On February 16, 2021, just outside of Barcelona, dozens of Spanish police in riot gear stormed the Universitat de Lleida, where Catalonia’s anti-capitalist, anti-fascist rapper, Pablo Hasél, and dozens of his supporters were barricading themselves. Dramatic images and videos of the Mossos d’Esquadra detaining Hasél outside of the university building, with his fist up, shouting, “They will never silence us! Death to the fascist state!” circulated rapidly on social media. What followed were weeks of protests where thousands of young people clashed with police across several major cities in Spain, including Madrid, Valencia, Girona, Bilbao, Barcelona, and of course, Lleida, Hasél’s hometown. Hasél was arrested by the state and is, at the time of writing, serving a nine-month prison sentence for insulting the King of Spain and “inciting violence” and “glorifying terrorism” with his tweets and lyrics. The case recalled rapper Valtònyc’s arrest in 2012, when he was just 18 years old, and his exile to Belgium where he fled to avoid his three-year jail sentence for similar “crimes.”

Ironically, the Spanish state’s repression of Valtònyc, Hasél, and others only served to strengthen their arguments that El Franquismo was alive and well in Spain nearly half a century after the end of Franco’s
dictatorship. The Spanish king Juan Carlos I, who left Spain for the United Arab Emirates after multiple corruption allegations, has been roundly criticized in Spanish media. From Hip Hop heads, and the youth of Spain more generally, the critiques have been particularly vehement because Pablo Hasél’s case has become a symbol of not only state repression but also of the resistance to the severe, neoliberal economic austerity measures and the threat of fascism spreading across Europe.

Many continue to march in the streets, pushing for an overturning of the government’s “la ley mordaza,” which Mr. Michael, a Spanish Moroccan member of La Llama Rap Colectivo (see chapter 5), described as “a bandage over your mouth . . . to keep us quiet.” Waqar, a Pakistani member of La Llama Rap Colectivo, added, “That’s why in the song, ‘Luchando Derechos,’ I wanted to send the message that the police mis-treats us because of how we look and also, more in general, for the system, it seems like they complain about us, but the system does nothing for us either.” Turning specifically to the Spanish state’s repression of Hip Hop artists, he reflected upon the power of Hip Hop in Spain: “They want to scare us, if you want to know the truth. Because I think Hip Hop in Spain has grown a lot . . . There’s like a united struggle also, in Hip Hop, in favor of freedom of expression. And I think that scares them . . . We use Hip Hop as a tool for change, because we believe that we can change the way people think, right . . . I think that music is freedom.”

Beyond the systemic oppression of the state’s politics of abandonment and containment, Communities of Color within Spain, as elsewhere, have been suffering under the debilitating weight of capitalism as well as the daily indignities of racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia, all of which are manipulated to serve the state’s repressive agenda. In Catalonia, the irony is that Communities of Color—who are routinely excluded from definitions of “who counts as Catalan” because of the regional identity’s ideological links to Whiteness—are holding Spain’s feet to the fire by insisting it live up to its democratic ideals. La Llama Rap Colectivo, like many artists within the pages of this book, make use of Hip Hop as a way to envision expansive futures beyond the narrow possibilities offered to them by the state.
FREEDOM MOVES: BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND DIASPORIC KNOWLEDGES

Speaking in front of an audience of approximately five hundred people in Los Angeles’s California African American Museum on March 11, 2020—the last event before the COVID shutdown—Chuck D explained how Hip Hop, as a continuation of Black freedom culture, or in his words, the next iteration of “Black creativity for survival,” has always imagined new futures even within the most brutal of contexts: “The Black culture had to speak loud because we had to be in code because we just couldn’t say, ‘Slavemaster, put your fucking whip away!’ We had all kinds of code in our music and our music was everything emitted from us. We spoke it even when we didn’t speak it. We hummed it to say so many things when we didn’t want to have to say it in words” (see chapter 1).

With Rakim co-signing, Talib Kweli explained: “Because it’s folk language, Hip Hop was speaking in the language that everybody could relate to. It’s like Dr. [Martin Luther] King called a riot ‘the language of the unheard.’ Chuck D talked about ‘a riot going on’ just like Sly and the Family Stone did. And so when you talk about the language of the unheard, what you’re talking about is Hip Hop music.” Then Kweli historicized Hip Hop even further, rooting it in African traditions: “You’re talking about something that goes back before us, before the Last Poets and Gil Scott Heron, before the Negro spirituals and gospel songs that slaves sang to get them through the day. You’re talking about things that go way back before, all the way to the African griot tradition. Banging on a drum and telling our story.”

In “Part 1: Black, Indigenous, and Diasporic Knowledges,” Rakim, Chuck D, and Talib Kweli are joined by Black, Indigenous, Arab, European, North African, and South Asian artists who continue to bang that drum, who continue to tell their stories. Collectively, they are recovering and rethinking traditional knowledges and ways of being at the same time that they are creating new ones; building worlds where the voices and visions of our youth are taken seriously in the futures of collective movements for freedom, sovereignty, and self-determination; imagining new ways of moving in the world within and beyond the “White settler capitalist” contexts of a “post”-apartheid South Africa and the United States; envisioning life beyond “occupation” and the crushing (neo)colonial geopolitics of the
Middle East (Palestine and Syria); and organizing against the suffocating, neoliberal austerity measures spreading throughout Europe and globally, as well as fighting for a world free of racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and political repression (Spain).

Organizing. Fighting. Recovering. Forging. Rethinking. Building. Imagining. Envisioning. Creating. From the rich and diverse narratives in this section, we learn that these are the actions necessary for making freedom move(s). They are both the engine that makes freedom move and the actions that facilitate freedom moves by young people creating art in contexts where just merely existing can seem like “a miracle,” as South Africa’s Prophets of da City once put it. Hip Hop, as conceived by many artists in this book, is necessarily an antiracist, decolonial framework that refuses and seeks to abolish White settler capitalist and global neoliberal systems, and increasingly, the ableist, cisheteropatriarchal, and other oppressive systems that have long haunted Hip Hop from within.

These artists, however, urge us to refuse being locked into languages and modes of resistance, and when we do think about resistance, to complicate the damage-centered narratives and all-too-often joyless depictions of our struggles. As Emile YX? shared, his music video for the haunting “Butterflies Fly By” recalled a moment in time in 1985 when “staring down the gun barrel of apartheid” was not just a metaphor for Hip Hop in South Africa (chapter 2). “The whole song explains me going to the rally, and for the first time in my life, a guy pointed his gun at me. And as the gun passed me, it slowed down, and I thought, ‘Damn, when is this passing me?’ Because it’s focused on me, right. And in that moment, my self-worth, in my own mind, was tested because all the time I was shouting, ‘Freedom or death, victory is certain.’” As he locked eyes with the apartheid regime’s soldier, he recalled others at the rally who were tired of waiting for the speaker to begin, asking him to “entertain” them:

So, in my own mind, I’m in this conflict. “We’re fighting a revolution and you want me to dance?” “Oh, okay, just clap your hands, everyone, let’s do it!” So constantly, for me, this period of time, when people speak about the struggle, it was a combination of picking up a brick and throwing it at whoever is pointing a gun at you, picking up teargas canisters and throwing them back at them. And, on the weekend, I go play soccer, and practice Kung Fu and go to a club and dance to Aretha Franklin, whatever. [Laughter]
As Lyla June, a Diné member of one of the most prominent collectives of Indigenous Hip Hop artists in North America known as the Dream Warriors (chapter 4), explained, Hip Hop doesn’t have to be framed solely as resistance: “To me, that’s what Hip Hop is, sharing wisdom, sharing our way of living, and helping people just exist on this earth while at the same time giving them joy and beauty and connection to their heart and their heartbeat.” Further, Muslim Mexican American spoken word poet Mark Gonzales argued (chapter 9) that abandoning postures of resistance, even temporarily, opens up new ways of thinking about our futures:

I don't like this language of what they call resistance and fighting back. I've been rooted and lived a lot of my life in that language, and I realized [that] even the best we were thinking about was like, “What's an alternative look like?” And I'm like, “No, I want to center what's important to me.” I want to create my own universe and my own galaxy. What's in there, and who's in there, and what are my values, and what are my dreams, and what are my hopes, and how do I just stay alive long enough to figure it out?

What happens when we center what’s important to us, rather than the value systems that have been imposed upon us? What happens when we are bold enough to consider the radical proposition: “What does it look like when we’ve won?” Recalling workshops by the NDN Collective, an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to building Indigenous power by decolonizing and transforming systems through radical imagination, Lyla June reflected upon the first time she confronted the possibility of freedom on Indigenous terms:

I started crying because as Indigenous peoples, we don’t often get to even think that way. We’re too busy fighting off today’s onslaught, everything from our kids need food, to our water's getting poisoned, to our women are going missing, to our language is going extinct... It's fucking hard to just wake up and be Indigenous, generally speaking. I think that for him to ask us that question of what does it look like after we’ve won, there's an aching in my heart, a good kind of aching that says, wow, no one's ever asked me that. I grieve for that fact that I’ve never been able to think about that. And then after that grieving, immediately there's celebration because now I'm thinking about that for the first time. And what I think what we see as Dream Warriors, among many other things, one of the things we see is our youth are safe. Our youth love themselves. Our youth feel empowered and
our youth have the older sisters and brothers they need to not just survive, but truly thrive and be the people they were born to be, whatever that is, whatever they choose that to be.

Casey Philip Wong’s conversation with the Dream Warriors highlights why contemplating futures, and even presents, from the Indigenous perspective can be profoundly political. The Dream Warriors’ artistic production forces viewers to think about how White settlers imagine Indigenous peoples as inescapably locked in the past, as if Indigenous people are already eliminated, do not exist, and have not continued to live, resist, and thrive. Because if Indigenous folks have a present and future, then it questions the legitimacy of White settler nation-states like the United States, their permanence, their history and future. In the case of the Dream Warriors’ Hip Hop production, Indigenous presence and futurity exposes the immoral foundations of the US because the very fact of being throws into stark relief the connection between the violent, White imperial project and the accompanying ideologies of erasure that uphold and maintain it.

“FREEDOM MOVES AT A WACK PACE”: BUILDING AZANIA, A NEW WORLD, FOR THE SAKE OF OUR CHILDREN

The same issues are thrown into sharp relief for artists in the White settler neocolonial-capitalist context of South Africa. Shaheen Ariefdien, of the legendary South African Hip Hop group Prophets of da City (POC), shared the lyrics to their now classic single, “Never Again,” which the group performed at the 1994 inauguration of then recently freed president Nelson Mandela (chapter 2). To put this performance in perspective, it took place less than one year after their classic album, Age of Truth, was banned by the repressive apartheid regime. Amidst all of the excitement and national fervor around the ushering in of a “post”-apartheid and “post”-racial democratic “rainbow nation,” POC sampled the most memorable line of Mandela’s inauguration speech, “Never, and never again, shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another,” to which Shaheen rapped:

So I dedicate this to those who are down with the revolution, all over the world and never snoozing
I dedicate this to those who are down with a struggle, G
even when things got ugly.
’Cause the Black race always had a slapped face.
’Cause freedom moves at a wack pace.
It sometimes takes a miracle to see my people free,
’Cause it’s not done e-e-e-as-i-i-ly.
So I dedicate this to those who don’t turn the other cheek,
and to those who would rather speak.
Against colonialism, imperialism and racism.
So I’m bringing it back to the basics and I—
know that those who supported the struggle locally,
I support your struggle globally.

Notably, Shaheen described that “freedom moves at a wack pace,”
which can be read broadly as a reference to centuries of living under brutal
White settler colonial rule, or even specifically as a reference to Mandela’s
nearly three seemingly endless decades in prison. Critically, POC is also
speaking directly to those who are “down with the revolution” and fighting
“against colonialism, imperialism, and racism” by “rejecting calls for re-
conciliation that are not accompanied with a clear plan for distributive
and restorative justice in post-apartheid South Africa.” As Adam Haupt
has argued, the policies of the African National Congress have “done
very little to reverse the racialized, class inequalities that legislated apart-
heid produced largely because they place a low premium on public
spending and adopt a laissez-faire approach to state regulation of mar-
kets.” Today, over more than a quarter of a century after the legal fall of
apartheid—talk about “a wack pace”—Hip Hop artists and activists are
not only calling for a transformational racial politics that moves beyond
the rainbow politics of reconciliation and toward the radical politics of
redistribution, but they are also challenging White settler capitalist logics
of privatization and ownership. As Shaheen explained: “People say ’post’-
apartheid, but it was a reality of neoliberalism. The apartheid racial
framework was and is still, to some degree, very much in place . . . And
with neoliberalism globally, people are feeling more and more under pres-
sure, feeling more and more under siege. The conditions that we saw
that gave birth to the South Bronx, and the Cape Flats, are being spread
globally. And in the South Bronx and the Cape Flats, it’s even more
intensified” (see chapter 2).
If freedom moves at a wack pace, then POC’s DJ Ready D rhymes about the need to make freedom moves by acquiring “knowledge of self” in preparation for a movement to “build Azania, the new world, for the sake of our children.” This hopefulness—this imagining of a precolonial, yet renewed Azania—captures much of the ethos behind the freedom moves that many Hip Hop artists and organizations in this book are trying to make from Pittsburgh to Palestine to Mitchells Plain.

MAKING FREEDOM MOVE(S) UNDER OCCUPATION, WAR, AND REVOLUTION IN PALESTINE AND SYRIA

Moving from “post”-apartheid South Africa, what does freedom look like under the current military occupation of Palestine or the devastating geopolitical warfare of Syria’s forgotten revolution? Critically acclaimed Syrian American rapper Omar Offendum and the groundbreaking Palestinian group DAM, much like Prophets of da City and Black Noise in the South African apartheid context, are recognized internationally for their rhymes against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Importantly, to them, they are also recognized locally by the people they are trying to reach (see chapter 3). DAM’s Mahmoud Jreri explained:

We come from a place that is very hard. There’s a big poverty problem, big drug problem, and of course, a huge political problem . . . When I speak about my neighborhood, when I speak about my poverty, when I speak about police violence on Arabs, or military violence on Palestinians, or against Arabs, when I speak about the right of return for Palestinian refugees, then of course, I will affect many people that feel or live the same thing that I live, because they feel connected to my message . . . I also was affected in the beginning by Tupac and I was affected by him and from his images, ’cause I only saw the images. I didn’t understand English back then, but I saw the neighborhood. I saw the poverty. I saw that he talked about political problems.

Omar Offendum, a Syrian American Muslim born in Saudi Arabia who broke through in 2011 with “#Jan25” (featuring Freeway, Amir Sulaiman, Narcy, and Ayah)—a song that both inspired, and was inspired by, the Arab Spring uprisings—explained that underneath the complexities of
post–Arab Spring politics there is a humanitarian crisis to which he remains committed:

Beneath all the political posturing, all the proxy wars, and all the conspiracy theories, there’s very real human suffering taking place. It’s half a million refugees outside of Syria, millions internally displaced, 70,000 killed, hundreds of thousands imprisoned . . . And for me, as a Syrian, and more importantly as a humanitarian, that’s kind of what I feel like I want to focus on, because if you get sucked into the political argument, you’ll end up losing sight of the fact that at the end of the day, there will be no Syria to come back to, you know? If nobody’s taking care of these kids, who’ve been out of school for 2–3 years, who are now in these camps, then you know, what are we really fighting for?

As he continued, toggling between moments of despair and moments of hope, he echoed Rakim (see chapter 1) and drew powerful connections between Hip Hop’s imperative to gain knowledge of self and his Islamic faith, given “the important status that the pursuit of knowledge holds in Islam.” He explained: “We are taught that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said ‘When a person dies, his deeds are cut off except for three: Continuing charity, knowledge that others benefited from, and a righteous son who supplicates for him’ . . . This important reminder puts so much in perspective for me in terms of how fame and material success are not at all the end goal when it comes to this sort of cultural production.” Reflecting back on his childhood, Offendum finds hope in a future his children will inherit: “I started rapping as a teenager and always felt the need to honor the great emcees who came before me by doing my best to not only entertain, but educate and inspire the way artists like Rakim and Nas did for me. Now that I’m a father I understand just how crucial this approach has been in terms of helping to shape the cultural spaces that my children will inherit in the not too distant future, insha’Allah.”

HIP HOP ORGANIZING FOR ABOLITION, REPARATIONS, HEALING, AND GROWTH

In Part II, “Hip Hop Organizing for Abolition, Reparations, Healing, and Growth,” we turn our focus squarely on the systemic injustices faced by
Black folks, as well as Indigenous, Latinx, and other Communities of Color, and the Hip Hop activists and organizers who are carrying forward freedom movements. Whether it’s large, predominantly Black and Brown communities in New York, Pittsburgh, and Chicago or the smaller, multiracial (Latinx, Black, Asian, and Pacific Islander) suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area like East Palo Alto, Communities of Color are faced with the silent and sweeping forces of gentrification, White settler capitalist exploitation, and multiple forms of state repression and police violence that continue to constrain and contain communities through dehumanization, displacement, and death.

In the face of all of this, artists and activists involved in the Hip Hop movement continue to organize a generation of young people to make freedom move(s) by seeking justice, looking beyond justice to healing, and moving beyond healing to growth. These Hip Hop organizations join a reinvigorated movement of racial justice working toward the abolition of prisons and policing, reparations for victims of police violence, and finding creative, community-rooted solutions that invest in the futures of Communities of Color.

In Pittsburgh, Jasiri X and the 1Hood family (chapter 6) have continued to speak up and out for “the invisibles” about the consistent police murders in that city, which have vanished far too many Black lives, as they have across nearly every major city in the US. Describing what he called the “glaring contradiction of being Black in America,” Jasiri X explained the impetus behind his song, “America’s Most Livable City”:

According to Forbes magazine, this is the place, of all cities in the United States, this is the most livable place . . . When you come to Pittsburgh, if you ever come, when you get off in the airport it says, “America’s most livable city.” The same year Pittsburgh was named the most livable city, according to the United States Census, we were told we had the poorest Black community in the country. Poorer than Detroit, poorer than Cleveland, poorer than Chicago. The poorest inner-city Black people live in Pittsburgh. “Most livable” for who?

In Chicago, we hear an overlapping narrative from Jacinda Bullie, Jaquanda Villegas, and Lady Sol, the founders of the community-rooted Hip Hop organization Kuumba Lynx (see chapter 7). Modeled after the Mississippi Freedom Schools, they have for over two decades made use of
making freedom move(s)

the Hip Hop arts to engage youth in practices of “liberation through artistic expression.” In their seeking “protection from police who hinder respiratory airways,” Kuumba Lynx joined Project NIA and others working toward passing what became known as “the Reparations Ordinance,” an ordinance to condemn and collectively heal from the violence committed by former Chicago police superintendent Jon Burge, who was convicted of obstruction of justice, perjury, and torturing hundreds of innocent men over a span of two decades in order to obtain confessions. Through the creation of a $5.5 million city fund, Chicago became the first city to offer compensation to victims of police torture. Importantly, part of the reparations ordinance included the mandating of curriculum on police torture in Chicago public schools so that the children of these communities would learn all about the racist legacy of the Chicago police department.

Reflecting on the importance of this work to youth and Communities of Color, Jacinda Bullie explained:

We talk about reparations and we talk a lot about reimagining a more just world, right . . . but what does that really mean? Because we often talk about this pain narrative, but we don’t talk about the joy narrative, about what we accomplish through our coming together, through community. We don’t talk about defining what our joy looks like in this work or what our reimagined world will be composed of. And this is that, in real time, young people witnessing what a reimagined world looks like, and can look like as we organize. How we heal. How we move forward.

Speaking from his experiences in New York City, Bryonn Bain imagines futures without mass incarceration, and ultimately without prisons. Describing his time working in Rikers Island, which he refers to as “the largest penal colony in the world” holding approximately 13,000 incarcerated men and women, he explained: “During any given year, there’s four to five thousand teenagers, 16–19 years old, incarcerated at Rikers. They spend $167,000 per year per person at Rikers Island . . . And the New York state public schools spend less than $15,000 per student per year. They spend over 10 times the resources to actually incarcerate young folks in New York City as they do to actually fuel their education.” Bringing the point home, he concluded, “So when I hear folks talk about, ‘The system is broken, we gotta fix it,’ I’m like, ‘No, actually, the system is working exactly
as it was designed to work.’ Right? To make Black and Brown folks slaves and hard workers for White folks, and to make White folks—unless you come from the upper echelons of the socioeconomic ladder—a cog in the wheel.” If we want to move from thinking about reforming and defunding, to abolishing, for Bain, “It’s also about rethinking and reimagining where resources and where power is located in this society.”

From New York, we move to East Palo Alto (EPA), a small, 2.5-square-mile suburb of the San Francisco Bay Area, that is a rapidly gentrifying and resegregating community of Latinx, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and other interconnected and overlapping Communities of Color. Flanked by some of the US’s most affluent White suburbs on one side, the tech industry’s billionaire behemoths like Amazon and Facebook on another, and one of the wealthiest, Whitest elite, private universities in the nation, EPA is surrounded by centers of global White supremacist wealth accumulation and knowledge production. And despite this, or more accurately because of this, EPA suffers from many of the same symptoms of systemic oppression faced by larger cities like Pittsburgh and Chicago, where these Hip Hop–centered arts organizations are helping youth to heal from the trauma and suffering caused by continued racial capitalist exploitation and to imagine new and more just futures.

Founded two decades ago, the Mural Music and Arts Project (MMAP, see chapter 8), like Pittsburgh’s 1Hood and Chicago’s Kuumba Lynx, has created “ripples of hope and healing” that sustain community by creating a youth-centered, social justice arts ecosystem where youth feel loved and cared for as part of an ever-expanding family—what Youth Speaks’s Michelle Lee referred to as an “ethic of radical love” (see chapter 9). Beyond the metaphor of family, through youths’ participation in the Hip Hop arts, MMAP’s transformative power is manifested through how it links together and sustains families, neighborhoods, and the larger community of East Palo Alto. As Measha Ferguson Smith explained, relationships of love and care are key to MMAP’s success because they allow youth “to make critical reflections on their own lives and critical connections with the people around them.” MMAP engages the Hip Hop arts not just in the interest of honoring, fostering, and perpetuating the power of Hip Hop, but with a direct focus on sustaining young people themselves as they confront racial capitalist-contrived poverty and exploitation, hyper-
policing and mass incarceration, gentrification and resegregation, toxic masculinities and gendered violence, and other forms of systemic violence and injustice.

As Mark Gonzales shared, youth are not “checked out” or “numb,” as they are often described; they are shellshocked:

And how do the people begin to heal from this shellshock, and move beyond healing to growth? If we are only talking about healing then literally we are saying the best that we can do as humans is to restore ourselves to the baseline that we came out of the womb. We are not here to heal; we are here to grow. How do we center a discourse around growth, a discourse around not just surviving but living and not just living but thriving? What does it mean to thrive? How many of us are engaging with one another on that story?” (see chapter 9)

Youth continue to survive oppressive circumstances, but moving beyond healing toward flourishing and thriving requires that youth feel safe enough to share and “surrender experiences to the collective, to the community, to be held by beats and harmonies, footwork, sacred ciphers—instead of in your body.” For Ferguson-Smith, “The young artists at MMAP are coming into the sacred knowledge of how they can help themselves to do more than just survive, but to return to wholeness” and grow.18

“THE INSURRECTION OF SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES”:
HIP HOP AS CRITICAL, CULTURALLY RELEVANT, AND CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGIES

If we want to talk about subjugated knowledges, it’s important to state at the outset that Hip Hop scholarship precedes the writings of scholars and journalists. It begins with the cultural movement itself. When the Herculords, the Furious Five, and the Cold Crush Brothers were trading and writing rhythms, they were creating a body of knowledge. When DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Charlie Chase, DJ Disco Wiz, and so many others were loading up their crates and refining their DJ techniques, they were building a body of knowledge. Every crate of records is a treasure trove of knowledge. What b-boys and b-girls were doing in terms of bringing movements together from across the diaspora was building
knowledge. The dances are reminiscent of other corporeal movements throughout the centuries. This persistence of cultural memory, literally embodied—in people’s bones, limbs, muscles, joints—and these reenactments of fluid forms of expression, of attack, of evasion, of illusion, of ecstasy on the dance floor, were forms of remembering, forms of knowledge production, forms of pedagogical innovation.

Despite pushes for standardization in education, the most effective pedagogies are profoundly local, profoundly personal. All of the Hip Hop artists and organizations in this book—from 1Hood in Pittsburgh and Heal the Hood in South Africa to Kuumba Lynx in Chicago and La Llama Rap Colectivo in Barcelona—move freedom forward by viewing Hip Hop as critical, culturally relevant, and cultural sustaining pedagogy. From paradigm-shifting theoretical interventions by Gloria Ladson-Billings, Django Paris, and Marc Lamont Hill, to the powerful collaborations between the Wu-Tang Clan’s GZA and Christopher Emdin, and the protest pedagogies of White teacher A. J. Robinson, Part III brings together artists, activists, and leading pedagogical theorists to rethink the relationships between Hip Hop knowledges, pedagogies, and futures. These pedagogical moves toward freedom center and sustain Communities of Color in the face of the myriad ways that White settler capitalist terror manifests—culturally, racially, linguistically, politically, geographically, economically, epistemically, ontologically, and otherwise. These pedagogies are, at their core, what Django Paris19 and H. Samy Alim20 describe as culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSPs).

First and foremost, these pedagogies explicitly name Whiteness as the problem, and thus, decentering Whiteness and recentering communities is their point of departure. In the context of the US and other nation-states living out the legacies and contemporary realities of genocide, enslavement, apartheid, occupation, and various colonialisms, CSP recognizes that the purpose of state-sanctioned schooling has always been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent White imperial project. As such, Django Paris further reflected as events unfolded in 2020, “That age-old question, ‘What is the purpose of schooling?’ has been thrown, for this generation, into existential relief. How can education be reclaimed, imagined anew, transformed to be a part of a possible future?”21 In this way, CSP is necessarily and fundamentally a critical,
antiracist, anticolonial framework that rejects the capitalist White settler
gaze and its kindred cisgender/complex sex, English-monolingual, ableist,
queer, xenophobic, and other hegemonic gazes. In many ways, as all of
the narratives in this book demonstrate, Hip Hop functions as what Alim
and Haupt referred to as an organic form of CSP. This formulation
requires us to theorize from the “ground-up” and from the “past-forward”
by recovering and reworking suppressed pedagogies in the project of mov-
ing freedom forward.

Hip Hop’s political project requires centering questions of pedagogy. As
Marc Lamont Hill argues, drawing on the intellectual traditions of cul-
tural studies, culture itself needs to be understood as a site of pedagogy,
and popular culture in particular “is a vigorously contested terrain on
which we come to understand what we’re supposed to value” (chapter 11).
So, even as we discuss the burgeoning field of Hip Hop education, con-
tributors focus on the cultural work that people have been doing in the
communities around Hip Hop for over four decades. As Jeff Chang has
explained, “Hip Hop is part of a continuity that goes back long before the
rise of the practices we now call Hip Hop. Hip Hop rises out of Black free-
dom culture, out of the Black freedom movement . . . The work does not
originate from the Ivory Tower; the work is happening out in the commu-
nities. We want to center community in this work and we want to talk
about its roots and foundation in Blackness.”

As Gloria Ladson-Billings and Django Paris shared, pedagogies must
begin by asking critical questions about the construction of knowledge as
well as the racialized political economy of knowledge (see chapter 10).
Paris began, “I’ve been thinking about the 5th Element and about knowledge.
Whose counts where, for what purposes?” And then pointing out the
glaring irony that the very same people who subjugate Hip Hop culture
are also the ones profiting off of its popularity and utility, he added:

It’s clear for instance that the knowledges and the practices and bodies of
Black and Brown and Native people count quite a bit in the domestic and
global marketplace. Think Hip Hop and Black music more generally. Think
college and professional athletics. Think the prison industrial complex. But
once we get into pre-K–12 through university classrooms they often count
quite less, if they count at all. And the knowledges and practices of People of
Color only do count if they can be assimilated into certain American stories
of progress, of opportunity, of meritocracy, of dominant norms of cultural practice. And so we continue the battle to make spaces for fully realized and complex engagements with the knowledges and practices of many of our communities.

Ladson-Billings offered additional insights by reminding us that, while certain knowledges are indeed suppressed, it is youth that often bear the brunt of state repression. “The overall agenda has figured out that the 18- to 25-year-olds are the most dangerous people in the society. So you either have to neutralize them through narcotics, lock them up, or convince them to go along with your program.” Hip Hop pedagogical theory requires us to think critically about what we want to produce. “I think I have a pretty good idea what the neoliberal agenda wants to produce—workers. Workers that don’t ask any questions, that don’t challenge, and they certainly don’t organize,” Ladson-Billings noted. In this current neoliberal moment with “the privatization of everything,” the erosion of labor unions, the suppression of voting rights for People of Color, Hip Hop, for many, functions as what Marc Lamont Hill, citing Foucault, referred to as “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges.”

But if we follow the critical reflexivity modeled by Hip Hop feminist Joan Morgan and queer Hip Hop artist and theorist Tim’m T. West, among others, we must also ask: Who is freed as a result of these insurrections and who remains oppressed under these new arrangements of power? Why is it that Hip Hop, not unlike many radical political and religious institutions, for example, so relentlessly critiques and unsettles the dominance of whiteness, but also just as frequently exploits and further subjugates already marginalized gendered, sexualized, and dis/abled bodies? As Hill pointed out in his already classic *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life*, Hip Hop, like any popular cultural form, “inevitably creates spaces of both voice and silence, centering and marginalization, empowerment and domination.” Emdin, speaking about young women and queer youth who are marginalized within Hip Hop spaces, added:

See, Hip Hop becomes a tool that oppresses these populations, but it becomes the only tool that can heal them. There are folks who love Hip Hop so much and are so hurt by what Hip Hop tells them they could become. And they’re just looking for an opportunity to reclaim what speaks to them in their own voice . . . reforming and recreating what Hip Hop becomes.
“CREATING A LIBERATORY THING FOR MYSELF”: A NEW LANGUAGE FOR NEW ARTICULATIONS OF BLACK / QUEER / DISABLED FUTURES

Many of the artists, scholars, and activists in the final section of the book not only raise queer, feminist, and disability justice-oriented critiques of Hip Hop but also theorize ways that Hip Hop might, and in some ways has already begun to, liberate itself in order to move freedom forward for all of us. Integral to all of their methodologies, as Joan Morgan argued, is the “creation of language” that shifts the terrains of these conversations (see chapter 14). In these final narratives, we witness artists and thinkers creating new language to navigate between the crushing weight of White supremacist, capitalist, ableist, cis-heteropatriarchal systems, on the one hand, and the painful exclusion from both Hip Hop and the broader Black communities within which they participate, on the other. Oftentimes, this new language requires centering the body, and thinking through how Black/queer/disabled folks move through the world in revolutionary and intentional ways in order to “create a liberatory thing,” as Kaila Adia Story put it, by “using the body as a revolting weapon to make folks uncomfortable with ideas of what is normative.”

Joan Morgan, Brittney Cooper, Treva Lindsey, Kaila Adia Story, and Esther Armah—affectionately know to us as “The Pleasure Ninjas”—provide new language for articulating a “politics of pleasure” that lovingly critiques Hip Hop’s sexism and misogyny, reductive views of Black women’s bodies as no more than sites of the intersecting oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism, as well as both Hip Hop’s and Black Feminist Theory’s lack of engagement with Black queer identities. Bettina Love, in conversation with Regina Bradley and Mark Anthony Neal, explores how young Black girls in Atlanta, Georgia, critically engage Hip Hop to make sense of these politics as well as their social worlds in the contexts of police violence, neoliberal capitalism, and the sweeping gentrification of “the New South” (see chapter 16).

Leroy F. Moore Jr., in conversation with Stephanie Keeney Parks, describes not just the reclamation of ableist language by Krip-Hop Movement artists, but how these artists employ Hip Hop to critique the rampant ableism within it, the overwhelming Whiteness of the disability
movement, and the broader intersecting systems of ableism and racism that alternatingly view Black disabled bodies as both “weak” and as threats deserving of police violence and brutality. And finally, and perhaps most painfully, he critiques forms of “Black ableism” that erase Black disabled bodies, at worst, or seek to “cure,” merely provide services for, or pray away the “crippled” among them, at best. As the Krip-Hop Movement found inspiration and allyship in the Homohop Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area, they have also continued to produce music and events with gender nonconforming, trans, and queer women like GenderKrip, once again reinventing Hip Hop as it moves freedom forward. As an international collective of hundreds of artists, Krip-Hop is creating futures where Black and other disabled people can finally “come home” (see chapter 15).

What all of these artists and thinkers have in common is their sense that there are very few spaces outside of Hip Hop for Black/queer/disabled girls, boys, and nonbinary youth to think through how to navigate these complex and fraught cultural politics and the oppressive systems that seek to circumscribe their activity and mobility. Winn, citing Angela Davis, and thinking about youth who are not engaged with these critical, creative art forms, argued “that one of the consequences of racism [and all of these oppressive ideologies and systems], particularly in schooling, is that it has rendered a whole generation of people who do not see their future” (see chapter 17). Winn’s “pedagogies of possibility” draw on Black artistic and literary traditions to ask what are arguably the most pressing questions within the pages of this book:

How are we going to do the work of not only helping them see their future, but supporting them to really generate and think about a collective and expansive freedom? These are the questions that I hope we all carry with us as we continue to think about the intersection of Hip Hop knowledges, pedagogies, and futures, particularly in this moment where youth are leading a new racial justice movement . . . How will we be ready to think about liberatory futures, not just for our youth but with them? How will you show up for them? How will all of us show up for them?

These questions serve as both a challenge and a reminder to all of us to redouble our commitment to youth and to revisit and extend the most oft-used verbs in this book. Organize. Fight. Recover. Forge. Rethink. Reframe.
Reclaim. Build. Imagine. Envision. Create. Care. Love. Make freedom move(s). Whether we are dealing with freedom of expression; freedom to define ourselves beyond White supremacist, cisgender patriarchal, colonial identities, ideas, and borders; freedom of mobility beyond the constrictions of neoliberal capitalist systems; freedom “from police who hinder respiratory airways”; freedom to heal and grow beyond the wounds—internal and external—that once held us back; freedom from a miseducation that has us hating ourselves and each other; freedom to think beyond modes of resistance; freedom to seek, in the words of Treva Lindsey, “a pleasure that ain’t got nothing to do with anybody else” and as Brittney Cooper put it, to “have great politics” and “want to fuck, too, sometimes”; and finally, freedom to think, feel, reflect, love, or just to be. Still.

AN INVITATION TO RETHINK AND REMAKE THE WORLD

Within the pages of this book, contributors weave narratives, tell tales, teach, sometimes preach, drop a verse or two, laugh, share, and sometimes even cry together, and in the process, create a familiar/familial text that breathes life into studies of Hip Hop culture. We have done our best to take seriously the centrality and ceremony of story within Hip Hop. These stories are our methodology—a methodology that goes back centuries—as well as a primary means of theorizing. In short, every story is an invitation to rethink and remake the world. As Mark Gonzales put it, story is not only “a medium”; it is “an engine for new possibilities and realities” (chapter 9).

It’s only appropriate, then, that we conclude by sharing the story of this book and how it came to be. It is not an exaggeration to say that our lives have been forever changed in the process of organizing and editing this book. The stories themselves are transformational and transformative. But this book wasn’t “work” for us. In fact, it wasn’t even a book. The process itself was a labor of love, a series of family gatherings, a continuation of a journey that we have been on, well, since falling in love with Hip Hop culture. Over the span of nearly a decade, we sent out invitations to like-minded folks to come to Stanford University’s Institute for Diversity in the Arts (IDA) and build something beautiful with us, something that would
Figure 0.1 (Top) Chris Emdin engages crowd after lecture. Photo by Abdul Alim.

Figure 0.2 (Bottom) Left to right, Jeff Chang, Emile YY?, and H. Samy Alim. Photo by John Liau.