DJs were breaking these new sounds to a receptive group of kids. Early on they began recording these sets; they began recording live performances by guys out in the park; and then, of course, making [cassette] copies of those . . .

There was an art to making a cassette mix. You needed to know your tracks and how long they were and be intimately involved in the process of actually putting this thing together and getting it to fit. Because the last thing you wanted was the song to cut off midway at the end of the tape; that was the ultimate mix tape faux pas. So it was all about how you were gonna create a flow of music but also get it down in a way where, by the end of that last track, you were gonna hear *click* and it was gonna be time to turn that tape over and rock on to the other side . . .

—**Andre Torres** *(EDITOR, WAX POETICS)*

There was a real excitement and exuberance around the music at the time. I don't know if you've ever heard about pause mixing. There were certain boxes—I want to say it was a Sanyo. This became big when you had a double cassette because you'd record, let's say, "Mr. Magic's Rap Attack," "The Supreme Team." These were local New York radio shows that came on once a week for a couple of hours that played the beginnings of what we know of as rap-slash-hip-hop music. You'd want to pause out the commercials and not have the filler; you want some good music. So if you have the right box, you can pause and then when the commercial's over you can wait. If you really had it down, you could come in on the right beat and the pause mix would be seamless. There were cats that prided themselves on being nice at that [LAUGHS] and then being able to go from cassette to cassette and kind of remix and remake stuff. That was huge.

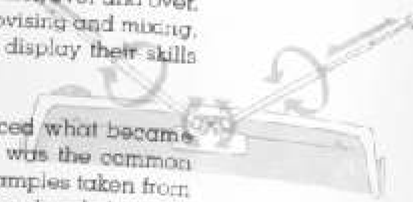
—**Fab 5 Freddy** *(PIONEER GRAFFITI ARTIST)*

EZ AD and Tony Tone
The Michaelangelos
Bronx, New York City, 1980
Joe Conzo

THE DJ AND THE MC

Hip-hop began as an uptown and outer-borough phenomenon that drew distinctive presence from its creator's desire for personal expression and innovation. The ability to incubate in the way it did, initially untouched by mass media, allowed the movement to gain the strength and posture that fed in to its indelible spirit and eventual staying power. While hip-hop was developing during the late seventies (and as breaking evolved as a dance style), DJs were creating the soundtrack to this new movement by taking the rhythmic breakdown sections (or "breaks") of dance records and looping them one after the other over and over. This provided a rhythmic background for improvising and mixing, while simultaneously allowing the dancers to display their skills during extended musical interludes.

> It created an almost DJ mentality knowing you were gonna be using this [tape] for a group of people to listen to. We all sort of became DJs in a sense—and the art of filtering and editing is the sort of seminal part of being a DJ. This was a reflection of who you were, for everybody else to hear what you had to say, because you were speaking through the music in a sense.
>
> —**Andre Torres** (EDITOR, WAX POETICS)



The pioneering DJs of this movement introduced what became the most elemental part of b-boy music. That was the common denominator of musical breaks formed out of samples taken from previously existing songs. In fact the whole genre of early hip-hop existed on a healthy dose of appropriated musical elements. Using audio clips (later known as "samples"), a sonic chain of sorts was looped together by the DJ. The tempo of this chain was generally beat-heavy, yet skillfully crafted into a smooth percussive pattern. Spine-rattling bass was usually the deft signature of this auditory tool. Urban history credits DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican transplant in New York, with the invention of this concept, which quickly became termed "the break beat," honoring its genesis as an ad infinitum interlude. These "breaks" or "loops of fury" innovations aimed at the dancers' favorite part in a song became the blueprint for modern hip-hop music. However, what occured in a DJ's mix booth did not translate so quickly to the music industry oligarchy. Some of the most influential tracks from the early days of hip-hop are now hard to find simply because the samples proved too hard to clear rights for once the genre ran rampant (Schoolly D's "The Signifying Rapper," which used "Kashmir" by Led Zeppelin, or Boogie Down Productions' heavy use of AC/DC on "Dope Beat" are some early samples of the break beat pushing the genre and stirring the ire of the recording industry). Other pioneers of this movement included Grandmaster Flash and the Sugar Hill Gang, who all reached into their record bins for funk beats to loop rather than use a live band to create the sounds they needed for their songs.

Following the rise of the DJ's stature as the preeminent sonic voice of the streets was the arrival of the MC. Born in the late seventies, the initial function of this individual was to hype the DJ's presence. The role quickly grew in prominence, incubating as a flow of words and style. Once accepted in front of the DJ's decks, the moniker MC (master of ceremonies) established a meaningful responsibility in hip-hop culture both as a visual centerpiece and as the "chairman of the board," so to speak. Initially the MC (or rapper, as they became known later) used rhyming verses of his own poetic creation to introduce and praise the DJ he was fronting. In the early days, the DJ was the head honcho, with the role of the MC to simply pump up the crowd with a shotgun blast of oration (it wasn't long before taunting one's own stature, commenting on the ills of society, or dissing another MC's style became the basis of this platform). As hip-hop progressed, the title MC became associated with a number of terms, such as Microphone Controller, Mic Checka, or Music Commentator. It also gained popularity through the lyrics of songs such as KRS-One's "The MC": "Who am I? The MC, la-di da-di. I don't wear Versace, I wear DJs out quickly at the party;" or MC Lyte's "Stop, Look, Listen": "M.C.—Master of Creativity / Rappin' is the activity." Whether the "master of creativity" or the one to "move the crowd" (as stated in the track "Eric B for President," by Eric B and Rakim), just as a master of ceremonies introduced boxers from opposite sides of the ring in a prize fight, the MC in hip-hop delivered a verbal discourse for all to take notice and listen, or if challenged, to jump into the fray and do battle with him. LO

Guys that felt that they were great MCs wanted everybody to hear them, you know, drop it. Guys would have their microphones with them, plug it into the box and just freestyle, drawing people so that the box became like that magnet that would bring people together. Then you had others that made tapes so hot they wanted everybody to listen to it. So the box helped enhance the whole spirit of your circle. Whoever had the box was the man back then. If you had the box, you had the power. Everybody wanted to be around you because you had the music. The women wanted to be around you because you're playing the tunes. The MCs wanted to be around with you just because they could show their skill.

—**Jamel Shabazz** (PHOTO DOCUMENTARIAN)

I'm a freestyle DJ. I like to play something that the radio should be playing that they're not playing.

—**DJ Kool Herc** (DJ / GODFATHER OF HIP-HOP)

DJs used to have a power to break a song or break a band because their personal taste overrode the station manager's playlist.

—**Jonathan Daniel** (MUSIC HISTORIAN / BAND MANAGER)

The rapper originally was just there to talk about the DJ. If you go back into West African culture, in West Africa—in Mali, they have what's called the griot. He says, "Hey, yo, this is what's goin' on; this is what's happenin." And this guy is the best, the most fabulous, the most interesting, the wealthiest, the most generous, the best lover, and the most beautiful man in his town, and he is here tonight to sit at this table and then for all of us to enjoy his presence at our party.

And they've been doing that in that culture for hundreds, maybe even thousands, of years. That's a form of a rapper.

—**Fab 5 Freddy** (PIONEER GRAFFITI ARTIST)

Radio stations had shows on certain nights of the week, so I would just sit there and record, not even record the whole show; I'd sit there with the record button on pause and wait until I heard something that I wanted to hear, and I'd just record that. Then from there, it expanded. You'd have friends that had boomboxes as well. So now what you do is you want to get songs that the other guy had and vice versa. You start making pause tapes. And that's really, I guess, what probably set me up for wanting to get into deejaying, the effect of having two radios next to each other, playing songs on one, and pause recording on the other, taking bits and pieces and trying to, like, compile your own little megamix of a medley.

—**DJ Eclipse** (DJ)

Tony Tone deejaying at the T Connection
Bronx, New York City, 1979
Joe Conzo

The Clash, Lower East Side
New York City, 1981
Amy Arbus

THE SUBCULTURES

A subculture is a group of people within a culture (whether distinct or hidden) who seek to differentiate themselves from the larger context in which they exist. It's this distinction that defines them and sets them apart from the greater whole. Characterized by a persistent opposition to the dominant culture, a subculture may even be described as a counterculture. Observing the divergent culture of the boombox (defined either as a subculture or as a counterculture), we see many elements coming together as a penetrating aural revolution that infiltrated the status quo—walls were forever shattered by voices and beats being mixed together that gave birth to a new form of articulating the desire to be seen and heard with validity and distinction, e.g.: hip hop, punk, new wave, speed metal, etc. Symbolizing a subculture's rise to significance, the boombox is a primary metaphor of voicing societal and cultural change. It's why their distinctive image still lingers amongst us today. LQ

The music was the backdrop. And you could hear it for miles around. You walk down the block and you hear that constant rhythm, that kind of musical flow.

We were feeding on a lot of different types of musical cultures. It's no surprise that Run-DMC would wind up using Aerosmith to do their take on that stuff, you know, because we were using a lot of that stuff in our communities.

—**Ricky Flores** (PHOTOJOURNALIST)

The boombox was also a fashion accessory. There was no MTV dictating our style or our taste. We kind of dictated that to them. Looking back, it's pretty amazing that someone says, "I'm going to wear sneakers and sweatpants and a Kangol, and I'm going to make it look really fly, and I'm going to carry a boombox, and it's going to be even more fly." If you really think about it, that's insane. Like, that's an insane notion. It's, like, really brilliant, you know? And you knew who was from where based upon their style. Like you know, "Oh, that's so Brooklyn. That's the Bronx. That's uptown, Harlem. That's Manhattan." You know? Poor Staten Island, you just knew because they had no style whatsoever. Thank God for Wu-Tang. Masta Ace, you know, straight from Brooklyn. Eric B and Rakim, straight from Brooklyn. MC Lyte, you know. It was a very specific style. Even Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Straight from Manhattan, you know? Remember they wore those leather outfits? Oh, God, they were horrible.

—**Rosie Perez** (CHOREOGRAPHER / ACTRESS)

I'd take music and use that as inspiration for skateboarding, and skateboarding influenced the music . . . For my generation, the boombox was a strong symbol of hip-hop. It was always part of my life, like graffiti, break dancing, deejaying, and producing music. So for me it was always an iconic symbol of, like, the youth culture. And it wasn't only hip-hop. You'd see just as many, like, crazy punk rockers walking around with a ghetto blaster.

—**Chad Muska** (PRO SKATEBOARDER)

You'll talk to some people and they'll say, "Oh, I don't like hip-hop," but they write graffiti. Or they'll say, "Oh, I'm not into hip-hop. I just like dance." And, you know, they don't understand that it's a four-legged table. You know, take one of those pieces off the table, and the movement might not be what it is today.

—**Cey Adams** (GRAFFITI ARTIST / ART DIRECTOR)

When people used to break-dance, you needed a boombox. When you were in a train station or underneath the subway, you'd have battles. That's what I used to do. You had this one kid, his whole job was just to carry the boombox. He did nothing else. But if he was going to have the boombox, he was going to have the right music. And that was a skill in itself. But he had to be able to carry it. You know, that shit was heavy at one point. It's not like we had cars. We had to walk and catch the trains all over the place.

—**Pras** (HIP-HOP ARTIST / MUSICIAN / THE FUGEES)

When I say that punk and hip-hop—the original hip-hop—were closely related, people look at me like I'm crazy. How could they even possibly be remotely connected to each other? Because they were irreverent. They were anarchic in a way. They were built from protest and dissatisfaction with where they come from, particularly graffiti artists. And even though the music didn't replicate that until "The Message." It really was the first rap tune that actually really thought about where these guys came from. There is a great similarity between the two movements.

And ironically enough, the people like the Clash, Bernie Rhodes, Malcolm, Don Letts, all these people that came from punk—and Bob Gruen—were all involved in rap music, too, and in hip-hop. To me that shows the strength and bond between the two genres.

—**Nick Egan** (ALBUM DESIGNER / ART DIRECTOR)

When I started going out to clubs in Manhattan in, like, 1985, '86, they would play new wave on one floor and hip-hop on the other floor and punk rock on the other floor and disco on the roof. So I think each culture benefited from the boombox. And there were, like, different aesthetics with each one.

—**Claw Money** (GRAFFITI ARTIST / FASHION DESIGNER)

From Kraftwerk and Afrika Bambaataa to 2 Live Crew and Jam Pony Express, the sounds of the revolutionary, phenomenon of the 1980s forever changed and inspired the sound of music today and into the future. The boombox, with its electronic transmission of the beats, becomes manifest through the B-boy's footwork as the message.

—**Jose Parla** (AGENCY / ARTIST)

BREAK DANCERS, NEW YORK CITY, 1981
TED POLHEMUS

LL Cool J.
Madison Square Park, New York City, 1985
Glen E. Friedman, from the book, Fuck You Heroes,
courtesy Burning Flags Press

RAP

From its early roots in front of the DJ's sound system, hip-hop culture spawned a new musical genre known as rap. From its outset, rapping took off from emceeing (MCing), which first hit the scene through linking up with the DJ—the subsequent urban marriage of rapidly delivered words over break beats led to the birth of the rapper phenomenon. The most prominent form of rapping is a fervent word display delivered lyrically over musical accompaniment. Today the term *rap* is so closely embedded within *hip-hop* that many use the terms synonymously (though pioneers in the movement will be quick to point out the difference between rap and hip-hop).

Initially established as the lead person to hype up a crowd for the DJ, the rapper quickly became defined as an artist, distinguished by a rat-a-tat-tat spoken delivery of rhymes, wordplay, and urban poetry. Once heard, it's never to be forgotten. Delivered as a rhythmic, flowing narrative, rapping is one of the primary components in contemporary hip-hop music. The phenomenon, however, predates hip-hop culture by many centuries. The tradition can be traced back to West Africa and the culture of griots. A griot is a larger-than-life character who can best be described as an announcer or praise singer of sorts. Picture a town crier with tribal robes using his voice as a bell to gather attention at a party. Once attention is gathered, the griot will tell a sing-song-like story about a citizen of rank, praising his virtues and stature. Rapping built upon this oral tradition of an honorable yet loud profession by pushing it in to new realms.

The whole genre of rap is based on extemporizing a subject or personal accomplishment with a high amount of bravado peppered with personal style and verve. However, the use of the word *rap* to describe a signature of quick speech predates the musical form by a long time. The word originally means "to knock or hit" (consequently drawing attention to someone or something). Considering the definition of *rap* is "grabbing hold of something," that it is now used to seize hold of spoken language to seek attention only further solidifies its meaning. In fact the word has apparently been used in British English since the sixteenth century, and has been used to mean "to say" since the 1800s.

The journey to where it is today really began in the 1960s as part of an inner-city dialect, meaning "a conversation." To "rap" was to literally talk things through, to spread the word or news, or to simply state something to a friend. Very soon after, *rap* found its way to its present usage denoting the musical style of rapping. Also known as MCing, flow, spitting, or just straight-up rhyming, rapping has a firm place in pop culture—stylistically, it can be said that the meaning of *rap* occupies a hazy stretch of road linking speech, prose, poetry, and song all together into a spectacle of parlance with break beats as a sonic backdrop. *LO*

Before it became branded as hip-hop culture, nobody called it hip-hop. Hip-hop was just this thing that guys said on the mic as a part of what a DJ's patter was—like, "to the hip, the hop."

—**Fab 5 Freddy** (*Pioneer graffiti artist*)

Rap is something you do. Hip-hop is something you live.

—**KRS-One** (*MC / hip-hip activist*)

The drum and the microphone are two things that really pushed the burgeoning culture of rap forward. The drum was, like, up front. That's what people danced to, people waited for the naked drum break. And the microphone was integral as well, because that's what controlled the crowd. That's what brought out the messages. That's what carried the personality and voice.

The next instrument that was integral to rap was the turntable, because now you have the turntable translating the drum, the recorded drum, to the party people. The turntable in and of itself, it's really not an instrument. The turntable is a mechanism to play music, but then the mechanism to play music becomes an instrument in and of itself because, Theodore, you know, he invents the scratch, and Flash, he gets crazy with cutting records and back and forth. And so now the turntable becomes an instrument.

So now you have three instruments: a microphone, you have a drum, and you have a turntable. Probably the sound system is the next instrument because the way those guys, like Herc, manipulated sound systems, it wasn't just like playing any speakers. The speakers were important now.

And quite possibly the last instrument is the boombox. It was the next instrument to really promote and translate the music. So you've got a top five of instruments, the early conduits of rap, of the culture. That's why the boombox is revered when people look back at it.

Bobbito Garcia (RADIO HOST / WRITER)

In the early eighties and nineties, the hype of activism within New York City had to do with police brutality and racial discrimination because it was so common during that time. And that's when you began to see rap music begin to change and have a particular political bent. Public Enemy began to give that thing a kind of a voice which was right on time.

—**Ricky Flores** (PHOTOJOURNALIST)

Back in the day, the tape recorders were pretty huge, with the cassette. I had the tape recorder and a friend of my mother's had given me the boombox with the microphone. I used to do the beatbox on the microphone, and tape myself beatboxing on the boombox. I would layer beats back and forth, so I would play back the beat I recorded onto the boombox, and then switch tapes again and keep layering and create a whole symphony with just my mouth, the boombox, and a tape recorder . . . . people were like, "No. I mean, you didn't do this in your house." I'm like, "Yeah, I did."

—**Rahzel** (HUMAN BEATBOX / THE ROOTS)

Hip-hop started with the boombox. When I was maybe ten, I was in the park, and these maybe, like, seven, eight guys approached me and they started to beat up on me, jump me. And as this was happening, we heard this sound, you know. I think we all heard it at the same time, but we didn't know what the hell it was. It got, like, louder and louder, and they stopped and wanted to see where this sound was coming from. Finally, this guy comes walking by with Pumas on, and the tight Lees on. He had the Kangol hat on. And he had this boombox on his right hand, on his right shoulder. And all we heard was boom, bap, bap, bap, boom, bap, boom, boom, bap, bap, boom, bap, bap . . . And we were like deer lost in the headlights, we couldn't believe how that incredible sound was coming from this box. We didn't know it was called a boombox. We just knew it was like a radio. And we just stopped and watched this dude walk past us as the music was being played . . . When he got out of earshot, they continued to beat me up, but I felt so good that day because I'd never seen it or heard anything like that before in my life. I felt like my life had changed. That's how I got into hip-hop, believe it or not.

—**Pras** (HIP-HOP ARTIST / MUSICIAN / THE FUGEES)

Back in the days, like 1976, '77, rap wasn't called rap; it wasn't called hip-hop; it was called "droppin' science." And when you got on the microphone, you said things that were relevant. You wanted to show that you was intelligent; that you was studious. You wasn't usin' profanity. You said things that made sense.

And the stuff that we called nursery rhymes, my circle, we stayed away from that. We didn't see the relevance in it. We wanted to rhyme about things that made sense. When I was growing up, a lot of other guys carried dictionaries because they wanted to perfect their vocabulary so they could be better MCs. So it wasn't about being dumbed-down.

—**Jamel Shabazz** (PHOTO DOCUMENTARIAN)

I ain't gonna front, the boombox was crucial. As far as hip-hop, it's very instrumental to where hip-hop is. It definitely played the music in the streets for us, for a lot of years, for everybody to hear. It was a statement, it was sort of the beginning of the revolution. People walked around with their music loud and played it proud for whoever to hear. Till the cops told you turn it down, and as soon as they'd leave we turn it back up again. You can't disrespect the boombox.

—**Jim Jones** (RAP ARTIST)

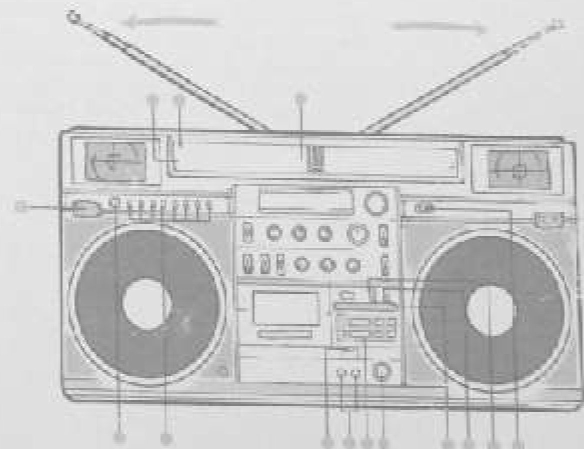
Bobby Brown's video "My Prerogative" was choreographed to a boombox. And when the A&R director came to rehearsal, he was like, "He has to be sexier. You have him dancing too hard." Then he goes, "I just want him to feel it!" and he went like this (HIP THRUST). That's how that [hump] move came. And Bobby loved it.

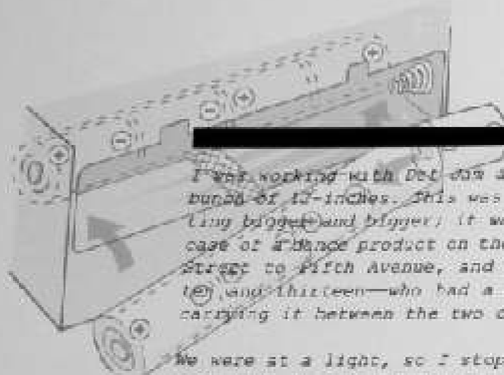
Heart and Soul was the dance group I hired for him; they had perfect synergy on the thing. When they were filming the video it was in front of a live audience. So we told Bobby, "If you forget a step, just hump. Just hump the air if you forget a step." And he did that move—through the whole video.

—**Rosie Perez** (CHOREOGRAPHER / ACTRESS)

I remember when LL Cool J's Radio came out in '85. I remember seeing that record cover. Def Jam, Columbia, did an amazing job of doing in-store promo on that record, because I think it was at Crazy Eddie's on Eighty-sixth Street, and the entire window was boomboxes and flats of that record. And I think that was probably the pinnacle of the boombox, being on the cover of that record.

—**Stretch Armstrong** (DJ / RADIO HOST)





I was working with Def Jam and we hadn't put out any albums yet. We just put out a bunch of 12-inches. This was around the time in New York City when radios were getting bigger and bigger; it was ridiculous. I'd just been to our offices to pick up a case of advance product on the LL Cool J Radio album. I was walking down Fifty-second Street to Fifth Avenue, and there were these two kids—they were probably between ten and thirteen—who had a radio that was almost half their size, and they were carrying it between the two of them, just by the handle.

We were at a light, so I stopped them, looked them up and down. Then I said, "Hey, take this," and opened the box, handing them a cassette. They looked at me a bit suspiciously, like, "Who is this guy? What does he want from us?" They looked down at the cassette, looked back at me. But they took it from me. Well, first they put the radio down on the sidewalk, took the cassette out of the box, put it into the thing, pressed play. And the first track was "Rock the Bells." "LL Cool J is hard as hell." So that was the first track. And then it went "LL Cool J is hard as, enh!" They kind of looked at each other, you know, "Battle anybody. I don't care if you enh! . . . enh!" Then one of the kids picked it up and put it on his shoulder. I mean, it took all his strength to get it up over his shoulder. And they just kind of walked away smiling. They didn't acknowledge me after that point, and it didn't even matter. These kids were so happy, and they just went off, walking down the street, blasting this thing in their car. At that moment I knew, this record was going to be a monster.

—**George Drakoulias** (RECORD PRODUCER / SOUND TRACK SUPERVISOR)

"My Radio" was really famous because you've got to remember, that was LL's first song. Everybody wanted a boombox and it was all about "My Radio."

—**Pras** (HIP-HOP ARTIST / [illegible] FUGEES)

My first boombox didn't play any tapes. It sat on the cover of LL Cool J's Radio. I bought the record at Apollo Records in Buffalo, New York, in 1985. Gary owned and ran Apollo. With his long, dyed-black hair and eyeliner, he looked like Siouxsie Sioux's beer-drinking, chicken wing-eating older brother. But he loved New York City hip-hop and stocked his store with every single new release. He made a handwritten and Xeroxed list of every record that had come out that week, in his order of importance, including a list of tapes of Marley Marl's WBLS radio shows that his friend from New York would regularly send him. I didn't chat with Gary much, but I went into his store and bought records every chance I got. While everyone else I knew was listening to the Grateful Dead, Tom Petty, Van Morrison, or the Clash, Gary introduced me to Spoonie Gee, Schoolly D, DJ Mark the 45 King, Wild Pitch Records, Marley Marl, Boogie Down Productions, Steinski, LL, and Run-DMC. I played "I Can't Live Without My Radio" over and over on my parent's turntable that I had absconded with into my room. The minimalist aesthetic and maximum impact of that song, and hip-hop in general with its time bomb-ticks and booming squeals, crept into my brain and never left.

—**Adam Levite** (MUSIC VIDEO DIRECTOR)

Grandmaster Flash developed this reputation as this amazing DJ. He had developed this technique of the cutting and the back-spinning. And his rappers had taken rap from a nursery rhyme thing to a really narrative form.

The buzz on them was amazing—on the real, real close to the street, under the concrete level. And I remember getting my first Flash tape, tape of a Flash party, and it was third or fourth generation bad dub—but there I had it. And it was, like, the Holy Grail.

—**Fab 5 Freddy** (PIONEER GRAFFITI ARTIST)

Rick Rubin's first record—when you do the research, you realize, oh, here's a guy who was into punk and he understood sound.

—**Ricky Flores** (PHOTOJOURNALIST)

In the mid-'80s I kept a boombox for Rick Rubin at my place in Los Angeles at his request. He was just starting to roll large, so we went to Hollywood Blvd. to find the biggest, best one we could, then he could leave it in L.A. for when he visited. It was something we shared. To insure the covert nature of this box he had the idea to spray paint the entire surface area black. Aside from the LEDs, heavy amount of chrome, and tape mechanism, the entire thing was black. We were the only two people who knew how to use it because all identifying marks, labels, and functions were eradicated off its casing. It was the most bad-ass stealth box you ever saw.

—**Glen E. Friedman** (PHOTOGRAPHER)

The whole point of hip-hop at that time was definitely being loud, and against the grain, and mildly counterculture.

—**Kool Moe Dee** (PIONEER HIP-HOP ARTIST)

Punk had a lot of nihilistic, kind of semi-fascist overtones . . . but the good part of it, like Don [Letts] always said, "Everyone had something to bring to the party." And if you had something to contribute, you could be a part of it.

—**Josh Cheuse** (PHOTOGRAPHER / ART DIRECTOR)

Right to left: Russell Simmons, Rick Rubin, and Run-DMC, (c) 2000 Ebet Roberts

Joe Strummer was my hero. I mean, I worked with the Clash and I was close enough to them that they didn't have to be heroes to me, but he still flew the flag for what punk meant to the day he died, without being self-conscious about it, without being opportunistic about it, without being all those things. I look back at what he did and what he said with the Clash. And even when they came to New York and they did the whole thing at the Bond's and "This Is Radio Clash." "This Is Radio Clash" used an illustrative boombox as its cover, as well, which was great.

—**Nick Egan** (ALBUM DESIGNER / ART DIRECTOR)

The Beatles and the Stones and Led Zeppelin—what were they diggin'? They're diggin' black music from the Mississippi Delta. But unless you're a train spotter, you'd never make the connection between Robert Johnson and Led Zeppelin, for instance . . . With the Clash I could hear reggae bass lines right out front; it wasn't disguised in the interpretation. And Joe Strummer would quite often sing about Jamaican artists and characters.

That was tremendously empowering for my generation—being first generation British-born black; black people coming of their own free will to a white country. When groups like the Clash or Slits or John Lydon's Public Image so organically embraced our culture and did something new with it, it empowered us because it made us realize that we had something to bring to the party.

—**Don Letts** (DJ / MUSICIAN / DIRECTOR)

When you went to England you had to stop by and see Don and get a new tape. That was more important than whatever your favorite restaurant or drink or whatever else you planned to do in London—Don Letts was, because he had his finger on all the new Jamaican music.

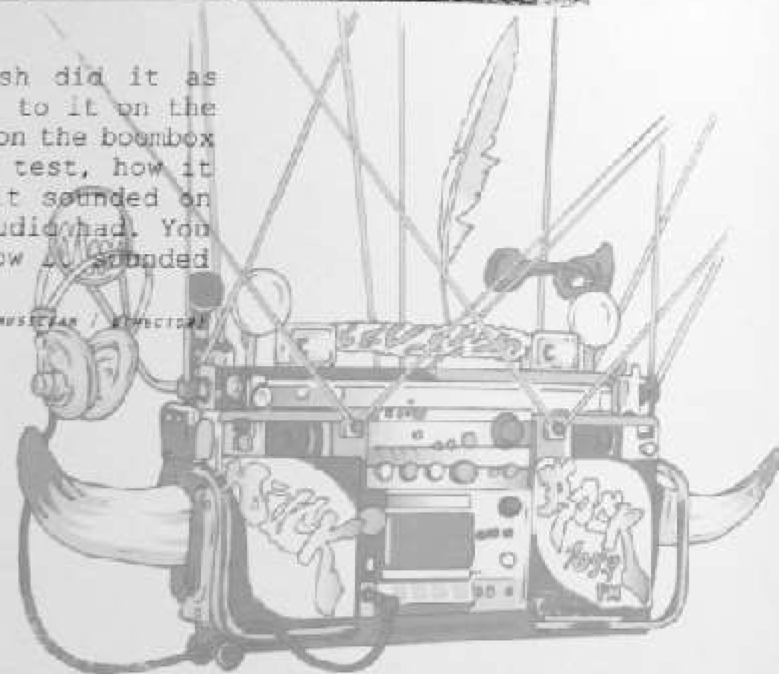
—**Bob Gruen** (ROCK 'N' ROLL PHOTOGRAPHER)

Big Audio Dynamite was that cross between all musics—punk, ska, reggae, hip-hop—the boombox was celebrated within their artwork.

—**Earle Sebastian** (DIRECTOR)

Big Audio Dynamite—and the Clash did it as well—after you finished listening to it on the big studio speakers, you'd put it on the boombox and ultimately that was the acid test, how it sounded on the boombox—not how it sounded on the twenty-grand speakers the studio had. You were much more concerned about how it sounded on a boombox.

—**Don Letts** (DJ / MUSICIAN / DIRECTOR)



MALCOLM MCLAREN, 1983
BOB GRUEN

[*Regarding the Duck Rock Boombox*] When Malcolm was with the Zulu tribes in South Africa. They honestly thought this was like some kind of god he'd brought with him.

—**Nick Egan** (ALBUM DESIGNER / ART DIRECTOR)

In the beginning, hip-hop was about that rockin'-ass beat that was just monotonous, and it was infectious, and it was hypnotic. I remember listening to the World Famous Supreme Team album. I think that was the first rap complete album that I ever bought. And it was *Duck Rock*. Everybody who has a boombox or loves boomboxes remembers the *Duck Rock* cover because it was a huge radio with the horns and the rearview mirror, and it had, like, a million antennas hanging off of it, and these little, like, rainbow-colored graffiti plates on the speakers. It was the hardest boombox ever used on a rap record ever. I don't even have anything to compare it to. I've never even seen a radio in person that could touch what the cover of *Duck Rock* had.

A lot of times when we talk about, you know, different urban cultures or different primitive cultures, we talk about signs and symbols that convey to the masses what words can't. That boombox said everything that it needed to say. And I remember seeing that cover and you knew—you didn't know what was on that record, but you knew that record was for you. Then when you flip it over and you see those Zulu kids sitting around the radio—for a suburban kid completely disconnected from Africa in his daily life, and black being beautiful in the home, but then stepping out of your suburban home to be called a "nigger" on the street, that album cover, especially the back side of it, I felt like I was immediately reconnected to my homeland off that there. Immediately.

—**Adisa Banjoko** (HIP-HOP HISTORIAN)

FAST FORWARD

4. FAST FORWARD ▶▶ We've seen the era of the boombox rise up from the stone age of modern day broadcasting only to slide back in the tar pits of D-cell-battery-powered history. ▶▶ But before the boombox is relegated to the time of the dinosaurs forever or completely wiped off the planet by an off-course comet, it's best to look at the impact boomboxes have made on society. ▶▶ Living in New York City, it's hard not to miss them. ▶▶ They still peek out of store windows printed on to T-shirts, handbags, or CD covers. ▶▶ Look at recent music videos and you'll see them held aloft by the latest bands who were probably in diapers when boomboxes truly ruled the earth. ▶▶ Boomboxes are an important part of our culture as they still signify a certain sense of rebellion, free speech, toughness, and attitude. ▶▶ They also make us smile and remember a time of ingenuity and innocence. *LO*

FAST FORWARD

The mechanism that starts the transport on a boombox to control the acceleration of the operating speed on the tape deck is called the fast forward button. This button increases the rotation of the motor drive to the capstan shaft, which in turn raises the speed of the tape tracking mechanism to provide a hunting feature along the cassette sequence. All this technical jargon means simply "Press the fast forward button and you can search along the recorded parts of a cassette tape to find where you want to listen." A very rudimentary feature when it comes to cassettes, but one that mixes personal choice and control over what you want to experience at that moment. Fast forwarding to the future of boomboxes means we've arrived to the place where they are not so prevalent in our daily lives. Though the memory of them still lingers, they've been replaced with a multitude of media devices and sonic alternatives. Knowing there is a tremendous amount of nostalgia for boomboxes, it's interesting to discuss the impression that the boombox has left on society, as well as the music and motivations of that era. *LO*

For me, the boombox died with the advent of CDs. That's when the shape of the machines physically changed to become sort of flat and more squat and look like rejects from R2-D2 or something.

—**Don Letts** (DJ / MUSICIAN / DIRECTOR)

In 1993-94, my generation all wore our hair in afros, but we'll never really understand why our parents wore afros in the '60s. It had a whole different meaning. With us, it was just kind of a fashion thing. But to our parents, at that time, that was the end of the civil rights situation and it was going into, like, a more radical thing . . .

Every generation is guilty of that to a certain extent. Everything goes in cycles, so if you take a look around nowadays, everything from that boombox era is coming back. Now once again it's about capitalism, cocaine is again the popular drug . . . And a lot of people who weren't even born then are kind of advertising those years. But when things come around a second time, they're always altered, and now people are kind of putting a new spin on it. I heard now that they have a boombox that actually has an iPod in it instead of a cassette. Elements of things in the past always come back, and a lot of that eighties imagery, good and bad, is starting to come back in different combinations.

—**J-Zone** (HIP-HOP ARTIST)

The boombox was a public sort of thing that people gathered around . . . now, with rise of the MP3 players, it's a sort of cocooning—individuals screening out potential interaction in public places by using portable individual radios, or now MP3 players. And I think it's not just a matter of people wanting to have their music available all the time, but actually advertising their unavailability for social interaction . . . perhaps it reflects the kind of hyperindividualism that our consumerist society generates. Social interaction, particularly with strangers, we perceive as being risky. And mainly because the media have created a culture of fear. And so this cocooning gives us a protection from it by telling people, "Don't talk to me."

—**Tyler Gibney** (ARTIST)

ROCKEFEELER CENTER, NEW YORK CITY, (c) 1980s
BEN WATTS

Not a lot of people have the balls right now to go and pick up a boombox, put a mix tape together, and cruise around listening to something they really believe in—because it's the fear of offending or the fear of being apart or the fear of standing out.

—**Josh Cheuse** (PHOTOGRAPHER / ART DIRECTOR)

The boomboxes that I remember being so impressed by as a kid, you can't find them anywhere. You can find them on collectors' sites, you know, guys that are showing off what they have and whatnot, but to actually get one? Very difficult . . .

The music of today, what kids are listening to, it's making them very aggressive; it's making them very agitated; in a sense it's programming them for destruction. KRS and Grandmaster Flash, they were saying things. But when it started to change, people started to change. Now I hear a lot of music is about "get money, get money." It's like, come on, what about the war? What about poverty, things of that nature—the stuff Marvin and Curtis Mayfield, and others addressed in their music.

—**Jamel Shabazz** (PHOTO DOCUMENTA

The boombox went away when the trains started getting buffed. And to me, it's like the audio equivalent of graffiti. The average citizen in New York City probably did not like to see young guys walking around blasting hip-hop on boomboxes, in the same way they didn't want to see graffiti all over their trains. I loved to stand at the front of the train or the back and watch the tracks, and then see all the graffiti in the tunnels, see the graffiti on the trains, the tags inside. You know, for a young kid, it was amazing just to sit and read these tags and try to figure out what they were saying, you know, when you're like four and five years old. And the same thing with the boombox. I mean, I loved just looking at them, listening to them. They were these amazingly sexy pieces of machinery.

—**Stretch Armstrong** (DJ / RADIO HOST)

There are some radios now that are out that are kind of like the boombox. I have one—it's called the Xplod by Sony. It has the power drive woofer, and the cassette / CD player. But a lot of modern radios today look like spaceships. I wish a manufacturer could do one run of a collector's-item boombox.

—**Rahzel** (HUMAN BEATBOX / THE ROOTS)

The power you felt walking through the neighborhood and blasting something, a song that just meant so much to you, a song that you could relate to, a song that you wanted other people to hear, that was just the greatest feeling in the world, just walking down that street blasting that music. I think that's kind of like the same concept I apply to deejaying now. I love being able to expose people to new music.

—**DJ Eclipse** (DJ)

Back then all you needed was a beatbox and a guitar.

—**Bob Gruen** (ROCK 'N' ROLL PHOTOGRAPHER)

The boombox was my only way of hearing anything to do with hip-hop—and the boombox was what romaticized it. The reason you loved it is because it was loud and it was against the grain of anything you were hearing.

—**Kool Moe Dee** (PIONEER HIP-HOP ARTIST)

The boombox was a very new development for people and carried the tradition of music being a social medium and bringing people together, more so than any other piece of technology has. It's interesting to see how from that we go, twenty years later, to where we are now, where music is now mobile but private again. Everybody has on an iPod and has on headphones and they're locked again into their own world much like they were when they were sitting in their homes listening to an LP.

But I find that with a lot of younger kids in their twenties, they have a sort of instant gravitational pull to a lot of this early stuff that there's almost no context for in their lives if you were to sort of look at it just at face value . . . as an icon.

Che Guevara is a sort of perfect analogy. Most of the people who are wearing these images [of Che] are not necessarily revolutionary. Some of these people who are wearing boomboxes on a shirt more than likely were too young to grow up with these things and are obviously not walking around with one today. But the boombox is an icon because it speaks to a certain time and place and social group that younger kids clearly identify with. Wearing that on your T-shirt as a form of self expression—which the T-shirt has certainly become—ties you in to that.

And there's a yearning for these older sounds which, ironically, become new sounds because they've never been heard before—things that didn't necessarily sell very well twenty or thirty years ago when they came out and were in the cutout bin and being sold for fifty cents. You know, these same records now could be worth hundreds of dollars because now they've gained a new audience . . . it's gratifying to know that in due time everything has its place, almost.

It gives me hope for music being made today. Some of it isn't necessarily of the highest quality and that's because of what's being pushed at us, just as it was twenty or thirty years ago. Now we see a lot of this music from the past popping back up and realize, "Wow, this is great. How come this didn't get popular?" It's the same way right now. I mean, you really have to be looking for it. And if you don't catch it this time around, you may have to wait until the time is right and you're ready and the rest of culture at large. And it has a whole new audience and new ears and a fresh perspective.

—Andre Torres (EDITOR, WAX POETICS)

We need to pass it on properly. We can't expect Lil' Wayne to talk about the South Bronx. Is that realistic? Is it fair? How can you bash some of these Bay Area kids because they don't know anything about some of these old-school DJs, like Charlie Chase and Whatnot, when no one's given them access to it? But somehow they're still replicating exactly what they do. They're still throwing their own jams in the park. They're still hooking up boomboxes to turntables to throw their own parties in a parking lot. They're still doing it. Somehow it still got transferred. Maybe not exactly the way we wanted it, but they're doing it for their generation, their way.

—Adisa Banjoko (HIP HOP HISTORIAN)

When we had the blackout here in New York, I had a small boombox, and I had batteries. And I remember that night in my court when everyone else was just sitting outside, I had sound because I had my boombox and my batteries.

—Joseph Abajian (PRESIDENT, FAT BEATS INC.)

The boombox has a larger visual impact than it does audio. I mean, you can crank it. And you crank the right music, everyone loves it. But once you start trying to crank it higher—and those batteries are expensive, and it's heavy. But the visual impact is unbeatable. If I'm going for sound, a lot of people that I know had portable sound systems. They'd have a car battery with a single speaker, with a little deck or whatever up on the top, and then you'd have it on a little trolley and stuff. Soundwise, it eliminates any boombox. But the boombox is such a strong visual icon.

—Ben Watts (PHOTOGRAPHER)

The boombox was this great social tool. And we could probably do with that again at some time in the near future . . . it was much more of a sharing of music . . . even when you're annoying you're still, you know, you're sharing [LAUGHS] —even if you were blasting it too loud.

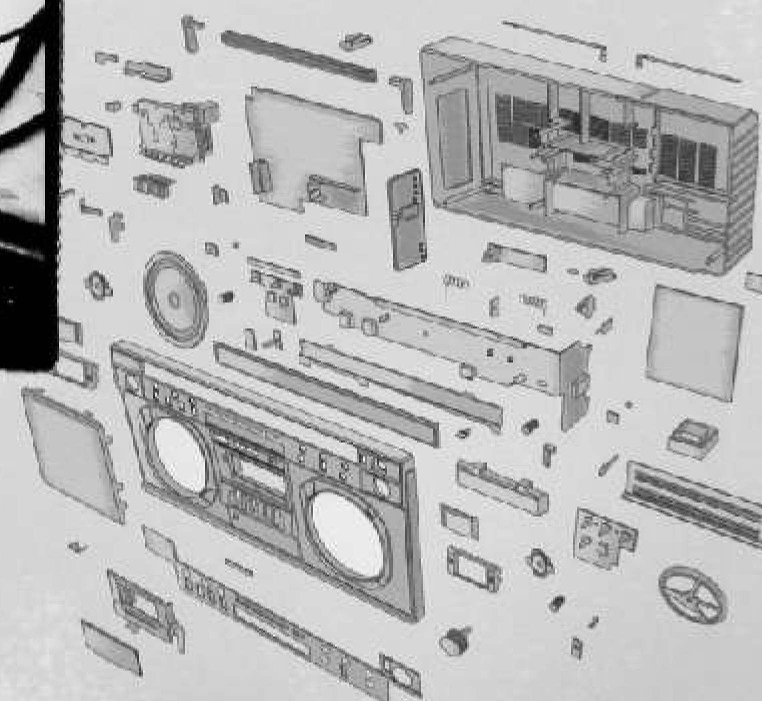
—Jonathan Daniel (MUSIC HISTORIAN / BAND MANAGER)

A subculture always does a 360 eventually and reappears somewhere else. For the generation below us that didn't grow up in that culture and missed out on something—they still want to embrace it as part of their own identity. The boombox has become a visual sample—and if you missed it, this is a second time around to be a part of it.

—Carlo Sebastian (DIRECTOR)

They're making boomboxes again now—Lasonic is making them with iPod attachments because they are so quintessentially a representation of a generation.

—Claw Money (GRAFFITI ARTIST / FASHION DESIGNER)



"BAD BOYZ" BOOMBOX, UK, 1980S
NORMSKI

RISING SCR-2015

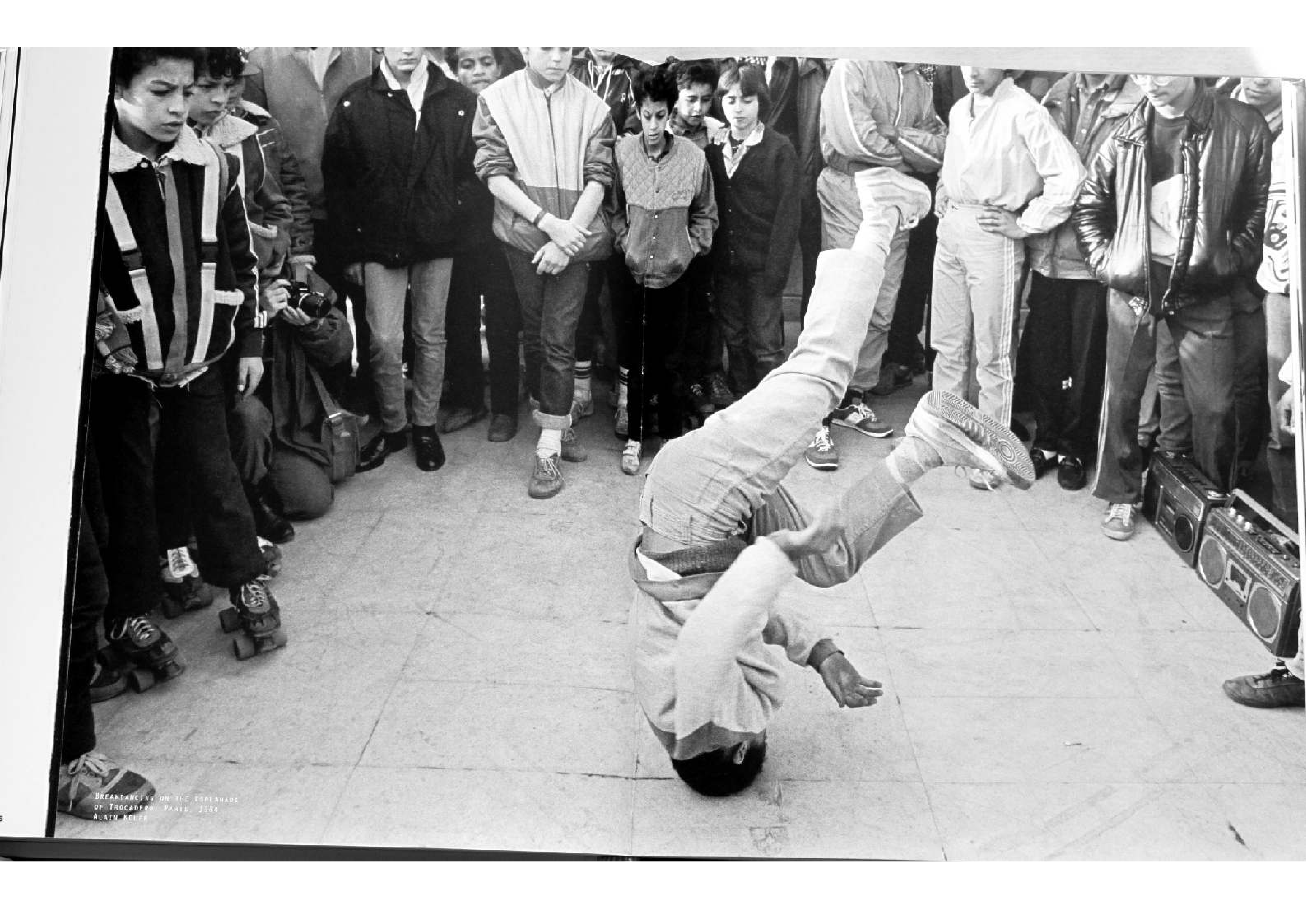
Sharp Tri Mate 5000

Panasonic RX-5350

Sony CFS 99

Lloyd's FT003

PHILIPS D8714 (AKA THE ELEPHANT)



BREAKDANCING ON THE ESPLANADE
OF TROCADERO, PARIS, 1984
ALAIN KELER

CROWN CSC-850F [CUSTOME BLACK EDITION]

SHARP GF-555

TOSHIBA BOMBEAT 16

AIWA CS-880

VU

VU

BREAKDANCING ON THE ESPLANADE OF TROCADERO, PARIS, 19[illegible]
ALAIN KELER

PROSONIC PQR-9962

MAGNAVOX D8300

NATIONAL RX-A2

VENTURER 1238

NATIONAL RX-7000

SHARP VZ-2000

GENERAL ELECTRIC 3-5259A (AKA BLOCKBUSTER)

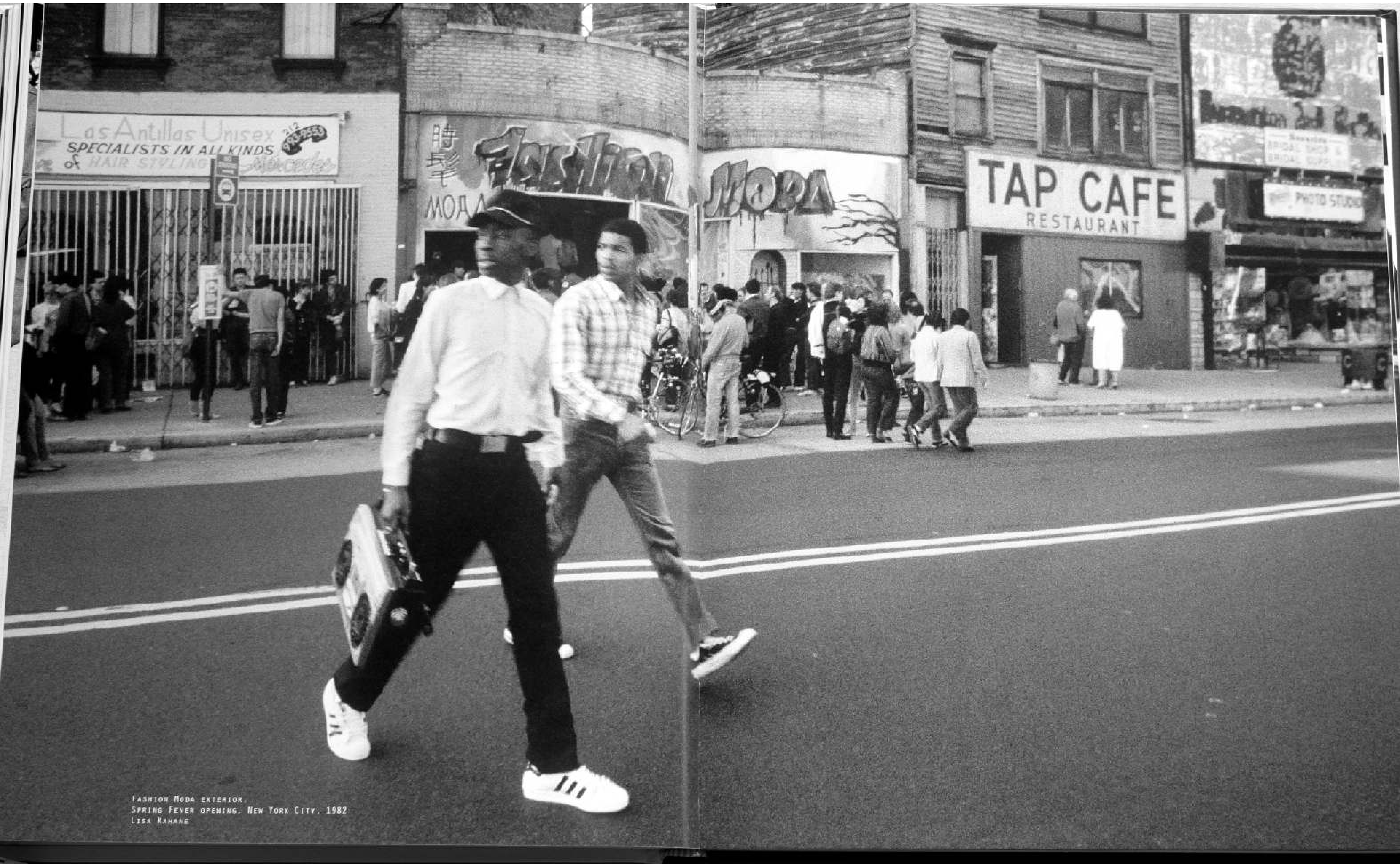
NEW
W-DECK
1
PLAYBACK

NEW
100 PMPO W
2
REC/PLAY

CONTINOUS PLAY SYSTEM
REW
F.F.WD
STOP EJECT
PAUSE
RECORD
PLAY
REW
F.F.WD
STOP EJECT
PAUSE

VU
PHONES

TAPE COUNTER
RESET



Fashion Moda exterior,
Spring Fever opening, New York City, 1982
Lisa Kahane

Toshiba BomBeat WX-1-RT598 (Makenzie edition with black speakers)

LASONIC TRC-935

SHARP GF-515

SHARP GF-9191

MONTGOMERY WARD
AIRLINE GENERAL MODEL 3996A

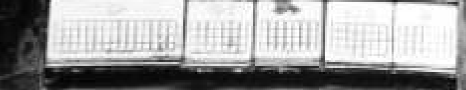
JVC RC M70

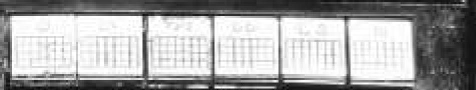
SUBWAY, NEW YORK CITY, (c) 1980s
JAMAL SHABAZZ

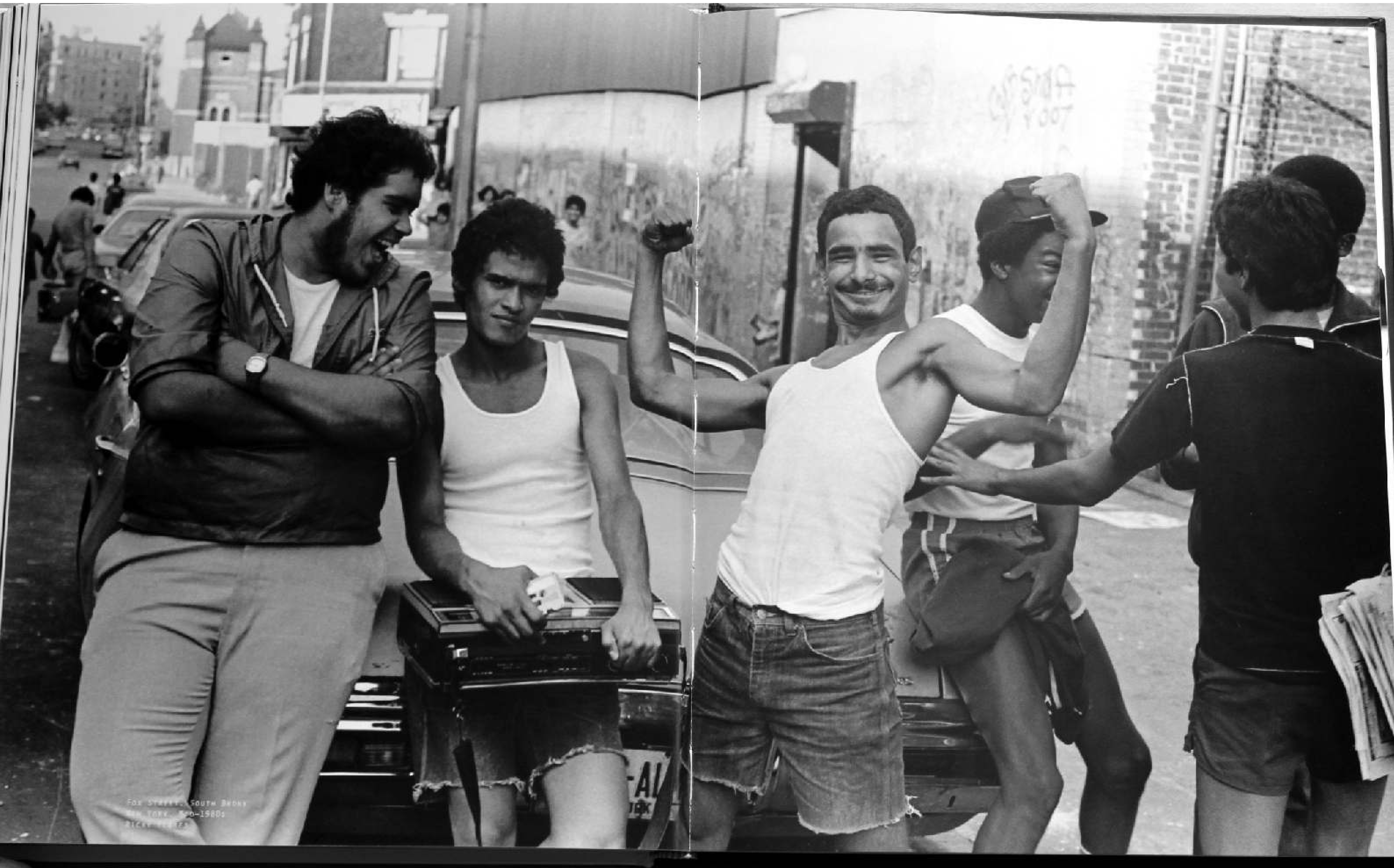
clairtone
4 BAND STEREO RADIO DOUBLE CASSETTE RECORDER
FM
SW1
SW2
AM
MHz
kHz

maxell
CONTINUOUS PLAY
PLAY

HIGH SPEED DUBBING
RECORD
PLAY
METAL


REWIND
F.FWD
STOP/EJ
PAUSE


REWIND
F.FWD
STOP/EJ
PAUSE


Fox Street, South Bronx

SANYO
FM STEREO
POWER
FM
FREQUENCY MODULATION
AM
AMPLITUDE MODULATION
MHz
kHz
METAL TAPE
maxell
TIMER STANDBY / FULL AUTO STOP
4 WAY METER
COUNTER
RESET
LEFT
RIGHT
20cm SUPER WOOFER PLUS 2 WAY SPEAKER SYSTEMS
20cm SUPER WOOFER PLUS 2 WAY SPEAKER SYSTEMS
BIGBEN

TOSHIBA BOMBEAT RT-1 ORTS98

SHARP GF-6060

JVC RC M90 (CUSTOM PAINT)

HELIX HX-4636

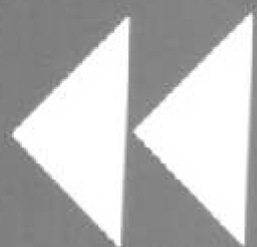
Panasonic
MULTI SPEAKER SYSTEM
FM
AM
TUNING
FM STEREO
COUNTER
RESET
PLAY
REW
FF
STOP/EJECT
PAUSE
CASSETTE
REC LEVEL
POWER
PHONES
BALANCE
SELECTOR
VOLUME
GRAPHIC EQUALIZER
Panasonic
FM-AM-FM STEREO CASSETTE DECK
TUNER AMPLIFIER

Break-dancers, B-Boys, on the street, New York City, 1981
Ted Polhemus

CROWN CSC-950

JVC RC M90

REWIND



5. REWIND Punching down the rewind button on a boombox sent a cassette tape careening through a squeaking and hissing flamethrower of sound not unlike that of a runaway train. After the bone-rattling discourse thudded to a stop, we were back to the beginning, so to speak. This ability to control what you wanted to listen to (and when), created a sense of empowerment previously unavailable to the masses. With this option, radio progamming no longer had a hold on when we could hear our favorite song or not; we could take our favorite tunes with us and listen to them anywhere and at any time. Through the power of song, rewinding allowed us to be torn by wild horses, dropped by a beat, shook all night long, to fight the power or to float on a careless whisper over and over again. For a generation on the move, the ability to rewind was an intrinsic if not noisy part of a boombox's appeal and control. *LO*

REWIND

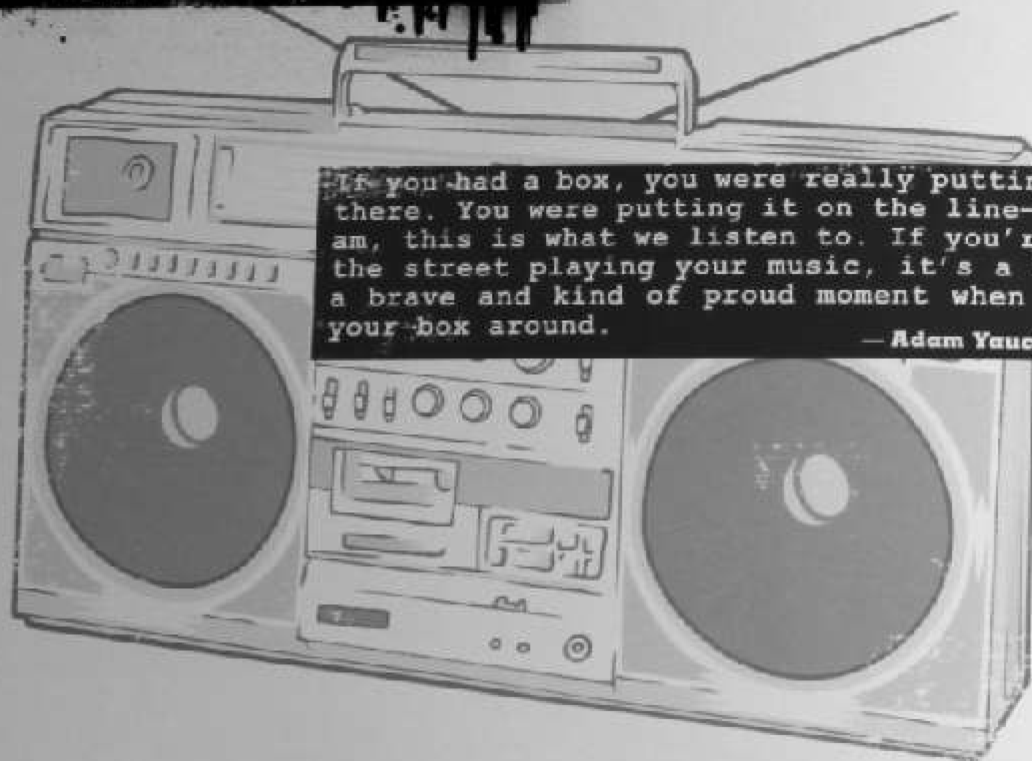
Within the culture of today, the boombox symbolizes both a call to action and a proclamation for notice and attention. As an icon, it has its place in the history of the power of broadcasting—when the portable radio signaled a call for gathering, or acted with presence, in the battle between races, perspectives, voices, and musical tastes as they collided on street corners, subway platforms, and dance floors alike. It was a physical thing, with stories tied to it, along with the potential to generate new things. Just as hip-hop, punk, new wave, and rock 'n' roll were music movements born along with the rise of portable listening devices, they were just as importantly visual crusades as well. The boombox was a bridge between those movements (and so many more)—it was not just a thing, it was an icon. It was a magnet both literally and metaphorically. The boombox was about expressing something. These large sonic devices were a cultural bullhorn, belting out the sound tracks of choice as loud as possible, exalting the vibe of upbeat dissonance everywhere they were taken. And really, if you opened up one of these boomboxes, they had no soul; however, combined with a piece of music, an attitude, and a strut, a beatbox (as they were sometimes known) suddenly became a powerful form of expression. The boombox stood as a daring opportunity to make one's presence known to the world! Long live the boombox—it is forever in our hearts, minds, and ears. *LO*

The boombox is a machine with the ability to tell stories.

— **Nick Egan** (ALBUM DESIGNER / ART DIRECTOR)

When I look at the boombox, it really symbolizes a very pure time before big business and money were interested, before it was on anybody's radar. Even parents. It was something that we shared as a small, youth-based community. This is how we communicate. This is how we listen to our music. And until the rest of the world was aware of that, it was something very pure.

— **Cey Adams**



If you had a box, you were really putting yourself out there. You were putting it on the line—this is what I am, this is what we listen to. If you're walking down the street playing your music, it's a big deal. It's a brave and kind of proud moment when you can carry your box around.

— **Adam Yauch** (MC / BEASTIE BOYS)

You'd have your little black leather zipper gloves and your boombox and you feel like you're hip-hop equipped and all that. Then you just throw it up on your shoulder and feel like a maniac. And then on top of that, what I used to do was, even when my man used to drive, I used to take the boombox, put my records on it, and put it facing out the window so people could hear what we was working on at the time. Just blast the neighborhood out like crazy. I was insane with it. And, you know, I just couldn't live without it, man. I really loved music. You know, and when you really love something, you get into it. I really loved it.

— **LL Cool J** (RAPPER / ACTOR)

We loved it all—"Square Biz," "The Message," Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, "Rock the Bells," Debbie Deb, Stevie B, "Hard Times" . . . If you were a borough kid, you listened to everything, because radio wasn't really segregated for a while. We listened to rock 'n' roll, you listened to punk rock, you know, you listened to hip-hop. We weren't exclusively listening to just hip-hop music; that's a myth.

Sometimes the boomboxes were a nuisance, because people would just be blasting crap, or it was too tight of an area where there would be conflicting music. Sometimes people were really fuckin' angry and it'd be reflected in their music choice. But the boombox could make you smile: like the hot, sweaty train ride to Coney in the sweltering heat, you know, and then a good song comes on, it changed everybody's mood. Everybody was sharing their joy, sharing their mood.

— **Rosie Perez** (CHOREOGRAPHER / ACTRESS)

The boombox was an object that worked as language . . . within different contexts, that object can say something differently, you know? If you're LL Cool J, you're talking about a boombox in a different way than the Clash . . . the boombox was like a perfect icon.

— **Geoff McFetridge** (GRAPHIC DESIGNER / ARTIST)

The boombox was like a statement. You're walking down the street. You were playing your music and it was like an African shield or some kind of, like, force field this thing was creating around you with your music.

— **Josh Cheuse** (PHOTOGRAPHER / ART DIRECTOR)

Boombox was supposed to be a portable radio that you'd probably bring on picnics or whatever. It wasn't meant for you to walk down the street with and blasting your music. But hip-hop was like, "Yo, I'm feeling good about this box. I'm going to blast it." When you played it, you wanted the world to know.

— **Pras** (HIP-HOP ARTIST / MUSICIAN / THE FUGEES)

The boombox is like the sonic campfire. It became the way for people to congregate and enjoy music as a group but not have to worry about having a live band. All you needed was a boombox and a good mix and the party could stay live for hours on end, depending on how many tapes you had.

— **Andre Torres** (EDITOR, WAX POETICS)

Records were a sort of format—a lot of the music that we were into was only
accessible through that format—old soul, jazz, funk records, for instance—
without it there wouldn't be hip-hop. These old records that were laying
around at Kool Herc's mother's house or Grandmaster Flash's girlfriend's
house—by finding these records they essentially were able to create this
new medium called hip-hop; utilizing two old records and a couple of turn-
tables they probably found at thrift stores and whatnot. The LP sort of got
sort of pushed to the side when the cassette tape came out.

Now vinyl sales are on such a high upswing, and why you have people—now
I even get cassettes sent to me. Now people making
albums will do limited edition cassettes, you know;
it's sort of now time for that format to have its
moment in the sun. The medium created a sense of
community and was able to sort of spread this music
. . . If technology has any role in our lives, it's
to make those experiences more possible for more
people. So I have faith that we will. Somewhere on
the horizon we'll utilize technology to create more
kinds of experiences.

— **Andre Torres** *(EDITOR, WAX POETICS)*

The boombox was . . . just a very bold, big way of expressing yourself, you know, like a chest-beating.

— **Ben Watts** *(PHOTOGRAPHER)*

I think the boombox stands for a few things. There's a musical integrity
that comes with it. You couldn't just listen to Lite FM or oldies radio
if you wanted to on it. There was sort of a pride in the music that came
with the boombox. It accompanied the dawn of hip-hop, which is this super-
authentic music from the street. And then the imaging of the boombox—it's
just a great-looking piece. So when you combine it, it's like this sort of
weird anachronism of futuristic and the past.

— **Jonathan Daniel** *(MUSIC HISTORIAN / BAND MANAGER)*

I have one [boombox], in my attic. I saved mine. It's little, but it's mine. It's mine and every time I look at it, it's a piece of time for me, of struggles and, you know, being able to express and being able to listen to those beats, and to make music myself, and to write lyrics. Everything that I went through with growing up. I would never, ever, ever change anything that I've gone through because to me that's what made me who I am today, and that boombox has a lot to do with it.

— **Lisa Lisa** *(SINGER, LISA LISA AND CULT JAM)*

Back in the days, the music was about social conscience and it was also about love . . . I have a tradition that I have to do in my neighborhood. I call it "flyin' my flag," and I bring my boombox with my old tapes from the eighties and seventies and I have to play music in my backyard to let people know that I exist and that I'm alive. My wife said, "What makes you think everybody wants to hear your music?" And I said, "I really don't care, but I have to do this to let people know that I am alive."

— **Jamel Shabazz** *(PHOTO DOCUMENTARIAN)*

Back in the sixties the hippies would have gathered around a fire, but in the eighties we were gathering around our boomboxes—and that might be in Central Park, that might be in a car park or the basketball courts or whatever. But that was the beauty of that thing, is that you could set up and have a spontaneous party almost anywhere, whether it be dancing or rapping or whatever. Once you had your sound track, you could do your thing if you had the balls and an idea.

— **Don Letts** *(DJ / MUSICIAN / DIRECTOR)*

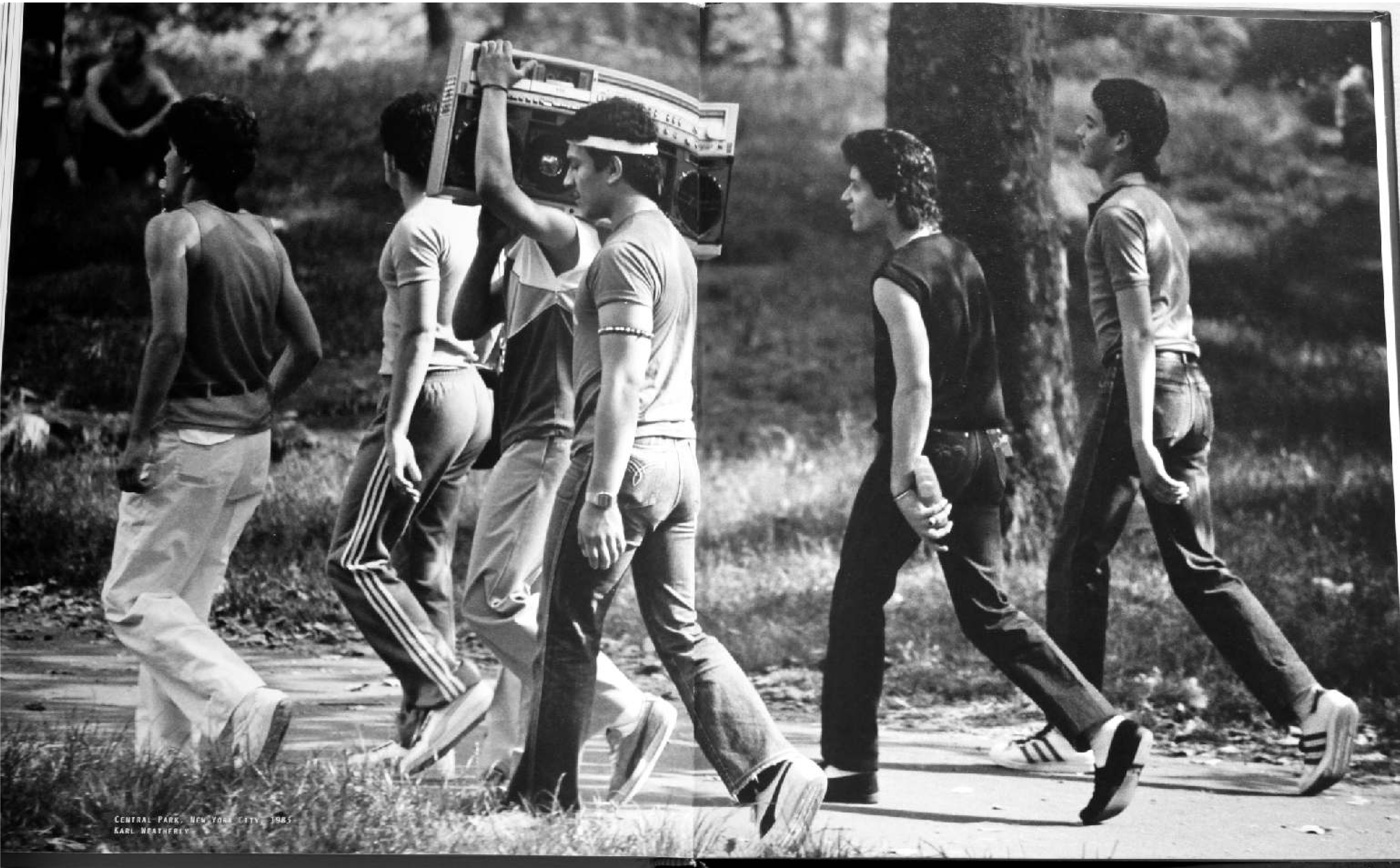
The boombox and the culture of mix tapes allowed you to have your own version of things. This translated to lifestyle—the boombox was social glue: Just set up the boombox on the street; your friends would come over and hang out.

— **Paul Miller / DJ Spooky** *(MUSICIAN / ARTIST)*

When you had a beatbox, you were living with the music.

— **Bob Gruen** *(ROCK 'N' ROLL PHOTOGRAPHER)*

SUBWAY GRAFFITI, NEW YORK CITY, 1985
RICKI ROSEN



Central Park, New York City, 1985
Karl Weatherly

STOP

CONTRIBUTORS

The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his information and his recreation, his love and his religion. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence at whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him he's always doing both.

— **Anonymous**

Joeseph Abajian
(president, Fat Beats Inc.)

Jonas Åckerlund
(music video director / filmmaker)

Cey Adams
(graffiti artist / creative director)

Adisa Banjoko
(hip-hop journalist / activist)

Josh Cheuse
(photographer / art director)

Trevor Clark
(hip-hop clothing and accessories designer)

Claw Money —
Claudia Gold
(fashion designer / graffiti artist)

Custom —
Duane Lavold
(musician / filmmaker / writer)

André Czarnobai
(author / drum and bass DJ)

Jonathan Daniel
(musician / founder, Crush Management)

DJ Eclipse —
Brian A. Johnston
(indie hip-hop tastemaker / DJ)

George Drakoulias
(music producer / soundtrack supervisor)

Dzine —
Carlos Dzine Rolon
(artist)

Nick Egan
(acclaimed album designer / art director)

Fab 5 Freddy —
Fred Brathwaite
(hip-hop historian / pioneer graffiti artist)

Ricky Flores
(urban documentalrian / photojournalist)

Glen E. Friedman
(artist / photographer)

Noel Gallagher
(founding member of the band Oasis) Quotation from "Stereos of the Stars: What the People You Listen to Listen to" by Matt Hendrickson, *Rolling Stone*: June 12, 1997

Robert "Bobbito" Garcia
(DJ / writer / entrepreneur / streetball player / sneakerfreak / member of the Rock Steady Crew)

Tyler Gibney
(artist / visual entrepreneur)

Billy Graziadei
(musician—Biohazard and Suicide City)

Bob Gruen
(renowned photographer known for his photographs of musicians)

Nicholas Jarecki
(director / producer / writer)

Jim Jones —
Joseph Guillermo Jones II
(rapper / hip hop entrepreneur) Quotation from an interview conducted by Aaron Farash for *The Boombox Project*, courtesy of Aaron Farash

J-Zone —
J. Mumford
(rapper / producer / CEO of Old Maid Entertainment)

Kool DJ Herc
(DJ / godfather of hip-hop) Quotation from an interview conducted by Davey D at the 1989 New Music Seminar

Kool Moe Dee —
Mohandas Dewese
(prominent hip-hop MC)

KRS-One —
Lawrence Parker
(pioneering hip-hop artist / activist) Quotation from the song "9 Elements" from the album Kristyles (Koch Records)

LL Cool J —
James Todd Smith
(iconic rapper and actor) Quotation from an interview conducted by Fab 5 Freddy for *The Boombox Project*, courtesy of MTV Networks

Spike Lee
(ground-breaking film director)

Don Letts
(accomplished documentary director / musician / radio host / DJ)

Adam Levite
(designer / video director)

Lisa Lisa —
Lisa Velez
(member of Lisa Lisa and the Cult Jam)

Geoff McFetridge
(enigmatic graphic designer / visual artist)

Chad Muska
(professional skateboarder / DJ)

Jose Parla
(b boy / artist)

Rosie Perez
(accomplished actor / dancer / activist)

James Phillips
(college professor / boombox historian)

Pras —
Prakazrel Samuel Michel
(Grammy Award winning rapper / actor / film producer)

Rahzel —
Rahzel M. Brown
(self-defined "vocal percussionist" / virtuoso beatboxer)

Michael Ruffino
(musician / author / renowned "rock 'n' roll" writer and raconteur)

Mike Schiffer
(college professor / author – The Portable Radio In American Life)

Torsten Schmidt
(co-creator and director of the Red Bull DJ academy / underground music advocate)

Earle Sebastian
(music video / commercial director)

Jamel Shabazz
(photojournalist / urban documentarian)

DJ Spooky —
Paul D. Miller
(artist / experimental hip-hop musician)

DJ Stretch Armstrong
(DJ / radio host / producer)

Rick Thorpe
(boombox collector)

Andre Torres
(editor Wax Poetics magazine)

Turbosonic —
Shogo Turuoka
(world renowned as Japan's best boombox retailer and mini museum)

Butch Vig
(musician / acclaimed band producer) Quotation from "The 90s Era: The Making of Nirvana's Nevermind" by Rob O'Connor, Rolling Stone: May 15, 1997

Ben Watts
(photographer)

Adam Yauch
(founding member of hip-hop trio the Beastie Boys / humanitarian)

Editor: David Cashion
Photo editor: Lyle Owerko and Jeff Streeper
Designer: Jeff Streeper
Design/Production Assistance: Aaron Mennon
Spot Illustrations: One Horse Town
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"**The Future is Unwritten**" - Joe Strummer

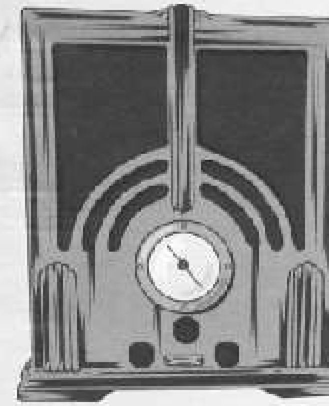
EVOLUTION OF THE BOOMBOX

1821 - Charles Wheatstone invents the first microphone

1887 - Emile Berliner invents the gramophone

1899 - Music recording industry loudspeakers are invented

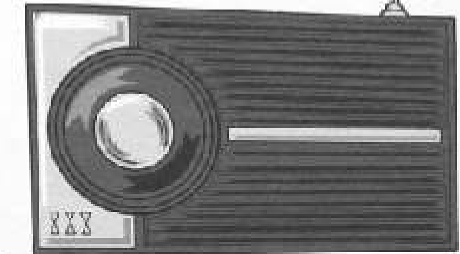
1916 - Radios with tuners are invented, allowing different stations



1930 - The golden age of radio. First TV broadcast in the United States

1948 - Long playing vinyl record is invented, playing at 33 rpm

1948 - First transistor radios invented



1973 - Hip hop appears on the scene with DJ Kool Herc's New York parties

1974 - Punk emerges in America and England with The Ramones, the Sex Pistols, and The Clash at the forefront

1975 - New Wave hits the music scene, pioneered by bands such as Blondie

1976 - First boomboxes begin to appear

1979 - Boomboxes become mainstream and are featured in pop culture and advertisements

1980 - First Sony Walkman appears on the market

1983 - The golden age of the boombox. Massive boomboxes such as the Sharp GF 777 "Searcher" appeared on the scene

1985 - The decline of the boombox craze. Consumers become more concerned with functionality and cost rather than quality

1985 - Cheap plastic boomboxes available for as little as $90. A far cry from the hefty metal boomboxes of the early eighties, some of which went for as much as $700

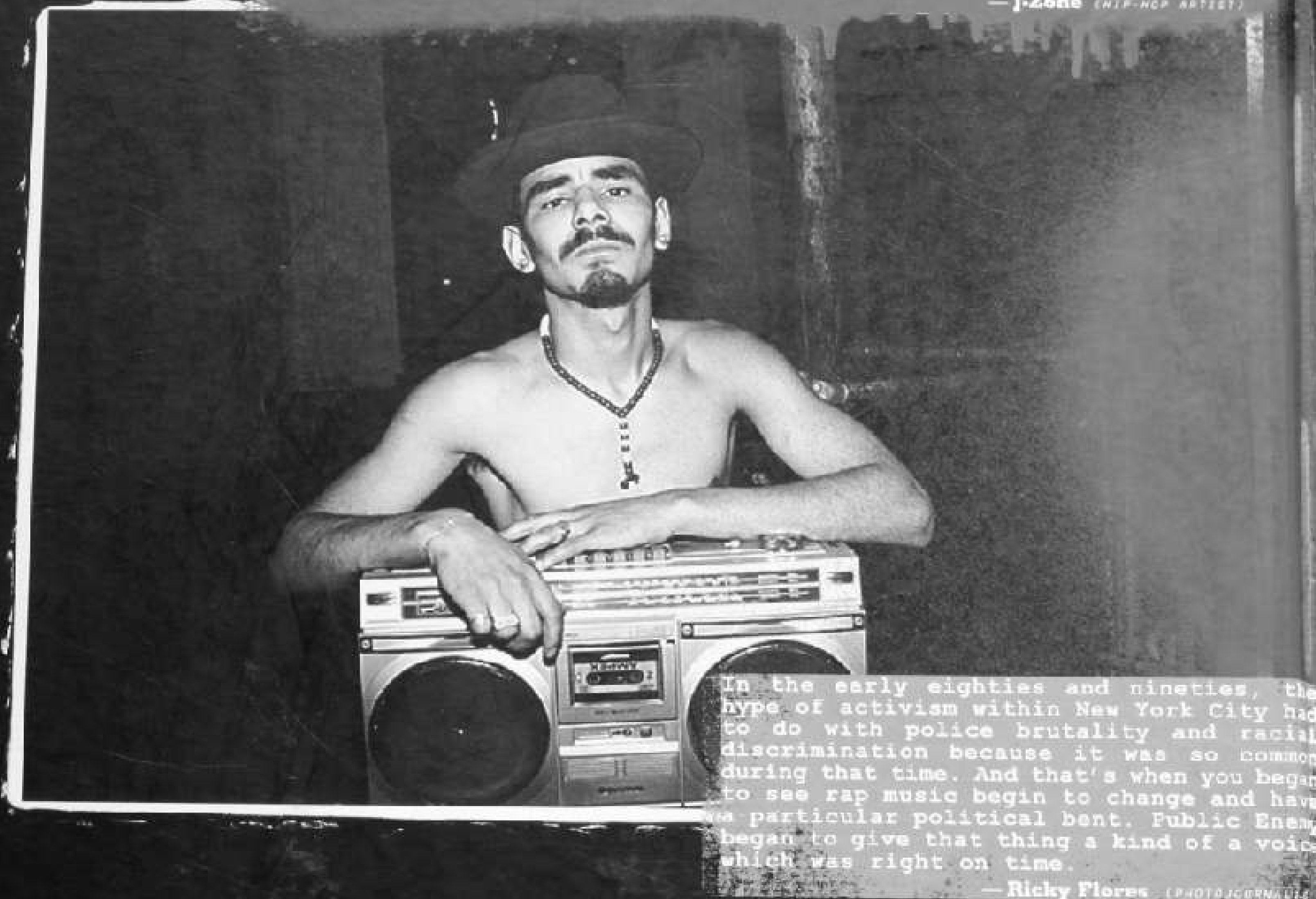
1985 - The CD is invented, also contributing to the decline of the boombox

The boombox was the actual conduit to how we communicated the music.

—**Kool Moe Dee** (HIP-HOP ARTIST)

The loudest boombox was the one that got the respect.

—**J-Zone** (HIP-HOP ARTIST)



In the early eighties and nineties, the hype of activism within New York City had to do with police brutality and racial discrimination because it was so common during that time. And that's when you began to see rap music begin to change and have a particular political bent. Public Enemy began to give that thing a kind of a voice which was right on time.

—**Ricky Flores** (PHOTOJOURNALIST)

An enduring icon from the epicenter of the hip-hop, rock & roll, and punk movements of the 1970s and '80s, the boombox has always been more than just a collection of metal, plastic, and wires—it was a means of expression and empowerment. Whether you were playing (or blasting) your music at a party, knocking about on a street corner, or simply strutting your stuff, a boombox added a prevailing swagger to the experience.

Presenting unrivaled documentary imagery from back-in-the-day next to stunning contemporary portraits of the machines themselves, as well as never-before-told memories from interviews with Spike Lee, Fab 5 Freddy, Don Letts, Bob Gruen, Rosie Perez, Kool Moe Dee, LL Cool J, DJ Spooky, and Adam Yauch of the Beastic Boys, among others, *The Boombox Project* is its own kind of gigantic mix tape that brings the impact of this movement back to life.

Lyle Owerko is a filmmaker and photographer with a wide range of commercial and editorial clients. In January of 2010 he was named a Hasselblad Master for "representing photography at its finest." His other awards include recognition for one of the forty most important magazine covers by the American Society of Magazine Editors, as well as honors from the New York Art Directors Club, American Photography, AIGA, the National Press Photographers Association, the Royal Photographic Society, *Communication Arts*, and many other notable organizations. Based in New York City, Lyle travels extensively around the world each year shooting assignments and personal work.

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