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Joseph G. Schloss, *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, \$19.95/£11.99). Pp. ix + 176. ISBN 978 0 19 533406 7.

On the website that accompanies his new book, Joseph G. Schloss, a forty-year-old professor of ethnomusicology and African American studies, admits that he cannot spin on his head. Despite this, he has managed to write a masterful analysis of b-boying (commonly, but incorrectly, known as “breakdancing”) that sheds new light on the hip-hop culture of which it is a crucial element.

B-boying is a form of competitive dance that developed during the 1970s when teenagers from across the African diaspora came together in the impoverished neighbourhoods of New York City. It is, Schloss argues, a complex and sophisticated cultural tradition that has ties to the social, cultural, spiritual, and martial traditions that preceded it. *Foundation* explores the role of music in preserving traditions, the teachings and philosophy of b-boying, and the significance of dance, style, space and history to hip-hop. Aiming to correct popular misconceptions of hip-hop as “the cultural embodiment of violence, degradation, and materialism” (3), or which overlook b-boying as a Reagan-era fad, Schloss argues that b-boying is a way of life that enables b-boys and b-girls to exercise control over the meaning, value, and direction of their lives. It is more than a teenage fad or popular music phenomenon; it is a philosophical approach that can positively enrich lives.

The respect with which Schloss treats his subject(s) comes from his belief that hip-hop’s internal philosophy and the views of those within the culture should be taken seriously, but also, one suspects, from his experience conducting the research. He rightly criticizes academic scholarship that takes the material product of hip-hop – rap music – as representative of the culture as a whole, and argues that to fully understand hip-hop one must become personally involved in it. This book is the result of five years of close interaction and engagement with hip-hop culture. Using methods derived from ethnography, the author attended “virtually every major b-boy event in New York City between 2003 and 2008” (14), interviewed several of the participants, and befriended central figures in the hip-hop community. The research clearly had a profound effect. Schloss soon admits, “I have internalized many b-boy values, and I am better for it. I have learned that there is a b-boy way to be in the world” (42).

Foundation expertly blends the history of b-boying and hip-hop’s cultural and musical development with the results of the author’s ethnographic observation. The result is a perceptive and nuanced analysis that takes academic writing on hip-hop into new areas. The book is punctuated by the expressive words of Schloss’s interviewees, which combine with the stylish crispness of Schloss’s more academic prose to make it a pleasure to read. For readers with an interest in contemporary American or popular culture, urban history, or youth subcultures, this is an important work. In the rapidly expanding field of hip-hop studies, *Foundation* is likely to become a key text.

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