Architectural Activism Through Hip-Hop

Micaela Goodrich

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/masters_theses_2

Part of the Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation

ARCHITECTURAL ACTIVISM THROUGH HIP-HOP

A Thesis Presented

by

MICAELA GOODRICH

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

May 2022

Department of Architecture
ARCHITECTURAL ACTIVISM THROUGH HIP-HOP

A Thesis Presented

by

MICAEWA GOODRICH

Approved as to style and content by:

____________________________________
Erika H. Zekos, Chair

____________________________________
Joseph B. Krupczynski, Member

____________________________________
Stephen Schreiber, Department Chair
Department of Architecture
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my advisor, Erika Zekos, for guiding me through this process and her support over the years. I would also like to equally thank Joseph Krupczynski. Both Erika and Joseph introduced me to the possibilities of social justice through design years ago and for that I am incredibly grateful.

I would also like to thank the friends who I have bonded with over a shared appreciation for Hip-Hop. Keep sharing your playlists with me, I really appreciate it.

And finally, I would like to thank my mom, Ann Carey, who has demonstrated what it means to be an activist and has been my biggest support in everything I do. This has been especially true during the last two years while attending graduate school during a pandemic. I don’t think I could have got through this process without you.
ABSTRACT

ARCHITECTURAL ACTIVISM THROUGH HIP-HOP

MAY 2022

MICAELEA GOODRICH, B.S. ARCHITECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

M.ARCH., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Erika H. Zekos

Hip-Hop Culture emerged in the early 1970s from Black and Latinx youth living in the South Bronx. At the time, the Bronx was stereotyped as the nation’s iconic “ghetto”. However, as in many of the nation’s cities, the built environment that defined the Bronx was a product of ghettoization that marginalized African Americans through confinement and overcrowding of urban centers; exclusions from mortgage loans and home ownership; and the redistribution of resources.

Hip-Hop Culture allowed marginalized communities to reclaim the built environment through repurpose of space and found materials; it creates opportunities for self-sufficiency; and establishes a community around the ethos of peace, love and having fun that mitigated street violence.

As the research makes palpable the impact the built environment has had on Black and Latinx communities, my intent is to turn the table and illustrate how the defining elements of Hip-Hop Culture can influence a design rooted in equity and social justice through the proposal of a Hip-Hop Youth Center in Springfield, Massachusetts; a facility that supports underserved youth in their creative endeavors and entrepreneurship.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... v

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ viii

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

I: THE SPATIAL HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF HIP-HOP ........................................ 4

1.1 The Emergence of 'White Fear' .............................................................................. 4

1.2 Redlining & Segregation ...................................................................................... 5

1.3 Racial Segregation Through Public Housing ..................................................... 8

1.4 Blight Removal, Slum Clearance, and Urban Renewal ..................................... 10

1.5 White Flight ......................................................................................................... 14

1.6 The “inner city”, the “ghetto”, the South Bronx .............................................. 15

II: FOUNDATIONS OF HIP-HOP ............................................................................. 18

2.1 Hip-Hop’s First Party .......................................................................................... 19

2.2 Building Community ......................................................................................... 20

2.3 Something from Nothing .................................................................................. 22

2.4 The Message ....................................................................................................... 23

III: HIP-HOP TO ARCHITECTURE, SPACE, AND PLACE ................................... 25

3.1 Why Hip-Hop Architecture? ............................................................................. 26

3.2 The Paralells of Hip-Hop to Architecture ......................................................... 27

3.2.1 the DJ ........................................................................................................... 27

3.2.2 the MC ......................................................................................................... 28

3.2.3 Breakdance ................................................................................................. 23
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Thesis Subject Evolution</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: Ernest Burgess, Concentric Zone Model of Urban Growth (Herscher, 2020)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3: Image by Joe Conzo Jr. (1980) of Charlotte Street, Bronx</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: Image by Alain Le Garsmeur (1977) of teenagers in front of burnt-out building in South Bronx</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5: Cartography by Molly Roy of Historical Hip-Hop Sites Superimposed onto Mapping of Burnt-Out Buildings (Roy, 2016, pp.120-121)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: Image by Joe Conzo Jr. (1982) of Unidentified dancer at the Roseland Ballroom</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: Image by Scott Trimble of Sekou Cooke (right) and Hasan Stephens (left)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8: Render of SHHHQ from Sekou Cooke STUDIO</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9: Image by Chad Holder of Exhibit (Holder)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10: Image by Chad Holder of Exhibit (Holder)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11: Image by Cristobal Palma of Completed Design Before User Intervention (Aravena &amp; ELEMENTAL, 2008)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12: Image by ELEMENTAL of User Intervention</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13: Comparison Image by Tadeuz Jalocha of Interior Before and After User Intervention (Aravena &amp; ELEMENTAL, 2008)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14: Image from Geordie Wood (nArchitects, 2008)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15: Image by Matthew Carbone of Exterior (nArchitects, 2008)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16: Map of Massachusetts locating Pioneer Valley and Springfield</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17: Locating Project Site in Springfield, MA</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 18: Indian Motorcycle Factory and Knox Automobile Plant. Original Image from Hess, 2000......................................................47

Figure 19: Knox Automobile Company plant, July 4,1904 from Hess, 2000........48

Figure 20: Recent Photo of 53 Wilbraham Rd. - East Elevation (Goodrich, 2022)............................................................................................................. 48

Figure 21: Recent Photo of 53 Wilbraham Rd. - West Elevation (Goodrich, 2022)............................................................................................................. 49

Figure 22: Existing Building and Site .................................................................50

Figure 23: Aerial View of Site and Neighboring Buildings.................................51

Figure 24: Schematic Program Diagram ...............................................................52

Figure 25: Proposed Program..............................................................................54

Figure 26: Defining the Cypher. Original image from Joe Conzo Jr. Archive. 1982............................................................................................................... 57

Figure 27: Intervention of Cylindrical Form..........................................................57

Figure 28: Conceptualizing Inscribed Breaks......................................................58

Figure 29: Realizing the MC ..............................................................................59

Figure 30: Introduction of Graffiti .....................................................................59

Figure 31: Layering in Hip-Hop. Original image: Album cover by Aimee Macauley for Nas. Illmatic. 1994. ................................................................. 60

Figure 32: Schematic Layering Approach............................................................61

Figure 33: Schematic Approach to Layering Program........................................61

Figure 34: Schematic First Floor Plan.................................................................62

Figure 35: Schematic Second and Third Floor Plans ........................................63

Figure 36: Carving into the Existing Form..........................................................64

Figure 37: Proposed First Floor and Site Plan......................................................65

Figure 38: Perspective View of Café....................................................................66
Figure 39: Proposed Second, Third, Fourth and Roof Plans ........................................ 67

Figure 40: Section cutting North to South .............................................................. 68

Figure 41: Section cutting through Cylinder and Wedge ........................................ 68

Figure 42: Perspective View of Art Studio/ Maker Space ....................................... 69

Figure 43: Exterior Elevations .............................................................................. 70

Figure 44: Physical Section Model ....................................................................... 71

Figure 45: Image of Existing Building (Goodrich, 2022) ....................................... 72

Figure 46: Rendered View of Proposed Hip-Hop Youth Center ............................. 72
INTRODUCTION

Hip-Hop Culture emerged in the early 1970s from Black and Latinx youth living in the South Bronx. At the time, the Bronx was stereotyped as the nation’s iconic “ghetto”. However, as in many of the nation’s cities, the built environment that defined the Bronx was a product of ghettoization that marginalized African Americans through confinement and overcrowding of urban centers; exclusions from mortgage loans and home ownership; and the redistribution of resources.

The consequences of ghettoization are still experienced by African Americans and Latinx Americans today who are frequently stereotyped as causes of crime, poverty and vandalism and barred from access to fair housing, good education, and high paying jobs. As Craig Wilkins states,

…the built environment is anything but an innocent landscape; its sensual pleasures are constituted through economic, social, and political forces that are hardly benign…architects’ share the responsibility for the mess we are in…in terms of the white noose around the central city. We didn’t just suddenly get this way. It was carefully planned… and executed! As people whose job is to shape space, to ignore this reality is to perpetuate it” (Wilkins, 2007, pp. 25, 29).

Yet, Hip-Hop challenges this narrative by providing insight into the experiences of marginalized populations living in the inner city and validity to the process of ghettoization. Hip-Hop Culture reclaims the built environment through repurpose of space and found materials; it creates opportunities for self-sufficiency; and establishes a community around the ethos of peace, love, and having fun (Bascunan, R., Wheeler, D, 2016).

For transparency, I am a middle-class, white woman from western Massachusetts. What drew me to the subject of Hip-Hop was primarily my avid appreciation for Hip-Hop music that has greatly influenced me as an artist and has led to some of my most
meaningful connections with peers. But also, my education in Architecture and African American studies that have challenged me to think more critically about the social impact of our environments. Noting relevance between Architecture, African American studies, and Hip-Hop music, I began to ask how could Hip-Hop be used as a paradigm for an equitable and just space? Through this thesis, I have sought to answer this question in the position of an activist and white ally. In line with Craig Wilkins argument, as much as white designers and architects share responsibility for the past, they are also liable for future projects that rectify spatial marginalization through equitable and inclusive design.

As the research makes palpable the impact the built environment has had on Black and Latinx communities, my intent is to turn the table and illustrate how the defining elements of Hip-Hop culture can influence a design rooted in equity and social
justice. Inspired by the early days of Hip-Hop and work of Craig Wilkins, Sekou Cooke, etc., this thesis proposes the renovation of a vacant industrial building in Springfield, Massachusetts into a Hip-Hop Youth Center that enables and celebrates youth with creative endeavors and entrepreneurship while also creating space that welcomes community use and participation.
CHAPTER 1
THE SPATIAL HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF HIP-HOP

Hip-Hop culture emerged from Black and Latinx youth living in the inner cities of New York. As Murry Forman (2002) describes in The ‘Hood Comes FIRST: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop, “the term “inner city” implicitly refers to racialized images or racially inflected conditions of danger, violence, and depravity that can be contrasted with the ideals of calm, safety, and security attributed to nonurban or suburban space” (p.43). Illustrated, these racialized images include poverty and welfare, gangs, substance abuse, etc., that were promoted by white politicians and policy analysis during the twentieth century (Forman, 2002; Appiah & Gates, 2004).

The narrative of this locale is not coincidental. Instead, it is a product of systemic racism implemented through the policies and practices of redlining and segregation, blight removal (also viewed as slum clearance and urban renewal), and white flight. As said in Reconstruction: Architecture and Blackness in America,

Race, the construct that underwrites white supremacy and propagates the subordination of the other, was spatialized from the beginnings of the US, and, as a consequence, its forms are continually renewed and strengthened by… inescapable cycles of false assimilation and impoverishment…. The so-called “inner city” was but a refraction of wide-spread social ills and the condensation of racial tensions found outside of cities. Ghettoization was not a place but a deliberate process (Anderson & Wilson, 2021, p.19).

1.1 The Emergence of ‘White Fear’

During the Reconstruction era following the Civil War, many newly liberated enslaved persons migrated from the South to escape remnant violence of the Confederacy. Across the nation, Black middle-class communities were established with Black-owned businesses, newspapers, churches, and literary societies (Rothstein, 2017).
African Americans now had the opportunity to enroll in education which resulted in the founding of 4000 schools and historically Black universities (Appiah & Gates, 2004). Additionally, African Americans could participate in government through voting, and held positions in political office working alongside or even managing white workers (Rothstein, 2017; Appiah & Gates, 2004). However, the achievement of African Americans ignited fear among white politicians who believed that capitalism was under threat by the disruption to the social stratification that had benefited white society through the free labor of Black bodies.

1.2 Redlining & Segregation

Redlining and segregation emerged after Reconstruction as a method to generate white fear of African Americans in order to maintain the social stratification of Antebellum that declared Black bodies as unequal to white counterparts. In *The Color of Law*, Richard Rothstein illustrates an early form of segregation that took place in government offices under President Woodrow Wilson’s administration. He describes, “Curtains were installed to separate black and white clerical workers. Separate cafeterias were created. Separate basement toilets were constructed for African Americans. Black supervisors were demoted to ensure that no African American oversaw a white employee” (Rothstein, 2017, p.43).

This method of segregation, observed on an architectural scale, was also replicated extensively through urban and regional planning. Zoning ordinances were established to prevent African Americans from settling in predominantly white neighborhoods and to protect white neighborhoods from deteriorating (Rothstein, 2017). Several cities adopted racial zoning ordinances that restricted African Americans from
purchasing homes in white neighborhoods. However, in the 1917 case of *Buchanan v. Warley*, the Supreme Court “ruled that racial zoning ordinances interfered with the right of a property owner to sell to whomever he pleased” (Rothstein, 2017, p.45). This ruling did not put an end to segregation but rather, it forced local governments and city planners to adopt alternative methods to institutionalize racial zoning in an inconspicuous manner through regulation of building height, use, area and location (Silver, 1997). For example, in St. Louis, Missouri, planning engineer, Harland Bartholomew was given the task to categorize properties as “single family residential”, “multifamily residential”, “commercial”, or “industrial” (Rothstein, 2017). This prevented African Americans from purchasing homes in “single family residential” neighborhoods that were populated with homes carrying deeds that prohibited ownership by African Americans. During the nineteenth century, property deeds adopted restrictive covenants, or provisions that prohibited the sale of such property to African Americans and Irish immigrants. Such restrictive covenants were even used to evict African Americans from their own homes (Rothstein, 2017).

Zoning ordinances of the early twentieth century established the foundation for segregation that would encumber African Americans from purchasing single family homes and impose ghettoization. However, this tactic alone was not enough. During the 1910s and into the 1920s, the federal government campaigned for white Americans to become homeowners to stimulate the capitalist system and contest Russian Communism (Rothstein, 2017). In truth, this campaign was a ploy to authenticate the racial divide between what would become white suburban America and Black urban ghettos as African Americans, who were obstructed from purchasing single family homes, were
forced into overpopulated urban environments while their white counterparts were encouraged to relocate from the inner city to the suburbs.

However, the onset of the Great Depression following World War I made it difficult for the middle and working class to purchase homes. In response, the Public Works Administration (PWA) under President Franklin D. Roosevelt adopted the New Deal in 1933 that was designed to support existing and new white homeowners to finance their homes (Rothstein, 2017). As part of the New Deal, the PWA organized the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HLOC) that instated mortgages with scheduled repayments that had a low interest rate. Before granting this mortgage, the HOLC hired real estate agents to appraise the condition of the property using “residential security maps” that categorized neighborhoods based on the level of “risk” they presented to mortgage lenders (Herscher, 2020). An area was deemed “high risk” by the presence of African Americans and the maps indicated this with a red marking (hence the term ‘redlining’). Needless to state, mortgages were denied to African Americans as African Americans could only obtain homes in the areas that their presence deemed high risk. The Federal Housing Administration, created in 1934, had a similar approach to appraising properties based on the presence of African Americans and would selectively grant mortgages under the clause of “whites only” (Rothstein, 2017).

In the years during and following World War II, the Federal Housing Administration took further action to enact segregation by sanctioning the creation of white suburban America. At this time, mass-production builders could receive bank loans for nearly the full cost of subdivisions. These builders could submit drawings and specifications to the Federal Housing Agency for approval of proposed subdivision
projects. If approved, they could then negotiate low-interest loans from banks without an appraisal (Rothstein, 2017). However, as Rothstein (2017) explains,

…the plans reviewed by the FHA included the approved construction materials, the design specifications, the proposed sale price, the neighborhood’s zoning restrictions (for example, a prohibition of industry or commercial development), and a commitment not to sell to African Americans. The FHA even withheld approval if the presence of African Americans in nearby neighborhoods threatened integration (p.71).

Thus, white suburban America was established with the abiding intention to exclude African Americans from inhabiting. Restrictive covenants were enacted in the form of contracts between neighbors that forbade the future sale to African Americans. In addition, many subdivision developers went as far as to establish community associations that required membership as a prerequisite of purchase, yet membership was denied to African Americans (Rothstein, 2017).

1.3 Racial Segregation Through Public Housing

Racial segregation through federally funded housing began during World War I as defense housing for military workers and their families. This housing applied to white workers exclusively, forcing African American workers and their families into overpopulated slums that were often located further from work sites (Rothstein, 2017). By the 1930s and through the 1940s, defense housing set a precedent for segregated public housing. In addition to support for white homeowners, the New Deal aimed to develop the nation’s first public housing for civilians. This was in response to the shortage of available housing to middle- and working-class families during the Great Depression due to the reallocation of resources to defense during the war (Rothstein, 2017). However, the New Deal followed a “neighborhood composition rule” that
permitted delineated racial zoning that, prior to, could only be insinuated through local zoning ordinances and restrictive covenants. Under this rule, many public housing projects were to be segregated and occupant race was to be determined by the racial composition of the project site. In response, city planners promoted racial zoning that forced African Americans into ghettos. According to Richard Rothstein (2017),

The PWA designated many integrated neighborhoods as either white or black and then used public housing to make the designation come true - by installing whites-only projects in mixed neighborhoods it deemed “white” and blacks-only projects in those deemed “colored” (p.21).

After World War II, the Fair Housing Administration, along with the newly established Veterans Administration, provided mortgages for returning servicemen to acquire homes in white suburbs. As a result, white families began to leave public housing, creating vacancies in white public housing that African Americans could then have the opportunity to inhabit. However, to avoid the risk of integration, cities began to approve Black public housing exclusively or reject projects entirely (Rothstein, 2017).

Following Roosevelt's death, Harry Truman advocated for desegregating public housing, yet conservative republicans would not concede to the notion. Ultimately, it became a decision between continuing racially segregated public housing or to end the public housing program altogether. As Rothstein (2017) writes, “the Senate and House rejected the proposed integration amendments, and the 1949 Housing Act was adopted, permitting local authorities to continue to design separate public housing projects for blacks and whites or to segregate blacks and whites within projects” (p.31). As a result of the 1949 Housing Act, segregated high rises, or “high rise ghettos”, were constructed in cities throughout the nation. However,
with segregated projects, African Americans became more removed from mainstream society than ever, packed into high-rise ghettos where community life was impossible, where access to jobs and social services was more difficult, and where supervision of adolescents and even a semblance of community policing was impractical (Rothstein, 2017 pp.31-32).

In response to this, some housing authorities adopted scatter site projects as opposed to high rises yet, white-occupied developments continued to have better facilities, maintenance, and services. It should also be said that because of zoning ordinances that prioritized the quality of white neighborhoods, toxic waste and other industrial facilities were placed in African American neighborhoods, creating harmful environments that whites believed, by association with African Americans, would be brought to their neighborhoods if integration took place (Rothstein, 2017). Rothstein summarizes the paradox of the projects for Black tenants writing,

> The condition of public projects rapidly deteriorated, partly because housing authority maintenance workers and their families had to leave the buildings where they worked when their wages made them ineligible to live there, and partly because the loss of middle-class rents resulted in inadequate maintenance budgets. The federal government had required public housing to be made available only to families who needed substantial subsidies, while the same government declined places to live. The loss of middle-class tenants also removed a constituency that had possessed the political strength to insist on adequate funds for their projects’ upkeep and amenities. As a result, the conditions and then the reputation of public housing collapsed (Rothstein, 2017, p.37).

He continues to quote President Nixon who claimed that public housing developments were “monstrous, depressing places - rundown, overcrowded, crime-ridden” (Rothstein, 2017, p.37).

### 1.4 Blight Removal, Slum Clearance, and Urban Renewal

Simultaneous with the development of segregated public housing and preclusion of African Americans from residential neighborhoods; Black members of society faced
displacement through the intervention of “blight” removal (also understood as “slum clearance” and “urban renewal”). “Blighted” properties are considered to be vacant or deteriorated; however, in “Black and Blight” from *Race and Modern Architecture*, Andrew Herscher (2020) acknowledges that “blighted” properties have historically been owned or inhabited by people of color. During the early part of the twentieth century until the 1960s, urban planners and real estate developers deemed “blighted” neighborhoods as unsanitary, creating a public health crisis that required intervention. This went so far as to label “blight” as a “disease”, that would impact property values; an argument that alarmed white folks (Herscher, 2020). Just as whites feared that African Americans would bring waste facilities to white neighborhoods through integration, they feared the associated infection of blight.

Circulating publications encouraged the narrative that charged African Americans as the source of blight. One such was the “Concentric Zone Model of Urban Growth” by Ernest Burgess that modeled the city as a series of concentric zones representing nationality, race, and class (Herscher., 2020, p.298). The inner zone, labeled the “zone of transition” was considered the area of “blight” or “slum” that could be problematic to the outer zones. Herscher (2020) quotes Richard M. Hurd, author of *Principles of City Land Values*, stating, “Property values have been greatly depreciated by having a single-colored family settle on a street for merely occupied exclusively by white residents…. Segregation of ne***** seems to be the reasonable solution to the problem, no matter how unpleasant or objectionable the thought may be to colored residents” (p.297). This rationale, in addition to the consideration of blight as a disease, allowed white developers,
investors and owners to capitalize on Black owned property by using public resources to condemn the property and reallocate it for white use or ownership (Herscher, 2020).

Figure 2: Ernest Burgess, Concentric Zone Model of Urban Growth (Herscher, 2020)

Highway development became another tactic for blight removal. Between the 1930s into the 1960s, organizations such as the American Concrete Institute, the American Road Builders Association, and the Urban Land Institute, advocated for the construction of expressways as a “solution” to blight by creating space for interstate routes through slum clearance (Rothstein, 2017). It was also argued that highway development would ease transportation for white folks traveling from the suburbs and
into the business districts of the city without risk of interference with Black and Brown populations (Rothstein, 2017).

Highway development began during the Eisenhower administration. As a result, many African Americans were displaced as homes were obliterated and rarely replaced. As Charles Lamb (2005) writes in *Housing Segregation in Suburban American since 1960 Presidential and Judicial Politics*, “from their (African Americans) vantage point, urban renewal meant black removal. Their neighborhoods were subjected to the daily upheavals of redevelopment, and their lives were frequently uprooted. One study estimates that the combined effect of urban renewal and highway development displaced more than two million people from their homes over the eight-year period from 1964 to 1972” (p.14).

Displacement was not the only consequence of highway development faced by African Americans, but jobs were also affected. Construction of highways encouraged large populations to relocate to suburban districts and businesses and industries follow suit (Lamb, 2005). This, in addition to restrictive covenants, zoning ordinances, mortgage exclusion and the lack of affordable housing in the suburbs, forced many African Americans to resign from employment opportunities or expend time and money commuting to work (Lamb, 2005).

Figuratively speaking, where highway development did not displace African Americans, it became the physical redline that segregated white neighborhoods from Black neighborhoods. As Rothstein (2017) writes, “the FHA favored mortgages in areas where boulevards or highways served to separate African American families from whites, stating that ‘(n)atural or artificially established barrier will prove effective in protecting a
neighborhood and the locations within it from adverse influences...includ[ing] prevention of the infiltration of...lower class occupancy, and inharmonious racial groups’ (p.65).

1.5 White Flight

Similar to how real estate developers capitalized on the argument of “blight” to seize Black owned property, real estate offices used this argument to monopolize the residential market. Studies during the mid-twentieth century determined that African Americans who sought to vacate the inner city were willing to pay more than white folks for similar housing (Rothstein, 2017). That is to say, African Americans had no other choice as they were denied mortgages as a result of redlining and prohibited from purchasing homes in the suburbs. However, real estate agents exploited this, and white fear, through a scheme referred to as “blockbusting”. As Rothstein (2017) explains, “when a neighborhood first integrated, property values increased because of African Americans’ need to pay higher prices for homes than whites. But then property values fell once speculators had panicked enough white homeowners into selling at deep discounts” (p.96). Real estate agents went so far as to hire African Americans to pose in white areas in order to create havoc and fear that would cause whites to flee (Rothstein, 2017).

Rothstein quotes Beryl Satter, the daughter of a Chicago attorney who so candidly described the reality that blockbusting imposed on African America neighborhoods:

Because black contract buyers knew how easily they could lose their homes, they struggled to make their inflated monthly payments. Husbands and wives both worked double shifts. They neglected basic maintenance. They subdivided their apartments, crammed in extra tenants...Overcrowded neighborhoods meant overcrowded schools; in Chicago, officials responded by “double-shifting” the students… Children were deprived of a full day of schooling and left to fend for themselves in the after-school hours. These conditions helped fuel the rise of gangs… In the end, whites fled these
neighborhoods...But black contact buyers did not have the option of leaving a declining neighborhood before their properties were paid in full… (Rothstein, 2017, p.97)

1.6 The “inner city”, the “ghetto”, the South Bronx

As Peter L’Official (2020) describes in *Urban Legends: The South Bronx in Representation and Ruin*, “the South Bronx was simultaneously the “inner city”, the “ghetto”, a “no-man’s land”, a notoriously “blighted” area of the city, and the nation’s most famous “slum” all at once (p.21). To the same degree that expressways deterred middle-class whites from interacting with “the inner city”, L’ Official equates this narrative as a euphemism that obscured the reality of ghettoization for white people (L’Official, 2020). That is, this narrative deceitfully associated ghettoization with African Americans rather than as a product segregation and disinvestment. However, by the mid-1970s, the South Bronx faced the additional onset of fires burning through neighborhoods, producing a landscape of abandoned and burnt-out apartment buildings (L’Official, 2020).

*Figure 3: Image by Joe Conzo Jr. (1980) of Charlotte Street, Bronx*
According to Marshall Berman (2016) in “New York City: Seeing Through the Ruins” in *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas*, landlords in the South Bronx were unable to maintain their properties as tenants faced unemployment and redlining prohibited obtaining loans. With little choice, landlords set their properties ablaze to recoup insurance money. Simultaneously, local fire stations were closed as the city approached a financial deficit. Former tenants moved in with family in public housing projects, as future development of assisted housing halted during the Nixon Administration. Despite the persistent need for housing, priority was given to concealing disrepair. Abandon buildings were masked in decals to obstruct the image of decay and present a false image to whites passing by on the Cross Bronx Expressway; a highway designed by Robert Moses that displaced thousands within the Bronx during the 1950s.
(L’ Official, 2020; Berman, 2016). Meanwhile, throughout the streets of the South Bronx, the infamous Grandmaster Caz of the Cold Crush Brothers recalls:

There were a lot of empty lots with a lot of junk in them, rubble from buildings. These places were our playgrounds. There were old mattresses piled up, and we would go and play trampoline on the mattresses…When things are at their worst, people start trying to look for alternatives (Berman, 2016, p.123).

*Figure 5*: Cartography by Molly Roy of Historical Hip-Hop Sites Superimposed onto Mapping of Burnt-Out Buildings (Roy, 2016, pp.120-121)

Within the devastation and false facades, a young generation of African Americans and Latinx in the South Bronx gave rise to a culture that would confront the consequences of spatial racism through innovation and collectivity. As photographer Joe Conzo states, “it was that boiling point to just give birth to something from nothing. And out of all that turbulence and upheaval was the birth of Hip-Hop” (Bascunan & Wheeler, D, 2016).
CHAPTER 2
THE FOUNDATIONS OF HIP-HOP

*The Message*

Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don’t care
I can’t take the smell, can’t take the noise
Got no money to move out, I guess, I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away, but I couldn’t get far
‘Cause the man with the tow-truck repossessed my car

Don’t push me
‘Cause I’m close to the edge
I’m tryin’ not to lose my head
Ah-huh-huh-huh
It’s like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under
It’s like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under
…

A child is born, with no state of mind
Blind to the ways of mankind
God is smilin’ on you, but he’s frownin too
Because only God knows, what you’ll go through
You’ll grow in the ghetto, livin’ second rate
And your eyes will sing a song of deep hate
The places you play and where you stay
Looks like one great big alleyway

…

Don’t push me
‘Cause I’m close to the edge
I’m tryin’ not to lose my head...

Lyrics from *The Message* [single] (Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five, 1982)
2.1 Hip-Hop’s First Party

The origins of Hip-Hop can be traced to the rec room of 1520 Sedgwick Avenue; a public housing project designed by Robert Moses in the South Bronx. It was here where DJ Kool Herc held Hip-Hop’s first party on August 11, 1973. He describes a modest party of forty to fifty people; however, attendees described a crowded atmosphere that was dark and smokey; music echoing, bass rumbling and b-boys dancing (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016).

What characterized this event as Hip-Hop’s first party was the type of music played and the method for how it was played. At the time, disco echoed through the clubs in New York City but in the Bronx, DJ Kool Herc was experimenting with funk and soul records that departed from mainstream music and connected to African American traditions (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). However, Herc did not simply play the record from beginning to end but instead, isolated the “break” or moment of a song in which only the drum or base could be heard. He developed a technique to extend the break referred to as “the merry-go-round” that involved duplicate records to be played consecutively (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). In essence, the break of the first record would play, the tone arm would be raised, then the same break on the second vinyl would play and this pattern repeated, creating a continuation of the break (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). In the foreground to Kool Herc’s breaks, another man by the name of Coke La Rock was on the mic, hyping the crowd by calling names and spitting amateur rhymes, giving him the title of Hip-Hop’s original MC, or master of ceremonies (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016).
While Kool Herc developed a technique that would define the sound of Hip-Hop; partygoers developed a new dance form that would characterize the culture. During the breaks of each song, the crowd organized into a cypher: a circular formation around an informal stage or spotlight inside which selected dancers would take the floor. These dancers became known as “break-dancers”, “b-boys” and “b-girls” respectfully, and the ace dancer from a particular neighborhood was referred to as a crew’s “A1” (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016).

2.2 Building Community

According to Martin Lamotte (2014) in “Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-Hop and Resistance in the City”, Hip-Hop emerged from two practices; block parties and mixtapes. As discussed previously, segregation and the departure of the white middle class from the inner city resulted in an influx of street organizations that competed for territory and respect. At the time, the Savage Skulls, a Puerto Rican affiliated group, and

Figure 6: Image by Joe Conzo Jr. (1982) of Unidentified dancer at the Roseland Ballroom
the Black Spades, predominately African American, were the most notorious of the
Bronx as having their own social normative and culture and quotes DJ Grandmaster
Flash, who stated:

We had territories. It was like, Kool Herc had the West Side. Bam had
Bronx River. DJ Breakout has way uptown past Gun Hill. Myself, my area was
like 138th Street, Cypress Avenue, up to Gun Hill, so that we all had our territories
and we all had to respect each other (pp.69-71).

In 1971, several of the South Bronx’s gangs including the Savage Skulls and
Black Spades came to a ceasefire (Lamotte, 2014). This truce was in part because of the
efforts of Afrika Bambaataa (Bam); a DJ from the Bronx River housing projects and
member of the Blake Spades. As a DJ, Bam was known for experimenting with disco,
rock, soul and punk (Watkins, 2005). However, he is most famous for the formation of
the Zulu Nation; a Hip-Hop awareness group that mobilized gangs under the premise of
“peace, unity, love and having fun” (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). The Zulu Nation
organized evening block parties as well as weekly meetings to discuss methods to uproot
the presence of drugs and violence (Watkins, 2005). Lamotte (2014) further explains that
block parties became an alternative method to violence for claiming territory through the
four elements of Hip-Hop; via the DJ or MC that dictated the music heard or by way of
the neighborhood A1s competing in a cypher or, through tagging streetcars and buildings
with graffiti. Melle Mel of the Furious Five reflects on this time stating,

We were coming out of a gang era at the time. In the Bronx there were the
Black Pearls, the Spades, the Roman Kings. But when the music started, it
brought everybody out of the gang vibe and into a music vibe. Looking at it now,
it was a beautiful thing; it saved a lot of lives (Berman, 2016, p.128).
However, Bam introduced a fifth element, knowledge, to the Zulu Nation that encouraged members to learn of and reconnect with their African heritage. As rapper Shad states in the Netflix series, *Hip Hop Evolution*, “Herc forged the foundations of Hip-Hop, and Bam built a community around it” (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016).

### 2.3 Something from Nothing

Hip-Hop is often considered as a culture that arose as “something from nothing” (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). In the South Bronx during the early 1970s, a young DJ by the name of Grandmaster Flash affirmed this sentiment. Having both an interest in electronics and rotating objects, young Grandmaster Flash searched the streets and back alleys of the Bronx for turntables, receivers, capacitors, resistors, etc. (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). Using a collection of found items, including speakers from an abandoned car, he engineered his own sound system. Before Grandmaster Flash, DJs transitioned between vinyls through a method of blending by tuning out of one song and into another, or via Herc’s approach of lifting the tone arm on one vinyl and placing it on another. However, Grandmaster Flash felt that these methods created an inconsistent tune as the tone arm could never be replaced in the exact previous location. He termed this the “disarray unison factor” (Watkins, 2005). As he explained in the documentary *Hip Hop Evolution*, Grandmaster Flash discovered that he could stop the vinyl with his finger and release it without disturbing the tone arm (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). Using a crayon, he indicated directly on the vinyl the moment at which the break began, traced the break and counted the number of revolutions until it ended. Once over, Flash placed his finger on the beginning mark, spun the record back the number of revolutions he counted and released again. This technique became known as the “Quick Mix Theory” that laid the
groundwork for techniques instrumented by future DJs of Hip-Hop (Bascunan & Wheeler, 2016). As Watkins (2005) writes, “Like many in hip hop’s first wave of innovators, Flash created a way out of no way and, in the process, transformed DJing into a serious art form and a lucrative profession” (p.28).

This relates to what Lamotte argues is the second practice of Hip-Hop: the mixtape. As he explains in Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-hop and Resistance in the City, mixtapes were Hip-Hop’s original medium that DJs recorded their own mixes on to from sampled records. Before Hip-Hop was commercialized in the 1980s, mixtapes were distributed on street corners and in the back of record stores. Lamotte (2014) states, “the notion of self-production was crucial to the early hip-hop cultural movement” (p.689) and quotes George C. Maher of the University of California, Berkley who wrote that the “culture found its subsistence, with the idea of self-sufficiency and self-production” (p.689).

2.4 The Message

Lamotte (2014) contends that “hip-hop can be seen as an unconventional form of activism… for urban youth up against marginalization, isolation, and exclusion” (pp.686,688). He explains this by describing Hip-Hop’s inherent place making and appropriation of passive space to claim presence within the city. DJ Grandwizzard Theodore illustrates this recalling,

“I lived here in the Bronx, so hip-hop was always around me. When I’d go to the train station I’d see the graffiti on the trains. When I’d go to the park I’d see the b-boys b-boying. As far as the MCs, there were always guys on the corner harmonizing and freestyling. And then once I saw my brother Mean Gene and Grandmaster Flash with two turntables and a mixer – that’s when I realized I was born into a culture we call hip-hop. Back then [the parties we threw] were just
called jams. We would go into abandoned buildings and do jams and charge people $1.99 or 99 cents to come in” (Berman, 2016, p.126).

However, the 1980s brought further meaning to place making with the debut of *The Message*. It should be said that until the 1980s, the DJ was the prominent figure of Hip-Hop who typically assumed the role of both the DJ and the MC. As DJing techniques developed, MCs, such as Coke La Rock, were brought on to perform call-and-response and simple rhymes to hype the crowd (Forman, 2002). By the 1980s, Hip-Hop groups formed, and lyrics evolved to bring the MC center stage. On July 24, 1892, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released *The Message*, a song that spearheaded a new form of conscious rap that departed from Hip-Hop’s party aesthetic (Forman, 2002; Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, 1982). Forman quotes co-writer of the song, Melle Mel who said, “what started as a party movement became a protest movement, and the rhymes followed suit” (Forman, 2002, p.83).

This chapter is introduced with lyrics from the recording that illustrate the affliction of ghettoization, likening the environment to a jungle. *The Message* introduced a rap form that was critical of the environment and the social politics of the inner city or ghetto. Conscious rap discerned the “truth” of the inner city that was concealed to outsiders (whites) behind euphemisms and decals (Forman, 2002; L’ Official, 2020). Rap “advances the idea that outsiders cannot expect to see and know what lies behind New York’s urban façade” (Forman, 2002, p.100).
CHAPTER 3
HIP-HOP TO ARCHITECTURE, SPACE, AND PLACE

The discourse for an architecture influenced by Hip-Hop began during the 1990s. According to Sekou Cooke (2021) in *Hip-Hop Architecture*, Hip-Hop Architecture made its first public appearance at the 1998 conference for the National Organization of Minority Architects in Washington, DC where graduate students Amanda Williams, Andres L. Hernandez and Brian C. West presented a vision for an “unapologetic” Black architecture. It was here where Hernandez introduced the “10 Points of Hiphopitecture” as paraphrased below:

1. Hiphopitecture must represent the veracity of the urban experience, and account for the diversity of these realities.
2. “Hiphopitecture must allow and account for the evolution and revolution of the communities within which it occurs…”
3. It must build on existing foundations, accounting for the histories and perspectives of the community it serves.
4. It must not be controlled by influences other than from the culture it occurs within.
5. Hiphopitecture carries a social responsibility.
6. The practice is a collective, not competitive, process.
7. It must be educational and functional, primarily to marginalized communities.
8. “Hiphopitecture must be accessible to the communities in which it occurs…”
9. The process and product must reflect the communities in which it exists.
10. “Hiphopitecture must occur by any means necessary - it must be”.

(Cooke, 2021, pp.045-046).

With these ten points of Hiphopitecture, Hernandez set the stage for a paradigm of Architecture that, as architect and educator Craig Wilkins argues, “should just be architecture” (Cooke, 2021, p. 057). In the *Aesthetics of Equity*, Wilkins (2007) proposes Hip-Hop as a model for an activist architecture; an architecture that is,
a way of perceiving, teaching, and practicing architecture that derives from, is relevant to, and vigorously engages in the community in which the architecture is placed. It is a process of design and development in which communal sustainability and environmental equity influence the physical growth and economic direction of the built environment (pp.173-174).

The significance of Hip-Hop is that it directly speaks to the African diaspora. Wilkins (2007) explains that the nature of Hip-Hop with respect to rhythm, flow and repetition is derived from African origins; that the use of storytelling, and call-and-response arises from African, Caribbean, and American influences; and the lyrical content that reflects oppression and the fight for justice is reflective of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. I argue this understanding is paramount to conceiving Hip-Hop Architecture.

3.1 Why Hip-Hop Architecture?

Craig Wilkins (2007) quotes Whitney Young who stated that architects, “share the responsibility for the mess we are in...in terms of the white noose around the central city. We didn’t just suddenly get this way. It was carefully planned’ (p.25). Following with, “planned and executed! As people whose job is to shape space, to ignore this reality is to perpetuate it” (p.29).

It is not only marginalization that is perpetuated, but the racist ideals that prohibited people of color from freedom. In The Aesthetics of Equity, Wilkins (2007) dissects philosopher John Locke’s theories of property and concludes that property is “essential to life and freedom” (p.197). Yet, as discussed in chapter one, African Americans were deprived from owning property and thus the right to freedom and the repercussions are still experienced by Black and Brown communities today. Therefore, it is imperative to develop an activist architecture that departs from traditional Eurocentric practice, such as those that have been instrumental to the oppression of people of color
and one that advocates for Black claim to space and property. Hip-Hop is the ideal paradigm for an architecture that is relevant to African American communities as “hip hop is – the voice from the ‘hood, a voice that has made itself heard from the ‘hood and made the force. The very existence – of hip hop breaks down many of those sorry, tired-ass cliches ‘bout the (inner) city” (Wilkins, 2007, p.198).

3.2 The Parallels of Hip-Hop to Architecture

From “Hip-Hop Architect”, Michael Ford, “Hip-Hop (culture) is a reflection of the built environment” (Lau, 2020). In an interview with Wanda Lau, Ford equates this to the practice of post occupancy evaluation, a practice of architecture in which function and occupant comfort are analyzed after a building has been inhabited. Ford states, “Hip-Hop artists...are talking about their environment...not only through music, but through the other elements of hip hop as well” (Lau, 2020). These elements are the MC (emcee/Master of Ceremonies), the DJ (deejay/Disk Jockey), breakdancing and graffiti. Since the 1990s, academics, architects and designers have noted the parallels between these elements and Architecture.

Let's break it down…

3.2.1 the DJ

As discussed in Chapter II, the DJ or Disc Jockey, innovated sound systems and techniques of sampling records to produce an original mix. Sampling is “the digitally enhanced process of transferring a sound, or series of sounds (the sample) from one source to another source” (Wilkins, 2007, p.185). As Sekou Cooke (2021) states, “DJs and producers continually decode, recode, elevate, and amplify lost or forgotten pieces of musical history. The parallel attitudes for architects engaged in renovation, restoration, or
adaptive reuse projects are implicit” (p.048). Both Wilkins and Cooke consider sampling as an archetype for renovation and reclaiming of space by giving new purpose and significance to abandoned building. However, in addition to the re-use or re-adaptation of space, there is a parallel in methods between constructing sound systems and physical space. Let’s return to the image of a young Grandmaster Flash, constructing his own sound system and turntable from found materials in alleyways and abandoned cars. Cooke (2021) acknowledges DJs, like Grandmaster Flash, as “pioneering hackers of phonographic technology” (p.048). He likens this to the architectural pursuit “in creating new modes of practice through the assimilation of available material and fabrication technology” (Cooke, 2021, p.048).

3.2.2 the MC

In *Hip Hop Architecture*, Sekou Cooke (2021) continues to discuss the relevance of the “rapper” (the MC) to architecture stating, “the structural relationships between the rhymes within a verse and the beats within its accompanying music presents a likely entry point into architecturalization of rap” (p.049). Cooke recognizes that rap is not merely a rhyming scheme, but rather an intellectual composition that is to be interpreted. The deriving of rap’s linguistic framework is correlated to conceptual diagraming within the architectural process of design. That is, both rap and architecture are comprised of symbolic meaning and messages. Ideas and histories relating to Black identity, oppression, relationships, segregated space, etc. are frequent themes in rap music that transform a song into a message or narrative. This is similar to how an architect’s conceptual idea influences the overall design of a building; transforming it from a physical space to an architecture with historical and social significance.
3.2.3 Breakdance

Breakdancing took place within the cypher; a performative space created by the organization of partygoers into a circular form around a central dancefloor. It was within the cypher that the A1s competed for territory during the DJ’s extended breaks, appropriating dance forms that can be traced to African and Afro-Caribbean traditions (Cooke, 2021). Beyond the construction of a performative architecture, Cooke argues that the gestural forms exhibited through movement can influence an architectural and structural form – that if we were to take stills of a performance, that structural forms could be conceptualized from these held positions (Cooke, 2021).

3.2.4 Graffiti

Graffiti has an obvious relationship to architecture as a visual aesthetic that utilizes the built environment as a canvas for this art. Cooke (2021) considers this element to be most similar to breakdance as both appropriate public spaces by introducing a new use or significance. Cooke quotes Jeff Change who argues that graffiti is a form of “reverse colonization” in that graffiti writers found freedom through tagging of property; a sort of reclaiming of space by making one’s presence known (Cooke, 2021, p.052-053).

3.3 Defining Hip-Hop Architecture

As Cooke and Ford have noted the parallels between architecture and the elements of Hip-Hop, Craig Wilkins recognizes a further correlation to how music and space are defined. He claims, “that music creates, and is created by, a distinct social context… and memory…that music experience and memory play an important role in constructing specific identities and communities” (Wilkins, 2007, p.182). By this, Wilkins infers that music has a spatial context – how and where it is made and where we
hear it. He states that Hip-Hop is a product of sampling and is typically produced in the studio. With regards to memory, Wilkins is stating that there is an experience and time associated with music and both the social context and memory influence how one experiences and listens – creating community. The memory associated with Hip-Hop is its connection to the African diaspora and the experience is one that creates space for Black communities to reclaim their identity and subjectivity (Wilkins, 2007). Similarly, Wilkins (2007) considers Henri Lefebvre’s spatial theory and deduces “that space is produced by bodies (people) interacting. The interaction is specific to a time, place, and social formation, but is also historical – it has a memory, a past” (p.184). Wilkins conquers a direct correlation to music and space and recognizes that the introduction of Hip-Hop to architecture manifests a space that challenges Eurocentric practices through acknowledgement of the memories associated with the African diaspora and through the act of reclaiming space. He (Wilkins, 2007) defines four principles of Hip-Hop Architecture as followed:

1. It is palimpsestic or “the rewrite”. Consider the abandoned buildings in the South Bronx that became sites stereotyped as violent and impoverished; these locations have the opportunity to be reappropriated as Hip-Hop spaces that are rooted in empowerment by reclaiming the stereotypical narrative of the inner city

2. It is anthropomorphic or “body style”. As opposed to the traditional western approach that replicates religious expressions through design, Hip-Hop architecture is concerned with the human body in space and is specifically representative of Black bodies.
3. It is performatve – it is a place that encourages movement.

4. Finally, it is adaptive – it encourages continual transformation of materials and space and allows for user intervention.

3.4 Space and Place

In *The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space and Place in Hip Hop*, Murry Forman (2002) describes a road trip along the east coast, listening to local and regional radio stations and noting that as he approached major cities, at least one urban station featuring funk, R&B, reggae and Hip-Hop came into tune. These urban stations were categorized as “other” in comparison to the mainstream stations that featured pop, rock, country, etc. and who blatantly denounced the inclusion of rap on their stations. Forman (2002) states, “this “othering” of funk and rap generally parallels the cultural and geographical ghettoization of black communities in American cities” (p.xvi). Essentially, a segregated sonic landscape, or as Forman refers to as a “soundscape” is formed, mimicking the demographics of the American landscape.

Additionally, Forman observes the frequent reference to place in rap lyrics, explicitly naming streets, neighborhoods, area codes, etc.. For example, rapper J. Cole often reference the ‘Ville, or Fayetteville, North Carolina where he grew up; titling his most famous album, *2014 Forest Hills Drive*, after the street he grew up on; and rappers Jay Z and Biggie are emblematic of Brooklyn, which is heard on the soundtrack, *Brooklyn’s Finest* (J. Cole, 2014; JAY-Z & The Notorious B.I.G, 1996). Forman (2002) explains that the radio host of urban broadcasting stations and audience callers take part in the “shout outs” to place and by doing so, “reinforce community ties” (p.xvi).
Forman also recognizes this engagement with place as an adaptation of a town meeting, quoting Mark Anthony Neal on the subject. In a similar vein to Michael Ford’s correlation of a post occupancy study, Forman (2002) states,

throughout the 1980s and 1990s… the specificity of reference to urban locale has become increasingly evident as rappers illustrate their awareness that the city is not an evenly structured space but one that is prone to a tangible unevenness, with different places constituting distinct zones of activity (p.xviii).

In 1994, Nasir Jones, known globally as rapper Nas, released what would be hallmarked as one of the greatest albums of all time, Illmatic. In the 2014 Netflix special Nas: Time is Illmatic, Nas and others reflect on the racial history that led to the formation of “the projects” and the resulting emergence of a drug economy due to the capitalist market relocating to the suburbs through white flight. Nas, who is from Queens, New York, grew up witnessing the aftereffects of ghettoization; poverty, the consumption and distribution of narcotics, police intrusion and loss of life. Reflecting on Illmatic, Nas explains,

I was trying to make you experience my life. I wanted you to look at Hip-Hop differently. I wanted you to feel that Hip-Hop was changing and becoming something more real. I gave you what the streets felt like, what is sounded like, tasted like, smelt like all in that album. And I tried to capture it like no one else could (One9, 2014).

Illmatic is recognized in the Hip-Hop community as a transformative work that brought awareness and validity to life in the inner city.

3.5 What Does it Look Like?

In the Aesthetics of Equity, Wilkins (2007) voices frustration with this question, stating, “If you have reached this portion of the book and have yet to divine that this is a question I do not feel compelled to answer, both you and I will be disappointed” (p.192-193). To put simply, Wilkins conveys less concern for the end-all image of architecture and instead, is advocating for more consideration to be given to the implication of
architecture on people and place; and the understanding of what architecture does and how it does this. He shares that in his experience, the architectural field expresses a domineering approach with subjects regarding marginalized communities; claiming a “show me and then I’ll determine its validity” attitude (Wilkins, 2007, p.192-193). Yet, the methodologies and end-all cannot, and he argues, should not be predetermined.

Wilkins does indicate a conceivable aesthetic stating, “hip hop architecture creates spaces that are constructed by the intersections of mobile elements – people (bodies) – but often includes objects of material culture (debris, monster speakers, and cars) as well” (Wilkins, 2007, p.187). However, it is my understanding from the works of Wilkins, Cooke, Ford, Hernandez, et. al, that Hip-Hop architecture prioritizes and celebrates the perspective, work and needs of marginalized communities; it strives to reclaim space and property from stereotypical narratives instilled by the oppressor and does so through renovation and re-purpose of local materials; it is one that allows for continuous user intervention; and finally, it departs from oppressive Eurocentric practices by drawing from those directly marginalized.
CHAPTER 4
PRECEDENT REVIEW

4.1 Hip-Hop Architecture

In Syracuse, New York, author of *Hip-Hop Architecture*, Sekou Cooke, is the architect of a proposed 40,000 square foot renovation to an abandoned dairy building. Named the Syracuse Hip-Hop Headquarters (SHHHQ) by Cooke, the intent is to rehabilitate the building into the headquarters for the Good Life Youth Foundation; a non-profit that utilizes Hip-Hop culture and entrepreneurship to support at-risk youth between the ages of thirteen to twenty-four in Syracuse (Cooke, Syracuse Hip-Hop Headquarters).

*Figure 7: Image by Scott Trimble of Sekou Cooke (right) and Hasan Stephens (left)*

The foundation was established in 2012 by Executive Director, Hasan Stephens, with the goal to use the elements of Hip-Hop Culture; the DJ, MC, breakdance, expressional art (graffiti) and Bambaataa’s fifth element, *knowledge*, as an instrument too.
mitigate violence and poverty among youth with the mentality of “create something out of nothing” (Good Life Youth Foundation, 2022). The program acknowledges that marginalized youth are frequently burdened with financial hardship and are pipelined into “negative” activities to afford basic necessities. The goal of the program is to expose students to positive financial opportunities through entrepreneurship partnership and collaboration with businesses and agencies. In addition, the program offers a “Cultural Economics workshop that teaches students how to manage finances (Good Life Youth Foundation, 2022).

The existing building, located at 215 Tully St. was sited for the headquarters because of its distinct façade that is covered in graffiti visible in Figure 7. The proposed design introduces glass and metal-cladded “boxes” against the existing colorful backdrop that will continue to serve as a canvas for graffiti artist (Figure 8). The interior of the building will feature event and performative spaces, classrooms, offices, a business incubation suit, and recording/printing studios (Cooke, Syracuse Hip-Hop Headquarters).

Figure 8: Render of SHHHQ from Sekou Cooke STUDIO
Although still awaiting funding, the project proposal is a precedent of Hip-Hop Architecture as it embodies the culture through building form, aesthetic, and function. Above all, the project is inspired by, celebrates, and serves marginalized members of society. It is also a renovation that requests continuous user intervention; inviting graffiti artists to make their mark. To any passerby, the culture that exists here will be undoubtedly known.

Sekou Cooke’s Hip-Hop intervention did not end here. In Saint Paul, Minnesota, Cooke curated an exhibit titled, “Close to the Edge: The Birth of Hip Hop Architecture” that featured a series of installation strategies, façade studies, building design and urban development proposals related to the Hip-Hop Architecture Movement from twenty-five participants (Cooke, 2021). The exhibit was a temporary installment in the former garage of a vacant car dealership that was commissioned to be transformed into a community art space designed by James Garrett, Jr. of 4RM+ULA. The project schedule allotted a two-month period for Cooke’s showcase to take place before demolition began. The physical space that was constructed by Cooke and twenty-two volunteers, invited graffiti artist to tag the existing concrete walls and temporary partitions made from shipping containers (Figure 9). Cooke states, “The amount of improvisation and performative adaptation required to bring all aspects of the complex exhibition together was reminiscent of a DJ manipulation levels, controls, and sounds to create a musical masterpiece…”’If that is not Hip-Hop Architecture…I don’t know what is’ (Cooke, 2021, p.181).

In the case of this exhibit, both the process and product embodied Hip-Hop Culture as a collaboration of community efforts to create a space that showcases work
and perspectives of Hip-Hop Culture from the re-use of an abandoned space and materials.

Figure 9: Image by Chad Holder of Exhibit (Holder)

Figure 10: Image by Chad Holder of Exhibit (Holder)
4.2 Black Perspectives

Featured in the Museum of Modern Art exhibit, *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, landscape architect, Walter Hood, proposed a project that re-writes the stereotypical narrative of Black space with the proposal for a reimagined environment. The project, titled *Black Towers/ Black Power* is a fictional adaptation of an existing one mile stretch on San Paulo Avenue in one of Oakland, California’s lowest income neighborhood. Hood recognizes the inequities in Oakland and the abundance of low-income housing, churches, liquor stores, gas stations and fast-food joints that exist in this neighborhood is a result of twentieth century planning practices that restricted healthy and vibrant environments to the suburbs (Hood, 2021). He argues that these practices (aka ghettoization), have hindered people of color from consideration of their environments as anything other than what white stereotypes have confined these spaces as (violent, impoverished, over-populated) and that these types of facilities encourage this narrative (Hood, 2021; Hood, 2020).

The proposed fictional intervention on San Paulo Avenue is a collection of models, mappings and recordings that suggest the construction of ten high rise buildings that are inspired by the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program and ten industrial machines invented by African Americans (Hood, 2020). It also includes lush plantings, new pavement with imprinted panther paw prints, statues of Panther members and community spaces dedicated for education and useful services (Hood, 2020). Hood views architecture as a form of power through ownership and property and this project claims power by allowing people of color to transform a space they did not previously have power over (Hood, 2020).
Similar to *Black Towers/ Black Power, Herman House*, another exhibit featured in *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, is a project that encourages people of color to imagine a space beyond the confinements of racism. In “Entanglements of Slavery, Segregation, and Mass Incarceration in the United States”, Diane Harris discusses the collaborative project between Herman Wallace and activist artist Jackie Summell that responds to the question, “what kind of house does a man who has been in solitary confinement for thirty years dream of?” (Harris, 2021, p.111). The project was a commentary on the manifestation of slavery into mass incarceration of Black men; largely due to the economic deprivation caused by segregation and redlining. Wallace, a former Black Panther who was wrongfully convicted of murder in 1971, spent over forty years incarcerated; a third of that time was spent in solitary confinement (Harris, 2021).

In the “Herman House” project, Wallace is the architect of an imaginary residential project that Summell drafts and models on his behalf. The home featured gathering space with displayed portraits of imprisoned political figures, a guest home for visiting activist, and an underground bunker. The significance of “Herman House” project is that it was a mental escape from the confinements of prison, and it drew awareness to the relationship of property/home ownership to freedom (Harris, 2021).

### 4.3 User Intervention

Unlike most re-adaptive use or renovation projects that assume a polished building by the project competition date, Hip-Hop-inspired architecture requests continuous user intervention after the architect has vacated the scene. The Quinta Monroy project by Alejandro Aravena in Iquique, Chile is a social housing project that plans for this perpetual intervention. The project aimed to create housing for 100 families and
avoid displacement by utilizing the same 5000 square meter lot that these families have illegally resided in. In keeping the original site that has a higher value, residents remain closer to economic opportunities and will experience increased property value (Aravena & ELEMENTAL, 2008). This is unlike typical social housing projects that seek inexpensive land away from education, work, health care, transportation, etc. to maximize density or construct high-rise buildings or row houses which lead to overcrowding and limit opportunities for expansion. Aravena’s intent was to design for reality; departing from standard expectation or layouts of small homes that include a kitchen, bathroom, stairs, partitions, etc. and instead designed for the ‘middle income house’ that provides a supporting framework for user intervention/expansion (Aravena & ELEMENTAL, 2008). Rather, Aravena designed ‘half a home’; featuring program that would not be financially feasible for inhabitants to construct on their own. The other half, a void between each home, invited user development. Both the interior and exterior also invited inhabitants’ identity to be expressed through vibrant colors and decorations, as well as unique layouts (Aravena & ELEMENTAL, 2008).
Figure 11: Image by Cristobal Palma of Completed Design Before User Intervention (Aravena & ELEMENTAL, 2008)

Figure 12: Image by ELEMENTAL of User Intervention (Aravena & ELEMENTAL, 2008)
Sekou Cooke (2021) comments on this project in *Hip-Hop Architecture* stating that it is, “the result is a perfect blend of the rational and informal – leveraging the creative resources of the architect without subjugating its residents to his singular vision, will, and ego” (p.204). Additionally, he acknowledges the relation to Hip-Hop Architecture as the Quinta Monroy project utilizes found materials and non-traditional construction techniques and accommodates unpredictability (Cooke, 2021).

### 4.4 Not Quite It

Black culture, including Hip-Hop culture, is repeatedly subjected to appropriation without proper credit given. Common examples are through music, fashion, and hairstyles however, this is also experienced through Architecture. In Brooklyn, New
York, nARCHITECTS designed the renovation of an existing warehouse into exhibit/event space, a fabrication lab and workspace, design shop and restaurant. Titled A/D/O, the project embraces a concept of “remixing” through the re-use of existing graffiti covered blocks and programmatically with continuous “undefined” spaces (nArchitects, 2008). Although the design presents a representation of Hip-Hop, the project fails to acknowledge Hip-Hop culture and Black culture. Additionally, Black communities today are faced with gentrification. A/D/O is a contributing project to this modern form of blight removal/urban renewal that subjects marginalized members of society to displacement. The project claims to consider the community however it is a space that primarily invites young *white* members of society to utilize and detracts from economic investment into and *for* marginalized communities (Figure 14).

*Figure 14: Image from Geordie Wood (nArchitects, 2008)*
Figure 15: Image by Matthew Carbone of Exterior (nArchitects, 2008)
CHAPTER 5
SITE EXPLORATION

5.1 Why Springfield?

Given the urban context of Hip-Hop culture, a site located in a city with a diverse population felt paramount, but which city? Although New York City has arguably the strongest connection to Hip-Hop as the birthplace of the culture, it is not a location that I have a connection to and did not feel justified selecting. In considering the role of an architectural activist, I believe it to be prudent that a designer shares a connection or understanding of the location and population they are designing for. Thus, the decision to place a Hip-Hop Youth Center in Springfield, Massachusetts was simple – it’s locale. Springfield is in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts, a region that I have always called home.

Figure 16: Map of Massachusetts locating Pioneer Valley and Springfield
Once an industrial town, is now economically driven by health care and social assistance. Although western Massachusetts has a predominantly white demographic, Springfield has a population that is roughly 20% African American or Black and 45% Hispanic (DATAUSA, 2019).

5.2 53 Wilbraham Road

As the Hip-Hop Youth Center is intended to support and celebrate marginalized youth, it was critical to choose a location within a diverse neighborhood that is accessible.

![Figure 17: Locating Project Site in Springfield, MA](image)

The above image highlights Winchester Square, a neighborhood of Springfield with a predominately African American and Hispanic population. Winchester Square is also a nationally recognized historic district that was once an industrial hub. During the
nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, multiple industrial buildings erected between State Street and Wilbraham Road, as well as a railroad. One such was for the Bullard Repeating Arms Company that was later utilized as the Indian Motorcycle Factory until the mid-1950s (Woodham, 2018). In recent years, the four-story industrial building has been transformed into apartments including affordable units.

Figure 18: Indian Motorcycle Factory and Knox Automobile Plant. Original Image from Hess, 2000.

Across the street, is the site of the former plant of the Knox Automobile Company at 53 Wilbraham Road. Beginning in 1899, the company was a leading manufacturer of gasoline engine vehicles having built cars, trucks, firetrucks, and tractors (Kinney, 2020; Goonan, 2016). The industrial building, built between 1891 and 1910, is a masonry and timber framed structure that was constructed in multiple phases during the early twentieth century (Goonan, 2016). The below image shows the building in its earliest days.
Later, two more floors were added as shown in the most recent photos below.
The Knox Company remained until the 1940s. In recent years, the 52,000 square foot building has remained vacant and dilapidating.

5.3 Choosing the Site

A proposal for a Hip-Hop Youth Center must adhere to the pillars of Hip-Hop Architecture including renovation and re-adaptive use. After visiting the Winchester Square district, I was drawn to the former plant of the Knox Automobile Company. In part, the size of the building would be well-suited for the proposed program. Secondly, as the building is vacant, a proposed renovation would not intrude on any existing businesses. Considering the role design has played in gentrifying neighborhoods in recent years (for example the A/D/O project by nARCHITETS) mindfulness of the surrounding existing business and residents was paramount. Finally, the location of the site in a diverse neighborhood and its proximity to multiple public schools, colleges and community centers/services made the former plant the ideal location for this proposal.
Figure 22 is a perspective drawing of the existing building and site. The site contains a series of industrial buildings occupied by the former Knox Automobile Company. However, this proposal is for the renovation of the primary building along Wilbraham Rd. as shown.

Figure 23 illustrates an aerial image of the site and broader context, highlighting the proposed site in green and notable buildings within walking distance in orange. Nearby community service includes the MLK Community Center, East African Cultural Center, the public library and Gardening the Community, a nonprofit youth development and urban gardening program. Neighboring schools and colleges include Springfield Technical Community College, American International College, Springfield College, Rebecca M. Johnson Elementary School, and DeBerry Elementary school which is currently under renovation.
Adjacent to the immediate site is the Mason Square Apartment complex, Mason Square Head start Daycare Program, Acme Auto repair and Inspection and a corporate office just south of the highlighted area in Figure 22.

*Figure 23: Aerial View of Site and Neighboring Buildings*
CHAPTER 6
PROGRAM

The program for a Hip-Hop Youth Center was inspired directly by Hip-Hop as a facility that promotes the continued creative work and celebration of the culture. As most Hip-Hop artists begin their careers during their teenage and early adult years, the program is specified for an age group between thirteen and twenty-five years of age. However, designated public spaces welcome community use and interaction. The intention of the Hip-Hop Youth Center is as follows:

1. To amplify the work and voices of underrepresented youth.
2. To establish a community through the appreciation of Hip-Hop culture.
3. To provide opportunities for youth entrepreneurship.

The facility seeks to accomplish this through programmed spaces that facilitate and showcase the artistic, musical, and performative skills of underserved youth as listed in the diagram below.

Figure 24: Schematic Program Diagram
In tribute to Hip-Hop’s early days, a space that can host Hip-Hop parties, concerts and events is imperative. This event space is the focal point of the building in which the four elements of Hip-Hop (the DJ, the MC, breakdance and graffiti) amalgamate in celebration and expression. As Hip-Hop Architecture encourages and advocates for continuous user intervention, the surface of this space invites graffiti tagging and display of student work while also functioning as a flexible space for community events or youth recreation when not utilized for performances.

Additional spaces that are integral to the mission of this building include an entrepreneurship center that fosters business and marketing skills and allows students to advertise their work in a public gallery; administrative support and offices; and a commercial kitchen to cater events and provide meals to students and community members.

With consideration to the poetic nature of rap lyrics such as conscious rap derived from *The Message* (as discussed in chapter two), the program includes a rooftop garden and a series of individual study booths intended for reflection and writing. These spaces provide separation from the urban landscape and collective spaces.

A detailed program that maximizes the allotted square footage of the existing building is as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROOM NAME</th>
<th>SQUARE FOOTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROGRAM SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFFICE(S)</td>
<td>150sf (each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFERENCE ROOM</td>
<td>250sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREAK ROOM</td>
<td>200sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMIN</td>
<td>500sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STORAGE</td>
<td>100sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER</td>
<td>1000sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIGITAL MEDIA LAB</td>
<td>500sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINT SHOP</td>
<td>500sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CREATIVE SPACES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ART STUDIO/ MAKER SPACE</td>
<td>3000sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerosol Booth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin Up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIGITAL MEDIA LAB</td>
<td>1000sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DANCE STUDIO</td>
<td>1000sf (each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressing Stalls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECORDING STUDIO</td>
<td>1000sf (each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording Booth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment Storage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAMPLE LIBRARY</td>
<td>500sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACTICE ROOM</td>
<td>500sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDY/ SOLITUDE (S)</td>
<td>50sf – 75sf (each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COLLECTIVE SPACE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOUNGE</td>
<td>1000sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHOWCASE/ HIP-HOP HISTORY DISPLAY</td>
<td>1000sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCKER STORAGE</td>
<td>(50 per floor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROOFTOP GARDEN</td>
<td>1000sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVENT HALL (with STAGE)</td>
<td>2500sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISPLAY/ SHOWCASE SPACE</td>
<td>500sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXHIBIT/ GALLERY SHOP</td>
<td>2000sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOBBY/ CAFE</td>
<td>1000sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECHANICAL</td>
<td>2000sf +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESTROOMS</td>
<td>500sf (per floor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELIVERY/ STORAGE</td>
<td>500sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSTODIAL</td>
<td>500sf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 25: Proposed Program*
In addition to the outlined interior program, exterior elements include an informal performance space, a basketball court, and community garden.
7.1 Conceptual Design

The design proposal for the Hip-Hop Youth Center in Springfield is guided by a framework informed by Craig Wilkins, Sekou Cooke, Murry Forman, etc. A space that is inspired by Hip-Hop culture must address the following:

1. Prioritize and celebrate the perspective, work and needs of marginalized communities.
2. Reclaim space and property through renovation and repurpose of local materials.
3. Allow for continuous intervention.
4. Draw from those directly marginalized.

As discussed in chapter five, this proposal is for the renovation and re-adaptive re-use of the former Knox Automobile factory; a four-story industrial building located in the Winchester Square district of Springfield, Massachusetts. Drawing from those directly marginalized, the project proposes design interventions to the existing plan and elevations that are inspired by Hip-Hop culture. The first, is the introduction of a cylindrical form to the existing massing.

7.1.1 Cylindrical Form

Contemplating the origins and significance of Hip-Hop culture, I was repeatedly drawn to the imagery of a circular form. The most visible connection is to the cypher: an informal and performative circular space created by bodies around A1s breakdancing in its center (Figure 26). This circular form is additionally strengthened as a symbolic notion to community and collectivity.
The cypher creates the parameter for a circular form that is then extruded and introduced to the existing linear building as shown below in Figure 27.

As discussed in chapter two, Grandmaster Flash developed the “Quick Mix Theory” by inscribing the moment at which the break occurred on a vinyl using a crayon. To reiterate, the break is the isolated moment of a song when solely the percussion is experienced. In the early days of Hip-Hop, DJs manipulated the tone arm, using multiple
recordings, to create an extended sequence of the break. This isolation of beats is what defined Hip-Hop as a genre of music.

Conceptualizing the image of Grandmaster Flash physically marking a vinyl reinforced the cylindrical structure while stimulating the addition of landings and openings that resemble a series of breaks (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Conceptualizing Inscribed Breaks

The interior space of the cylinder is programmed to be the primary event space as described in chapter seven and features a performance stage on the first floor. In schematic design, the cylinder was merely a void on upper floors in which circulation and interaction with the cylinder took place on the outer surface with catwalks and windows. However, during the final stage of development a spiral staircase and series of landings were introduced to create a dynamic interaction of space within the cylinder and allow for additional program that reflects the position of the MC in Hip-Hop. By the late 1970s, the MC was brought to the forefront of Hip-Hop, notably with the production of conscious rap. Although Sekou Cooke has likened the MC to structure as described in chapter three, in this project, the MC is realized with a display surface with the use of a media mesh.
system that functions as a double skin around the cylinder providing shade during
daylight hours and serving as a digital communication in the evenings. The landings are
then programmed as interior display space for student work. As outlined in chapter six,
the poetic nature of the MC is conceptualized with a roof-top garden that is introduced on
the fourth floor of the cylinder (Figure 29).

![Figure 29: Realizing the MC](image1)

Finally, the exterior of the cylinder invites graffiti artists to tag the surface as a
method of user engagement and reclamation of the building (Figure 30).

![Figure 30: Introduction of Graffiti](image2)
7.1.2 Layering

An additional influence on the design was the concept of sampling and layering that informs the composition of Hip-Hop music. As previously described, Hip-Hop music derives from the sampling of previously recorded songs that are layered to produce a new composition. However, layering in Hip-Hop is also evident by the lamination of graffitti tags and imagery on album covers (Figure 31).

![Figure 31: Layering in Hip-Hop. Original image: Album cover by Aimee Macauley for Nas. *Illmatic*. 1994.](image)

Layering is introduced with murals, graffitti, and contemporary materials such as aluminum composite panels and curtainwall systems onto the existing brick façade (Figure 32). In the final development, this layering becomes more evident with a series of metal cladded and glass extrusions and surfaces for street art. As well as programmatically through the layering of spaces in section.
7.2 Schematic Design

Early schematic design considered an approach to layering the program within the existing structure. The existing second floor is dissolved creating a series of double height public and mechanical spaces on the first floor and placing the youth program on the second and third floors.
This layout also considered the arrangement of spaces vertically placing private and conditioned program on the southern end of the building and social and public spaces toward Wilbraham Road (Figure 33).

On the first floor, the cylindrical form is placed as a central focal point within the existing footprint, concealed by a curtain wall system on the west elevation. The intent was to create an open floor plan that allowed users to circulate around the enclosed cylindrical form and tag the surface with graffiti.

The second and third floors contain administrative and creative spaces for the youth program within the existing structural grid.

Figure 34: Schematic First Floor Plan
Figure 35: Schematic Second and Third Floor Plans

The programmatic organization of space in this approach felt appropriate, however the rigid layout was unconvincing as it conceded to the existing building rather than to the ethos of Hip-Hop.

In a next approach, I developed a physical model (shown in Figure 36) as a massing study. In this model, I relocated the cylinder to the perimeter, making it visible from Wilbraham Road. I then continued to break into the existing form while maintain the curvature of the cylinder. What was created was an “alleyway” like space that would draw users into the existing form and around the cylinder before entering the interior.
Figure 36: Carving into the Existing Form

I also included box-like extrusions to the existing façade as a mean to break into the existing elevations and introduce contemporary materials against the original brick.

The repositioning of the cylinder to the perimeter of the existing floor plan allowed for it to become a focal point of both the interior and exterior of the building that largely informed the final design.

7.3 Final Design

The proposed first floor (Figure 37) invites community use and interaction in a series of public spaces that engage with the site. Central to the building is the cylindrical form that is designed to function as an event space with a stage but also includes suspended basketball hoops for daytime recreation. The form is constructed of cast-in-place concrete but features kinetic partitions and a curtain wall system on the western elevation. During the warmer seasons, the space opens to a lawn that functions as an outdoor concert venue. Radiating from the center of the cylinder, is a lobby and café space (Figure 38). The north-most segment of the building features an exhibit/gallery space that is enclosed with storefront windows along the northern façade, inviting
pedestrians to glance at youth work. The southern section consists of traditional “back-of-house space” including a mechanical room, delivery and storage, custodial, restrooms, and a commercial kitchen/servery that support the café. The first floor is arranged to support events for up to 250 people but offers flexibility that may transform the space for recreational use or community support (i.e., a meal center). Additionally, special consideration was given to the restrooms on all floors. Striving for complete inclusivity of all genders and mobility, all restrooms are ADA compliant single user facilities arranged around an open lounge. Furthermore, each floor features a shower.

Figure 38: Perspective View of Café
From an aerial perspective, the site imitates a turntable with curved walkways that resemble inscribed breaks. Included in the exterior program is a full-size basketball court in acknowledgment to the history of Springfield as the birthplace of the sport, as well as it’s entanglement with Hip-Hop culture. Following the radial curvature are a series of garden beds and water features that juxtapose the urban setting. In respect to the existing surrounding businesses, the existing parking remains but is resurfaced to include a bus drop off that services both the Hip-Hop Youth Center and existing daycare, as well as medians that introduce greenery to the site. To accommodate egress along the eastern elevation, Waltham Ave. is converted into a one-way street which allows for a sidewalk and vegetation.

Figure 39: Proposed Second, Third, Fourth and Roof Plans
Figure 39 depicts the upper floor plans that are programmed to support youth members and their creative endeavors. The second-floor hosts staff offices and administration as well as an entrepreneurship center that is furnished as a co-workspace and includes a digital media lab and print shop. Surrounding the entirety of the cylinder is a walkway that invites graffiti work on the exterior. Within the cylinder is a landing, as described within the conceptual design section, that is open to the below event space and is programmed to showcase student work. A spiral staircase located here connects to the third floor that is a continuation of this display space. Intertwined with student work, this space is dually intended to be an educational exhibit that highlights historical moments in Hip-Hop Culture (shown in Figures 40 and 41).
The north-most segment of the third floor features a full recording studio that is acoustically sound and furnished with a recording booth, control room and equipment storage. Wedging from the central point of the cylinder is a library that protrudes from the east elevation and looks out to the city (Figure 41). This library is for a collection of records, CDs and recordings for student to sample. Continuing south are a series of study booths, a digital media or computer lab, restrooms and student storage and an art studio/maker space. This roughly 3000 square foot studio is an open space intended for fine art, sculpture, and textiles. Included in this space is a conditioned aerosol booth and storage closet. Above is a lofted extension of this studio that brings users up to the fourth floor (Figure 42). The north-most end replicates the third floor’s recording studio, sample library (practice room) and study booths. However, the cylinder is transformed into a rooftop garden that features a small performance platform and radiating skylights that bring natural light into the below display space. Centrally located is a lounge area for recreation and to the south are two dance studios and a gender-neutral dressing area.

![Figure 42: Perspective View of Art Studio/ Maker Space](image)

As an expression of layering, the exterior elevations feature a series of box-like extrusions that are framed with a vibrant aluminum composite material and faced with a
curtain wall system. The varying sizes, colors and locations of this series juxtapose the tradition and regularity of the existing windows. Furthermore, surfaces are programmed for street art – whether graffiti, murals, or vinyl graphics. Figure 43 depicts an example of how these surfaces could be illustrated however, they are intended for user intervention and design. Although the nature of graffiti is spontaneous, the surface of the cylinder is designed to welcome continuous tagging of the graffiti from the exterior walkways on the second and fourth floors. Enclosing these walkways is a media mesh (visible in the physical model shown in Figure 44) that allows for visibility of the graffiti through the perforations but acts a secondary communication or display during the evenings. This mesh may be used for advertising events, display of student work digitally or to introduce a pattern of lights to the exterior.

Figure 43: Exterior Elevations
Figure 44: Physical Section Model
Figure 45: Image of Existing Building (Goodrich, 2022)

Figure 46: Rendered View of Proposed Hip-Hop Youth Center
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

I speak passionately when I say that racism is entirely a problem derived from white society and therefor is the responsibility of white people to amend through reparations. However, white people must not assume how this reparative work takes form. As the Black Lives Matter movement demands, the perspectives, success and needs of those marginalized must set a precedent for activist work. The Hip-Hop Youth Center does this by drawing directly from Hip-Hop culture as an influence on the program and design. Rather than designing for a general audience, the Hip-Hop Youth Center prioritizes the histories and success of Black and Brown members of society. Furthermore, the ultimate goal is to uplift, serve, and celebrate those who have been marginalized. Yet, a limitation of this project is that it did not include extensive community engagement because of time constraint and limitations of completing this thesis during a pandemic. However, I did have the opportunity to engage in ongoing discussions with two local Hip-Hop artists/organizers who greatly influenced the product of this proposal.

Overall, I believe the project to be a success in that it fulfills the goals of celebrating, serving, and drawing from marginalized communities; it proposes the renovation and reuse of an existing building; and it invites continuous user intervention. In particular, the program and chosen location were commended by the invited reviews as an appropriate selection that would be advantageous to the Winchester Square district. And although I do feel the essence of Hip-Hop Culture is experienced through the exterior interventions of graffiti and street art and through the cylindrical form, further consideration and experimentation, as well as partnership with local artists, would
undoubtedly strengthen the project, given more time. This project was designed with the intention for further intervention and transformation by the users; a design prospect that I am most excited by and hope will serve as an example of architecture that can serve and celebrate Black and Latinx communities.
HIP HOP YOUTH CENTER

53 WILBRAHAM RD, SPRINGFIELD, MA

MICAELA GOODRICH

**APPENDIX**

**ORAL DEFENSE PRESENTATION BOARDS**

- Prioritizes and celebrates the perspectives, work and needs of marginalized communities.
- Strives to reclaim space and property from stereotypical narratives instilled by oppressors and does so through renovation and re-purpose of local materials.
- Allows for continuous user intervention and flexibility.
- Departs from oppressive Euro-centric practices by drawing from those directly marginalized.


One9 (Director). (2014). Nas: Time is Illmatic. [Film; online video] Netflix.


