out just a few days later. And I saw those scenes and immediately got stuck on them. I recorded them and when we had the battle with the PCBs ten days later, I used those moves from the movie. Everything that I could soak up, I practiced like crazy.312

As soon as Beat Street reached movie theatres around France, young people flocked to see it. Abdoulaye Diarra, a young Franco-Malian living in the working-class 19th arrondissement of Paris, who later became a famous rapper under the nom de plume Oxmo Puccino, evoked the excitement that accompanied the release of the film: "That movie had us all going crazy. Beat Street was the movie that traumatized us. When I saw it, it was like seeing Star Wars. The day after you saw it, you immediately started

breakdancing, and it only seemed normal." Stéphane Begoc, a neighbor of Bruno Lopes's ("Kool Shen") in Saint-Denis and a graffiti writer who is best known by the moniker SEAR, recalled (with characteristic sarcasm and wit) the film's impact:

On Sundays, we were watching h-i-p-h-o-p hosted by my best friend... Sidney! One time he showed us some sneak preview scenes of Beat Street, notably the battle at The Roxy and an uprock scene in the subway! A slap in the face! The film comes out and I go to see it, in the theatre, on the Champs Elysées! As soon as I had enough money, I went to see it again, a total of 11 times... At school, my already dubious school record went irreversibly downhill. On the tables at school I was clumsily imitating with a pen the graff that Ramo did in the subway in the film. I was dreaming of suede Puma [shoes] and a Kangol [hat]. It was an established fact: Hip Hop had definitively taken over my life.

A young Moussa Setouane, who also went to see the film at a theatre on the Champs Elysees, recalled, "They were giving out t-shirts at the entrance of the theatre... There was so much dancing going on inside the theatre that the cops stormed in before the end of the movie! Kids were dancing on the stage, in front of the screen! And everybody was kicked out... Plus, that was the era when you could pay once and stay at the movies the whole day. And Daniel Fourneuf, who only a couple years later would become the manager of one of Europe's first and most significant Hip Hop clothing and music stores, remembered: "Beat Street! We went to see it four times, just to get a really good look at the dance moves." Beat Street led young aspiring Hip Hoppers to plunge even more deeply into cultural movement.

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Very concrete relationships also grew out the New York and California dancers' travels to France, as they met and exchanged with the de facto leaders of France's emerging Hip Hop movement. Scalp, founder of the pioneering Paris City Breakers dance crew and early star of Sidney's TV show, fondly recollected: "I had the opportunity to meet a crooner that my mom was a fan of—Harry Belafonte—and I ended up at the Cannes Film Festival for the premiere of Beat Street with the Rock Steady Crew, the New York City Breakers, [and deejay Afrika] Bambaataa. At that time, in Europe, there wasn't any well-established [Hip Hop dance] group. So we served as the ambassadors of the [Hip Hop] movement." Indeed, the Paris City Breakers spent time with the Rock Steady Crew and New York City Breakers, informally learning about dance moves and the history of Hip Hop in New York. Solo, another original member of the Paris City Breakers, bought his first pair of Puma Clydes from one of the members of the New York City Breakers, thus making him one of the first Hip Hoppers in France to sport these iconic sneakers that were otherwise impossible to find in France.

When Solo and Scalp traveled to New York later that year, they re-connected with some of the New York dancers they had met. And Bruno Lopes went from seeing Beat Street at a movie theatre in Paris to traveling to New York to dance alongside the film's Hip Hop prodigies: "The Rock Steady Crew' and the 'New York City Breakers' really inspired us... Two months after the release of 'Beat


318 Souleymane "Solo" Dicko, interview with author, 30 June 2009, Paris, France.
Street,' I was breaking with the Rock Steady Crew in front of the Roxy [nightclub in New York]."319

This impact was not confined to France. The film influenced nascent Hip Hop scenes in countries as varied as Brazil,320 Denmark,321 Belgium,322 Japan,323 and Germany.324 But the presence of the film's dancers at the Cannes Film Festival and related promotional events meant that French Hip Hoppers also gained first-hand knowledge of what were otherwise very local New York dance forms, fashions, and histories. Likewise, pioneering Paris Hip Hoppers like Sidney, Solo and Scalp were able to introduce New York Hip Hoppers like Afrika Bambaataa to local music shops where they could search for hard-to-find records. These informal connections helped solidify the transnational reach of the cultural movement and helped cultivate French youth's sense of belonging to the increasingly global Hip Hop community.


320 Derek Pardue, Ideologies of Marginality in Brazilian Hip Hop (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 44.


322 Didier Stiers, Flashback: Histoire(s) de la danse hip hop en Belgique (Charleroi, Belgique: Couleur Livres / Bruxelles: Lezarts Urbains, 2007), 30-33, 62-64.


The End of "H.I.P. H.O.P." and the End of an Era

After breaking for the traditional French summer vacation month of August, the production team for "H.I.P. H.O.P." returned for the fall television season faced with a new timeslot. TF1 had removed the show from Sunday afternoon timeslot and placed it on early Wednesday evening, the day of the week on which French public school is dismissed early and which students have the afternoon free (the logic being that since school-aged children were the show's target audience, this would be the ideal time to air the show). The show continued to do well in this timeslot; in the opinion of some of its production team, almost too well.

Many involved in the cultural movement grew increasingly uneasy about Hip Hop's mass media presence. With the show's quick rise to popularity, Hip Hop began to be covered in nearly every major media outlet and used by all sorts of companies to promote products, from clothing to yogurt. The creators of the television show felt strongly that this kind of widespread but superficial exposure was doing a disservice to the cultural movement by diluting its seriousness and significance. Sophie Bramly commented, "[The media coverage] was too much and too intense, [the show] couldn't have lasted... For six months, everything was Hip Hop: advertisements, articles. At the end, nobody could stand it anymore." Sidonie, "Sidney: À Chiper, À Choper," 56.

Sidney Duteil, the show's host, felt that "it became too much of a routine. Plus, the kids knew how to dance, they weren't learning anything any more." Laurence Touitou, who had co-created and co-produced "H.I.P. H.O.P.," was very weary about the

326 Ibid.
direction the show was taking and the kinds of pressures to which it was increasingly being subjected:

It was so successful, the public was getting younger and younger... As the audience was becoming really young as the show became such a big commercial success, they wanted us to do dolls, other products from the show, etc. It was becoming a little bit stupid... I was always conscious of—you know, when you're in the movement, you don't want the thing to turn stupid. And after one year, we stopped. And me, I thought we did three months too much. There are shows that I'm not proud of. It was really difficult to do the show and to keep its integrity and be on TF1 with that success... It was better to stop. And I think it was a good decision.\(^\text{327}\)

For the thousands upon thousands of young people who religiously followed the show, however, its cancellation was a bitter betrayal. These youth had dedicated much of their daily lives to participating in the growing cultural movement of Hip Hop and relied heavily upon Sidney's show as a source of community-building, of recognition and valorization of the otherwise villified post-colonial suburban communities, and of new dance moves and new music. Nonetheless, the last show aired on December 19, 1984, after more than forty episodes over the course of twelve months.

The backlash from the show's fans and from Hip Hoppers across France was unforgiving. Although Duteil was well aware of the impact his show was having, he hadn't imagined how disappointed his followers would be by his acceptance of the show's cancellation. He admitted:

We didn't think that it would upset the youth that much, but they held it against me: 'How could you stop, you were our only thing.' I didn't realize that I was really holding the whole movement together. I simply said, there's no more lessons [to be taught], I just went to work on other shows where, by the way, I wasn't happy at all. They saw me on another show and it was war: 'No, you don't have the right to do that to us.' I tried to talk to them, to convince them, but there was so much rage

\(^{327}\) Laurence Touitou, interview with author, 15 August 2006, Paris, France.
[against us] and so much faith in Hip Hop, I absolutely didn't want to take that away from them.\textsuperscript{328}

In a matter of days, Duteil went from being French Hip Hop's revered founding father to being considered a sell-out. He recalled:

That was very difficult because when I stopped doing the show, I didn’t think... I thought, 'Okay, that’s cool. Everyone is into Hip Hop now and it’ll continue on its own. The young folks everywhere in France are dancing... It’ll all continue whether there’s a show or not.' As it turned out, it wasn’t like that at all. It was like an outpouring of hate. People thought, 'Sidney did the show just to get known, and now that he’s known he can get his money. He doesn’t really care about Hip Hop.' No, it was just the contrary. I left and did a big tour all around France, with dancers, and with dates everywhere. But, the TV show stopped.\textsuperscript{329}

In Duteil's view, the show became too big for its own good. Even though it was a success, he felt that the television station was not fully supportive of their efforts. Therefore, he, Touitou, and Bramly thought it was a fitting moment to end the show:

Laurence Touitou and Sophie Bramly, they had fought and fought, and were tired of doing the show because it wasn’t fun anymore. It began to lose its way. Hip Hop was always in our hearts, and by that I mean we remained true. We didn’t want the show to be a caricature of Hip Hop. We didn’t want it to be like they [i.e. television executives] wanted it... There was a lot of stress that came with the show, and no budget. You have to understand, it was a show that they didn’t really want. There was me, a Black host; the first Black host on TV. Plus, I had North Africans on the show, and things like that. They did everything they could to get the show off the air. They changed the airing from Sunday to the middle of Wednesday We said, 'It’s best that we just stop the show.' But, for the youth, we were sorry. They were mad at me. Articles in newspapers were like, 'Sidney just made his money and took off.'\textsuperscript{330}

\textsuperscript{328} Sidney Duteil, interview in Hugues Bazin, \textit{La culture hip-hop} (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1995), 23.

\textsuperscript{329} Sidney Duteil, interview with author, 29 July 2005, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France. Also see: Meghelli et al., \textit{Tha Global Cipha}, 285; and Meghelli, "From the Bronx to the Banlieues."

\textsuperscript{330} Ibid.
Dismissed by former fans and by print news outlets, Duteil faced limited work opportunities:

It was too late. Either I could become a tasteless TV host or go back to the streets. I decided to go back to the streets and see the people, go touring a bit, bring Hip Hop dance where it hadn't yet been, where people wanted to see me.\(^3\)

A few days after the airing of the last episode of the "H.I.P. H.O.P." TV show, Duteil arrived in Abidjan, the capital city of the West African country of Ivory Coast. He was invited as the guest of honor at an inter-African competition that featured breakdance crews from all across the continent. The Abidjan City Breakers, a breakdance crew who modeled themselves after the French TV show's Paris City Breakers (themselves modeled after the famous New York City Breakers), hosted Duteil during his visit. The organizers of this contest invited not only Duteil, but also Afrika Bambaataa, one of the most respected Bronx pioneers of Hip Hop. Dance crews from Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, Gabon, Benin, Gambia, and Liberia participated in the contest, which was held at the Palais des Congrès at the Hôtel Ivoire in the heart of Abidjan.\(^3\)

It was truly a bittersweet moment for Duteil. His being invited to an international Hip Hop dance contest that featured crews from across Africa was a testament to the remarkable impact of Hip Hop and of his television show. Yet it also marked the end of an era for Hip Hop's presence on television and in mass media at large. The television show that had made such an event possible had ceased to exist. In one sense though, the show had done its job. Sidney Duteil, Sophie Bramly, and Laurence Touitou had helped spread

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\(^3\) Sidney Duteil, interview in Bazin, *La culture hip-hop*, 23.

Hip Hop across France, Western Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. Even though the show would no longer be a steady part of young Hip Hoppers' lives, it had planted the seed that was already beginning to blossom into a transnational cultural community.

**Conclusion**

In describing the ways "H.I.P. H.O.P." transformed the social and political landscape in France by bringing to public attention previously marginalized post-colonial youth populations, sociologist Annick Madec observed: "Nobody knew how to make sense of these youth that had suddenly become visible. The country realized that now it had to come to terms with a population that it didn't know. The municipal elections of 1983 demonstrated that a political party, the National Front, had taken advantage of this fear of the Other." But Sidney's show helped familiarize a broad French public with these populations and showed them to be active and engaged in the cultural life of the nation. Language, dance, fashion, and music—all key aspects of French culture—were being transformed right in front of the millions of television viewers' eyes, as well as the eyes of any and every French person who walked through the streets of Paris that year.

The show was intervening in a context where the existence and experiences of the new generation of working-class, suburban, post-colonial French youth were relentlessly maligned, or altogether invisible. Sidney's show reimagined the multicultural as the norm and valorized the cultural practices and living spaces of post-colonial youth. Through the kinds of cultural adoption and adaptation that the show facilitated, these youth were

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enacting their membership simultaneously as racialized subjects in the French nation, as actors in the burgeoning transnational Hip Hop community, and as part of the broader Afro-diasporic world. "H.I.P. H.O.P." and its impact would continue to reverberate throughout and beyond French society in the years that followed.
Chapter 4
"Fear of a Black Planet":
Race, Space, and State Intervention in French Hip Hop
A twelve-year-old Thibaut de Longeville moved with his family from Senegal to France in 1986. He and his brother had only one ambition on their first day in the country. They dressed themselves head-to-toe in their favorite Hip Hop gear and headed to the headquarters of the TV station they knew to be the home of Hip Hop: TF1. He, his brother, and their friends had been watching taped VHS copies of Sidney Duteil's show, "H.I.P. H.O.P.", while living in Dakar and had formed their own crew of Hip Hop dancers, the Little Rascals ("les Petites Canailles"). Now that the De Longeville brothers had moved to the city where their favorite Hip Hop television show was filmed, they were determined to join the movement and take part in the show's famous 'dance battle' segment. Thibaut De Longville vividly recalled: "The first thing I did was run off to the TF1 headquarters on the first day [I arrived in France]! I had a Japanese flag headband on, I had gloves, everything! I had the whole get-up... So we went to TF1 and I asked the dude, 'I came for Hip Hop.' Our biggest dream was to compete against the PCBs [the Paris City Breakers], which was the best dancers. We got there. It was me and my brother. We were like, 'Hip Hop! We wanna dance Hip Hop!' I'll remember this for the rest of my life. The security dude said, 'Hip Hop is dead. That doesn't exist anymore, it was just a fad.' We were like, 'No, it can't be! This is our life. You don't understand.' He was like, 'No, it's over.' We were so young that we thought it was a trick, like that you had to go in another way to get into [the show,] 'H.I.P. H.O.P.' So we went the other way. They confirmed that the show was dead... But it didn't stop our curiosity or passion."

334 Thibaut de Longeville, interview with author, 1 July 2007, Paris, France.

335 Ibid.
A decade later, Thibaut de Longeville was still a self-professed Hip Hopper. In an ironic twist of fate, he was hired by Laurence Touitou—the co-creator of the TV show that he had once religiously watched as a young kid—as an Artist & Repertoire executive at the influential French Hip Hop record label that she headed, Delabel. De Longeville would also go on to become a successful documentary filmmaker and marketing consultant, working with everyone from New York Hip Hop legend Fab Five Freddy to seminal New York-based Hip Hop record labels Def Jam and Bad Boy. But while still a newly arrived twelve-year-old in Paris, De Longeville—like so many other Hip Hop enthusiasts—felt betrayed by TF1's cancellation of Sidney Duteil's show and by the broader abandonment of the cultural movement by the French mass media. In 1991, when journalist David Dufresne questioned graffiti artist SEAR (Stephane Bégoc) about Hip Hop's evolution in the years following the show's cancellation, he replied: "Hip Hop is a movement, it’s not just about records. Everyone was announcing its death when Sidney's TV show stopped. But all the B-Boys continued, and the movement was definitely stronger."336

So "strong" and widespread had Hip Hop become by the turn of the 1990s in France that French Minister of Culture Jack Lang proclaimed: "Intellectually, morally, and artistically, it is a movement. Even if in the beginning it drew inspiration from America, I believe it has found its originality here in France."337 But for Minister of Culture Lang, the significance of the cultural movement was to be found in its social function, just as much as—if not more than—its artistic expressions. In explaining his interest in Hip Hop,

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337 Jack Lang, in an interview with journalist Olivier Cachin on the TV show, Rapline. Channel M6 (undated, but more than likely 1990-1991).
Minister Lang continued: "it is an instrument of integration into the life of a neighborhood. It is a kind of socialization: connections are made, new relationships are built between the youth and the adults, between the youth themselves, between different apartment complexes, between the city center and the periphery." Lang’s interest in the relationship between Hip Hop and "integration" was symptomatic of broader public and political debates about the fate of France’s first large wave of post-colonial youth who were coming of age in the 1980s. Many French "were persuaded that the country was witnessing a crisis of assimilation" in which these youth refused or were simply incapable of becoming properly "French" and that this "posed grave dangers." The Socialists pushed to reframe the issue as one of "integration," and their efforts were accompanied by the rise of movements around the country seeking recognition of "le droit à la différence" ("the right to be different"). But, as it turned out, this version of "integration" was in many ways merely a "modernized' reformulation of [the same old notion of] assimilation."

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338 Jack Lang, in an interview with journalist Olivier Cachin on the TV show Rapline. Channel M6 (undated, but more than likely 1990-1991).


The embrace of Hip Hop—an (African)American cultural movement—by postcolonial and working-class youth represented a threat to the historically exclusionary, assimilationist politics that prevailed in France. As Hip Hop gradually took root among these "problem populations," the French state reacted by going to great lengths to understand and manage its influence, fearing further exacerbation of an already troublesome "integration" crisis. Through a range of social and cultural programs implemented by the Ministry of Culture and urban policy initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s, Hip Hop was deployed as a tool in service of "insertion sociale" ("social integration").

While Hip Hop was primarily seen as a fun, harmless American cultural import in the early- to mid-1980s, by the turn of the 1990s it had re-emerged in the French media with a vastly different—and more worrisome—set of meanings. In the half-decade following the cancellation of Sidney Duteil's television show, Hip Hop became rooted even more firmly in the bleak social and political landscape, and youth began using it to express their frustration with discrimination and inequality. Both the French mass media and political discourse witnessed a proliferation of references to the fear and possibility of the 'Americanization of French ghettos,' the 'Americanization of the French race problem,' the 'Americanization of French gangs,' and, of course, the 'Americanization of French

Increasingly understood as tied to issues of race and space in France, Hip Hop became a key prism through which these fears were refracted.

For French Hip Hoppers, these same discursive tropes—along with a range of other dimensions of performance—were the "raw materials" they used to bring attention to their own plight. Rather than adopt American rap wholesale, these artists drew on particular aspects of the iconography, style, and lyrical subject matter of their fellow Hip Hoppers on the other side of the Atlantic, all the while recontextualizing them in ways that spoke to their unique French experience. Historian Micol Seigel described process as using "the transnational mental maps [people] developed out of cultural exchange [to] reshape two of the most consequential social categories structuring their lives: race and nation." Only when this began to occur—in the late 1980s—was there a flourishing of the French rap scene.

The Rise and Rage of French Rap

From the beginning of Hip Hop's arrival in France, aspiring rappers sought to imitate their American counterparts. The earliest French rappers, dating to at least 1982, largely attempted to rap in English. This was inevitably a doomed pursuit, since few youth

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could speak English fluently and mere copying of American raps left little room for creativity or innovation. One of the first widely heard French rappers was DJ Dee Nasty, who could be heard on a range of pirate radio stations in the early 1980s. He described the process by which he and his rapping partners first adopted the style and attempted to mold it to fit their native language: "Everyone was rapping in English. But we said, 'No, the only way for this art to progress is to rap in French.' So, at the beginning, what we said was, 'What we’re gonna do is take the newest American rap songs and do adaptations of them in French.' The most memorable—or really, the easiest example to give—is with Melle Mel’s [song]: 'New York, New York/ Big city of dreams/ But everything in New York ain’t always what it seems.' We turned it into: 'Paname, Paname/ Grand ville des rêves/ Mais tout à Paris n’est pas ce qu’il paraître.' ['Paris, Paris/ Big city of dreams/ But everything in Paris ain’t always what it seems.]" Although this entailed a mere translation of American lyrics into French, Dee Nasty and others were able to perfect aspects of the practice of rapping as they performed these verses, such as flow, cadence, rhythm, speed, and intonation. In time, and at the urging of American Hip Hop figures like Afrika Bambaataa, French youth began writing their everyday experiences into their lyrics and inflecting their rhymes with their own linguistic particularisms. The French vernacular

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345 Daniel Bigeault (DJ Dee Nasty), interview with author, 28 June 2005, Paris, France.

346 From very early on, Afrika Bambaataa encouraged aspiring French artists to rap in their own language and about their own experiences. Many followed his advice, including one of the best-known French rappers, MC Solaar. See: Desse [Desdémente Bardin] and SBG [Sébastian Bardin], Freestyle (Paris: Massot & Millet, 1993), 3-5, 107.
known as *verlan*, in which the syllables of words are reversed, was a widespread feature of not only the language of many *banlieue* youth but also eventually of French rap lyrics.\(^{347}\)

In October 1988, DJ Dee Nasty was hired by Radio Nova—the radio station owned by *Actuel* magazine—and he opened the airwaves to French rappers from around Paris, inviting them to come perform on his show (named "Deenasty").\(^{348}\) Each suburban city and Paris neighborhood had crews of rappers, and the radio show became home to many of their first public performances. Every major French rap group from the region that would later become famous—such as NTM from Saint Denis, Ministère Amer from Garges-Sarcelles, Les Little MCs from Vitry, Assassin from Paris, and MC Solaar—appeared on Dee Nasty's show. For the first time, a consistent French rap scene had emerged. Rapping styles became more complex and nimble, and the content of rap lyrics often broached pressing social issues. Even as French rappers continued to be inspired by American artists, they were capturing dimensions of *French* postcolonial youth life that were nowhere else present in their society's public sphere.

In one example, Stomy Bugsy, a young rapper of Cape Verdean descent from the northern Paris suburb of Sarcelles, improvised a rap on French radio that related his quotidien experience of confronting the skinhead gangs that controlled particular sections


of Paris, just as he commented on the media representation of he and his fellow local "gang" members:\textsuperscript{349}

\begin{verbatim}
They say the 'gangs' of Garges-Sarcelles are crazy mad/
And that sometimes they're real rebels...
But when we see the skinheads, we react/
Skinheads are the enemy number one of our movement.\textsuperscript{350}
\end{verbatim}

His rap—done all in French—was punctuated with an English refrain which he borrowed from an American rap song, "Black Is Back," by New Jersey artist Lakim Shabazz.\textsuperscript{351}

Stomy Bugsy exclaimed repeatedly, "So, I say, 'Black is Back'! So, I say, 'Black is Back'!"\textsuperscript{352} Many observers feared and criticized French rap for importing racially-charged (and allegedly uniquely American) issues that had no place in the French context. But Stomy Bugsy and rappers like him were drawing on tropes from the American Hip Hop scene—where Black Power-inspired lyrics, iconography, and styles predominated—and recontextualizing them in their own local worlds where they faced real targeting by skinheads and discrimination of all kinds. Through the African American idiom of rap, French artists were articulating racialized and spatialized realities that were not otherwise easily expressed in a society that insisted on a color-blind discourse.\textsuperscript{353} When Jean-


\textsuperscript{352} Ibid.

François Bizot of *Actuel* magazine questioned Stomy Bugsy's groupmate, Kenzy, about whether this "afrocentrist kick" was going to catch on, he replied, evidently irritated: "Like some trend, you mean?... Africa or not, with what we live here [in France], we're seen as niggers by the cops that follow us everywhere. And that, we can't ever just forget." And when Bizot asked why they chose "Knowledge is a Weapon" as their group slogan, Kenzy explained: "Because we realized how important it is, for us in the suburbs, to know our history. In school, they didn't teach us anything about African history. Nothing... We were angered when we learned that even in Africa they also taught so little of our history." Even as Stomy Bugsy and his group, Ministère Amer, drew on American influences, they made clear that they were not claiming some superficial Americanness, but rather, embraced their African heritage. Mocking an imaginary "traitre" ("traitor") who does just the opposite, Stomy Bugsy rapped on their first EP record:

Man, your haircut makes me laugh/
But that's not even the worst/
You claim America/
Your origins are in Africa/
Your mom calls you Mamadou/
But you took the name Andrew/
But that's not even the worst, because the worst is to misrepresent.

This impulse to seek out and claim one's history and heritage was common among the French Hip Hop community, which was disproportionately comprised of postcolonial

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355 Ibid., 24-25.

youth. The French context made this a controversial stance since to take pride in any other identity aside from the immediately national one was considered un-French (or even anti-French). But Hip Hop became a conduit for many to question this rigid, singular formulation of Frenchness. Graffiti artist "Mag 3" (whose real name is Juan Massenya and who is of Martinican descent) was interviewed by a television crew about this very issue while still a student at the University of Paris-VIII (in Saint Denis). He asserted: "Growing up, everyone's talking about the Gauls, the Gauls, the Gauls—showing a photo of a blond-haired, blue-eyed Gaul. After a while, you say to yourself, 'I don't look anything like a Gaul.' You have to find out about your own history, your own people. And, in a way, that's what this [Hip Hop] movement is about."

These were the artists—and the spirit—that inspired the first compilation of French rap music, *Rapattitude*. The album brought together ten artists from around the Paris region, including many who had appeared on DJ Dee Nasty's *Radio Nova* show, such as Assassin, NTM, EJM, and New Generation MCs. It was released in the summer of 1990, and brought mainstream attention to the indigenous French rap scene for the first time. The album was quickly followed by others, but NTM's first full-length album, *Authentik*, featured an explosive song that captured the ears and imagination of the French public. Their song, "Le Monde de Demain" ("The World of Tomorrow"), reflected a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the grim conditions of their *banlieue* of Saint-Denis and of those

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around France just like it. Such a powerful portrayal of many youths' perspective on the world

In my neighborhood violence is an everyday occurrence/
So come take a tour of the suburbs/
Look at your youth in the eyes/
You that rule from high above/
My call is serious/
No, don't treat it like a game/
Because the youth are changing/
That's what bothers you/
No more waiting around 'til things get better/
I'm not a leader/
Just a loudspeaker/
Of a generation in revolt/
Ready to burn everything/
Even the system/
That pushes us to the extreme/
But NTM is not gonna let go of the reins/
On the shoulders of all the struggling youth/
There's only one truth/
The right to equality/
Here we are ready to reignite/
A dirty civil war/
Non-military style/
We're tired of the promises/
We're gonna totally mess everything up...

New York and the Specter of the 'American Syndrome'

By the summer of 1990, Hip Hop carried radically divergent meanings for its French adherents and critics. For French Hip Hoppers, New York was the birthplace and breeding ground of the cultural movement with which they deeply identified, a site of exceptional creativity and style, a rich source of their cultural imaginary (particularly

through film, television, and music), and a symbolic site of Afro-diasporic cultural and political empowerment. On the other hand, for many public officials and much of French society at large, New York—and by extension, the United States—was the counter-example (not to be followed), the embodiment of failed urban policy, neo-liberal capitalism, and entrenched racism, as well as proof of the failure of a presumed "American" model of multiculturalism. As the French faced a continuing "crisis" of assimilation/integration with its postcolonial populations, they feared that the infiltration of American racial ideologies into the French context would further destabilize an already fragile social/racial landscape. References to "New York" and "America" proliferated in the mass media as policy makers, intellectuals, and the general public pondered whether the many (partly accurate, partly exaggerated) problems of American cities would soon take root in France. And since "Hip Hop" was understood by many French to be a quintessentially American "ghetto" phenomenon, the fact of its adoption by postcolonial youth stirred fear that it would act as a vector for the transmission of American social ills.

This recurring comparison reached a crescendo in the period from 1989 to 1992. In one striking example (among many), Philippe Broussard of Le Monde was documenting

the "proliferation of gangs in the Paris suburbs" and anxiously asked: "Will Paris imitate New York, where gangs fight over streets and drug markets with gunshots from 357 magnums?" He continued: "the risk exists because these kids are growing in number and live on a foreign planet somewhere between Manhattan, Dakar and Argenteuil. They pretend to be the warriors of Harlem while in Cergy-Pontoise, and pretend that there are Central Parks in Evry." Further extending the stereotypes, Broussard wrote: "Often forced to grow up on their own in dislocated families (notably the Guadeloupeans), these crossbred sons of Africa and the Bronx, who wear shiny chains, backwards hats and baggy jeans, imagine themselves being as charming as Eddie Murphy and stronger than Myke [sic.] Tyson." Similarly exaggerated fears appeared in local newspapers across the Paris region. In 93 Hebdo, the weekly newspaper of the Seine-Saint-Denis département, photos of the graffiti-scrapped suburban train system appeared with the subtitle, "the halls are beginning to resemble the New York subway," noting that the "B Line" was experiencing "on average, one violent crime every two days."364

Sociologist Loïc Wacquant described the context in which these kinds of comparisons were being drawn, explaining that France was witnessing "the rise of urban inequalities, xenophobia, and protest movements of youth from the working or lower class


362 Ibid.

363 Broussard, "L'été zoulou."

'banlieues.' Wacquant observed that "in only a few years, a moral panic has spread according to which the deteriorating cités (public housing projects) of the urban periphery are on the verge of being transformed—indeed have already been remade—into so many 'ghettos,' repositories where all the ills afflicting the lower reaches of French society accumulate and brew. Arising out of nowhere and appearing everywhere at the same time, fed by stereotypes imported from across the Atlantic (Chicago, the Bronx, Harlem...), this trope has imposed itself as one of the clichés of contemporary public debate on the city."366

Historian Nancy Green argues that this tendency to use America as a foil for France came to pervade even scholarly "books about French immigration," which "refer time and again to the United States."367 Green notes that "America is... used rhetorically and politically to interpret France," and that "decoding the United States is most often a way of encoding France: that France is a melting pot / country of immigration just like the United States; that the United States has renounced its literal melting pot to follow a dangerous path of diversity, which France should in no way copy; or that an American model of


366 Ibid.

warring communities is not nearly as grim as some pundits like to point out and is therefore usable.\textsuperscript{368}

The predominant mode of New York-Paris comparison in the late 1980s and early 1990s was clearly one in which media and public figures were "obsessively invoking the specter of the 'American syndrome' [of failed multiculturalism and widespread ghettoization] at every turn."\textsuperscript{369} This was confirmed when Left-wing, Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard proclaimed that France "cannot be 'a juxtaposition of communities.' It is a society in which 'the adherence to a set of common values is primordial.' France does not have to follow the Anglo-Saxon models, which allow ethnic groups to barricade themselves within geographic and cultural ghettos, resulting in 'a soft form of apartheid.'\textsuperscript{370} These public figures, as Wacquant noted, served as "prophets of doom and gloom" who were "playing up sensationalistic and exotic images 'made in the USA' (as striking as they [were] fuzzy)."\textsuperscript{371}

\textbf{Public Enemy at the Zenith}

In the aftermath of the bicentennial celebrations of the French Revolution, around which were had some of the fiercest national debates about citizenship and French national identity, a new American Hip Hop album was released that had global repercussions.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{368} Ibid.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{369} Wacquant, "America as Social Dystopia," 131.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{370} Michel Rocard, quoted in \textit{Le Monde}, 7 décembre 1989, 13, cited in Green, "Le Melting-Pot," 1198.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{371} Wacquant, "America as Social Dystopia," 131.}
Arriving in Paris several days after the April 1990 release of their album entitled *Fear of a Black Planet*, American Hip Hop group Public Enemy was set to perform at the prestigious Zenith concert hall. But this was no ordinary Rap group. They had already released groundbreaking albums like *Yo! Bum Rush The Show* and *It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back*, and were receiving wider acclaim for their song "Fight The Power" which featured in Spike Lee's controversial 1989 film, *Do The Right Thing*. Their new album, *Fear of a Black Planet*, generated interest among fans and critics alike, first with "Fight The Power," then with songs like "911 Is A Joke," which criticized the lack of response of emergency services in Black neighborhoods, "Welcome to the Terrordome," "Burn Hollywood Burn," and "Revolutionary Generation."

The album couldn't have been more aptly titled, if only because the music and ideas of Public Enemy struck utter fear in much of the French public. More than anything, it was the frank, incisive talk about race and racial inequality that jarred French sensibilities. The French republican political tradition of race-blindness that traditionally precludes the acknowledgement of "race," also often deems discussion of it as "anti-French." Public Enemy, on the other hand, advocated a stark view of racism and argued for the necessity of addressing it head-on. And yet, few in France could deny that there were already rumblings of social and racial unrest in their country, as an increasing number of incidents of police brutality and anti-immigrant violence had occurred in the preceding months and years (and would eventually peak at the end of 1990 and the beginning of 1991 with a series of

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riots). But seeing postcolonial youth embrace the music of Public Enemy came as a shock to much of the rest of France, and once again became a source of paranoia over the possibility of the infiltration of American racial ideologies into the neighborhoods of the working-class suburbs.

In the days leading up to the Zenith concert, the French National Police put in place a series of efforts to prevent any racial unrest. They even met with the concert organizers—a group of young Hip Hoppers from the suburb of Saint-Ouen who had formed a promotions company called IZB—to gather intelligence about the upcoming event. The two founders of IZB, brothers Angelo and Jean-Marie Gopée, claimed that "the prefecture wanted to prohibit the concert because of all the hype by the media." This was not uncommon, since as journalist Olivier Cachin noted, early coverage of French rap often conflated the music with suburban violence: "In the first years that there were pieces in the French press about rap, it was exclusively linked to the suburbs, and further than that, to the riots in the suburbs. You know, if there's a trashcan burning or cars being turned over or young guys throwing stones, [it was like,] 'Hey, rap music!' There were ludicrous pieces, even in good [news]papers like, for example, Canard Enchaine... That was one of the big frustrations of the artists and of me at the time: that it was never seen as a music, it was like a sociological movement... It was always like, 'Oh, the suburbs are burning? Let's

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talk about Hip Hop!"³⁷⁵ For the April 1990 Public Enemy concert, the story was no different. The news media played a central role in further promoting the already prevailing sense of fear. The many French Hip Hop fans that attended the concert recall with disbelief and disgust—even many years later—the surrounding media coverage.

Two important figures of the French Hip Hop scene, DJ Fab and his associate Awer, have vivid memories of the experience. Awer explained, "I remember the first time Public Enemy came to the Zenith. Man, it was like... The coverage on the TV news was like that of the beginning of the [Gulf War]. All the TV channels were like, 'Tonight, there will be a big war here.'"³⁷⁶ DJ Fab added: "I remember, me and [my rapping partner] EJM appeared on a TV show. They followed us for 24 hours leading up to the concert, came to my [house], everywhere... They followed us with a camera, like 'We're going to a Public Enemy show with EJM and his crew, to find out what this is all about.' It was like France was under attack!"³⁷⁷ Awer interjected: "It was crazy, man. 1pm, opening of the news: 'Tonight, at the Zenith: Public Enemy, this group, of almost like terrorists,' you know? 'All of the kids from the suburbs will be coming'.... People were scared. You could see the cops were everywhere. It was crazy. It was like we were at war."³⁷⁸

The archival television footage reveals how remarkably accurate DJ Fab and Awer's account is. The midday news of Antenne 2 on the day following the concert opened their broadcast announcing, "Public Enemy in concert at the Zenith in Paris: an event both

³⁷⁵ Olivier Cachin, interview with author, 4 December 2008, Paris, France.
³⁷⁶ DJ Fab and Awer, interview with author, 1 December 2008, Paris, France.
³⁷⁷ Ibid.
³⁷⁸ Ibid.
much awaited and much feared." The news anchor continued: "With Public Enemy, the message is clear and the symbols powerful." They cut to footage of a group of young Afro-French fans waiting outside the concert venue, pumping their fists and throwing peace signs in the air. The news narrator noted: "It is for them that [Public Enemy] came to perform, but one hour before the concert it was to the journalists that [Public Enemy] addressed themselves." Then came footage of Public Enemy's pre-concert press conference, with rapper Chuck D proclaiming, "We play music, but at the same time, in our music we have a message. And our message is: 'Rebuild and uplift our people.' In the Western world, we've been discriminated against, we've been enslaved. And today it's a different type of mental slavery that's taking place. So, all we wanna do is play our music and fight for what we stand for." In a blatant, willfully inflammatory (mis)translation of the second and third sentences of Chuck D.'s comments, Antenne 2 overdubbed with the following: "Nous voulons rendre la race noire sa dignité. Par la faute des blancs, nous avons été victime de la discrimination, de l'esclavage." ("We want to return to the black race its dignity. At the hands of whites, we were victims of discrimination, of slavery.") Rather than use the common French word "l'Occident" (meaning "the West") for Chuck's use of "the western world," Antenne 2 made the conscious choice to use the much less commonly used and far more shocking term (to French sensibilities), "blanc" (meaning "white"). And where Chuck referred to "our people," Antenne 2 employed the phrase,


380 Ibid.

"black race." The television channel's use of racially antagonistic language was symptomatic of a broader pattern in the mainstream news media's treatment of working-class, postcolonial youth.382

On the evening news of a neighboring channel, *France 3*, the news anchor opened by saying, "We feared the very worst yesterday night in Paris, but the worst did not come to be... No, Paris was not at all burning last night."383 Continuing with the incendiary language, he added: "'Not a single white person allowed in the concert hall.' That crazy rumor had been circulating all day long. It must be said though that Public Enemy has a bad reputation. In the United States, this group is number one in Rap, a music born in the ghettos and which chants its cry of revolt against misery and hopelessness. On stage, Public Enemy only increases their provocations as they advocate the defense of the black race against whites. They're 'racist, hateful, and anti-Semitic,' charge their critics... But yesterday, the concert ended the rumor: a young audience, a lot of Blacks, but also some whites. A relaxed ambience. Not the slightest of incidents."384

The most widely watched broadcast of nightly news, on channel *TF1*, covered the concert in much the same way, highlighting the racial dimensions of Hip Hop and then "measuring the impact" of Public Enemy's show. The anchor began: "Rap is arriving in

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384 Ibid.
Europe. This Black American musical movement, born several years ago in the poor neighborhoods of New York, has spread across the largest cities in the United States and now, it is spreading here. Rap asserts itself firmly against the white establishment, and at times, it can go very far in that direction. Public Enemy [performed] yesterday at the Zenith in Paris, and [reporter] Bernard Gely was there to measure the impact.\(^3\) Bernard Gely offered his take: "A good sense for marketing and opinions that cause concern in the United States. Leaders of Rap, Public Enemy moves our countrymen more with the force of their music than with their words which are delivered in English. But overall, the message resonates." They cut to footage of young Afro-French fans at the concert pumping their fists in the air. Gely continued, "What Public Enemy demands is recognition of a Black identity and a world without inequality.\(^4\)

Although the concert happened without incident, the heightened awareness of racial tensions and the increasing popularity of Hip Hop both left their mark on the country's collective imagination. In late 1990 and throughout following year, riots were periodically erupting in cities across France in response to repeated incidents of police brutality.\(^5\) French Hip Hop artists, for the first time, were called upon to appear on television and radio to comment upon the social conditions in their communities. In many ways, as the only postcolonial youth of any stature to be visible in the French public sphere, rappers

\(^3\) Archives of the *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel* ("National Audiovisual Institute," Paris, France): Evening news (8pm), Channel: *TF1*, 12 April 1990.

\(^4\) Ibid.

were expected to act as spokespeople for their communities and their neighborhoods, even as they often wrestled with this responsibility or in some cases outright rejected such roles.

"Jack le Rappeur" and "Le Président Hip Hop"

When François Mitterand became president in May of 1981, he named Jack Lang his Minister of Culture. And in a historic move, the Ministry's budget was nearly immediately doubled, providing unprecedented funding for cultural initiatives. Each year thereafter, the budget continued to grow until it surpassed 1% of the French government's total budget in 1993, just as Jack Lang's tenure ended. Within months of the election of Mitterand and nomination of Lang, clashes occurred between police and immigrant youth in the Minguettes housing projects in the Lyon suburbs. This placed immediate pressure on the new administration to address the issue of poor social conditions in such public housing complexes and to resolve the ongoing violent conflicts between youth and police in these neighborhoods.

In the months and years that followed, Jack Lang oversaw a cultural policy that was carried out in tandem with a new urban policy. In both cases, a primary concern was the integration of postcolonial youth. Since Hip Hop increasingly became a central force in


their everyday lives, the Ministry of Culture sought to target this newly arriving and quickly adopted cultural movement. As Loïc Lafargue de Grangeneuve explains, "As a cultural component of urban policy... the public administrations put in place a group of programs intended for hip-hop for the reason that the majority of its practitioners—youth living in the suburbs, often of immigrant descent (notably African and Maghrebi)—embody sociological characteristics that define them as a 'problem populations,' and therefore a potential target for public policy."\(^{391}\)

At the very moment that questions of "integration" came to the fore in the mass media and in national political debate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Ministry of Culture (along with other government organizations, such as the Fonds d'Action Sociale (FAS)—Social Action Fund) sponsored a trans-Atlantic conference on Hip Hop that brought a large group of French Hip Hop artists, social workers, police officials, politicians (mayors, assemblymen, etc.) to the Apollo Theatre in Harlem to dialogue with American Hip Hop artists and journalists. This conference, which occurred November of 1991, represented an attempt by the French state to gain a better understanding of this (African)American cultural movement which, by this period (and as they saw it), had invaded France's most troubled neighborhoods and overtaken the youth. The inclusion of law enforcement, social workers, and government officials in the French delegation was evidence of the degree of utter fear and misunderstanding that accompanied Hip Hop in France.

As Jack Lang served as Minister of Culture from 1981 to 1992 (except between 1986-1988), he became the figurehead of the Ministry's engagement with Hip Hop. Critics on the Right often sardonically referred to him as "Jack Le Rappeur." This image was solidified when, several months after the infamous Public Enemy concert, he appeared in a two-page photograph spread with a group of Hip Hoppers in *VSD* magazine and publicly promised to commit 2 million francs to support Hip Hop initiatives. In that cover story, he famously proclaimed (referring to Hip Hop), "Cette culture, moi j'y crois" ("I believe in this culture"). The front cover read: "Generation Rap: Music, Graffiti, Style, the Rage of Rap has Conquered our High Schools and our Suburbs. Investigation about this phenomenon that came from the Sidewalks of New York."  

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392 "Jack Lang: Je crois à la culture rap," *VSD*, no. 687 (du 31 octobre au 7 novembre 1990), 41.  
393 Jack Lang, "Cette culture, moi j'y crois," *VSD*, no. 687 (du 31 octobre au 7 novembre 1990), front cover.  
394 Ibid.
Minister Jack Lang in *VSD* magazine, pictured alongside Hip Hoppers from around Paris (1990)\(^{395}\)

\(^{395}\) From the article, "Generation Rap," *VSD*, no. 687 (du 31 octobre au 7 novembre 1990), 39.
French cartoonist "Plantu" playfully mocked François Mitterand and his administration for their attempts at pandering to French youth, dubbing him "Le Président Hip Hop."  

A Return to Roots: From Paris to Harlem

Nearly ten years after the "New York City Rap Tour" brought the first Hip Hop performers to Paris, a group of French Hip Hoppers and government officials were making their way to Harlem. But the cultural distance between the two moments was telling. When Bernard Zekri led the November 1982 tour from New York to Paris, French audiences had never before witnessed Hip Hop live on stage. And by the time this November 1991 trip left Paris for New York, Hip Hop had become so deeply rooted in the French cultural landscape that many youth of the working-class banlieues identified more closely with this American-born cultural movement than with the (musical) culture of their own country. Indeed, this was part of the rationale for what was only the latest of many government-backed Hip Hop initiatives. Almost as if in response to the continuing fear and lack of understanding that accompanied Hip Hop in France, the French Ministry of Culture sponsored a three-day symposium at the Apollo Theater which sought to bring together interested parties from both sides of the Atlantic to engage in dialogue about this now-global cultural movement.

Long-time music industry businessman and political insider Jean-François Michel launched a non-profit organization called World Culture which was the main coordinating body for the conference. According to Michel, World Culture was created with the idea that "at a time when the North-South gap is growing deeper," "culture is an essential means of dialogue." He continued, explaining that the organization "initiates encounters between the two 'camps'; but also between countries and cities that share the same

problem, like urban violence, for example. New York, the city of rap, the most open-minded city in the world but which is also full of ghettos, seemed a fitting candidate. The goals of this Paris-to-Harlem trip were "two-fold: raise awareness, create dialogue between different social actors (artists, social workers, elected officials, etc.), and then implement it in the long-term. One example: after this trip, there will be a program with police officers (an eight-month training program), with the F.A.S. [Social Action Fund for Immigrant Workers and their Families], the Inter-Ministerial Delegation on Cities, and the Ministry of Culture. Institutions have difficulty working transversally, and we're here to help them."

The French delegation included around fifty members representing more than ten different cities, including Paris, Saint Denis, Clichy La Garenne, Creil, Bondy, Mérue, Lille, Toulouse, Angoulême, Nantes, Saint Quentin, Marseille, and Montpellier. In addition to more than a dozen Hip Hoppers, the delegation included journalists, local government officials (including at least one mayor), social workers, and law enforcement officials, who were "particularly motivated by the issue of delinquency in problem districts." The kinds of professions represented in the delegation made clear that this trans-Atlantic conference was organized as a kind of fact-finding mission on which various representatives of the French state were hoping to learn what this cultural movement was all about and how they could expect it to develop in their country in the future. Over the


399 Ibid.

400 "Hexa...Rap", official event documentation, 1991, in the personal collection of James G. Spady.
course of three days, all the delegates would participate in panel discussions with their American counterparts, including a range of artists, intellectuals, and journalists, such as Hip Hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa, rapper Harmony, City College Professors Leonard Jeffries and James Small, journalists James G. Spady and Harry Allen, and radio deejay Gary Byrd. The French delegates were also going to be taking part in a trip to Newark Arts High School to meet with students, going on a visit to a Harlem police precinct to talk with law enforcement officials, and then going on a tour of the surrounding Harlem neighborhood.

Christophe Lacroix, graffiti writer and co-founder of the first French Hip Hop magazine (entitled Get Busy), offered his perspective on the organizers' intentions: "They wanted to understand the cultural phenomenon and the bridges between our worlds, like why the same things [exist—such as Hip Hop—] in the Bronx and in Harlem and in Saint-Denis, and Sarcelles, and Orly, you know." Journalist and French delegate Olivier Cachin added: "It was very [naive]. It was like, 'So, the Hip Hop stars from America welcome their equivalent from France. And we're going to have a discussion and talk and exchange ideas.'... That was the idea." But as William Grimes of the New York Times noted, "The rude awakening came early. American rap, and the rhetoric surrounding it, turned out not to be as the French had expected. Many participants said they had come unprepared for the anger and stark racial division they encountered... Suddenly, they found

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themselves face to face with American racial politics.” Grimes characterized the conference as "a weekend rich in mutual incomprehension despite the simultaneous translations." The French journalists agreed. Olivier Cachin said, "It was very weird because it was two worlds that couldn't speak to each other." Le Monde newspaper's Thomas Sotinel wrote that "a good portion of the time was spent overcoming misunderstandings." It was "three days [of] cultural electroshocks," ultimately revealing "the divisions in the French microcosm transplanted in New York. Elected officials and educators leapt out of their chairs when a member of the [French rap] group Assassin declared, 'France is a racist society.'"

It was only appropriate then that the three-day symposium ended on a characteristically shocking note—shocking, at least, to the French officials and educators. One of the few women Hip Hop artists to present on a panel, Harmony, posed a final question to the audience: "How many people here want peace?" Everyone's hand went up in unison. She paused, then concluded her remarks: "Don't you know that there has to be war before than can be peace?" The New York Times reported that at that moment,

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404 Ibid.

405 Olivier Cachin, interview with author, 4 December 2008, Paris, France.


407 Ibid.

408 Grimes, "Traveling From France to Harlem," C-12.
"there was a sharp intake of breath among the French delegation." Thomas Sotinel noted that at the very end of the trip, just as the delegation was going to be taking off for France, a French "educator discreetly but firmly cursed 'the myth held by the Ministry of Culture that the housing projects are reservoirs of creativity,'" a myth he felt resulted in "holding onto illusions and wasting money."n

The airplane ride back to Paris was a lively one. Journalist Olivier Cachin described the sentiments shared by many of the attendees: "We thought, 'What a trip!' We were very happy to have been there, but it's not exactly what we or [the organizers] expected. It was like, 'There's still a long way to go to extend the French-American friendship as far as Hip Hop music was concerned.' I think the most surprised were the people who organized it. They didn't expect that at all... It didn't turn out the way it was supposed to turn out."n Graffiti artist Christophe Lacroix at first hesitated, but then agreed to speak with one of the traveling journalists who wrote for the conservative Le Point magazine: "I remember having an argument with people on the plane, especially with a guy from Le Point. I talked to that guy for almost three hours on the way back on the plane, you know. I tried to explain [Hip Hop] and all that... I was giving [answers] from my heart, but that guy already knew what he wanted to write. When the article came out, I [saw] he was completely taking my words out of context... I was trying to explain why [Hip Hop] is something important, why it is a movement and a culture, and not just a trend.

409 Ibid.

410 Sotinel, "Des Français en plein coeur de Harlem."

Whereas he was like, 'This is those funny young Black and Arab guys dressing crazy, talking on some bullshit music, and dancing with crazy moves.'

Even if, as some journalists suggested, the symposium did not turn out as the organizers had hoped, it still revealed a great deal about the state of the transnational Hip Hop cultural movement. On the one hand, the government officials, law enforcement, and educators in the French delegation demonstrated how woefully ignorant they remained of the deep-seated racism in the United States and in their own country. That they were continually shocked to hear denouncements of racism, and especially from the Hip Hoppers in their own delegation, suggested their fundamental blindness—as is symptomatic of French republicanism—to the racial dimensions of the social order. On the other hand, for the French Hip Hoppers who traveled to New York, it was like a pilgrimage to the mecca of the cultural movement; its birthplace and breeding ground. They showed solidarity with their American counterparts who spoke out forcefully against racism, since they, too, knew what it was like to be profiled by the police, to be relegated to living in segregated neighborhoods, and more generally be faced with discrimination.

On an artistic and personal level, they were also able to build connections with their American counterparts that, in several cases, would last for many years to come.

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412 Christophe Lacroix ("TEXACO"), interview with author, 26 June 2008, Paris, France.

413 James G. Spady, interview with author, 14 August 2009, Philadelphia, PA.

414 For example, the rapper Squatt, of the group Assassin, returned many times to New York to record songs and collaborate with American artists. Christophe Lacroix, too, returned many times, first as simply a Hip Hop enthusiast and then as an urban marketing consultant.
Conclusion
In February of 1991, just as French rap was beginning to be discovered by a mass public, a popular television talk-show invited a cross-section of Hip Hop artists and critics to discuss this still largely misunderstood music. Hosted by Christophe Dechavanne, *Ciel, Mon Mardi!* brought Paris-based rappers Lionel D. and MC Solaar, Marseille-based rappers Akhenaton and Shurik'n (of the group IAM), and other Hip Hoppers, face-to-face with a rock music critic, record industry executive, and musicologist. The discussion was lively, as the Hip Hoppers ardently defended their art form in the face of an unconvinced and sometimes uninterested panel of 'experts.' The episode included performances and ended in heated debate. In a moment of exasperation, Gérard Zwang, the invited musicologist, interjected: "I am persuaded that in ten years, we won't be talking about rap anymore," implying that it was a passing fad. He added, pointing his finger at rappers Akhenaton and Shurik'n who were seated across the stage from him: "In ten years, they'll be doing something else!"  

Almost exactly seven years later, in February of 1998, rappers Akhenaton and Shurik'n (and their group IAM) were awarded "Album of the Year" at the annual *Victoires de la Musique* (the French equivalent of the Grammy Awards), winning over longstanding popular French musicians like Julien Clerc and Michel Sardou. Their album, *L'École du Micro d'Argent*, on which they closely worked with New York-based rappers and audio engineers, sold more than one million copies in France. The group had by that time

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415 Gérard Zwang, in "Ciel, mon mardi!" on Channel TF1, 5 February 1991.

helped cultivate a generation of Hip Hop artists not only in their home city of Marseille, but across France. MC Solaar, who had appeared alongside IAM on the *Ciel, Mon Mardi!* television show, also won several *Victoires de la Musique* and was awarded the *Grand Prix de la Chanson Française* by the *Académie Française* in 1998.\footnote{418}

By the mid- to late-1990s, France had emerged as the largest market for the production and consumption of Hip Hop behind only the United States, the country of the music's birth.\footnote{419} As waves of talented French rap artists fought their way into the music industry, they were finding increasing success. The genre was an unintended beneficiary of the Pelchat amendment to the 1994 Carignon media law, which requires commercial radio stations to have playlists with at least 40 percent of songs performed in the French language.\footnote{420} And half of that 40 percent has to be early-career artists.\footnote{421} In time, France became home to many local and regional rap radio shows, as well as one of the first national Hip Hop radio stations in the world, *Skyrock*.

But despite this success and seeming acceptance by the music establishment, Hip Hop remains deeply controversial, still carrying the same stigma as a music of the

\footnote{417} Akhenaton (Philippe Fragione), telephone interview with author, 28 September 2010; Prince Charles Alexander (Charles Alexander), interview with author, 15 and 29 September 2010, Boston, Massachusetts.


\footnote{421} Ibid.
working-class, postcolonial youth populations of France. In fact, the National Front party has had an ongoing campaign against rap since at least the mid-1990s. When FN politician Catherine Mégret was elected Mayor of Vitrolles, she swore she would "bring order to [French] culture" by doing away with "this whole rap culture which is not ours."

As Alec Hargreaves notes, "In the eyes of FN supporters, French rap is triply alien: its American origins, a cardinal sin in themselves, are compounded by both the African ancestry of its founding practitioners and the Third World minority ethnic milieu in which its French offshoots initially took root."\(^{423}\)

But one need not look as far right as the National Front for continuing persecution of Hip Hop. In the aftermath of the October-November 2005 riots, French Hip Hop artists were among the first people to be solicited as commentators on the events as they were transpiring. They were also, however, among the first to be blamed, as French Justice Minister Pascal Clément opened an investigation into seven rap groups accused of promoting "incivility, if not terrorism" among France's "deracinated, de-cultured youth."\(^{424}\) The investigation and subsequent legal cases grew out of a petition spearheaded by parliamentary deputy François Grosdidier—onto which nearly a quarter of the French parliament had signed their names—that criticized these rappers for fostering "anti-white


\(^{423}\) Hargreaves, "Resetting the Margins," 316.

"racism" and a "hatred for France." If anything, such continuing attacks which link Hip Hop to questions of citizenship and race(ism) make clear that the cultural movement carries as much potency and controversy as it did when it first arrived in France more than three decades ago.

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