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# 1

## PLANTED SEEDS GROW TREES

*The Impetus for the Urgency of “K for the Way”: DJ Rhetoric  
and Literacy for Twenty-First-Century Writing Studies*

P.S.K. we're makin' that green / people always say “what the hell does that mean?” /  
P is for the people who can't understand / how one homeboy became a man /  
S for the way we scream and shout / one by one, I'm knockin' em out /  
K for the way my DJ kuttin' /  
other MCs, man ya ain't say nufin! /  
rockin' on to the break of dawn . . .

Schoolly D, “P.S.K. (What Does It Mean?)” *Schoolly D*, Jive Records, 1986.

. . . one of the records I'd always have on deck for my old-school set was  
“PSK” by Schoolly D. It was an undeniable record when it came out,  
and still is an undeniable party-rocker, a tune that  
truly stood the test of time sonically. I always thought  
Schoolly D killed that song. His flow was dope and innovative,  
no one was really rhyming like that just quite yet,  
the beat was hard-hitting, and the vibrations from  
the overly reverbed TR-909 drum through the speaker woofers  
will still rattle your chest cavity. Almost twenty years later,  
I'd start my tenure-track gig wanting to buy decorative letters  
to put “PSK” in my office . . .

I start this book by thinking back to how I gained my sense of literacy—specifically in regard to writing, reading, and critically thinking. I have to pay homage to Hip Hop. My first life memories revolve around my two uncles: one I was named after, and his partner in crime DJ Jam aka Dea Mill. I was spending the night at my cousins' house. Just imagine three young boys—no more than three or four years old. It's late Friday or Saturday night, and this blaring noise won't let me sleep. So I walk out the bedroom into a dark sound-filled living room. I didn't know what was happening, but I knew there were a lot of cool-sounding noises and sparkly lights shining through the darkness; some colors bounced up and down, while some were stationary, jutting out of nowhere, from left to right or vice-versa. I can still see it, being a little boy and getting a little closer while trying not to distract these two men—'cuz we all know as a kid, if you made your presence felt this late in the evening, it'd be off to bed for dat ass! So I crept up on them, their backs were turned, with these funny-looking things on their heads and ears that stopped them from noticing I'm *not* where I'm supposed to be. Peering through the darkness, I could distinguish the items we were told NOT to touch: the "records." These two men kept picking up those records, and then they'd put them right back . . . and every time that happened, soon after the sound changed, and the colored lights moved differently. I was young, and this was nothing short of absolutely incredible.

And I can *still* see it.

So I went back into the bedroom, woke my two cousins up, and made them come into the living room to see this whole operation going down. And don't get me wrong, I remember the sonics just as clearly as the visuals: the multicolored lights that floated and cascaded like a Christmas tree in front of a background of fireworks, or even the Empire State Building on a clear night. But then we started running around and playing; at first, the two men were so caught up in their zone, they didn't even sense our presence. After all, they never caught wind of me standing there by myself for so long. Something in me knew—there was a power in their actions, because nothing seemed to matter but the changing sounds and the dancing lights. But as all little kids do, someone knocked something down, something got broke, and alas, the moment was ALL over. Those two men were my two uncles: one is still alive; one has passed on—both were DJs. The other two boys were my two cousins: one is still alive; one has passed on—the remaining two of us were influenced

by this moment for the rest of our lives. One became a successful music producer. Some of his hit songs were created with some of those “records” we were told not to touch. I went on, with some of those “records,” and became a DJ, taught by James Miller Jr., my Uncle Dea—who passed away a week before I started my doctoral coursework—the same uncle who stood there in that zone with my other Uncle Todd. This is one of my top-three earliest life memories, and one of the most formative, as it is the cornerstone to my understanding of DJ culture and literacy.

In his book *Reading for Their Life: (Re)Building the Textual Lineages of African American Adolescent Males*, Alfred Tatum argues that one way to reinvigorate African-American adolescent males in the subjects of reading and writing is to help them understand their “textual lineage.” This textual lineage is comprised of students’ favorite authors; as students see the value in the authors they choose, this should translate into an eagerness to read and explore more literature of varying authors writing similar work or coming from a similar background to the authors originally presented in their textual lineage. This concept perfectly captures spoken and unspoken mentorship in Hip Hop DJ culture; thus, as Tatum describes it, my introductory story sparks the initial stages of my DJ textual lineage.

This developmental stage in my early childhood would forge my initial understanding of Hip Hop culture and how DJs were integral in its early formation. As a product of Queensbridge and Ravenswood Houses, my literacy evolved once I realized that on Friday and Saturday nights, between 9 p.m. and 1a.m. (sometimes 2 a.m., depending on the station), there were these DJs who followed the philosophy that Red Alert detailed in our interview, when he said, “Kool Herc I always felt was considered a Pied Piper of the culture, because his vibe and his music embraced a little bit of everybody to be under one roof. That’s what I feel the importance of a DJ is: he helps lead the audience through whatever the whole [musical] form is at that time” (KOOL DJ Red Alert). These DJs introduced me to what Hip Hop music and culture would be: from the early idea of the “Hip Hop sounds” (KOOL DJ Red Alert) to what would later become Hip Hop music. It was a schizophrenic learning; I would sit, glued to the old-school one-piece stereo system with the record player on top, a cassette deck, an 8-track player, and the AM/FM stereo. I’d be in my bedroom next to the stereo, with a blank cassette tape I bought from the bodega earlier that week for 0.75¢ in the “record” position, spanning the analog dial between “home team”—Mr. Magic with DJ Marley Marl (who was from Queensbridge)—and “away team”—with DJ Chuck Chillout on Fridays and

KOOL DJ Red Alert on Saturdays. Here's how it worked: The recording would start with home-team . . . after all, I'm from Queens. If the first song was hit-tin', I'd immediately start recording. And I'd rock with Mr. Magic and Marley until one of two things: a wack song or commercial break. On the other hand, if the first song was wack, overplayed, or on one of the many cassette tapes I'd already made, I'd quickly spin the chunky silver analog dial from 107.5 WBLS counterclockwise to 98.7 KISS-FM. Honing in to catch the right spot was a craft in itself. These were *not* the digital-tuning days, when you punch in a number that takes you right to the station . . . these were the days of armgrease, where hand and eye coordination met each other, as I quickly cranked the dial counterclockwise, while watching the orange-yellow hued line move to the left. Getting from 107.5 to 100 was easy, especially since I didn't know the Awesome Two were on 105.9 WHBI. The difficulty was honing those spins to catch 98.7. There were a cluster of radio stations in that area of the FM dial: too far left, you'd be in dance music zone . . . too far right, you'd be in Rock or Oldies. So precision became crucial. This was how Friday and Saturday nights would go, back and forth between these two, with one ninety-minute tape always in the cassette deck, and another ninety-minute tape on-deck. You didn't want to miss this four-to-five-hour window, because once it was gone, the lesson was over, and the "Hip Hop sounds" would not be back for another six or seven days. That was back when our DJs were the pied pipers to the subculture emerging from the Bronx, and arguably Queens, depending on who's talking. This was the foundation of my formative teachings in Hip Hop literacy and DJ culture. These childhood moments also became literacy sites for many young members of Hip Hop and DJ culture, because this was where Hip Hop really began to get consistent exposure amongst people who subsequently became the culture's community members and practitioners.

Decades later, I evolved from studying the craft with Uncle Dea in QB on the sixth floor of 41-05 12th Street, to high school and college radio, club residencies in New England, and parties up and down the Eastern Seaboard, including a DJ set where I opened for DJ Premier of Gang Starr in one of Philadelphia's most well-known nightclubs. My journey had come full circle: from the first piece of vinyl I bought with my allowance (Whodini's *Back in Black*), to scratching the bells on the intro of Bobby Brown's "Don't be Cruel" with my cousin on that same old-school one-piece component system, I had walked the DJ journey. My first pair of turntables were from a pawnshop; it took both belt-drive Technics I bought for my uncle to help me build one that was fully functional. And the second turntable: a Fischer direct drive with

three AAA batteries taped to the tone arm as a counterweight. And in the middle was the all-black Realistic 32-1200B Radio Shack DJ mixer. Any DJ worth their weight in Hip Hop gold understands this struggle and has walked that mile in a pair of shell-toed moccasins!

***“When Needle Meets Wax”: The Effects of Broken Grooves,  
Broken Promises, and Breaking BIPOC Spirits in Academia***

Skip stage from my humble DJ beginnings to over twenty years later, when I’m preparing for a conference presentation. A senior scholar in Composition/Rhetoric (or Comp/Rhet) unexpectedly asked me to join a conference panel. The invite was based on a referral from an elder statesman in the field, and it led me to an intriguing search involving Hip Hop scholarship.

For this panel on innovative writing strategies and first-language teaching, I wrote an abstract using Hip Hop scholarship as an example of a marginalized field in Comp/Rhet. I wanted to investigate how our discipline could begin to counteract discriminatory language, literacy, and pedagogy practices. How might we include various voices and sources of cultural capital that now serve as more “standard” in American society than “Standard English?” Finally, where in this paradigm might Hip Hop scholarship fit and serve as a learning tool?

This brings me to two specific texts. On the song “No Role Modelz” by J Cole, he says, “Fool me one time, shame on you / fool me twice, can’t put the blame on you / fool me three times, fuck the peace sign / load the chopper / let it rain on you.” The second text is the classic Comp/Rhet document “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (CCCC; hereafter SRTTOL), which presents a loophole: to promote students’ language rights, instructors and scholars who teach those students require the same right(s) to said language(s) in both teaching and research. Here, I contend SRTTOL acts as a hegemonic mantra: while the field may purport its validity, the scholarship of teacher/researchers enacting and engaging in Hip Hop Nation Language (Alim, *Roc the Mic Right*) practices both with and for students becomes marginalized by Composition/Rhetoric in conference appearance(s) and publication(s). For example, the 2016 program for one of the premier Comp/Rhet conferences revealed that in 300 pages’ worth of panels over four days, there was only *one* Hip Hop panel: Saturday at 9:30 a.m. (the last day of the conference, typically labeled the most undesirable time slot, as people usually leave on Friday night or early Saturday morning).

I want to quickly make the connection here with SRTTOL and Hip Hop scholarship, as Hip Hop was, is, and continues to be based in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). We know from Geneva Smitherman to Valerie Kinloch to myriad others, that there are sociocultural and political values ascribed to, as well as rhetorical strategies exhibited within, AAVE. These same strategies and values help set the stage for the emergence of Hip Hop culture and its shift from “underground” to mainstream popular culture. For more clarity, consider this: both Mina Shaughnessy and Geneva Smitherman published *Errors and Expectations* and *Talkin and Testifyin*—respectively—in 1977. Both books engage poignant discussions about writing, language structure and formation. Meanwhile, Kool Herc was on Cedar and Sedgewick birthin’ Hip Hop in August 1973 . . .

In other words, during a critical moment where dialogue about writing, language use/construction, and their connection to racial and cultural enclaves is happening in Comp/Rhet, Hip Hop has already been birthed, uttered its first words, and even completed the arduous task of potty training. The point here is these pieces of cultural activity and a particular push toward a critical consciousness of how the teaching of writing and language education take place are transpiring around the same time in the mid-1970s. Yet almost fifty years later, while Hip Hop remains more prevalent than ever, it seems less prominent, or even relevant, for Composition/Rhetoric as a field. But why?

To further demonstrate the lack of representation in Hip Hop scholarship in Comp/Rhet, I did some scholarly crate-diggin’. By no means is this mini research dive scientific or extraordinarily futuristic. But the cursory search is helpful in exposing a larger point. I took one of the premier journals in Writing Studies and looked at its content over a ten-year period. This small-scale perusal entailed using college databases and two physical library spaces to locate copies of the selected journal. In this premier journal in the field, the editor wrote that in over four years, there have been over 697 submissions; of that number, I counted 187 publications (including articles, reviews, symposia, conference addresses, and awards speeches). Thus, the journal had a 26.8 percent acceptance rate. In this 26.8 percent acceptance rate, I could roughly account for the following: nine scholars of color; six of the nine were Black scholars and “usual suspects,” and of those six, four were “executive addresses.” So of the 187 publications, roughly 4.8 percent are scholars of color; 3.2 of the total 187 were Black and identify as “active Hip Hop” scholars.

“Fool me one time, shame on you!”

In five and a half years, there were two book reviews of Black authors who actively cited Hip Hop as a location of scholarship in their work. Three addresses actively cited Hip Hop as a location of scholarship, and one person cited an author whose work is Hip Hop specific (note this person was not of color). One person cited the DJ as the impetus for how a student understood the writing process. However, the same scholar ignored the Hip Hop DJ’s influence on said student, yet *sentences later* the author summarizes the student’s understanding of writing. At this time, there were at least three contemporary publications that identified the Hip Hop DJ as a source of intellectual query—specifically in writing (Paul Miller [DJ Spooky], *rhythm science*; Jabari Mahiri, “Digital DJ-ing”; Jeff Rice, “The 1963 Hip Hop Machine”).

In one issue of this Comp/Rhet journal, both a writer *and* the editor evoke Hip Hop by referencing a website. They mention the website in name only to spark possible interest around this article. But like “clickbait headlines,” they just evoke the name. So here, we see Hip Hop as a flashy hook or catchy chorus that becomes critical to this publishing structure. These editors understood evoking Hip Hop was a way to keep their journal “relevant.”

In combing through the 5.5 years of journal issues, the last time a Hip Hop-centered piece was published *in this journal* was in 2007.

“Fool me twice, can’t put the blame on you . . .”

It seemed that active Hip Hop scholars of color working within Comp/Rhet were not appearing in the journal as were their white colleagues. Even though this spoke volumes, I dug back into the Comp/Rhet digital crates, finishing the remaining four and a half years. Extrapolating from the 26 percent acceptance rate calculated above, I made a rough calculation that in this ten-year timespan, there have been 1,476 submissions and 396 acceptances. As well, in this ten-year period, there were four citations, one article, and one book review in 2007 that have a Hip Hop focus.

Why does this statistical set become integral to this already difficult conversation? Honestly, there was—and still is—no way to ignore the obvious impact of race here. After all, this same journal documents the resignation of a BIPOC conference chair but does not explain why or deal with the reinstatement or controversy surrounding said resignation.



“Fool me three times, fuck the peace sign / load the chopper let it rain on you . . .”

In fairness to the journal in question, I cannot account for how many BIPOC scholars submitted Hip Hop–based articles for publication, or if those articles met the journal’s publication criteria. What I can share, however, is much of the field’s folklore among colleagues, elders, and peers was the gatekeeping practices of this journal were overtly aimed at keeping Hip Hop scholarship (specifically coming from BIPOC scholars) out of the publication mix. Meanwhile, you can peruse the same ten-year time span to see how Hip Hop scholarship was thriving in other fields and intellectual locations.

*“This right here is word on the streets . . .” aka Literature Review*

During the same time period (2007–2017), I identified over forty books and articles privileging Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) from BIPOC scholars, engaging with Hip Hop on Hip Hop’s terms, or pinpointing the DJ as a figure worth investigating. I’ll quickly highlight this vast range of Hip Hop scholarship to lend clarity to this argument.

H. Samy Alim’s “The Whig Party Don’t Exist in My Hood” (Alim and Baugh, *Talkin Black Talk* [2007]) highlights an interview with American Cream Team rapper Bankie, while focusing on his work with middle school students in creating a Hip Hop–based student magazine. Both Brian Coleman’s *Check the Technique* (2007) and Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton’s *The Record Players: DJ Revolutionaries* (2010) use narrative and direct artist/DJ commentary to illustrate Hip Hop practitioners’ voices around Hip Hop cultural practices.

William Jelani Cobb’s *To the Break of Dawn* (2007) examines how the MC/emcee’s artistic choices affect aspects of Black language arts and revolutionized storytelling in Hip Hop music. H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook’s *Global Linguistic Flows* (2008) addresses Hip Hop’s global expansion, with Hip Hop Linguistics evolving from “English-imitating” versions of Hip Hop, into more region-specific, localized language that occupies pockets of resistance and struggle. While Adam Bradley reviews emcees’ poetic structures in *Book of Rhymes* (2009), Gwendolyn Pough explores the rhetorical savvy of women MCs who are able to “catch wreck” in navigating the complex connections between Hip Hop culture, feminist philosophies, and Black womanhood in *Check It While I Wreck It* (2015). Sophy Smith interrogates Hip Hop DJ turntablist teams’ composing practices in *Hip-Hop Turntablism, Creativity and Collaboration* (2013), situating the work of the DJ and probing DJ

notational practices—a technique used to chart DJs actions from a musicality perspective.

*The Real Hip-hop* (2009) finds Marcyliena Morgan documenting Project Blowed (a West Coast–based Hip Hop freestyle/improvisational group) and exploring intrinsic connections between youth, Hip Hop culture, and language practices. Greg Dimitriadis analyzes Hip Hop’s influence on identity formation and construction with midwestern youth in *Performing Identity / Performing Culture* (2009). In 2012, Bettina Love and Emery Petchauer share two critical HHBE books: *Hip Hop’s Li’l Sistas Speak* and *Hip-Hop Culture in College Students’ Lives*, respectively. Both texts grapple with how students both embody and negotiate their relationships with Hip Hop, as they experience the culture within academic confines and outside of academia in their everyday lives.

Marc Lamont Hill and Emery Petchauer’s collection *Schooling Hip-Hop* (2013) includes HHBE scholars Chris Emdin, David Stovall, Joycelyn A. Wilson, Decoteau J. Irby, H. Bernard Hall, and others who contribute perspectives on the current and future climate of HHBE practices. Envisioning digital sampling as a special case of musical borrowing in the newly formed art world he labels “hip-hop’s imagined community,” Justin A. Williams in *Rhymin’ and Stealin’* (2014) contemplates the nuance created when DJs and producers engage in sample practices responsible for inventing completely new sounds and sonic compositions.

With an acute focus on the DJ, Felicia Miyakawa’s “Turntablature: Notation, Legitimization, and the Art of the Hip-Hop DJ” (2007) examines Turntablist Transcription Methodology (TTM) created by John Carluccio, and DJs catfish and Raydawn, and what this notation means both rhetorically (thinking about the language practices used in notating and describing turntablist’s musical actions) and culturally (expanding the legitimacy of the DJ into music canon’s “high art”). In *Capturing Sound* (2010), Mark Katz investigates both digital sampling (again, part of the DJ/producer pedagogy and discourse) and Hip Hop turntablism. Examining this specific subset of DJ culture allows Katz to pinpoint the modes, operations, and practices of many turntablists. Jared A. Ball embraces elements of Hip Hop DJ discourse in *I Mix What I Like! A Mixtape Manifesto* (2011). Ball reflects on “the mixtape” as a source of “Emancipatory Journalism”: a form of media and communication disbursement that revolves around decolonizing practices. The title itself, “A Mixtape Manifesto,” is a clear indication of rhetoric rooted in DJ practices.

Dating back to the early 2000s, there are a series of books, anthologies (Forman and Neil), and articles that reflect on the impact of Hip Hop music and culture, whether from a sociocultural or historical perspective (Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop* [2005]; Kitwana [2002]; Spady, "Mapping and Re-Membering" [2013]), a sociolinguistic perspective (Alim, *Roc the Mic Right* [2006]; Richardson, *Hiphop Literacies* [2006]), Hip Hop based—educational practices in K–12 (Hill [2009]; Low [2010]; Mahiri [2006]; Morrell and Duncan-Andrade [2002]; Petchauer, "Framing and Reviewing" [2009]; Rodríguez [2009]; Sánchez [2010]), or specific college-classroom-based perspectives (Campbell [2005]; Rice, *Rhetoric of Cool* [2008]; Sirc [2006]; Wakefield [2006]). DJ Spooky's *rhythm science* (Miller [2002]), Carol Becker and Romi Crawford's "An Interview with Paul Miller aka DJ Spooky—That Subliminal Kid" (Becker, Crawford, and Miller [2002]), and Tim Lawrence's *love saves the day* (2003) all engage with the DJ; the most formative text that begins to do this work is Joseph Schloss's *Making Beats* (2004), even though this book primarily focuses on the Hip Hop producer.

There are three notable DJ-centered texts published just outside the ten-year window of the journal that sparked this exploration. Victor Del Hierro's "DJs, Playlists and Community: Imagining Communication Design through Hip Hop" (2019) specifically addresses Hip Hop DJs as technical communicators within their local communities, who build complex relationships that translate into accessible and localized community content. Jenny Stoever's "Crate Digging Begins at Home: Black and Latinx Women Collecting and Selecting Records in the 1960s and 1970s Bronx" (2018) inserts the oft-removed narrative of mothers, aunts, and sisters who helped birth Hip Hop culture by essentially serving as the cultural curators who taught foundational Hip Hop DJs how to listen to, play, and synthesize records. Finally, DJ Lynnée Denise's "The Afterlife of Aretha Franklin's 'Rock Steady': A Case Study in DJ Scholarship" (2019) explores the practices and four different tenants she identifies in labeling a form of DJ scholarship: "'Chasing samples', 'Digging through the crates', 'Studying album cover art', and 'Reading liner notes'" (Denise 64). These practices inform a specific type of DJ praxis she builds through the lens of Aretha Franklin's "Rock Steady" alongside EPMD's "I'm Housing." These three texts show the rich and complex site of inquiry for Hip Hop DJ research.

In contrast to the premier journal that started this conversation, over half the authors listed in this review of Hip Hop-based texts identify as BIPOC scholars. Furthermore, there are many more texts rooted in HHBE as well as

other disciplines that critically engage Hip Hop culture as a viable source of knowledge and meaning-making for young people in classroom settings. But the truly uncharted territory is how the Hip Hop DJ can serve as an example of twenty-first-century new media reader and writer in the college setting, specifically in Comp/Rhet spaces. Thus, it becomes imperative to remember the earlier scholarship comparison between the premier journal versus the pool of sources listed above to situate the importance of the work *K for the Way* will tackle when thinking about DJ Rhetoric, Literacy, and Pedagogy in the twenty-first century.

Finally, I bring these two instances together to spotlight the schism I've experienced between understanding aspects of my own literacy acquisition via the DJ and Hip Hop culture on the one hand and entering a field that seems to diminish the relevance of this same culture, on the other. This moment is not an exercise in the essentialist mantra that "only Black and Brown" folks can speak on Hip Hop. Quite the opposite. I maintain that damn-near *nobody* gets to talk about the music and life stylings that currently dictate global popular culture in Comp/Rhet and Writing Studies. Furthermore, when Hip Hop is evoked, it is clearly misused (like the earlier journal article author who fumbled the moment when the student cites the Hip Hop DJ as a source for understanding the writing process). It is this misuse that *K for the Way* aims to address.

***"Houston: We Have Lift-Off . . . Everywhere Else but Here . . ."***

How might this conversation extend past English Composition and Rhetoric, and infiltrate other disciplines across the Humanities? And why is it so problematic? Let's explore this difficult conversation together to make sense of this quandary.

If you currently have a stake in teaching K–12 and believe in the Houston Baker mantra, you will understand that by 2017, Hip Hop is completely ingrained in the psyche of our young people, from ages two to twenty-two (Baker). As clearly identified by various HHBE scholars, if you have spent time helping students become invested in their cultural awareness and identity formation educationally, and Hip Hop is a piece of the culturally sensitive and responsive pedagogy you have engaged in through your K–12 work, know that when these same students enter college, they are *all* required to take two specific classes: First-Year Writing I and II, also known as English Comp. But as evidenced in the Comp/Rhet journal discussed in the preceding section, there

seems to be an investment from Comp/Rhet as a field to diminish Hip Hop culture—and thus, a specific contingent of racial, cultural, ethnic, and sociopolitically marked bodies—within the landscape of the field. This move by Comp/Rhet, one of the few required courses in the undergraduate experience, suggests to students that bringing one's culture to the college writing classroom will quickly become problematic, thereby compromising the choices students need to make in order to be considered “proficient” or “competent” (Flores and Rosa; Kynard, “I Want to Be African”).

Because First-Year Writing is an introductory class in every collegiate General Education program nationwide, it is essential that the academy at large works to strengthen students' undergraduate experiences by reinforcing their racial, ethnic, and cultural ties. Let's also think about how the BIPOC community affects the landscape of New Media Studies, with a barrage of contemporary “texts”: images, sonics, and technology—from Black Twitter and @HipHopEd to *Power* and *Atlanta*, from *Luke Cage* and *Fresh Off The Boat* to ESPN and HGTV (rockin' the “Ante Up” instrumental on *Flip or Flop* commercials), and even *The Life of Pablo* and *DAMN*—erased from a twenty-first-century landscape to instead perpetuate twentieth-century models of reading, writing, and two-dimensional text-on-the-page. Meanwhile, Hip Hop has healed our souls during a pandemic, and sold us everything from food, clothing, and shelter within the last fifteen minutes if you're not living under a rock. However, instead of utilizing students' inherent cultural capital, marrying it with intellectual sensibilities to create a unique form of critical consciousness, Comp/Rhet seems to be moving in the opposite direction. And if First-Year Writing courses set this tone at the start of college, one can see how it could easily cast a shadow on the rest of a student's journey through the undergraduate experience.

So when people ask why I feel Comp/Rhet has shunned Hip Hop, or even diminished Hip Hop scholarship as part of the intellectual conversation, *this* is why. It's not a “Mad Rapper moment” for me. It is truly an instance where I'd like to have a formative, and probably difficult, conversation with my elders and peers in the field. The same culture that is currently global popular culture is the very same culture that gets delegitimized by the field my doctoral degree requires me to claim. So how does one navigate this quagmire? Or to repose the question many BIPOC have posed throughout academia: Who gets to tell our story, and what perspective gets privileged in the telling? For me, the dismissal of Hip Hop culture in the field for the students I teach sits on my soul, in the same way Aja Martinez describes the importance of and her



Figure 1.1. Rich Medina at “TEDxPhilly: The City.” November 2011. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tedxphilly/6352000667/in/photostream/>. Photo by Kevin Monko.

connection to counterstory. Thus, *K for the Way* aims to tell a Hip Hop–centered story that includes the culture, “and will always include my family, nonacademics, because the work is for them, is sometimes about them, and is nearly *always* inspired by them” (Martinez 19; emphasis mine).

### “So Why Tell That Story, Sun?” aka the Rationale of It All

*K for the Way* addresses the story of the DJ. To introduce that idea, we start with international club DJ Rich Medina. In Medina’s TEDxPhilly talk, he names Philadelphia as the mother city that nurtured his “musical muscle.” In the days before his DJ career exploded, Medina talks about how he kept his day-job, but notes,

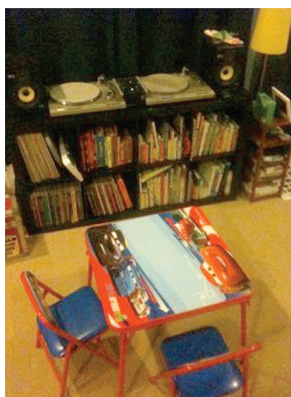
All along I was still nurturing my musical aspirations . . . 3–5 workdays a week, you could find me in Armand’s Records, Sound of Germantown, Funk-O-Mart, suit on, tie undone, spending ALLL of that gigantic paycheck on records and equipment and things that were gonna help me take care of my craft. I say my “craft” being DJing because it was my shrink when my basketball career ended. I moved to Philadelphia, I went home, I got my turntables, I got my records, I put them in my apartment and every day: right hand, left hand, right hand, left hand, right hand, left hand (Medina, “TEDxPhilly”).



DJs within DJ culture have countless stories like this, sharing anecdotes about the modes, methodologies, and practices used toward perfecting their individual crafts and acquiring an acute DJ literacy. While the DJs may be different, many of these stories converge in similar ways on similar meeting grounds surrounded by similar landmarks and sponsors, benchmarks, and cornerstones within DJ culture. This book aims to collect and retell some of these stories, constructing an argument for DJ Rhetoric, Pedagogy, and Literacy.

Finally, Medina was writing a recurring weekly column with *Complex* magazine ([www.complex.com](http://www.complex.com)) called “On the Road with Rich Medina.” In this column, Rich usually recapped his week’s events with pictures accompanied by his own blurbs, including club appearances and performances, special edition sneakers gifted to him, and family moments. His column extended an up-close and personal view into the life and times of an internationally known DJ (for perspective, on the *Master of the Mix* TV show, DJ Scratch said, “Rich Medina is my FAVORITE club DJ”). In his weekly update from January 21 to January 27, 2012, Rich posted a blog called “Head Start” which included a picture of his son’s room. The image captured a colorful kid’s table with matching chairs, in front of a small set of shelves containing children’s books, with turntables and studio monitors on the top level. The caption of the picture reads as follows:

The State of Things: On the Road with Rich Medina (Jan. 21–27)



*Head Start*

**WHERE:** My Son’s Room

**WHEN:** Every Day

Lil’ man’s new set up. Had the CDs in his room, but he was whining about wanting to have “reow turntaybows” . . . so he can start practicing “wiffout” me. I second that emotion like Smokey Robinson . . . wax on, wax off . . . (Medina)

Anyone familiar with Rich Medina knows he was exposing his son to DJ practices since Kamaal Nasir could fit functionally in the front-facing Baby Bjorn. From outdoor festivals in the summer to practice sessions in Rich's home studio, Kamaal has been surrounded by records, CDJs, Technic 1200s, DJ and studio mixers, and all the other necessary pieces included in the DJ's intricate educational puzzle. For Kamaal's three-year-old birthday party at Fluid Nightclub in Philadelphia (they rented the club out during the day), Kamaal—aka DJ Snacks—made his first public debut on the turntables. Since then, a small internet video collection posted by Medina and friends shows Kamaal flexing his then four-year-old DJ muscle—even scratching on 45s. After Medina developed DJing as a passion for Kamaal, at four years old, his son was asking to move up from CDJs to real turntables. Showing Kamaal DJ modes and discourse fostered within him the desire to follow in his daddy's footsteps. This moment shows the DJ's ability to enact what Adam Banks notes as griot: an orator of sorts, passing down traditions, stories, and practices of the culture not only through storytelling but also by allowing those stories to unfold live in praxis, thus demonstrating the DJ as a writer and digital storyteller.

### *"The DJ Literacy Sound-Off"*

Rich Medina's TEDxPhilly lecture that highlighted early moments in his DJ career and his son Kamaal's budding DJ talents demonstrate a highly functional set of practices and language that can be categorized as DJ Rhetoric, or the pedagogy of the DJ. Thus, the idea of DJ as a twenty-first-century new media reader, writer, and literary critic is long overdue, as the craft of DJing is indeed its own unique form of rhetoric and literacy. The Hip Hop DJ's modes and methods comprise a distinctive set of discursive practices, stemming from the Black tradition of a shared sonic and life experience in the early 1970s, and have since evolved in forty-plus years to become a very well-popularized position and title in popular culture. And the logic is quite simple: while there were many before the Hip Hop DJ to engage in the craft of "spinning" records, it was the Hip Hop sounds coupled with the creation of the "scratch" (shouts to Grand Wizzard Theodore and Grandmaster Flash) and manipulating the breaks that revolutionized the craft of DJing into what we know it to be now. As said by Grandmaster Caz in Ice T's documentary *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*: "Hip Hop didn't invent anything. Hip Hop RE-invented EVERYTHING!" (Grandmaster Caz). The scratch and the break are part-new-invention while also part-reinvention building blocks



when thinking about Hip Hop culture's origins. Since the formation of Hip Hop culture, the DJ has always served as the premier "tastemaker" for not only music but also product branding and technology. Frankly, if the Hip Hop DJ plays it, "it's lit." Having the right DJ at your event hits different and can catapult brand visibility and consumption. Finally, turntables, headphones, mixers, and computer software have been engineered and manufactured with the Hip Hop DJ in mind, tweaked out of beta phases *after* DJ usage and feedback. Indeed, the Hip Hop DJ is integral and irreplaceable in this process of "reinvention."

***"From 'Nas Album Done' to 'I Got It on Me': DJ Literacy  
and Research from the Folklored Perspective***

It becomes important to situate this study in the scope of Hip Hop scholarship; a huge majority of research on Hip Hop's elements addresses either the emcee, the b-boy/b-girl, or graffiti (aka graf) writers. While there have been contributions on the DJ, there is still a limited range of work on this seldom-addressed topic. And the work that has been produced tends to focus on the metaphor of the DJ as writer or the DJ as collager and examines metaphoric analyses of what the DJ does and how the DJ does it. For example, in his book *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age* (2011), Banks identifies the metaphor and thus opens the door to the idea of the DJ as griot, as the DJ initially gave the storytelling MC that first opportunity to shine on the M.I.C. This thinking builds upon earlier work from Jeff Chang; in exploring the importance of foundational DJs to Hip Hop culture's formation, Chang identifies the myriad roles DJs occupied in the early to mid-1970s: "Godfather, yes, but also original gangster, post-civil rights peacemaker, Black riot rocker, breakbeat archaeologist, interplanetary mystic, conspiracy theorist, Afrofuturist, Hip Hop activist, twenty-first-century griot" (Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop* 92).

One does not have to look too far in today's society to find examples of griot-rockin-DJs. First, let's look at DJ Khaled. A quick listen to HOT 97 the weekend his album *Major Key* dropped, and you could hear Khaled killing the airwaves with that left-hand-right-hand DJ business. He ran the record gambit from dropping the latest and greatest, back to "Wu-Tang Forever." While the HOT 97 crew was rocking the first-ever Summer Jam Japan in June 2016, Khaled was providing an extended DJ set featuring records on his new album, but he was especially excited about "Nas Album Done." After playing it on at least five different occasions, DJ Khaled took to the microphone with his signature style: "Tri-State:

somebody call Nas and tell him I'm makin' this movie right now!!!" From there, it took about three years before Khaled was hosting Nickelodeon's 2019 Kids' Choice Awards. This range of settings—which display part excitement, part enthusiasm, part “fingers on the pulse of the culture,” and part “know he's ahead of the curve”—makes Khaled the DJ/Producer enigma we all know and love.

For the next example, the Mid-Atlantic's tristate area (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut) hears him almost every night on HOT 97. His name: Funkmaster Flex. Any example of Flex premiering a new record will do. Whether Flex showcased Jay-Z and Kanye West's “Otis,” Rick Ross's “3 Kings,” or Pop Smoke's “Got it on Me,” his attitude and bomb-dropping approach can be likened to a historical survey of Black griotic tradition. Don't get me wrong—many people, myself included, have said the following about Flex over the past twenty years: “PLEASE shut up and let the damn record play!?” But the fact that we've all been saying the same thing for the past twenty years is a testament to who Flex is, what he has done, and continues to do for Hip Hop culture via his position as DJ/radio personality. Put simply, his iconic relevance in Hip Hop DJ and radio culture cannot be dismissed or overlooked. An unmistakable radio personality, Funk Master Flex was one of the first DJs who stood at the apex of Hip Hop going mainstream. This is documented in his long-standing history on New York City's HOT 97. Mounting his milk crate with megaphone in hand, Flex serves as part Malcolm Little and Martin King Jr., part Alex Haley and Ralph Ellison, part Louis Armstrong and Langston Hughes, and even part Muhammad Ali and Miles Davis: African-American griots who encompass the tradition of our great orators and cultural historians, storytellers and record keepers, folktale chroniclers, shit-talkers, and back-turners who back that shit up properly. Only a small few could hold a candle to Funk Flex when he presents the theatrics of the modern-day Black Hip Hop moment. He also served as record producer, working alongside Big Kap (RIP) to release a series of DJ-inspired Hip Hop compilation albums that stood as the blueprint for a kind of legal “mixtape as album”: approved by record labels, and pushing the taste-making DJ back to the forefront of Hip Hop culture. Each of those four mixtapes (released on Loud Records) as well as his album *The Tunnel*, further propelled Funk Master Flex into a three-decade-plus career in radio, TV, and entertainment. Add into the mix his LitDigitalDJs movement, where he has combined forces with DJ pioneers like KOOL DJ Red Alert and Chuck Chillout, alongside his contemporaries and younger DJs like Bobby Trends and DJ Spazo. This endeavor to bridge the gap between generations of Hip Hop DJs is invaluable, making Flex the griot who communicates on the 1s and 2s, while also living out a particular narrative of how Hip Hop DJ culture should look.

Finally, a quick perusal of Arbitron and Nielson radio ratings of decades past will help identify Funk Master Flex's radio relevance in his primetime evening slot of 7 p.m.–10 p.m. At one time, when the Arbitron radio ratings released for the quarter, you could hear Flex in rare form, taking a musical "victory lap": always talking with his hands, but evoking the griot in telling the story of the record, of the ratings or of certain situations in grandiose fashion. After one of these broadcasts, listeners cannot mistake his positioning in Hip Hop culture.

*K for the Way* stands as a text about the Hip Hop DJ that inhabits Comp/Rhet, while also straddling Hip Hop Studies, to contribute perceptive scholarship to both fields. Hip Hop music—and specifically the Hip Hop producer—utilizes the sample to capture various sonic moments that get chopped, flipped, and reconstituted to form unique sonic compositions. As well, the Hip Hop DJ manipulated the breaks from various genres live to present what was known as "the Hip Hop sounds." So too, does *K for the Way* utilize a New Literacy Studies approach that cultivates interdisciplinary insights in order to explore and (re)envision DJ Rhetoric as a means of twenty-first-century new media reading and writing. This book will read as an amalgamation of DJ conversations, theories, and scholarship from Hip Hop culture, Composition/Rhetoric, Hip Hop Studies, New Literacy Studies, Ethnomusicology, and Education. *K for the Way* will achieve praxis in its embodiment—showing, telling, and doing DJ culture.

### ***Because the Two Do Connect: The Hip Hop Lens in Academic Practice***

Many people can tell you about the transformative nature of Hip Hop music and culture. Hip Hop has truly saved my life—it comes back and forth in various iterations of savings. Most recently, Hip Hop rejuvenated my academic soul with the Hip Hop Institute. This type of lifesaving happens when you see your dreams come true and unfold right before your eyes.

The first year Wes and Ebonie Jackson came to our college with programming for the first two days of the Brooklyn Hip-Hop Festival, my friend and colleague Kareen Odate coordinated the programs through the Women's Center. Soon after, Kareen coordinated a meeting between Ebonie, Wes, her, and me. Of course, I gave my ultimate pitch about preserving Hip Hop in New York City from an academic lens. My argument was clear: we've spent a lot of time traveling hours to get to intellectual spaces that honor and chronicle Hip Hop. Why do we not have that same physical space at home, where Hip Hop was born, grew up, and came of age before going off to conquer the world? Couple that pitch with my wife working with Wes back in the day when she was at

Footwork in Philadelphia, and there you have it. I would help them coordinate the next three years of programming through the English Department. After watching the second year of the Hip-Hop Institute and Dummy Clap Film Festival happen at my home institution, I realized I had witnessed a dream come true. That dream culminated on Saturday during a Brooklyn Hip-Hop Festival performance.

We attended the festival, initially running around to different booths and vendors while Rapsody was rockin' in the background. She left the stage to overcast. The cloudy darkness turned to monsoon status, raining through Talib's whole set. I stood in line for food during Fabolous's set but was still in-tune when Lil Fame joined Fab on stage and dropped that infamous "Ante Up" verse. I made everyone with me as comfortable as possible before the moment of my own truth, one of the main reasons I was in attendance.

It happened right there in the VIP area, under the cement and metal suspension we like to call the Brooklyn Bridge. And it was during the headlining act with a dude named Nasir Jones. His set started with his band playing the Black National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." But then his band and DJ started to play the Sting record "The Shape of My Heart." Anyone who knows the record recognizes that signature string introduction. After about four bars of the solitary guitar rift, there's a brief pause, right before Sting goes in with the lyrics. The strummed melody on that Sting tune sonically pulls on an emotion that matches the name of the song. I remember closing my eyes for a second and hearing Nas talk about "this was Sting's version . . . let's rock to my version." So when Nas's band and DJ rolls right into "The Message" from *It Was Written*, the interconnectedness and intertextuality of the sound came full circle for me. Some people around me didn't know exactly what was happening. But as a DJ, I knew this roadmap because I had studied both records, so I could see/hear the exact course Nas had charted for his listeners. There was a younger dude, no older than thirty, sportin' multicolored Flyknits, who knew every word of every verse. A few people made the sonic connection, but once Nas started his verse, it all came into form for the community of avid Hip Hoppers. This moment was special for me: imagine the kid from Queens listening live to the kid from Queens with the lethal first verse on the first full track of his highly anticipated second album. I was in undergrad rockin' that album on cassette in the '83 Mazda 626 when it came out. And now, I was hearing that verse live, only a few years after I had used that same verse in my own work.

On July 2, 1996, Nas released his second album, *It Was Written*. The first lines Nas spits on the first full-length song "The Message" are specifically

directed at members of the Hip Hop community claiming to be gangsters in their written music, while their lives stray quite far from the lifestyle they portray. When Nas says: “Fake thugs / No Love / You get the slug / CB4: Gusto,” he is referring to artists who are exploiting the monetary gain seen during the time when rappers—who come from a mainly urban underclass wrought with sex, drugs, and violence—discuss that life in the content of their songs (Nas, “The Message”). This idea springs from the film *CB4—The Movie*, where one of the three protagonists, Gusto (Chris Rock) is the lead member of gimmick-snatching gangster rap group CB4—even though Gusto’s personal background and musical preferences do not match the music his group makes as gangster rappers. They insert themselves into the “gangster” trope of Hip Hop music solely for monetary gain and popularity. This immediately resonates in academia, as we have seen in the past few decades how Hip Hop has been embraced but also at times intellectually used to exemplify or epitomize the latter construct. The irony is many academics were never in a position to dictate what Hip Hop is in any circle beyond limited academic ones. In fact, the temporary utility of Hip Hop to such academics leads them to reject the tenants and cultural background of the people who created Hip Hop in the first place. By doing so, they are in effect rejecting the students they claim to love working with so much via “Hip Hop in the classroom.” People who engage in this type of activity can be seen as the CB4-Gusto types Nas references.

Carmen Kynard addresses this very notion in “‘Looking for the Perfect Beat’: The Power of Black Student Protest Rhetorics for Academic Literacy and Higher Education.” In thinking about her student Rakim and the sophisticated sense of political and cultural capital he brought with him to college through his organizing with the Universal Zulu Nation, Kynard identifies not only how racism has permeated various facets of higher education, but also offers a solution:

While the dominant discourse of literacy educators today often centres on how to create bridge models for students of colour to take their “street codes”/ (neighbour)hood/community literacies and translate them into academic literacy and/or the norms of a “culture of power,” the history of black student protest rhetorics and activism flow in the opposite direction. It is the university and school structure, including its literacies and rhetorics, that are in need of change, not the students and thereby, the communities and cultural histories that they represent. (Kynard, “I Want to Be African” 393)

Here, Kynard captures two ideas. First is the academy must change and shift based on the importance of Hip Hop culture—as it has indeed become

popular culture. Second, Kynard connects Hip Hop to its lineage and legacy, which are intrinsically connected to a Black diasporic tradition of literacy. Similarly to Travis Harris's definition of Hip Hop as "an African diasporic phenomenon" (Harris 21), I contend the DJ (and thus, Hip Hop DJ culture) is the epicenter of Hip Hop culture's creation, which includes aesthetic and cultural values and sentiments, that springs forth from the African-American social and lived experiences in the Bronx, Queens, and other New York City boroughs—specifically impoverished urban communities. Although graffiti emerges before the DJ, the Hip Hop DJ brings all the cultural elements together, mixing more than just records on turntables. Therefore, the DJ is the glue of Hip Hop culture as we know it. Understanding Hip Hop culture as an African diasporic phenomenon accounts for foundational Hip Hop DJs whose roots and origins stretch into the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and other areas. Asian Americans and white folx were there too, no doubt. But the universality of Hip Hop's global inclusivity happens in the urban inner-city epicenters of New York—BIPOC melting pots—which, frankly, were inherently Black by design. I don't find labeling this origin to be exclusively limiting or creating a narrow binary. Hip Hop started as a multicultural happening that emerges from the Black experience. Hip Hop deejaying is an act that emerges as the sonic foundation of Hip Hop culture, with DJ elements convening a Black sonic experience. And because the DJ has always sat at the forefront of Hip Hop, it makes sense that the DJ sits as a griot, in the forefront of this cultural phenomenon called Hip Hop.

The intentionality of highlighting Hip Hop in the academy can become problematic when scholars fall short in the very place Kynard pinpoints when defining rhetoric. While some may find the stakes to be high in research and the paradigm of "publish or perish" in academia, some teacher/researchers do not want nor try to understand the paradigms involved for African-American youth in Hip Hop culture. This is an important distinction to recognize and is illuminated by Kynard. In her article "'Looking for the Perfect Beat': The Power of Black Student Protest Rhetorics for Academic Literacy and Higher Education," when redefining rhetoric in regard to African-American student protest history in the 1960s, she states:

I am using rhetoric to encompass much more than the art of persuasion and stylised speaking. I mean the qualities of language, both oral and written, through which cultural meanings and histories are communicated and thus, where attitudes towards language and life are central. Rhetoric is, thus, a means of discourse, where what gets said in stories, dance, song, paintings and



everyday banter communicates belief systems, social values, a sense of the past, notions of shared identity and communal aspirations. (Kynard 396)

So when Comp/Rhet scholars utilize traditional notions of rhetoric when engaging Hip Hop culture, they may not coincide with the belief systems, social values, historical and contemporary shared identities, or communal aspirations. Without the cultural or social connections to the communities about which they speak and “teach,” we see years later that their research does not speak to the ideas of rhetoric Kynard presents. This idea is also fleshed out further by Banks, as he quickly establishes the pitfalls of such careless choices in scholarship, as it “risks becoming yet another in a long line of those who have ‘taken our blues and gone,’ as Langston Hughes would call it, if we somehow build our theorizing on individual practices without full recognition of the people, networks, and traditions that have made these practices their gift to the broader culture” (Banks 13). It is further explicated by Travis Harris, when he states, “While writing about Hip Hop may be an academic exercise, the experiences of colonization, coloniality, hegemonic Whiteness, dispossession and other oppressive events that have destroyed African diasporic lives raises the stakes and brings a heaviness to this subject. As a result, non-Black scholars and especially White scholars need to recognize their position when studying, researching and writing about Hip Hop” (Harris 64).

Here I define DJ Rhetoric as the modes, methodologies, and discursive elements of the DJ. DJ Rhetoric encompasses the quality of oral, written, and sonic language that displays and expresses sociocultural, historical, and musical meanings, attitudes, and sentiments. From what gets said in the songs to what gets looped in the break in the mix, from the part of the song that gets cut up and scratched on the 1s and 2s to what gets chopped and flipped in the sample. DJ Rhetoric communicates the values of Hip Hop culture, (re)shaping it as we have known, now know, and will continue to know it (Craig, “Tell Virgil Write BRICK”). With this definition in mind, DJ Literacy stands as the sonic and auditory practices of reading, writing, critically thinking, speaking, and communicating through and with the rhetoric of Hip Hop DJ culture.

Thus, *K for the Way* aims, on the one hand, to examine and present a Hip Hop DJ Rhetoric and Literacy that includes ideas about poetics, communicative practices, and language formation and clearly demonstrates, on the other hand, the social, cultural, and political values ever present in DJs’ roles and actions. This brings us back full-circle to Banks’s understanding of the DJ as

a particular type of griot: communicating the pulse and the evolution of a culture that once sat as “underground” but now has dramatically evolved to “mainstream.”

But is this movement from forefront to background then back to the forefront some sort of mysterious happenstance? I argue not, because anyone who knows Hip Hop cultural history knows full well it was the DJ first and foremost making the culture move. In my interview with God’s Favorite DJ and acclaimed producer DJ Clark Kent, he describes the DJ’s historical function as “the style of DJing, the cutting up the breaks, the making the break the most important part of a record: that was the DJs fault and that is the 100 percent beginning of what we understand Hip Hop to be—it’s what the DJ created. You ain’t hear about no rappers before you heard about DJs. We are the cornerstone, DJs *are* the cornerstone of Hip Hop . . . the DJ—first, always!” (DJ Clark Kent). While many people might gravitate toward the movie *Scratch* when thinking about the DJ (since it focuses solely on the DJ and the turntablist), I think one of the most compelling movies for our contemporary generation is *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*. Director/narrator Ice-T’s extraordinary documentary on the art of the MC shows many of “your favorite rappers’ favorite rappers” (Styles P from “Ryde or Die”), highlighting their entrance into Hip Hop via DJ positionality. For example, stories tell how Redman, who early in his career at his shows would come out on stage and, before even touching the mic, first push the DJ on the set out the way and start rocking on the turntables (Redman currently DJs on his Sirius/XM show, *Muddy Waters Radio*). In my interview with triple-threat (Emcee/DJ/Producer) Lord Finesse—who is probably best known for being an MC and later a producer—he told me the story of his Hip Hop history behind the turntables:

Back in the day, the DJ was the thing to be . . . I always wanted to be the DJ first, I ain’t want to be a rapper. And people go, “how’d that happen?” I always wanted to be the DJ, the DJ was the dude! I just got real nice at [rapping], to the point where people were like “you need to pursue THAT!” So I got into rapping heavy, that took priority first. And in my spare time, I was still practicing and practicing until it got to the point where I *know* I’m nice, lemme start entering these DJ battle competitions . . . I’m doing the tricks, I’m doing the blindfolded thing, I’m doing ALL of that! (Lord Finesse)

Lord Jamar of Brand Nubian also discusses in *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap* how he started as a DJ. Finally, Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest states, “In the beginning it was sound systems. Because the DJ was probably more



prevalent than the MC actually, when the shit started off” (Q-Tip). Around the same time, Smirnoff was at the forefront of showcasing and highlighting the DJ within their company branding. Along with Smirnoff’s *Master of The Mix* DJ reality show, the company also launched a campaign that premiered legendary DJ Kid Capri as the cornerstone of the party in a series of commercials. So to find the DJ sitting at the forefront of mainstream culture only shows the cyclical nature of history.

Given the modes of new technology—as DJs move between vinyl and computer-based software to manipulate turntables, CDJs, DJ controllers, and other devices—we, too, see our students in English Studies moving toward the need for more technology-based discourse. While the discipline thus begins to move in directions toward a type of Digital Humanities, part of the work we must do as English scholars is think about giving students captivating examples of writers. DJ Rhetoric and Pedagogy could have intriguing implications on how students in English Studies examine and (re)approach the modes and methods of writing and composing. In my interview with internationally renowned DJ Spinna, he stated very clearly, “We ARE writers, we are ABSOLUTELY writers!” (DJ Spinna). Spinna voices this sentiment because DJs program music, construct playlists, (re)write songs, compose digital sets with the new advancements in technology, and then make the natural progression into music production. Spinna pulls together these elements in DJing in the same way, conversely enough, that English Studies makes distinctions between and fractures itself into English Literature, Composition/Rhetoric (or Writing Studies), and Creative Writing. However, would any of these elements exist without its second or third counterpart? Not at all. So as we move forward from the two-dimensional sense of text given to us by twentieth-century English Studies into a more multidimensional idea of twenty-first-century writing exhibited by the new push toward the Digital Humanities, we must examine different types of writers and composers, orators, and storytellers. If we can explore the idea of the Hip Hop MC as a writer within English Studies, why not equally explore the DJ as new media reader and writer, in the creation of DJ Rhetoric and Pedagogy? Spinna has captured it best in saying, “I tell a story with a beginning, middle and end . . . we ARE writers” (Spinna). It follows that if our argument is English Studies is a discipline that functions around the construction of and subsequent analysis of “the word,” we must investigate the meaning-making writer known as the DJ. But as I showed earlier in this chapter, we must do this work in a manner that responds to the ways Hip Hop scholarship within English Studies has shunned community members of

the culture in that scholarly conversation. I argue this approach will require a change in perspective and the need to privilege a different set of voices in this integral cultural conversation.

So to collectively push toward an ecology that bridges scholarship in English Studies with voices of the cultural practitioners and communal meaning-makers in Hip Hop culture, *K for the Way* highlights DJ voices through conversations grounded in hiphopography, a philosophy introduced by James G. Spady. In promoting the advantages of an emic view when conducting research in the Hip Hop community through the lens of hiphopography, H. Samy Alim states:

hiphopography can be described as an approach to the study of Hip Hop culture that combines the methods of ethnography, biography, and social and oral history. Importantly, hiphopography is not traditional ethnography. Hierarchical divisions between the “researcher” and the “researched” are purposely kept to a minimum, even as they are interrogated. This requires the hiphopographer to engage the community on its own terms. Knowledge of the aesthetics, values, and history as well as the use of the language, culture, and means and modes of interaction of the Hip Hop Nation Speech Community are essential to the study of Hip Hop culture. (Alim, “The Natti Ain’t No Punk City” 969)

With this philosophy in mind, the premier voice in *K for the Way* is the DJ. And to ensure those voices resonate and shine throughout the research, you’ll see every DJ’s name quoted in parenthesis, just as MLA instructs us to do for academic voices. In *K for the Way* the voice of Hip Hop will be prevalent and the voice most paramount will be the DJ.

### *The Method to the Madness: The Research Roadmap of “K for the Way”*

*K for the Way* deploys James G. Spady’s hiphopography as the methodological process of data collection. With a philosophy that embraced the avant-garde meaning-making of Hip Hop artists, Spady defined hiphopography by stating:

Our objective was to present a shared discourse with equanimity, not the usual hierarchal distancing techniques usually found in published and non published (visual-TV) interviewers with rappers. That is why we decided to do a HipHopography of the Bronx rather than an Ethnography of the Bronx. The crucial difference is the fact that in our case, we shared the cultural, philosophical values embedded in Black life stylings. HipHopography provides unique means of assessing and accessing the word/world realities found therein . . . as

Hip Hop investigators we saw it as crucial to render the subject's cultural realities as accurately as possible (Spady and Eure vii)

Hiphopography allowed me to engage a variety of Hip Hop DJs while also maintaining my own shared values and sentiments around my love of Hip Hop culture and DJ practices. My intricate understanding of both Hip Hop and DJ culture transformed many discussions with participants to quickly turn from “formal interview” to friendly conversation. I also conducted more interviews by asking DJs to refer me to people they felt I should include in the project; this was an unscripted question I quickly began to ask at the very end of every interview. Because one of the main goals of *K for the Way* was to have an interview with “your favorite DJs’ favorite DJ,” it was critical and mandatory that I organically circulated through the DJ community with the organic intellectuals of the landscape—mainly through word of mouth, peers, and sponsors who experienced the process and understood the direction of this project.

Since there is not an expansive body of research on the DJ that springs directly from the DJ, hiphopography was favored simply because understanding DJ Pedagogy must come from the DJ and not from the abstract perspective of a certain type of “wax poetic” theorizing of the DJ from afar. In this regard, *K for the Way* strives to achieve praxis: the theory emerging from this research study is primarily based in the practice of DJs who participated in this study. The data accumulated from interviews reveal the life practices of various DJs; these practices dictate the theory and intellectual body of knowledge *K for the Way* aims to interrogate when discussing the Hip Hop DJ.

Whether overtly quoted or subconsciously embedded in the thinking and theorizing, various DJ voices drive this book. Furthermore, the Hip Hop aesthetics both Alim and Petchauer identify—the ways of knowing and being “Hip Hop”—serve as the theoretical skeleton. While my experiences as a DJ serve as bone marrow, hiphopography is the theoretical lens that adds the research meat on this book’s bones. Yet, it is also innately dwelling as the backdrop—to discuss DJs, I could not afford the haphazard musings of a “whatever” moment. I have a responsibility as a DJ and Hip Hop participant/practitioner to the culture to present it properly. DJ Rhetoric is an explicit form of Hip Hop aesthetics; it is a way of knowing and being Hip Hop without even really laying claim to that label. For example, DJ Clark Kent would not call himself a “Hip Hop DJ.” However, his DJ style—the way he knows and breathes the rhetorical savvy of his sonic communication through his hands with records and two

turntables—is very much Hip Hop knowing and being. Hiphopography lends itself to a conversational practice that brings forth meaningful qualitative data. Yet at the heart of this methodology is the humanizing of participants; the knowledge and cultural capital DJs shared in our interviews truly became the privileged knowledge source.

A technique used in *K for the Way* was member-checking: using cross-referential information from participants to gauge the importance and relevance of data given from their peers. While I began with an initial set of DJs I wanted to interview based on my knowledge of DJ culture, those interviews happened organically only after being referred to those individuals by other peers in the community. For example, while KOOL DJ Red Alert was on my personal “Wish List” of participants, he was interviewed very late in the process. It took an earlier interview with Christie Z-Pabon alongside numerous other interviews before Red Alert contacted me and said he heard about my project and would like to be involved.

### *“The Hiphopological-Semi-Structured-Methodological Movement”*

A semi-structured interview method rooted in hiphopography was used for *K for the Way* for several reasons. An interview technique that encompasses elements of both the traditional standardized interview guide with open-ended interview strategies allows for greater rapport with participants and consistency within every interview so that each participant is asked the same set of questions. There is an interview matrix, but it is not necessarily the only roadmap within the interview. This flexibility encourages participants to offer important content that might be absent in the interviewer’s questions; it also affords the interviewer flexibility in further exploring a respondent’s unanticipated ideas (Patton 347). This transactional relationship between interviewer and respondent fosters more organic dialogue, eliminating some of the power dynamics that may arise in most interview formats (Cohen and Crabtree). This sentiment also falls directly in line with the tenants of hiphopography.

The semi-structured interview approach through the lens of hiphopography in *K for the Way* empowered the participants, their thoughts, and ideas throughout the process and in the research itself to let participants’ voices shine. I found myself interviewing DJs on their own terms, many times on-location at Hip Hop events. For example, Mr. Len and I went to “Toca Tuesdays” in LES (aka the Lower East Side) so I could interview DJ Tony Touch. While I

was there, DJ Clark Kent made sure I connected with the guest DJ: a young Chi-Town DJ named Timbuck2 (RIP and “throw two fingers in the air for Timbuck”). DJ A.Vee connected me with Prince Paul at the “Donuts Are Forever” J Dilla Tribute at Brooklyn Bowl. These interviews were entrenched in the DJ’s world of nightclubs and venues known for hosting Hip Hop events. These location-based interviews further exemplify Alim’s premise that “hiphopographers have the chance to document the lives, narratives, and practices of Hip Hop’s culture creators while they are actually living and engaging in Hip Hop cultural practices—it’s a living history, a history in motion. This enhances the power and accuracy of our interpretation of Hip Hop cultural production exponentially” (Alim, “The Natti Ain’t No Punk City” 972). As both Spady and Alim have said, you gotta be in the place to be with the people who make the place to be *the place to be*.

Part of how I built rapport with DJs who participated in this research project was linking the perspective of the research to our collective connections via Hip Hop culture, which superseded many of the formalities presented in “standard academic research.” Since my perspective and approach were different, more aligned with Hip Hop and “Black life stylings” as presented by Spady, the lens for what information was privileged shifted. For example, during my interview with BreakBeat Lou in my home office, his interest in the project grew exponentially upon seeing my DJ equipment sitting right underneath my framed master’s degree. My genuinely tangible love of DJ culture in my questions and our conversations coupled with a framed MA degree sparked a special interest in the research. He veered off-course in our interview to address seeing all sides of my researcher/practitioner/participant spectrum merge:

On the real right now—I’m gonna say it, I know he’s not expecting this—and I’m a be a little extra right now, but [picks up the framed master’s Degree from the desk shelf]. The reason I don’t mind doing this, and I’m being forward, but somebody that has this right here, this is worth more than anything that I’m saying. Someone who has this, and has an appreciation for the culture that we call Hip Hop, and even more so as to rep the DJ, git ya game right, for real! And that’s one of the main reasons why I’m here right now! (BreakBeat Lou, personal interview)

BreakBeat Lou highlighted my positionality in the interview, and then became an ally for me within the DJ community. If you let Lou tell it, “Todd is the truth—he’s REALLY part of our culture” (BreakBeat Lou talking to Ben Ortiz of Cornell’s Hip Hop Archive at “Diggers Delight” in Harlem, summer 2012). This natural rapport was established by the connectivity hiphopography lends

as methodology using the semi-structured interview method. Since the goal of this qualitative study is to give life to DJ culture through the experts and participants in the culture, it made the most sense to sit down with various players throughout the community and capture their voices in terms of how they envision the reality they participate in and represent.

Narrative analysis will be crucial throughout *K for the Way*. While the academy might occasionally indulge in narrative driving sections of academic manuscripts, we typically don't permit narrative to be integral in the process of sponsorship and fact-checking for who gets to tell a story and how the story is actually told. Because of my positioning as a DJ and my membership within both the DJ community and Hip Hop culture, there are aspects to the DJ community most people would not be able to access or analyze, as well as aspects to DJ modes and practices to which I am already innately familiar and connected. This positionality allows me an uncanny insider perspective to successfully complete this research and to foster a sense of trust within the community the average researcher might not gain. There is a saying in the Hip Hop community that "real recognize real." Even though I am a researcher and English scholar, my DJ peers understand and trust my commitment to the DJ community, to Hip Hop culture, and to ensuring this research presents DJ Rhetoric, Literacy, Pedagogy, and culture objectively, by presenting an honest portrait of the cultural, communicative, and discursive practices of the Hip Hop DJ to an academic community.

### *Questions That Drive the Movement:*

#### *"K for the Way" Research Questions*

If we take into consideration the aspects of previous scholarship about the DJ from scholars like Jeff Rice, Paul Miller, and Adam Banks, one of the major questions of this research is how can the DJ's rhetoric, practices, and modes compel us to (re)envision writing as we know it? Other questions include:

- What is the history and lineage of the Hip Hop DJ? What is the main role of the Hip Hop DJ in popular culture in the twenty-first century?
- How can the Hip Hop DJ be included in the category of new media reader and writer?
- What is the evolution of the DJ as writer? How do contemporary Hip Hop Studies help in framing Hip Hop DJ Rhetoric and poetics?
- What implications might a Hip Hop DJ Rhetoric, Literacy, and Pedagogy have on English Studies for (re)imagining and (re)envisioning contemporary Writing Studies?

These questions all strive toward elucidating an overarching research question: How can we better understand the previously presented metaphor of “DJ as writer” and “DJ as Griot” or the connections between the DJ as orator and the linkages between African-American rhetoric, sonics and technology?

*When the Headline Reads, “Todd Craig Leaks ‘K for the Way’ Tracklist”: The Project Creation and Content*

*K for the Way*’s structure is steeped in honoring DJ practices. Chapter 1 states the primary goals of the book and introduces an argument for DJ Rhetoric and Literacy. Chapter 2 explores aspects of the author’s acquisition of DJ Rhetoric and Literacy alongside narrative taken from DJ culture to expand on the idea of “sponsors” within the DJ community. The narrative is coupled with sponsorship/mentorship theories provided by Eric Pleasant and Gail Okawa, alongside commentary from Antonio Gramsci and Morris Young.

Chapter 3 examines more tangible implications for DJ Rhetoric and Pedagogy in writing by exploring how sampling techniques and practices in Hip Hop DJing and production can challenge the ideas of citation and plagiarism. Chapter 4 hones in on theoretical quandaries around DJ Rhetoric and Literacy, using narrative to probe the practice of “DJ as educator” when applying revision strategies in student writing.

Chapter 5 introduces and interrogates the meaning-making of six groundbreaking women DJs: Spinderella, Kuttin Kandi, Pam the Funkstress (RIP), Reborn, Shorty Wop, and Natasha Diggs. How these super-bad record-rocking sisters make their way through the testosterone-heavy Hip Hop industry is a story to be told and heralded both within and outside of DJ culture. Chapter 6 utilizes a “contact zone” framework in order to both define and explore the positionality of the DJ. This chapter also highlights interviews with DJs Mr. Len, Rich Medina, Sonny James, Phillip Lee, and Boogie Blind to examine ideas we see in Comp/Rhet from scholars such as Scott Lyons, Karla Holloway, Kermit Campbell, and others. Finally, chapter 7 examines the different directions scholarship on DJ Rhetoric can go and grow in envisioning “Comp3.o.”

Each chapter starts with a quote, followed by a written excerpt, which consists of either prose or music lyrics, from somewhere else in the book. Each chapter ends with either a quote from an artist, an action that is demonstrated in the chapter or should be acted upon by the reader, or prose and music lyrics from somewhere else in the book. The formatting evokes how



DJs dig for records: you go into a record store, grab a set of records, and make your way to the turntable, or “listening station” to get a sonic snippet of your selections (when there’s no listening station, you might be savvy enough to break out your Vestax or Columbia portable). In a store, there is no time to listen to 15 or 115 records from start to finish. So as a DJ, you take the stylus and needle-drop through the record, trying to get a feel based on thirty-to-forty-five-second segments of sonic sensings. The quotes from the chapter intros and outros aim to embody diggin’ for the DJ: what BreakBeat Lou aptly titled “The Diggin’ Exhibition” and what Lynnée Denise highlights as one of DJ Scholarship’s four cultural practices—“Digging through the crates” (Denise 64).

*“K for the Way”: DJ Rhetoric and Literacy for Twenty-First-Century Writing Studies* samples from a larger research project entitled “SPINificent Revolutions: 360 Degrees of Stylus as Pen” and uses over twenty (20) interviews from DJs who are scholars, “curators” (Chairman Mao), historians, and experts in their field. The work they have amassed in their world equates to, or possibly overtakes, much of the work done by scholars examining the culture. And because there hasn’t been much work done by scholars in this particular field, the experts are the DJs who were interviewed. My job as researcher is to serve as a conduit that frames the information in these DJs’ voices (Creswell 18–19), illuminating potential possibilities for English Studies. While part of DJ Rhetoric sits with quotes and extensive conversations with DJs that can’t all be included here, DJ Rhetoric is embodied in both the writing and analysis. These DJs have become friends and mentors, and they create a familial culture through the bloodline of 1200s and Radio Shack Realistic mixers. Again, I’m reminded of Aja Martinez, who says if this work doesn’t include family, then what good is it, and what’s the use? Spady also addresses the importance of conversations about Hip Hop with Hip Hop participants: “In this connection it is necessary to realize that the interviewers/editors were as interested in the rap artists’ narrative discourse as its historical content. An interview is a speech event. You should have been physically on location as these visionaries/knowers rapped” (Spady and Eure vii). The same approach that Spady deployed with the emcee was my approach with the DJ.

Thus, one of the objectives of *K for the Way* is to engage Hip Hop DJ Rhetoric and Literacy from the Hip Hop DJ’s perspective, privileging their voices as opposed to someone who may have never touched a turntable, or even know what a 1200 is. Second, *K for the Way* approaches this topic from a different perspective; instead of privileging aspects of scholarship in the field while using



participant interaction, interviews, and narrative as supplemental, this book will explore the outcome of research that privileges the narrative experiences of both the participants and the author/researcher/scholar and will tell stories as a way to “get at the details of one’s life and all of the factors that shaped that particular Hip Hop artist . . . individual life histories become especially powerful when collected into a large body of representative participants who are active in the culture” (Alim, “The Natti Ain’t No Punk City” 971).

Finally, the structure of *K for the Way* aims to replicate the machinations of a DJ set. Digging and listening; twisting and turning; cutting and scratching; blending, dropping, and spinning between modes, genres, and musical selections, this book aims to navigate aspects of memoir and storytelling with research-minded creative nonfiction and interview data. *K for the Way* will not only talk about the DJ; it will also embody the DJ. In any live DJ set, there are deft moments of cutting and scratching. There are crescendos through blends and beat-matching that boggle the mind and ear. There are abrupt drops that get the listeners from one record to another . . . and there are also those moments of “trainwrecks”—where everyone looks at the DJ, knowing full well that was *not* supposed to sound the way it did! *K for the Way* hopes to achieve at its best a conversation about DJs as an enactment of DJ Rhetoric and Pedagogy. Whether in written dialogue about other DJs, MCs, or producers, the twenty-first-century practices of reader, writer, and literary critic shine through from the page and are embodied in these words and ideas through a thought process, synthesis, and intellectual sensibility that are cultivated and maintained by Hip Hop DJ culture. And at its worst, hopefully the book maintains a stance presented to us by Havoc of Mobb Deep and the Alchemist in the song “Maintain (Fuck How You Feel).” In trying to describe how his longevity in Hip Hop music can be derived from creativity, Havoc says, “Push the envelope like the knob on the mixer”; worst-case scenario, *K for the Way* proves the attempt at pushing the envelope may be valiant but may also be a location that needs wrinkles ironed out in a practice session after the live event.

There is a question that still may remain here: Why DJ Rhetoric? Let’s think back to James G. Spady and Joseph D. Eure’s seminal 1991 text *Nation Conscious Rap*. In analyzing the emergence of Hip Hop culture, Spady writes, “The fact that a mass national cultural movement has grown organically out of disparate Black communities is a musical phenomenon worthy of further exploration” (Spady and Eure 414). Couple this sentiment with the Houston Baker mantra of 1993, with Hip Hop culture needing to be an integral part of an educator’s wheelhouse if they are invested in K–12. Extend this idea to college education,

specifically college writing, and we can clearly see that an exploration of DJ Rhetoric can help college students (re)imagine and (re)envision how they approach writing. By exploring DJ Rhetoric, college writers deeply invested in Hip Hop culture can see how the cultural knowledge and capital they bring with them is invaluable to their success in academia via writing and rhetoric. Thus, taking some time to understand how the DJ maneuvers the intricate details of writing and storytelling through distinctive discursive patterns is most worthy of inquiry and analysis. We have done this work for the emcee. We have also done this work with the graf writers, b-boys, and b-girls. I contend we take it back to the essence and do this work with the cornerstone of the culture: the DJ. To do such work, it must be done on the DJ's terms. So while we acknowledge this text as an embodiment of DJ discursive practices, let's also recognize that DJ sets rarely conform to a prescriptive formula. Thus, *K for the Way* won't always conform . . . and that's the point. Think of this book as an open-source textual-party-rockin' moment. Is it trade? Is it academic? Yeah and nah bro . . .

These embodied practices and aesthetic sensibilities are the elements that constitute the basis of what Comp3.0 might look like.

### ***“Yo, Wrap It Up, Bee!?!”: Concluding to Get to the Point of It All***

On July 2, 1996—the same day Nas released *It Was Written*, multiplatinum Hip Hop group De La Soul (RIP Trugoy the Dove aka Plug 2) released their fourth full-length album *Stakes Is High*. The first album they recorded without longtime collaborator and producer (and DJ) Prince Paul, De La constructs a project which makes poignant commentary on the state of Hip Hop culture, specifically the shift in lyrics from consciousness to “gangster rap”—which, in their definition, focused on violence, drug distribution and usage—and the “baller” or “player” lifestyle,—which functioned on spending exorbitant amounts of money on material items to portray a lavish lifestyle usually above the spender's (and the average listener's) means. While the climate of the Hip Hop music industry seemed to be rapidly changing, in that moment De La Soul made it clear throughout the lyrics of this album that their music had not and would not change; the insightfulness they presented on this album came at a time when their record sales had steadily declined since and despite the multiplatinum crossover success of their debut album *3 Feet High and Rising*. Thus, when De La Soul entitled this album *Stakes Is High*,

they were not only referencing their own positionality in the business of Hip Hop music but also the state of affairs in Hip Hop culture that was quickly moving away from its foundation based in originality, Afrocentrism, Black pride, and empowerment. A critically acclaimed classic album, *Stakes Is High* was responsible for some key Hip Hop moments, including introducing the mighty Mos Def (now known as Yasiin Bey) to a larger listening platform. Moreover, on the first single, “Stakes Is High,” they featured the work of rising producer Jay Dee (also known as J Dilla—RIP). A musical historian and sample curator, Dilla created the Jazz-inspired “Stakes Is High” beat by chopping, sampling, and replaying an excerpt of Ahmad Jamal’s “Jamal Plays Jamal.” Before he passed away in February 2006, Dilla would be recognized as an upper-echelon producer and emcee. While Dilla was known primarily as a production genius, few knew of his origins as a DJ in his youth with Frank of Frank N Dank (Charnas, *Dilla Time*; Liu and Anderson). While Dilla came from a family steeped in musical knowledge, I wonder if I were to ask Dilla—like so many of the DJs in *K for the Way*—if he would make the argument that his processes as a DJ were instrumental and influential in his production success. Essentially, the Dilla-produced track “Stakes Is High” serves as a perfect sonic backdrop for the subject discussed in the song by De La Soul, at a time where the stakes were indeed high in the culture of Hip Hop as we knew it.

The stakes are also high in regard to this research. In constructing an argument for a DJ Rhetoric, Pedagogy, and Literacy, it involves capturing a specific “DJ Lineage” as well as identifying the roots of the DJs who have and continue to serve as mentors and role models, icons, and architects to Hip Hop DJ culture. Some of these DJs have lineages dating back to a time void of this culture we call “Hip Hop.” So it becomes even more critical to reel in these historical lineages, and center Hip Hop squarely back into its roots in the Black tradition that borrows from various African-American cultural and social practices that are inherently political. Furthermore, this process centers around constructing an argument for a DJ Rhetoric and Pedagogy that encompasses the modes, practices, and discourse of what the Hip Hop DJ does: from turntablism, writing, and composing via sampling and music production, to bending and manipulating technology to serve those purposes until the technology is created specifically for the aforementioned purposes.

I am compelled to complete such high-stakes research as a DJ/scholar. And DJ comes first in this pair because since I can remember, I have been brought up surrounded by DJs, music, records, and Hip Hop. I learned how to be a researcher from studying the sounds, grooves, and breaks (both vocals and

beats) of records, as well as diggin' to find the origins of those sounds, grooves, and breaks (both vocals and beats). I learned how to write from my friend Pee and other emcees . . . lyricists . . . from rewinding countless tapes and records, listening to lyricists on vinyl and cassette to understand flow and construction, to later sitting in the studio, observing some of the best rappers who have done it do it—from start to finish. I learned how to listen from Hay, Uncle Dea (RIP), Leo (RIP), and others—from finding the sound and pause-tape looping it, to finding the sound and turntable looping it . . . and even to finding the record that had the sound in the first place. I emerged from this journey as a DJ/scholar to give back to students who were cut from this same cloth. This community of students has been at times overlooked by English Studies in moments where the discipline has made no effort to relate to the textual lineage that influenced these bright, highly motivated students for them to understand what writing, orating, and critical thinking could look like. As a perfect example, just think back to the student writer who evoked the DJ in that journal article with which this chapter opened . . .

One night during a recording session for legendary Hip Hop group Mobb Deep, Havoc looked at Prodigy and said, “Yo—Todd *really* loves this Hip Hop shit, yo! He loves it more than we do, for real!” We all kinda looked at each other after that, as the gravity of the statement sunk in for everyone in the room. Reflecting on that comment now, it presents a vital point—this research comes from the premise that Hip Hop was birthed on: I do this for the love of the culture and hopefully for some student in a college or grad school course who could use some validation, or a way to figure out how to marry the culture we love with the content we study.

No doubt, the stakes are high in this research. And be clear: I'm ecstatic to have embarked on this journey. I would've done these DJ interviews no matter what. I would've wanted to speak to these people and pick their brains to understand my own Hip Hop lineage and family tree no matter what. Because I have BreakBeat Lou's records in my crates. Because Clark Kent mentored some of my all-time favorite DJs. Because Lord Finesse and Large Pro (Large Professor), Mr. Walt and Evil Dee, Mr. Len and Prince Paul crafted some of my all-time favorite beats, tracks, and albums. Because Kool Bob Love (Bobbito) and Eclipse, Matthew Africa (RIP), and Sucio Smash educated me from some of the illest underground locations known to man. Because Ca\$h Money and Jazzy Jeff, Rhettmatic and Revolution, Spinderella and Shortee, Pam the Funkstress (RIP) and Kuttin Kandi helped open doors for Rob Swift and Boogie Blind, Moppy and Damage, Timbuck2 (RIP) and Illvibe, Shorty Wop and Tyra from

Saigon, Reborn and Killa-Jewel. Because I studied Spinna and Mark Farina mixes. Because Red Alert schooled me on this Hip Hop thing as a youngin! This is part of my own DNA and lineage. So this full-length offering helps me to make sense of my journey and share it with everyone involved. It's been what I've lived, eaten, and breathed way before living, eating, and breathing were in style, feel me?

Let me invite you to embark on a sonic and literary research ride orchestrated by two turntables, a mixer, and the vast and rich historical landscape that comes with it.

Welcome to *K for the Way* . . .

You know what this is? This is the sound of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly!

Sean Price at Rock The Bells 2012, New Jersey. He says this when his DJ starts playing Catalyst's "Uzuri" off the *Perception* album. This is the original sample for The Fab 5's classic collaboration entitled "Leflaur Leflah Eshkoshka."