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URBANITY AND ART: NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE AND THE EVOLUTION OF HIP-HOP IN BEDFORD STUYVESANT

Robert Curran

Mentor: Carol Camp Yeakey

Bedford-Stuyvesant, colloquially known as Bed-Stuy, is the heartbeat of the African-American existence and identity in Brooklyn, New York. Acting as the primary residence of Black Brooklynites for more than 60 years, Bed-Stuy, or “Brooklyn’s little Harlem,” occupies an important place in the annals of American urban history. Formerly a wealthy, white neighborhood, Bed-Stuy became arguably the largest ghetto in the United States by the mid-twentieth century. Forming this transformation were various individuals, policies, and systems. Bed-Stuy’s particular transformation is noteworthy for it illuminates the inequalities, navigation tactics, and hegemonies within both a unique neighborhood and the City of New York as a whole. Moreover, the neighborhood’s economics, politics, migratory patterns, and infrastructural changes have acted as sources of water and sunlight for the blooms of local cultural and artistic responses. Among the many cultural outgrowths of the ghetto, perhaps none are more important than hip-hop, which will serve as a helpful lens in better understanding Bed-Stuy, its residents, and its historic and recent evolutions. In many ways, hip-hop is not just a reaction to life in the ghetto, but it is also the life of the ghetto; broken and battered, but beautiful and buoyant.