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German Sports Shoes, Basketball, and Hip Hop: The Consumption and Cultural Significance of the adidas 'Superstar', 1966–1988

Thomas Turner

During the 1960s, adidas was the world's leading sports footwear manufacturer. Based in Bavaria and with a history stretching to the 1920s, the company dominated elite sports through aggressive promotion and innovative shoes that catered to athletes' needs. The 'Superstar' is one of the company's most successful models, still in production over 40 years since its launch in the late 1960s. Designed to wrest control of the basketball market from American rubber companies, in the two decades that followed it developed cultural meanings far beyond those envisaged by adidas, becoming associated with hip hop, a youth music and subculture born in 1970s New York. Arguing that design is shaped by use and consumption is allied to practice, this article examines the processes by which the 'Superstar' came into being, placing it into a wider context of changes within basketball, corporate ambition, and international trade. Tracing the actions and influence of young consumers in New York, it also considers how new ways of thinking about the shoe arose, spread, and were eventually commodified by adidas. It argues that a product's meaning can never be fixed, that producers and consumers are engaged in a constant dialogue over how things are used and perceived.

Introduction

Profile Records released the album *Christmas Rap* in late 1987. A compilation of seasonally themed rap songs, it was designed to cash in on the

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global success of Run-D.M.C., a trio of African American rappers signed to the label, and the growing popularity of rap music among mainstream audiences. The cover featured none of the artists on the record; rather, it was dominated by a pair of white adidas 'Superstar' basketball shoes, worn without laces and with the tongues flipped out (Figure 1).¹ We can speculate on why this image was chosen: ease, cost, time, and commercial or racial concerns could all have factored in the selection process. What it was intended to represent, however, is clearer. Run-D.M.C. had worn the 'Superstar' since bursting onto the rap scene in 1984. The sleeve's designer and the label's white bosses, and the consumers at whom the record was aimed, understood that these shoes, made in France by a German company, signified the music of a largely African American and Hispanic youth culture that had emerged from the ghettos of New York City in the late 1970s. The connection between sportswear and hip hop – and street fashion in general – is by now so well established in the popular imagination that it is taken almost for granted. How and why European sportswear became closely associated with an African American musical form and the cultural movement from which it sprung are questions that are rarely asked. Yet the cover of *Christmas Rap* begs the question: how was it that a pair of sports shoes could signify a group of young, black American musicians?

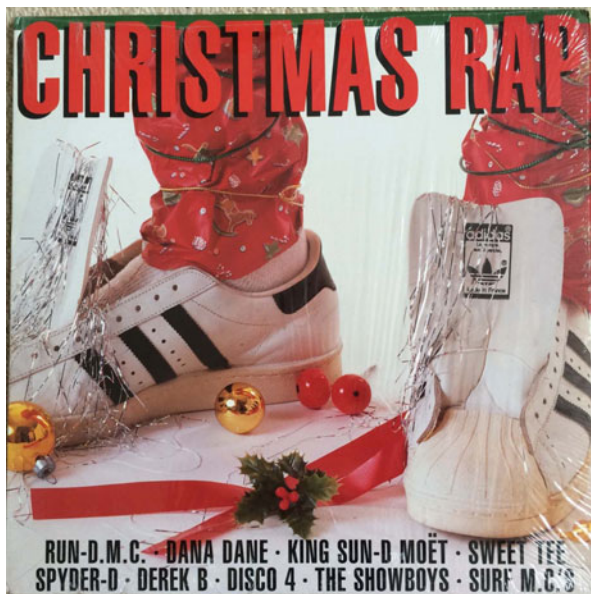


Figure 1 *Christmas Rap*, Profile Records PRO-1247, 1987. Author's copy.

To unravel this relationship, it is necessary to look at the longer history of the 'Superstar' itself. The shoe is one of adidas's most popular and enduring models, still in production almost half a century since it was born. To understand it, we must consider the factors that prompted its creation, that shaped and determined its design, and which affected it after it became available to be bought and used by consumers. The scholarship on everyday products is extensive, and has shown that industrial commodities have meant very different things to different people in different places and times.² Bernhard Rieger's recent study of the Volkswagen Beetle demonstrated that German goods took on a variety of meanings as they spread around the globe after the Second World War.³ However, as Frank Trentmann has argued, historical studies have 'primarily looked at objects to reveal processes of symbolic communication and identity formation.'⁴ Historians have tended to focus on cultural meaning and what things 'say' about us. While these investigations into the communicative power of objects are useful, they can also give a misleading impression of people's intentions, and offer only a partial interpretation of commodities and their role in the world. Many things are acquired and used for non-communicative purposes; objects exist to enable people to do something. Trentmann has therefore urged historians to expand their understanding of things, materials, technologies, and the processes of consumption by embracing scholarship from the social sciences that has shown how objects and social practices are co-dependent, and that objects are woven into the day-to-day realities of life.⁵ Doing this goes some way to increase our understanding of products, but to more fully comprehend them we must also consider the wider contexts against which they are created and within which they exist. As Harvey Molotch and Wiebe Bijker have suggested, manufactured goods are not born spontaneously and do not exist in isolation; wider technological, commercial, material, social, cultural, and physical networks affect the design process and determine the resulting product.⁶ Something similar can be said of the meanings and associations attached to consumer goods. Dick Hebdige has suggested in his study of the Italian motor-scooter that reconstructing the cultural meaning of something entails taking 'into account the kinds of significance generated as [it] passes through a maze of independent but interlocking frames – drawing back at every point to consider the structures in which each individual frame is housed'. The 'cultural significance' of an object is, he argued, 'the sum total of all the choices and fixings made at each stage of the passage of an object from conception, production and mediation to mass-circulation, sale and use'.⁷ Similarly, in their analysis of the Sony

Walkman, Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay and Keith Negus argued that the cultural processes through which an artefact passes (they suggested production, consumption, regulation, representation, and identity) must all be considered if it is to be properly understood.⁸ To discover how a German sports product became associated with an American music and youth subculture, we must therefore examine how, why, and when the 'Superstar' was created, and consider what it meant to people at different points. This approach reveals the 'Superstar' as a dynamic product, constantly evolving in the minds of consumers and producers, capable of holding multiple meanings while its material form stayed largely the same. Most importantly, it sheds light on the processes by which cultural meanings are created, and shows how the link between sports and hip hop style was forged.

Before the 'Superstar'

Basketball was created in 1891 by Dr James Naismith, a YMCA physical education instructor who sought an indoor activity for winter.⁹ The first specialist shoes were introduced a few years later. When the 'Superstar' was launched in the late 1960s, large American rubber companies had dominated the basketball footwear market in the United States for decades. Regardless of who made them, American basketball shoes followed a template that had been in place since the beginning of the twentieth century: lace-to-toe canvas uppers with rubber soles and toe-caps, and a branded ankle patch. The United States Rubber Company's 'Pro-Keds' of the late 1960s were almost identical to shoes endorsed in the 1920s by top professional and amateur teams.¹⁰ The Converse Rubber Company's bestselling 'Chuck Taylor All Star' was introduced in 1917 and by the 1960s had become an American institution that crossed generations.¹¹

Rubber-soled basketball sneakers like this were used for a variety of sports and training purposes, but were also worn as relatively inexpensive children's shoes. During the 1930s they were advertised as school footwear and by the 1960s had become a must-have item for many schoolboys. According to an article in the *New York Times* in 1962, 'between the age of 6 and 8, having enrolled in school where he can emulate his elders, a boy is wont to demand a pair of basketball sneakers'. They were, the paper observed, 'a symbol of admission to full-fledged boyhood'.¹² For African American boys, the most desirable were those worn by elite black ballplayers, who were both role models and icons of black pride. The filmmaker Spike Lee, describing the importance of basketball during his

childhood in 1960s Brooklyn, recalled that 'white high-top Chuck Taylor All-Stars' were 'the most coveted legitimizing agent for the discerning youth' because they were worn by the Knicks, Lakers, and other top teams.¹³ When in 1973 a reporter from the *New York Times* interviewed African American students at Sands Junior High, a public school 'squeezed between the Fort Greene projects and the Brooklyn Navy Yard', he found that sneakers were prized status symbols. His interviewees refused anything other than the costly models worn by their sporting heroes.¹⁴ Schoolboys were not the only people wearing sneakers as everyday wear. The leaders of the American footwear industry reported 'a sharp increase in production and sales of vulcanized fabric footwear, known as sneakers' in 1961, as increased leisure time and an expanded population of baby boomers stimulated the market for casual clothing.¹⁵ At the same time, the growing emphasis placed by the federal government on physical fitness after John F. Kennedy's attack on the 'soft American' created a market for multi-purpose athletic footwear to which the canvas sneaker seemed well suited.¹⁶ Executives at BF Goodrich, owner of the P.F. Flyers brand, observed that the market doubled between 1958 and 1964. With sales of 103 million pairs in 1964 and predictions of 146.3 million predicted for 1970, the company invested in machinery that could produce old designs using fewer workers rather than seeking to alter a proven formula.¹⁷

Executives within the rubber industry perhaps saw no need to tamper with what appeared to be a hugely successful product, but from a sporting perspective canvas and rubber sneakers were beginning to fail. As Elizabeth Shove and other scholars have demonstrated in their analysis of everyday objects, consumption is allied to practice and design is informed by intended use. But as practices shift and develop, the suitability of the products designed for them can decrease; what was once perfectly designed becomes imperfect or unsuitable.¹⁸ This was true of the canvas basketball sneaker, which did not keep up with developments in the game for which it was intended. When the first canvas and rubber shoes were launched at the beginning of the twentieth century, basketball was a relatively sedate, regimented, floor-based sport that emphasised quick passing and shooting from a standing position. It was played in industrial urban centres, generally by first- or second-generation immigrants from Europe. Things started to shift in the 1930s. A series of rule changes, the development of the jump shot, and – as a consequence of demographic shifts – the arrival of black players who brought with them a flamboyant style of play honed on the public courts of America's cities, meant that by the 1960s the game was faster-paced, more aerially-

based, and more improvisatory than when the shoes of Converse, United States Rubber, and other manufacturers were introduced.¹⁹ At the same time, players became physically taller, heavier, and stronger. The rise of the professional National Basketball Association (NBA) in the 1950s and the arrival in the 1960s of television meant the game was more business-oriented than in its early days.

As television audiences thrilled to the ‘razzle-dazzle [...] guard play,’ ‘pin-point passing,’ and ‘individual moves, improvisation, and spectacular ball handling’ of black athletes in the college and professional leagues, the shortcomings of traditional basketball footwear were becoming apparent among top players.²⁰ The limited support provided by canvas and the lack of cushioning offered by thin rubber soles meant ankle injuries were endemic, and the method used to stitch the uppers caused discomfort and pain. John Wooden, the most influential coach of the 1960s, later complained he ‘had to use a razor blade [...] on every new pair [of ‘All Star’] to cut the seam [...] over the little toe’ to prevent his players developing blisters.²¹ Despite this, American manufacturers did little to accommodate the shifting needs of basketball players. Molotch has written of the way ‘previously established products and physical infrastructure thwart innovation and hold type form’, and of how existing factory tooling influences the shape of prospective stuff.²² This was true of the American sneaker industry, where innovation was stymied by high machinery costs and rubber companies’ understandable focus on increasing consumption of rubber. American manufacturers started with the raw material, not athletes’ requirements. More significantly, trade tariffs on rubber footwear – erected in the 1930s and designed to protect the American shoe industry from Japanese and Czechoslovakian competition – gave American companies a near monopoly on the domestic market, which militated against product development. As the game changed, the shoes stayed the same.

The birth of the ‘Superstar’

By the time adidas entered the basketball market, the company was already well established as one of the world’s leading producers of athletic footwear. With a history of manufacturing that stretched to the 1920s, by the 1960s the company founded by Adolf ‘Adi’ Dassler in Herzogenaurach, a small town in Franconia, Germany, dominated elite and professional sports, particularly soccer and track and field athletics.²³ Dassler emphasised constant experimentation and collaboration with athletes as part of an ongoing quest to produce the best possible shoes for sports, and

was engaged in a bitter struggle with his brother, Rudolf, the owner of adidas's main rival Puma, to dominate the sports shoe market. His company was embedded in the German *mittelstand* – a network of medium-sized family businesses – and was able to build on expertise developed elsewhere. This was most apparent in the realm of materials, where adidas drew on the strength of the German chemical industry, which since the late nineteenth century had led the world in the application of chemistry to commerce.²⁴ As the historian John Lesch has argued, the recovery and renewed prosperity of the chemical industry was a major component of West German post-war economic revival, and was underpinned by a 'stream of technological innovations with far-reaching material impact on human life'.²⁵ Teams of scientists at German and Austrian chemical and plastics firms worked to develop synthetic compounds that adidas used to create innovative and increasingly specialised shoes.²⁶ As a result of this willingness to embrace new technology and the company's aggressive marketing, adidas products were generally viewed as the best available. Dassler's company altered ideas of what a sports shoe could be and introduced a new design paradigm that was soon imitated by European rivals. By the mid-1960s, adidas shoes set the standards against which all others were judged and were worn by the majority of the world's elite soccer stars and track and field athletes.

The 'Superstar', however, was an outcome of a familial struggle for the company's future. With demand increasing, in 1959 adidas bought an ailing shoe manufacturer in Dettwiller, a village in French Alsace.²⁷ It was converted to make football boots for the German market and was managed by Adi's 23-year-old son, Horst. His ambitions were growing after a successful stint distributing shoes at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, and away from his parents he transformed the French factory into an almost entirely separate business. Additional plants were acquired from struggling local manufacturers, contacts were developed with French sportsmen, and an attack on the French market was launched. New products were introduced that rivalled those made in Germany, and independent production agreements were established with suppliers in Spain and Eastern Europe. According to Karl-Heinz Lang, one of Adi's assistants in the 1970s, the two sides 'acted like two different companies challenging each other[;] there was a kind of competitive spirit going on'.²⁸ They fought for international orders and staff in France were encouraged to see Herzogenaurach as their primary competition. By 1968, Horst controlled a separate administrative hub and eight French factories.²⁹ With Adi about to enter his 70s, adidas France increasingly became the driving force behind the entire business.

Horst was keen to push the company in new directions and moved beyond his parents' focus on track and field shoes and football boots into areas with wider market appeal. One of the first signs of his ambitions was the 'Haillet', a technologically advanced leather tennis shoe developed in the mid-1960s with the French tennis professional, Robert Haillet. With a moulded herringbone sole stitched and glued to lightweight ox-hide uppers, it was a departure from the rubber and canvas shoes worn by most players. It provided better grip and support than anything else available, and quickly became the shoe of choice for serious players, including many on the professional tour.³⁰ Importantly, professional tennis offered better marketing opportunities than track and field, which was governed by amateur rules that prevented athletes from endorsing products. In catalogue photographs, the company had to obscure the identities of Olympic athletes photographed in adidas shoes. By contrast, the connection with Haillet and other professional sportsmen and women could be openly celebrated. Perhaps more significantly, the 'Haillet' also offered a way into the vast American market for casual sports shoes. With the tariffs on rubber-soled footwear lowered (but not removed) in 1966 as part of the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations, foreign manufacturers were presented with an opportunity to dramatically increase their share of the American market.³¹ As a simply styled, flat-soled, white tennis shoe, the 'Haillet' was perfect for American leisure or everyday casual wear. Indeed, following Haillet's retirement in 1971, the shoe was renamed after the American Stan Smith and went on to become one of the bestselling sports shoes of all time, a testament to the flexibility of its design.

Adidas France began to explore basketball around the time the 'Haillet' was being developed. As one of the 'big three-and-a-half' of American sports, basketball promised prestige and significant sales, especially when the popularity of basketball shoes in the youth casual market was taken into account. Chris Severn, a distributor in California, noted the lack of innovation among American manufacturers and urged Horst to respond to the latent desire for better footwear. With his help, adidas developed their first basketball models, the 'Supergrip' and high-top 'Pro Model'.³² These were designed with the modern game in mind and were constructed along the same lines as the 'Haillet', with padded leather uppers stitched and glued to moulded herringbone soles. The physical requirements of tennis and basketball players were close – both needed to be able to run, stop, and move from side to side without slipping – but the similar designs also showed adidas's desire to make the most of its new production equipment and expertise. Like the 'Haillet', the new models used a lace-to-toe design reminiscent of the 'All Star' and other American

shoes, but with adidas's trademarked stripes contrasting against the white uppers, the shoes were visually distinct. The company claimed the stripes helped 'bandage' the foot, but they also ensured adidas footwear advertised itself in press and television pictures. The new shoes were unveiled in catalogues issued before the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. Salesmen's patter promised better performance for the professional player and that adidas had overcome the shortcomings of canvas sneakers. The 'Supergrip' and 'Pro Model' were said to be 'Marvellously light, extremely comfortable', and 'The most advanced basketball shoe[s] yet produced!' Special features included 'Excellent traction from a long-wearing sole, well-cushioned heel, form insole, arch support, and large heel counter' designed to hold the foot in place. The 'Pro Model' had 'Revolutionary new ankle padding [that] insures comfortable, snug fit and extra ankle protection'.³³ A French catalogue issued around the same time revealed that a distinctive ribbed rubber 'shell' toe-cap had been added to both models.³⁴ This was developed for tennis – it protected against wear incurred when serving – but served no functional purpose for basketball. Instead, it may have been employed as a visual reference to the rubber toe-cap on traditional canvas basketball shoes.³⁵ Like the lace-to-toe upper, it is possible that it was an attempt to make the shoes appeal to American buyers more familiar with Converse and Keds. In 1970 the 'Supergrip' was given a new, more aspirational name: the 'Superstar' (Figure 2). A note added that it was 'For Export', an indication that it was designed primarily for American buyers.³⁶

The 'Superstar's' reception

In their intended market, the new shoes received a hesitant welcome from coaches and players more accustomed to American models.³⁷ Many expected leather to be heavier and less comfortable than canvas.³⁸ Chris Severn pitched the newly developed 'Supergrip' and 'Pro Model' to NBA teams, but only Jack McMahon, the coach of the San Diego Rockets, could be persuaded to try them. His players wore adidas during the 1967–1968 season (Figure 3). McMahon's willingness to try something new may have been because several of his players had suffered injuries from slipping, though it may also have been because the Rockets were the lowest placed and least successful team in the NBA.³⁹

It was hardly an auspicious start, but Severn's deal with McMahon ensured other teams were exposed to adidas when they played the Rockets. Players on the Olympic squad also encountered German shoes at the 1968 games, during which adidas and Puma fought to give shoes to as



Figure 2 American catalogue image of the "Superstar", 1971. Adidas archive, DC-341.

many athletes as possible.⁴⁰ This exposure checked many coaches' and players' doubts; the new shoes were, as adidas claimed, superior to those made by American manufacturers. According to the company, 'Most players are immediately surprised by the unusual lightness and instant comfort.'⁴¹ The following year, the Boston Celtics, the dominant



Figure 3 The San Diego Rockets wearing adidas, c. 1967. Author's collection.

professional team of the late 1960s, wore adidas to victory in the 1969 NBA Championship, and John Wooden switched the similarly successful UCLA Bruins from 'All Star' to adidas. Several other professional and college teams followed suit. Orders multiplied. By 1970 adidas legitimately claimed that the 'Superstar' was 'Worn by the best basketball players in the World'.⁴² By 1973 around 85% of professional and many college players wore the 'Superstar', which had become one of adidas's most successful models. Around 10% of the company's overall sales were basketball shoes, all of them produced by adidas France.⁴³

With countless players wearing three-stripped shoes, television and magazine coverage acted as unofficial advertisements for the German brand. Among schoolboys, the 'Superstar' was almost immediately recognised as the state-of-the-art, modern sneaker and became desirable because of its association with top college and professional teams.⁴⁴ As Lee noted, the shoes linked to top basketball players had a special significance in New York, which had long been the game's spiritual home. The *New York Times* called 'schoolyard basketball' an 'essential' part of the city's identity, and many players graduated from the city's public courts to college and professional teams across the country.⁴⁵ Ballplayers, professional or

otherwise, were local heroes and role models for young boys, and thousands flocked to see celebrated athletes compete on playgrounds like the Rucker in Harlem.⁴⁶ In the 1970s, many of the top players wore adidas. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, a New Yorker and a leading star of the early 1970s, wore the 'Superstar' before adidas introduced his signature model in 1978. According to testimony gathered by Robert 'Bobitto' Garcia for his encyclopaedic oral history of New York's basketball and sneaker subculture, the desirability of the 'Superstar' increased because it was worn by Joe 'The Destroyer' Hammond, a local playground legend described by one admirer as 'the Elvis of basketball'.⁴⁷ On the city's public courts, it was regarded as a shoe for serious ballplayers. The *New York Times* reported that '[a]didas, of course, will get you into a game before P.F. Flyers'.⁴⁸

The allure of the 'Superstar' was heightened by its elusive nature and high cost. During the 1960s and 1970s adidas's American distribution was split between four regional companies, each responsible for securing orders with sporting goods stores across huge territories. European factories struggled to meet demand; American distributors routinely complained that orders were filled late, partially, or not at all.⁴⁹ The company focused on supplying elite college and professional players over retail. Until the mid-1970s the 'Superstar' could only be found in New York with the right knowledge or sporting contacts. According to Garcia's interviewees, it was initially sold in one store: Carlsen Imports on Lower Broadway, the adidas distributor for the north-eastern seaboard. Supply was limited and potential buyers had to show school identification and prove they played basketball before they could make a purchase.⁵⁰ Even then, the shoe cost twice as much as canvas Converse, making it an instant status symbol. For many, Garcia's interviewees included, the fact that the 'Superstar' had to be actively sought out – and its high cost – only made it more desirable.

American manufacturers were left reeling by the arrival of adidas (and Puma, which launched the coloured suede, Walt Frazier-endorsed, 'Clyde' around the same time). *Sports Illustrated* noted in 1969 that 'Converse is concerned with the inroads Adidas is making in basketball', and that American firms were struggling to cope with German competition.⁵¹ With some accuracy, adidas described the 'Superstar' as 'the basketball shoe almost everyone is trying to copy'.⁵² Converse and Uniroyal (formerly known as United States Rubber) quickly launched suede and leather versions of their traditional vulcanized models – the Pro-Keds 'Royal Plus' initially even copied adidas's trademarked three stripes – but it was not until the launch of the Converse 'All Star Professional' in 1976 and the

Pro-Keds 'Royal Master' in 1977 that American companies produced leather shoes with moulded soles that truly compared with their German rivals.⁵³ By this point, however, adidas was at work on a more advanced replacement for the aging 'Superstar'. In 1979 the 'Top Ten' was launched, a \$100 shoe the company said was created in collaboration with basketball professionals.⁵⁴ Incorporating several innovations, the model established a new design template for basketball footwear, replacing the 'Superstar' as the shoe to copy.

The 'Superstar' as fashion object

The 'Superstar' did not disappear with the arrival of the 'Top Ten', but remained in production, intended as a multipurpose gym shoe or a more affordable alternative to the new model. With improvements to adidas's American distribution arrangements, it was far more easily obtained than in the early 1970s, and in the early 1980s became hugely popular among teenaged New Yorkers. Although it was intended for the basketball court, the shoe's flat sole and robust construction made it well suited to everyday use in an urban environment. Garcia recalls that when he started at Brooklyn Tech High School in 1980 'about half the school (which included African American, Asian American, Latin American, and European American students from all 5 boroughs)' wore the model.⁵⁵ It was this ubiquity that led to the shoe becoming associated with hip hop, a youth subculture that emerged in the late 1970s from the post-industrial ruins of New York's outer boroughs.

Based on the three pillars of rap music, breakdancing (also known as b-boying), and graffiti art, and existing outside mainstream popular culture, hip hop was created haphazardly during the late 1970s by teenagers from largely African American, Caribbean, and Puerto Rican backgrounds.⁵⁶ Like most youth subcultures, it was associated with a particular sartorial style. Outfits were assembled from accessible sources – denim, army surplus, workwear, sportswear – but these basic ingredients were tweaked and personalised, with the aim of looking 'fresh'. Clothing was a form of individual and group performance, with an emphasis placed on garments that looked new or visually striking. Sneakers were a crucial component of hip hop style, and, worn loose or with fat ribbons for laces, were chosen to match or complement other items.

For the historian Tricia Rose, this clothing represented an unspoken challenge to a neglectful white mainstream. In her estimation, it was 'sartorial warfare' based on the 'appropriation and critique via style'. The kids who created hip hop were bricoleurs, appropriating everyday items

such as the sports shoe and giving them new meanings that expressed their frustration at their marginalised position in society.⁵⁷ Yet as several fashion theorists have pointed out, clothing can be notoriously difficult to read, with wearers' intentions often different from viewers' perceptions.⁵⁸ Moreover, as the historian Kathy Peiss has argued in a study of the zoot suit, historians need to be cautious when discussing youth style. As she points out, young people often left no records of why they dressed in a particular way, nor of what their wardrobe was supposed to mean.⁵⁹ The historian of hip hop faces many of these difficulties. There are few records of why particular garments were chosen, and later recollections are often coloured by an awareness both of hip hop's subsequent development and the critical interpretation offered by academics and commentators such as Rose. Nevertheless, hip hop style can be placed into the longer tradition of African American sartorial inventiveness described by Shane White and Graham White. In *Stylin'*, they argued that African Americans have long used clothing to subvert and mock white authority and 'give visual expression to cultural preferences that were at variance with those of the dominant racial group.' Writing of black urban areas in the early twentieth century, they suggested that being 'dressed up' was an important part of creating a collective identity based on more than wage labour: 'the donning of flashy attire, the representing of the black body through neat, elegant clothing constituted "a public challenge to the dominant stereotypes of the black body... reinforcing a sense of dignity that was perpetually being assaulted".'⁶⁰ Clothing was a means of creating and expressing a sense of pride, both in oneself and one's community. Commentators in the late 1970s agonised about school children donning '\$10-plus sneakers' as 'modest, yet flashy status symbol[s]', but it was part of a long trend in urban, African American culture.⁶¹

Sneakers were important within hip hop style for a variety of reasons. The subculture was created by teenagers who were already likely to wear them as everyday status symbols; it coalesced around informal dance parties at which comfort was important; and sneakers fitted within an aesthetic tradition that expressed and reflected African Americans' complex relationship with mainstream white society. Hip hop was also closely associated with basketball. Many of the first parties took place in gymnasiums or on public courts. Alongside musicians, black players provided models of African American success. The game's importance among hip hop's core constituency was highlighted in 1979 on the first commercially successful rap record, 'Rapper's Delight' by The Sugarhill Gang, which included the line, 'I've got a color TV / So I can see / The Knicks playing basketball'.⁶² The popularity of the 'Superstar' in New York

meant it was worn at countless hip hop events in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it was not the only sports shoe worn. The 1970s jogging boom and changes in manufacturing, international trade, and the retail sector – notably rising production in Asia, increased imports into the United States, and the birth in the early 1970s of sports shoe chains The Athlete’s Foot and Foot Locker – meant athletic footwear was far more readily available than ever before. This was accompanied by a proliferation of branded shoes, as new companies were created and manufacturers from around the world moved into the United States. In American stores, shoes from adidas, Converse, and Pro-Keds, now sat alongside those produced by Puma, shoes made in Asia for American companies such as Nike and Pony, and those from a host of lesser-known brands. With hip hop fashion a means of expressing both individual and group identity, each of the sports shoe companies experienced a degree of popularity among the kids who created hip hop, a fact shown by the variety of sneakers on show in contemporary photographs.⁶³

As hip hop became more established, several outsiders, many of them from New York’s parallel art, music, and film cultures, were attracted to its energy. It was as a result of their influence and promotion that hip hop became a global phenomenon, but as New York’s diversity was codified into a series of easily reproduced images, this process of mediation reduced the stylistic variety of New York teenagers into a more uniform ‘hip hop look’ and erased some of its original meaning. As Hebdige wrote in *Subculture*, the attention of outsiders ‘invariably ends with the simultaneous diffusion and defusion of the subcultural style.’⁶⁴ Yet this process helped cement the connection between the ‘Superstar’ and hip hop, adding an extra layer of significance to the shoe. Typical of those who became involved was Michael Holman, a player on the downtown experimental music and art scene who moved to New York in 1978 after studying at the University of San Francisco. In 1981 and 1982, he contributed articles to the *East Village Eye* that were among the first on hip hop, and Negril, the club he opened in Manhattan, brought DJs, rappers, and breakdancers to downtown audiences. A series of short films he made for New York cable TV about rap and breakdancing provided the seed for *Graffiti Rock*, a pilot show that in 1984 was broadcast around the United States.⁶⁵ Like his articles, it introduced viewers to what he considered the essentials of hip hop. In a graffiti-covered studio, rappers, DJs and breakdancers performed while an audience of black, Hispanic and white teenagers danced. As host, Holman asked a DJ to explain his technique, invited rappers to demonstrate competitive rhyming, and introduced breakdancers who performed various moves. Key terms, such

as 'fresh', were defined in animated inserts similar to those used on *Sesame Street*. This educational tone extended to clothing. In one sequence, Holman introduced Rosemary and Dino, audience members who were presented as the archetypal b-boy and b-girl. Both wore 'Superstar' with loose, fat laces. Holman quizzed them:

Holman: Y'all look kinda fresh. Tell me something about your fashion.

What're you wearing? What are these shoes?

Rosemary: These are a pair of adidas with the fat laces. That's the way we sport them.

Holman: And what do you call your fashion overall?

Rosemary: Fresh!

Holman (turning to Dino): What about your fashion? What about your look? How do you describe it?

Dino: You know, I call it b-boy threads [...]. I got [...] a pair of white-on-white adidas with fat laces. [...] I sport it fresh, homes.⁶⁶

At the same time as he pushed the TV show, Holman published *Breaking and the New York City Breakers*, a book he hoped would similarly transmit hip hop to a wider audience. Clearly aimed at young readers, it was illustrated with photographs of *Graffiti Rock* and other hip hop events. The 'Superstar' appeared frequently and a loose-laced pair graced the contents page, a representative image that indicated what was to come. In a list of the essentials of hip hop fashion Holman included 'Adidas sneakers that are or at least look brand-new with fat laces, laced in perfect criss-cross design and never pulled tight [...] but left loose and stylized'.⁶⁷

Holman was not alone in bringing hip hop style to a larger audience. The Rock Steady Crew, a group of breakdancers from the South Bronx, featured in the video to Malcolm McLaren's 1982 single 'Buffalo Gals' and briefly became popstars in their own right when their single '(Hey You) The Rock Steady Crew' became a global hit (Figure 4). In matching sportswear, they embodied Holman's claim that '[h]ip hoppers want to look sharp and perfect like an animated image'. The single's artwork included caricatures of the group, four of them wearing stylized 'Superstar'. (The other two wore Puma 'Clyde' and all six wore Nike 'Windrunner' jackets.)⁶⁸ Hip hop was also at the heart of the 1983 documentary and documentary-fiction films *Style Wars* and *Wild Style*, and could be glimpsed in Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant's 1984 bestselling book on New York graffiti, *Subway Art*.⁶⁹ Hollywood got in on the act in 1984 with *Beat Street* and other breakdancing movies.⁷⁰ Publishers cashed in with cheap books like *Breakdance!*, which instructed readers on clothing 'essentials you've got to have if you're going to look

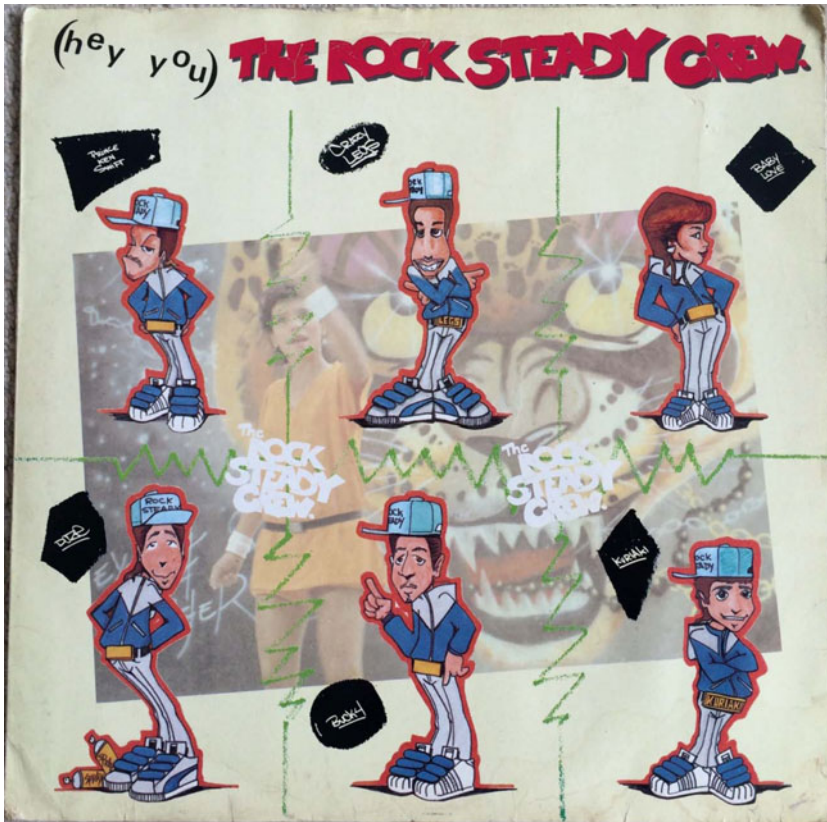


Figure 4 '(Hey You) The Rock Steady Crew', Virgin Records, RSC 1-12, 1983. Author's copy.

like the real thing'. These included, perhaps inevitably, adidas 'Superstar'.⁷¹ In an era in which hip hop had not penetrated the mainstream, these books and films provided images that could be copied by readers and viewers far from New York City. Without easy access to the real thing, during the mid-1980s fans of rap music looked to scarce visual reproductions of the New York scene for a template of what it meant to be a true b-boy or b-girl. *Graffiti Rock* never progressed beyond the pilot stage, but home video copies of it circulated between young hip hop fans in Europe and the United States long after Holman shelved the project. As part of this process of mediation, the meaning the 'Superstar' held in New York was subsumed beneath a broader significance; it was no longer linked primarily to basketball, rather it became one of a handful of visual symbols of hip hop culture in its entirety.⁷²

Hip hop superstars

Hip hop bubbled on the fringes of pop culture through the early 1980s, but it was the arrival of Run-D.M.C. – who made their first television appearance on *Graffiti Rock* – that truly thrust New York youth culture into the global limelight. The group grew up with hip hop and were instrumental in taking rap to a worldwide audience. Their 1984 debut, *Run-D.M.C.*, was the first rap album to achieve gold status, their second, *King of Rock* (1985), the first to go platinum, and their third, *Raising Hell* (1986), the first to achieve multi-platinum status. They were the first rap act nominated for a Grammy, the first to appear on MTV, *American Bandstand*, and the cover of *Rolling Stone*, and the only one to appear at Live Aid. Sartorially they drew inspiration from the streets around them and dressed like many of their teenage peers in New York, even after becoming international pop stars. Imitating black prisoners whose shoe-laces were removed in jail, they wore their shoes without laces.⁷³ Their uniform of black jeans, black leather jackets, and ‘Superstar’ sneakers marked a break from the flamboyant, theatrical style of earlier rap acts such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, and was transmitted around the world via record sleeves, public appearances, photo shoots, and popular music videos. As the most successful of a second wave of rap acts that appeared in the mid-1980s, the group’s adidas, like the rest of their image, signalled their direct connection to the street culture that spawned them. The ‘Superstar’ became a symbol of the group’s ‘authenticity’. Yet at the same time, the trio’s three-stripe shoes also functioned as an easily recognisable – and easily copied – gimmick that identified them as they moved from underground to mainstream commercial success. The group’s image was carefully cultivated by their manager, Russell Simmons, one of the canniest entrepreneurs involved with hip hop.⁷⁴ Like the Beatles’ mop-tops, or the Bay City Rollers’ tartan, Run-D.M.C.’s adidas were visually memorable and provided an accessible means by which fans could demonstrate their affinity for the group. Around the world, young people began to seek out this aging basketball shoe simply because it was worn by Run-D.M.C.

Back in Germany, many at adidas were either unaware or bewildered by the shifting associations of one their most successful models. To them, the ‘Superstar’ was simply a shoe that could be produced inexpensively for the American market, and which could help generate profits that could be ploughed back into the development of high-end specialist footwear.⁷⁵ The company was aware that sports shoes were becoming fashionable, and were beginning to cultivate the sports fashion market, but was largely

ignorant of the impact of Run-D.M.C. and hip hop; Herzogenaurach was a very long way from the South Bronx. Despite being unofficial ambassadors for the brand, Run-D.M.C. were notably absent from *adidas News*, the newsletter adidas produced in Herzogenaurach for distribution through sporting goods stores around the world. A section entitled 'Pop' was added in the mid-1980s, but it was dominated by photographs of mainstream white rock and pop stars popular in West Germany dressed in adidas shoes and clothing, presumably donated by adidas marketing staff. The closest it came to New York street culture was to reproduce a promotional photograph of Madonna wearing fat-laced 'Superstar' in 1985.⁷⁶

It was not until Run-D.M.C. released the single 'My Adidas' in 1986 that adidas realised the commercial opportunity presented by hip hop. With the lyric, 'My adidas and me, close as can be / We make a mean team, my adidas and me', the song recounted the group's successes and was a powerful advertisement for the brand.⁷⁷ Written at a time when adidas was being overtaken on the New York streets and basketball courts by Nike and Reebok, the song can be read as a nostalgic recollection of hip hop's early years. Run-D.M.C.'s DJ, Jason Mizell (a.k.a. Jam Master Jay), claimed it was written in response to fans asking why the group still wore adidas when everyone else had moved on to Reebok, Fila, or Troop.⁷⁸ By sticking resolutely to adidas, Run-D.M.C. stayed demonstrably true to their roots. More significantly, however, the song was a blatant attempt by the group to attract adidas's attention and secure financial acknowledgement for their positive impact on shoe sales. Sporting goods retailers, who benefited from and promoted the wider fashion for sportswear, had already noticed the group's effect, and arranged in-store performances at which adidas products were sold alongside records and other merchandise.⁷⁹ After the single's release Run-D.M.C. sent a video to adidas in which they pointed to their chart success and demanded a 'million dollars'.⁸⁰ This prompted Angelo Anastasio, a product placement and endorsement manager in the United States, to attend their triumphant homecoming show at Madison Square Garden. Aware he was present, the group urged the crowd to hold their shoes in the air during 'My Adidas'; several thousand pairs of 'Superstar' were enthusiastically raised aloft. After seeing this, Anastasio persuaded Horst Dassler to establish a deal with the group. A contract was signed and Run-D.M.C. became the first non-sports stars to formally endorse a sporting goods company.⁸¹

It was not until after the release of 'My Adidas' that Run-D.M.C. appeared in *adidas News* (Figure 5). The newsletter's writers appeared unsure of how to deal with the group's success, or of how best to insert



Figure 5 Run-D.M.C. (top left), wearing “Superstar”, alongside Chris de Burgh, Tina Turner, and David Lee Roth in *adidas News*. Adidas archive, Z-1-193.

them into a company narrative, which, despite forays into fashion and pop music, remained overwhelmingly focused on sports and technology:

A hard and heavy rap hymn dedicated to adidas shoes has become a hit all over the world. An absolute sensation! The big hip-hop group

Run DMC sang 'My adidas' and topped the hot black charts in the USA. With 'Walk This Way' the three coloured guys have also conquered the European market.⁸²

The clumsy handling of African American youth culture continued in the following issue. A section titled 'Rap – what is it?' attempted to introduce readers to rap music, despite it having been a feature of the pop charts since the release of the 'Rapper's Delight'. The genre was described, fairly accurately, if very simply, as 'short rhymes to the instrumental parts of records'. The brief piece included a photograph of Run-D.M.C., 'the Number One among the rappers', dressed in unlaced 'Superstar'.⁸³

The 'Superstar', however, was reaching the end of the product cycle and was obsolete from a sports perspective. Senior staff at adidas knew this and so welcomed the opportunity to increase sales of an outdated model that could be cheaply produced.⁸⁴ Moreover, as the 1980s drew to a close, the company faced serious financial difficulties as its dominance was challenged and overtaken, first by Reebok and later by Nike. Within the crucial basketball market, Nike had targeted high school players and coaches since the late 1970s, aiming to get players accustomed to Nike shoes before they reached the college or professional leagues. By the mid-1980s the effects of this long-term strategy were beginning to show, as Nike replaced adidas on basketball courts around the country.⁸⁵ Nike's 'Air Jordan', the signature model of basketball superstar Michael Jordan, was launched in 1984 and quickly became the must-have shoe of the mid-1980s. Facing a declining market share, adidas's deal with Run-D.M.C. promised a much-needed sales boost. A range of Run-D.M.C. adidas shoes and clothing was launched, including the 'Superstar'-inspired 'Ultra Star', a casual shoe designed to be worn without laces.⁸⁶ The group appeared at trade shows and in promotional material for the company.⁸⁷ Television advertising pushed the group and the brand, and the company helped promote the group's 1988 Tougher Than Leather tour.⁸⁸ The deal paid off. Fans in the USA were said by adidas to be 'crazy for Run DMC outfits, the range launched by adidas on the US market under the band's name' and which included 'Run DMC T-shirts, sweatshirts, sleeveless sweaters and training suits'.⁸⁹ It is estimated that Run-D.M.C. generated sales of more than \$100 million, though they could not prevent adidas slipping into financial crisis after Horst's unexpected death in 1987, and could do little against the relentless rise of Nike on and off the basketball court.⁹⁰

For Naomi Klein, writing in her turn-of-the-millennium bestseller, *No Logo*, this was simply cultural appropriation on the part of the sports company. Adidas were the corporation that led the charge 'to the basketball

courts of America's poorest neighbourhoods' in search of a coolness they could sell to mainstream white consumers. The endorsement deal was 'the latest chapter in mainstream America's gold rush to poverty', as 'young black men in American inner cities [became] the market most aggressively mined by brandmasters as a source of borrowed "meaning" and identity'. In her analysis, adidas cynically exploited and commodified black style for commercial gain.⁹¹ While there is a degree of accuracy to Klein's analysis, the relationship between adidas and hip hop was not as straightforward as she suggests. Adidas had always sought to associate itself with top athletes, whatever their ethnic background. It did this by providing elite sports men and women with free shoes and by signing endorsement deals with famous names, such as Haillet, Smith, and Abdul-Jabbar. The association with New York street style, however, developed more organically. It was an unintended consequence of the company's entry into the basketball market in the 1960s, and the importance of basketball in the lives of – most especially – African American teenagers in New York that the company's products became associated with inner city style. It was through the efforts of people outside the company, including those who sought to promote hip hop to wider audiences, a young band seeking to cultivate a distinctive look, and small retailers who hoped to cash in on the fashion for sportswear, that these associations spread. By the time executives in Herzogenaurach eventually came round to working with Run-D.M.C. the group had reached the peak of their success and had been wearing adidas on TV screens and magazine covers for almost three years. The connections between the brand, the band, and hip hop were all well established, and for many consumers the 'Superstar' was already a fashion, not a sports, product. Adidas simply capitalised on cultural shifts that had occurred outside their control.

The questions of financial gain remains, however. Even though the company had not actively sought the connection, adidas profited from hip hop, and eventually helped promote it as a means to sell shoes. Run-D.M.C. were also rewarded; Mizell acknowledged in 1996 that they received 'over a million dollars' from adidas.⁹² The reward for the teenagers such as Rosemary and Dino who created hip hop style was less easily quantified. They did not receive financial payment, but it could be argued that the attention of adidas did give them cultural credence. In a reversal of the traditional endorser–endorsee relationship, Darryl McDaniels (a.k.a. DMC) suggested in an interview for adidas in 2008 that 'the relationship with adidas legitimised our culture, because before it happened, people said it's just a fad, rap music is just a fad, it's negative, it's not good, nobody will ever like it'. In his analysis, the link to a company that 'was very well respected, that was very household, families[,] [...] gave us some legitimacy [and] took

us from the streets to mainstream white America'.⁹³ In McDaniel's analysis, the commercial backing, television advertisements, and tour support were powerful statements of cultural validation for a subculture that developed on the fringes of mainstream society and respectability. Whether or not the kids who created hip hop in the 1970s and 1980s feel the same as a global pop star, however, is open to debate.

Conclusion

By the time *Christmas Rap* was released in 1987 the connection between the 'Superstar' and hip hop was well established – as executives at Profile Records must have realised. Indeed, the shoe was so closely associated with mid-1980s' hip hop that within 18 months 'shell-toes' and 'fat laces' were among a list of outdated fashion clichés ridiculed by De La Soul, a group who helped usher in a new era in rap music and hip hop style at the end of the decade.⁹⁴ Consumers had ignored a narrow category of intended use and in doing so had turned the 'Superstar' into something much broader than initially intended. No longer simply a sports product, it had also become a fashion item. The shoe remained, however, intimately bound to the game for which it was created, even as the link to basketball faded into memory. Product and practice were closely connected. It was created in answer to a need for more robust basketball footwear as the game developed after the Second World War. The shoe's overall design, and the materials and construction methods used, were shaped by the needs of basketball players, who wanted lightweight footwear that would enable them to run, stop, turn, and jump without injury on smooth wooden surfaces. Yet the shoe's existence and material form were determined by more than practical functionality. A complex and interconnected web of social patterns, economic shifts, and cultural and industrial developments was as important as the game of basketball itself. Tensions within the Dassler family, a son's desire to establish himself independent of his parents' control, changes to sport, international trade agreements, and the enormity of the American market were all factors behind adidas's moves into the United States in the 1960s. The growing importance of television and photographic media affected the design, most visibly in the shoe's prominent branding, as too did the limitations of the company's production machinery. As a manufactured object, it drew on the Dasslers' heritage of manufacturing and the company's willingness to experiment with new materials, ideas, and methods. In design terms, it referenced a tradition of basketball shoe making that dated to the beginning of the century. More specifically, it owed much to its immediate forerunner

at adidas France, the 'Haillet'. The similarity between the two designs went beyond the physical parallels between tennis and basketball; it showed adidas France's desire to extract as much as possible from investment in technological innovation and manufacturing processes. The shoe's broader cultural meaning and its associative power were similarly rooted in basketball but shifted as it moved through different frames. Adidas, as it did with all its products, initially sought to associate the shoe with elite athletes and did little to cultivate a connection to fashion. Yet it was because the shoe was popular on the basketball court that it eventually became popular on the street in New York, and it was this popularity that led to it being worn by Run-D.M.C. in the mid-1980s. It was an accident of production and distribution cycles that the shoe's popularity coincided with the birth of hip hop, and it was the declining relevance of the shoe as a sports product that allowed adidas to build on its connection to New York street culture and promote it as a fashion garment in the late 1980s. Significantly, adidas were never able to control the reception of the shoe, and so were unable to determine the ways in which people thought about it. Consumers, the people who bought and wore it, shaped the cultural meanings attached to the shoe as much as adidas; the association with hip hop developed almost entirely independently of the company. Adidas did little to nurture or exploit the connection created by kids in New York and spread by popular media, and it was only when it became too hard to ignore that adidas moved to accommodate and capitalise on this new way of thinking about their product.

Over two decades, the adidas 'Superstar' went from being an innovative, top-of-the-range sports shoe, designed to answer the needs of basketball players and provide a German manufacturer with a way into the American sneaker market, to a casual fashion shoe, associated with Run-D.M.C. and hip hop culture in general. In the quarter century since, sneakers and sportswear have been fully incorporated into the world of mainstream fashion and sports shoes have exerted a powerful influence on everyday footwear. The 'Superstar' has continued to accrue further cultural meanings, some of them independently, some of them pushed by adidas. The connection with hip hop remains strong, but it is now just one of many cultural links. The shoe's longevity is testament to the power of its cultural associations, but also to the adaptability of its design. Like the 'Haillet'/'Stan Smith', the 'Superstar' has proved that a product rooted in one practice can be ideally suited to a range of more mundane, everyday tasks. Tracing this trajectory from sports to everyday fashion shows that intended use can often lead to other, unexpected twists and turns. Perhaps more importantly, it reveals the complexities, coincidences,

chance encounters, and historical contingencies that cause products to exist and which determine the ways in which people think about them.

Notes

1. Various Artists, *Christmas Rap*, Profile Records, PRO-1247.
2. Examples from an extensive literature include: Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Alison J. Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999); Virginia Scott Jenkins, *Bananas: An American History* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); John Loadman, *Tears of the Tree: The Story of Rubber* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010); Giorgio Riello, *One Foot in the Past: Consumers, Producers and Footwear in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999). The Cultures of Consumption research programme produced an extensive bibliography of scholarship from the humanities and social sciences. See <http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/publications.html#bibliography>.
3. Bernhard Rieger, *The People's Car: A Global History of the Volkswagen Beetle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
4. Frank Trentmann, 'Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics,' *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 306.
5. Examples of this literature include: Elizabeth Shove and Dale Southerton, 'Defrosting the Freezer: From Novelty to Convenience,' *Journal of Material Culture* 5, no. 3 (2000): 301–19; Jukka Gronow and Alan Warde, eds., *Ordinary Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2001); Elizabeth Shove and Mika Pantzar, 'Consumers, Producers and Practices: Understanding the Invention and Reinvention of Nordic Walking,' *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 1 (2005): 43–64; Elizabeth Shove, Matthew Watson, Martin Hand, and Jack Ingram, *The Design of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2007).
6. Harvey Molotch, *Where Stuff Comes From: How Toasters, Toilets, Cars, Computers and Many Other Things Come To Be As They Are* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Wiebe E. Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
7. Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London: Comedia, 1988), 81–2.
8. Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (Milton Keynes: Sage, 1997).
9. On the early history of basketball see Robert W. Peterson, *From Cages to Jump shots: Pro Basketball's Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 15–31; Keith Myerscough, 'The Game with No Name: The Invention of Basketball', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12, no. 1 (1995): 137–52.
10. 'The Shoe of Champions', United States Rubber advertisement, c.1925, author's collection; 'A.A.U. National Champions – in Keds', United States Rubber advertisement, c.1926, author's collection.

11. Compare, for example, Wallace R. Lord, ed., *Converse Basketball Year Book for 1930* (Malden, MA: Converse Rubber Company, 1930), 78; Wallace R. Lord, ed., *Converse Basketball Yearbook 1965* (Malden, MA: Converse Rubber Company, 1965), back cover. Although Taylor played professionally in the early 1920s, the addition of his name to the shoe in 1932 was more in recognition of his role as a travelling Converse salesman, responsible for high school basketball clinics that were instrumental in spreading the game's popularity. See Abraham Aamidor, *Chuck Taylor, All Star: The True Story of the Man Behind the Most Famous Athletic Shoe in History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).
12. Marilyn Bender, 'Shift to Low Sneakers Still Plagues Mothers', *New York Times*, October 26, 1962, 48.
13. Spike Lee with Ralph Wiley, *Best Seat in the House* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 31.
14. Richard Flaste, 'For Eighth-Graders, the Sneaker is More Than the Sum of Its Parts', *New York Times*, May 12, 1973, 38.
15. 'Shoe Men Expect Output Increase', *New York Times*, November 26, 1961, F15.
16. John F. Kennedy, 'The Soft American', *Sports Illustrated* 13, no. 26 (December 26, 1960): 15–17.
17. Mansel G. Blackford and K. Austin Kerr, *B.F. Goodrich: Tradition and Transformation 1870–1995* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 283–4.
18. For an outline of the concept see Shove and Pantzar, 'Consumers, Producers and Practices': 43–64.
19. John Christgau, *The Origins of the Jump Shot: Eight Men Who Shook the World of Basketball* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2004), 276, 289–92.
20. Rader, *American Sports*, 276, 292.
21. John Wooden quoted in Jackie MacMullen, 'The shoe fits', *Ultrasport Review*, April, 1987, 77–81, quoted in Abraham Aamidor, *Chuck Taylor, All Star: The True Story of the Man Behind the Most Famous Athletic Shoe in History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 139.
22. Molotch, *Where Stuff Comes From*, 106–7.
23. Adolf and Rudolf Dassler established Sportschuhfabrik Gebrüder Dassler in the 1920s, but argued irreconcilably in the late 1940s. In 1948 the company was split between the brothers. Adolf renamed his half of the business adidas. Rudolf called his Puma. On the history and prehistory of adidas, see Detlef Vetten, *Making a Difference* (Herzogenaurach: adidas, 1998), 92–175; Barbara Smit, *Pitch Invasion: Three Stripes, Two Brothers, One Feud: Adidas and the Making of Modern Sport* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); Rolf-Herbert Peters, *The Puma Story: The Remarkable Turnaround of an Endangered Species Into One of the World's Hottest Sportlifestyle Brands* (London: Cyan, 2007), 3–24.
24. See R.G. Stokes, *Opting For Oil: The Political Economy of Technological Change in the West German Chemical Industry, 1945–1961* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John E. Lesch, ed., *The German Chemical Industry in the Twentieth Century* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).
25. John E. Lesch, 'Introduction', in *The German Chemical Industry in the Twentieth Century*, 1.

26. Karl-Heinz Lang, in discussion with the author, August 18, 2011.
27. The following section on the rise of adidas France draws on Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 69–78, 99–104.
28. Karl-Heinz Lang interviewed in Anon., *Superstar 35th Anniversary PR Book* (Herzogenaurach: adidas, 2005), 10, B/AD/23, adidas archive.
29. Adidas, catalogue (France), 1968, 32, DC-312, adidas archive.
30. Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 106–8; adidas, catalogue (global), 1965, 13, DC-290, adidas archive; adidas, catalogue (France), 1968, 24, DC-312, adidas archive.
31. Blackford and Austin Kerr, *B.F. Goodrich*, 283; Alison Gill, ‘Limousines For Feet: The Rhetoric of Sneakers’, in Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeill, eds., *Shoes: From Fashion to Fantasy* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 377.
32. Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 104–6.
33. Adidas, catalogue (United States), 1968, 15, DC-319, adidas archive.
34. Adidas, catalogue (France), 1968, 22, DC-312, adidas archive.
35. Karl-Heinz Lang interviewed in Anon., *Superstar 35th Anniversary PR Book*, 10.
36. Adidas, catalogue (global), 1970, 41, DC-339, adidas archive.
37. Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 105.
38. Charles L. Perrin, Charlie’s Sneaker Pages (www.sneakers.pair.com), email correspondence with author, March 8, 2005.
39. Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 105.
40. See Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 91–8.
41. Adidas, catalogue (United States), 1971, sig., DC-341, adidas archive.
42. Adidas, catalogue (United States), 1970/71, 12, DC-4139, adidas archive.
43. Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 105–6.
44. Perrin, email correspondence, March 8, 2005.
45. Sam Koperwas, ‘Schoolyard Basketball: A Primer Of Styles and Wiles’, *New York Times*, August 24, 1975, 170.
46. The importance of the Rucker Playground is discussed in Roberto Garcia, *Where’d You Get Those? New York City’s Sneaker Culture: 1960–1987* (New York: Testify Books, 2003), 33; ‘The original player’, *Just For Kicks*, DVD, directed by Thibaut De Longeville and Lisa Leone (Caid Productions, 2005).
47. Garcia, *Where’d You Get Those?*, 47.
48. Koperwas, ‘Schoolyard basketball’, 170.
49. Smit, *Pitch Invasion*, 102.
50. Garcia, *Where’d You Get Those?*, 45–7.
51. John Underwood, ‘No goody two shoes’, *Sports Illustrated* 30, no. 10 (March 10, 1969): 24–5.
52. Adidas, catalogue (United States), c.1970, sig., DC-4022, adidas archive.
53. ‘Introducing a Leather Basketball Shoe That Isn’t Stuck Together With Glue’, Pro-Keds advertisement, 1970, author’s collection; ‘All Stars for All Stars’ and ‘Now Basketball’s More Colorful Than Ever’, Converse advertisements, in Wallace R. Lord, ed., *Converse Basketball Yearbook 1970* (Malden, MA: Converse, 1970), 1, back cover; ‘All Pro Line-up’, Pro-Keds advertisement, in Anon., *Pro-Keds Coaches Digest* (New Haven, CT: Uniroyal, 1971); Thomas W. Ricker, ed., *Converse 1976 Basketball Yearbook* (Malden, MA: Converse, 1976), front cover; ‘Take Your Next Shot in the Pros’, Pro-Keds advertisement, in Anon., *Pro-Keds Coaches Digest* (New Haven, CT: Uniroyal, 1977), 18; Garcia, *Where’d You Get Those?*, 40–6, 60–1.

54. Adidas, footwear and accessories catalogue (United States), 1979, sig., DC-260, adidas archive; 'Rick Barry, Inventor', adidas advertisement, 1979, reproduced in Garcia, *Where'd You Get Those?*, 99.
55. Garcia, *Where'd You Get Those?*, 89.
56. The development of hip hop is described in '1. Close to the edge', *The Hip Hop Years*, television show, directed by David Upshal (RDF/Channel 4, 1999); Alex Ogg and David Upshal, *The Hip Hop Years: A history of Rap* (London: Channel 4 Books, 1999), 13–71; Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation* (London: Ebury Press, 2005), 7–211. Hip hop culture is examined in Joseph G. Schloss, *Foundation: B-boys, B-girls, and Hip-hop Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
57. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 36–8. Rose's interpretation is based on the method of analysis suggested by Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).
58. See Malcolm Barnard, 'Part Five: Fashion as Communication', Umberto Eco, 'Social Life As a Sign System', Fred Davis, 'Do Clothes Speak? What Makes Them Fashion?', Colin Campbell, 'When the Meaning Is Not a Message: A Critique of the Consumption as Communication Thesis', Malcolm Barnard, 'Fashion Statements: Communication and Culture', all in Malcolm Barnard, ed., *Fashion Theory: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2007), 137–81.
59. Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of An Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1–14.
60. Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 4, 85–94, 127, 164. The quotation is from Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 50.
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