



2018 SCHWARTZ PRIZE NOMINATION

Straight Outta Fresno: From Popping to B-boys and B-girls
California Humanities

Straight Outta Fresno: From Popping to b-boys and b-girls (SOF) is an innovative and imaginative public humanities project that aimed to document and share the history of hip-hop dance and culture in Fresno from the late 1970's to the early 2000's, supported by a California Humanities public programming grant. This project melded traditional humanities pursuits (research, archiving, publication) with public engagement drawn from hip hop culture (a series of "dance battles"). Drawing on 21st century digital tools and old-school grassroots methods, SOF engaged the attention of thousands of people representing a wide variety of audiences both in and beyond Fresno. SOF demonstrated how the humanities play a role in revitalizing community life and fostering genuine connections between people of different generations, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds.

OVERVIEW

California Humanities is pleased to nominate *Straight Outta Fresno: From Popping to B-boys and B-girls* (SOF) for the 2018 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize. SOF showcases an innovative

and imaginative public humanities project that aimed to document and share the history of hip-hop dance and culture in Fresno from the late 1970's to the early 2000's. Organized by humanities faculty members at California State University, Fresno and conducted over the 2017-2018 academic year, with substantial support from our Humanities for All Project Grant program, the project melded traditional humanities pursuits (research, archiving, publication) with a model of public engagement drawn from hip hop culture (a series of "dance battles" furnished the means to collect and disseminate historical knowledge, as well as a platform for dialogue and discussion). Drawing on 21st century digital tools (online publication and social media), as well as old-school grassroots methods (flyers, posters, and word of mouth), the project was able to connect with a wide variety of public and academic audiences both in and beyond Fresno. By breaking down real and perceived barriers between campus and community, engaging the public in producing as well as consuming historical knowledge, and drawing on multiple sources and forms of expertise, the project broke new ground. SOF also demonstrated how the humanities can play a role in revitalizing community life and foster genuine connections between people of different generations, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds.

Launched in late 2016, after a year of research and reflection that resulted in a re-envisioning of our grantmaking programs to reflect the imperatives of responsiveness and accessibility identified in our [new strategic framework](#), the [Humanities for All Project Grant program](#) is an ongoing, competitive grant program of California Humanities with statewide scope. Awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000 support a broad range of public humanities projects that advance our mission to provide high quality humanities learning experiences for the people of California. Projects that show potential to engage new and historically underserved audiences for public humanities programs are of special interest.

SOF was one of 12 projects funded through the first round of this new program. The reviewers were enthusiastic about the proposal, seeing it as outstanding example of community-engaged scholarship, one that would enable the public to actively participate in a humanities research endeavor, as well as create relevant, accessible, and engaging public programs and knowledge products. They were also impressed by the promise it showed to provide a high-quality public humanities program to a region of California – the Central Valley - that is under-resourced in comparison to other parts of our state. They were intrigued by its potential shown by the subject (hip-hop) and the innovative programming formats (performance, exhibit, talks, and dialogues) to engage underserved constituencies, particularly young people of color who are often not reached by traditional humanities programs. Now, a year later, we believe it has produced many of the desired outcomes, including several that are emphasized in the call for nominations, in particular:

- Involvement of new audiences
- Unique collaborations
- New uses of technology
- Innovative merge of public and academic programs/audiences

We hope that you will enjoy reading this account of the project and find it, as we did, a good fit with the vision of the humanities that this prestigious award reflects.

RATIONALE – WHY THIS PROJECT?

As the first project of Fresno State's newly minted Valley Public History Initiative: Preserving our Stories, *Straight Outta Fresno: From Popping to B-boys and B-girls* (SOF) emerged from a commitment to reduce the barriers between academic institutions and the public and radically re-imagine the way archives are constructed and how historical knowledge is created and disseminated. When Dr. Romeo Guzmán founded the Valley Public History Initiative in the heart of California's great Central Valley in 2016, he knew that he wanted to do work that would truly reflect the richness and diversity of this predominantly agricultural region, which is often overlooked by scholars as well as the general public, as a vital factor in California's cultural and social life. Dr. Guzmán also knew that he wanted to work in a way that would democratize the practice of historical research and engage students, as well as the community as producers and consumers of knowledge, particularly knowledge about underrepresented and marginalized communities.

SOF was born from the unique collaboration between Dr. Guzmán and Professor Sean Slusser (PhD Candidate at UC Riverside and part-time faculty at Fresno State), as well as their simultaneous arrival to the Central Valley. Professor Sean Slusser brought a wealth of experience researching hip-hop culture, organizing hip-hop-centric events, and working with the hip-hop community. Dr. Guzmán's award-winning public history project *East of East: Mapping Community Narratives in South El Monte and El Monte* provided the theory, practice, and language for building the SOF public history project. Within a few months of meeting and talking with community members, they learned that Fresno had nurtured a generation of innovative youth of color in the 1970s who navigated a sophisticated cultural network up and down the I-5 corridor, California's "spine," in the process helping to birth the new dance form, popping. This was followed by a new generation of dancers, who in their own right, placed Fresno on the hip-hop map.

Straight Outta Fresno is directly informed by a generation of hip-hop scholars who argue that hip-hop culture cannot be understood outside of the devastating effects deindustrialization,

white flight, and benign neglect had on inner cities across the United States and that were felt at the most intimate levels of the street and neighborhood. Focusing principally on the Bronx, South Central Los Angeles, and Oakland, hip-hop studies has sought to understand the historical agency of working class youth of color who invented new forms of music, dance, visual art, and poetry and built complex cultural networks by piecing together fragments of post-industrial rubble.

As they drew from scholarship on hip-hop culture, Guzmán and Slusser also became painfully aware of the degree to which their students, as well as the broader Fresno population, felt overlooked particularly by academic and popular histories of hip-hop. Indeed, by focusing on Fresno and the Central Valley, they sought to challenge metropolitan-centric understandings of hip-hop culture and history that either ignore smaller urban, suburban, and rural hip-hop scenes or treat them as the products of trickle down funk from hip-hop's central nodes. It became clear to them that the accomplishments of Fresno's hip-hop practitioners had been achieved with very limited resources and in the face of indifference, if not denigration, by their coastal counterparts, music producers, and others in the larger hip-hop ecology. Finally, they were interested in the manner in which Fresno's hip-hop community reflected the unique mix of ethnicities and cultures of the region, produced through over a century of domestic and foreign migration from the American South, South-East Asia, Mexico, and Latin America.

Informed by this knowledge, Dr. Guzmán and Professor Slusser decided to execute an ambitious public history project focused on creating an historical archive of hip-hop dance and culture in Fresno from the late 1970s to the early 2000s that would address a multiplicity of needs and provide a setting for innovative programming they wanted their scholarship to embody. With support from CSU Fresno History Department, College of Social Science, FresCo and Arte America cultural centers, contemporary

practitioners, and a growing audience of hip-hop scholars and researchers (both academic and community) they decided to extend the research initiated in fall 2016 into a new phase and sought support from California Humanities early in 2017. A project grant award awarded that summer helped provide the material support they needed to conduct the robust plan of research, programming, and publication they envisioned.



Ken and Deborah McCoy of the Puppets, a Hip Hop Dance Group from Fresno, 1970s.

ACTIVITIES

Using the structure of a year-long, hip-hop dance battle to provide a programming framework that would be familiar and engaging to the desired audience, SOF hosted three innovative and groundbreaking events, which were supported, supplemented, and linked by regular social media posts and a prolific output of articles published on the academic blog [Tropics of Meta](#). Collectively, these events served to collect primary sources (oral history interviews, flyers, photographs, and other material objects related to hip-hop), disseminate scholarship in an accessible manner, host conversations between academics and hip-hop community, showcase hip-hop culture, and ultimately create a new narrative about Fresno's place in hip-hop history.



SOF was officially launched on December 7, 2017 with an exhibit launch and party at FresCo (a cultural center in the heart of downtown) that drew a crowd of 175 people. Working with graduate students, b-boys, and FresCo curator Tony Carranza, Dr. Guzmán and Professor Slusser curated an exhibit using material they had collected during 2016 academic year and in the fall of 2017, as well as

material objects and original art by acclaimed muralist Mauro Carrera. The exhibit provided a general historical narrative of hip-hop in Fresno and, perhaps more importantly, served as an invitation to the Fresno community to help them build a more robust and complete archive and narrative of hip-hop. Community members, who ranged from dancers from the 1970s to youth who are just learning how to pop, were able to learn not just about the history of hip-hop in Fresno, but to understand Fresno's relationship and vital importance to developments in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. An intriguing experience for many was the chance to hold a cassette tape, place it in an old-school boom box, and listen to oral history excerpts — a flashback to an earlier technological and musical era.

The exhibit also provided an opportunity for youth from Deborah McCoy's hip-hop academy (primarily youth of color from primary and secondary grades) to showcase their skills on the dance floor. The night was framed by introductory comments by Dr. Guzmán, Professor Slusser, Tony Carranza, a hip-hop cypher, and Monique Quintana, a Fresno-based writer, reading *Womb Geography*, which is a creative non-fiction story commissioned for SOF about navigating Fresno's racial geographies and about crossing and encountering racial borders. In short, this

event not only served as an invitation for community members to collaborate with SOF, but set the eclectic and inclusive tone that characterized future events.



SOF's first official b-boy battle was hosted by another community venue, Arte Americas, Fresno's historic (and only) Latino/a museum, on Saturday, February 3, 2018. Inside the museum's walls, the project team collected, displayed, and showcased hip-hop history, including a reinstallation of the FresCo exhibit. From 11 am to 2 pm, Fresno State undergraduate and graduate students in Dr. Guzmán's oral history course conducted oral history interviews with b-boys and graffiti artists and digitized original photographs and flyers from their personal collections. The narrators (the people interviewed) cut across generations, ethnicity, and neighborhoods. Lastly, from 12 to 5 pm, Fresno and Los Angeles based b-boys battled in a knock-out style tournament for a cash prize and a chance to compete in Final Championship Battle. The winner, reflecting both the success of the event and its reach, was a group

composed of members from Los Angeles and a recent transplant from Boston by way of Russia. Arte America staff estimated that approximately 500 people attended throughout the duration of the event; while this number is impressive, equally impressive was the energy and enthusiasm of the dozens of boys and girls who "busted their first moves on the practice linoleum and on the main stage during breaks," according to Dr. Guzmán.

These first two events helped to promote and build excitement for the final event in April. Other marketing strategies included the extensive use of social media, grassroots marketing, and more traditional support provided by [Fresno State's University Communications](#). The project directors and graduate students made numerous television appearances and distributed flyers at countless b-boy practice sessions throughout Fresno. SOF also quickly and efficiently used the archive it was building to produce and share new historical knowledge and narratives in real time. Throughout the programming period, SOF published [seven posts](#) on the *Tropics of Meta* site. With approximately 10,000 subscribers, *Tropics of Meta* provided an ideal platform to disseminate SOF findings to a local, national, and international audience. Some of these pieces, like "[Exhibit Preview](#)" and "[Judges Bios](#)," announced an event by giving community members a glimpse, a sample if you will, of what they might experience. Others, like Naomi Klein's "[On the Front Porch: Deborah McCoy and Fresno Streetdance](#)" used the SOF

archive to create accessible and academically informed 3,000 word essays. The last post invited community members to attend their final event and receive a free copy of [*Dispatches from Straight Outta Fresno Archive*](#), a collection of essays and historic photographs and flyers published in hard copy, as well as digital formats. On average, each post received about 300 unique views.

“Battle for Fresno State: Championship Round,” the final public program of the series, was held on campus on April 1, and brought together a diverse group of 200 people that included academics, Fresno residents of many backgrounds, and the hip-hop community. Internationally respected b-boys evaluated crews from the Central Valley, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area, as well as one crew composed of members from the East Coast and Peru. Community members took home *Dispatches from Straight Outta Fresno Archive*, viewed the exhibit, and some participated in another session of oral history interviews. A special feature of this event was a dialogue with some of the “culture bearers” who were able to share their firsthand knowledge and experience with a new generation. Between the first round and the final dance battle, community members got to listen to Timony “Poppin’ Pete” Solomon, Charles Montgomery (aka B-boy Goku), Deborah McCoy, and Aren “DJ Hecktik” Hekimian discuss their experience with hip-hop in Fresno. Collectively, their narratives placed audiences’ members in Fresno during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s across the globe and back to their respective neighborhoods.



“It was such an honor to have these McCoy hip hop students with me at the Battle for Fresno State,” said hip hop teacher Deborah McCoy. “Not only to support me but to learn more about the history of hip hop here in our community and to watch and learn from the dancers in the dance battles.” Charles “Goku” Montgomery noted the experience had “been on an epic adventure this past few days.. most



definitely it has been humbling, inspirational, and fun.” Twelve-year old, hip hop student Belle Vasquez said, “I felt like the event helped me see different styles of dancing and different ages

of people dancing, and with the different ages comes different understanding, expression and interpretation of dance...I also learned that people dance for different reasons, for example, if they are sad, mad, or depressed, they would escape out of those emotions on the dance floor. "

OUTCOMES – PROJECT IMPACT AND REACH

New audiences for public humanities

Fresno State is located right below Barstow and “north of Shields.” For Fresno residents, “south of Shields” is used as shorthand to signal the perceived association of certain neighborhoods with crime and poverty. As proposed, SOF worked with community members to tell a history of Fresno through its youth cultures by highlighting the contributions of its ethnic neighborhoods. To promote



participation, rather than expecting these communities to come to campus, the project team organized events in downtown Fresno, which functions as hub for the city and is in close proximity to Southeast Fresno (which is predominately made up of Southeast Asian immigrants and Latinos) and West Fresno (which is both African-American and Latino). Each of the events brought together hundreds of residents, predominantly people of color (African-American, Latino, and Asian). Linked by their connection to hip-hop, the audience was intergenerational. Most were unfamiliar with academic humanities work and somewhat surprised, albeit pleased, to learn that they were active participants in a historical research project.

Democratizing the Humanities

It is no longer uncommon to see immigrants, working-class and LGBTQ communities, African-Americans, and youth in academic syllabi. Indeed, they are the subject of scholarship, as well as documentaries, exhibits, journalism, and fiction. It is still, however, to quote Dr. Guzmán, “Rare to see underrepresented communities as central actors in the historical process.” It is here that Guzmán’s public history model and the SOF project is particularly innovative. Starting with the premise that the community must be integral to the entire project and historical process, SOF integrated the Fresno hip-hop community into SOF in four key ways.

- First, they were central to the creation of the archive. By viewing them as partners in this process, SOF collected their stories and scanned photographs and flyers.

- Second, rather than mere subjects, community members were the intended audience, shaping and influencing for whom and how scholarship is produced.
- Third, the hip-hop community was both the audience and the headliners. In other words, in any event, the transmission of knowledge went from scholars-to-community and from hip-hop community-to-scholars.
- Fourth, the hip-hop community was integral in constructing the format of the event and served as consultants on the exhibit.

In short, by placing underrepresented communities at the center in all aspects, SOF transformed how knowledge is created and experienced.



Fostering Connections

Lastly, SOF demonstrated how collaborations can benefit and indeed are essential to doing humanities work that truly engages the public. The project would not have been possible without many individuals and organizations, both on and off campus, who provided intellectual and material support of many kinds: cultural and historical knowledge; technical expertise; provision of meeting and programming venues; outreach and marketing assistance; and an enormous amount of goodwill, enthusiasm, and encouragement. The project was particularly notable in the way it engaged an eclectic mix of partners and supporters. These included hip hop culture bearers and current adherents and practitioners from Fresno and beyond (individual b-boys and “crews” as well as dance academies). Other supporters included students, staff, and faculty members from Fresno State and other academic institutions; hip hop and popular culture enthusiasts generally; and many individuals and organizations in the community. These community supporters included non-traditional humanities partners (businesses and civic groups), as well as more traditional ones of museums, arts organizations, and libraries. Last but not least, one of the major accomplishments of the project was the way it

forged intergenerational, interethnic, and intercultural connections, enabling participants and audiences alike to discover commonalities of interest — and even common ground.

MAKING IT HAPPEN — RESOURCES

The People Behind the Project

Co-directors

Romeo Guzmán is an assistant professor in US and Public History at Fresno State where he is the founder and director of “The Valley Public History Initiative: Preserving our Stories.” He received his Ph.D. in Latin American history at Columbia University. Guzmán is the founder of South El Monte Arts Posse’ public history and place-making project *East of East: Mapping Community Narratives*, which has received funding from the Los Angeles City Department of Cultural Affairs, National Endowment for the Arts, Columbia University, and the American History Association. *East of East* was awarded the Autry Museum and Western History Association’s Public History Prize in 2015. He has published on migration, popular culture, and politics in both academic and popular outlets and collaborated with a number of cultural institutions and grassroots organizations, including La Casa de El Hijo del Ahuizote, Vincent Price Art Museum, Mexicali Rose, FresCo, and Arte Américas, among others. Guzmán is an associate editor at Tropics of Meta. He resides in the San Joaquin Valley with Caribbean, the writer, and their daughter Aura. For more on his work please visit romeoguzman.com

Sean Slusser: Sean Slusser is a PhD candidate in history at UC Riverside where he is writing a dissertation on Filipino participation in 1980s and 1990s Los Angeles hip-hop culture. Slusser’s research focuses on the links between hip-hop culture, urban environments, and global contexts. As a part-time instructor at UC Riverside, Cal State Los Angeles, and Fresno State, Slusser collaborated with hip-hop practitioners, including DJs and graffiti artists, to organize events that helped highlight hip-hop culture’s artistry and historical significance. Slusser currently teaches for the Chicano and Latin American Studies and History departments at Fresno State university. In addition, Slusser is also a public history fellow with “The Valley Public History Project: Preserving our Stories” where he has helped launch the archive documenting Fresno hip-hop history.

Timothy “Popin’ Pete” Solomon (Keynote Panelist)

Hailing from West Fresno, [Timothy “Popin’ Pete” Solomon](#), is one of the most recognizable dancers on the planet. Before he was known to the world as a popping pioneer and innovator, Popin’ Pete learned to dance alongside his legendary brother, Boogaloo Sam, founder of the Electric Boogaloos, and one of the creators of popping. As a first-generation member of the

Electric Boogaloos, Popin' Pete helped introduce the world to popping through two iconic [Soul Train appearances](#). In the process, Popin' Pete and his crew caught the eye of Michael Jackson who requested that they teach him to pop, a request that culminated in Pete appearing in *Beat It* and Michael Jackson's groundbreaking short film, *Captain Eo*. Hollywood also came calling landing Pete a role in the 1984 film *Breakin'*. Pete has since collaborated with some of the biggest names in pop music, including Janet Jackson, Justin Timberlake, Mya, [Chris Brown](#), and Gwen Stefani, as both a dancer and choreographer. Popin' Pete stays active, crisscrossing the globe both with the Electric Boogaloos and as a solo performer, judge, instructor, and dance ambassador.

Charles "Goku" Montgomery (MC and Consultant throughout the project)

Fresno's own [Charles "Goku" Montgomery](#) has over 24 years in experience in the performing arts, as a b-boy, tumbler, and instructor. Goku's dance career began in 1993 in Fresno where he helped found Climax crew. Eventually, Goku was recruited to [Soul Control](#), an all-star b-boy crew made up of some of the dopest b-boys in the nation. As a member of Soul Control, Goku contributed to the crew's reputation as b-boy innovators all while traveling the globe to take on all-comers. As a well-respected b-boy, Goku has participated in and [judged](#) some of the biggest b-boy battles across the world including Freestyle Sessions and the Silverback Open. Since 2008, Charles has been the owner/manager of SCMX Dance Academy in Fresno where he teaches basic, intermediate and advanced Breaking, Tumbling, and other genres of dance. He has dedicated his life as a b-boy, who always strives to support dance communities throughout the world and nurture these talented dancers for the love of Hip-Hop. His objective is to utilize knowledge and leadership skills to help build dance communities, promote self-confidence, implement rules and regulations, and encourage a healthy lifestyle through breaking ("b-boyin/b-girl").

Authors and Editors

Naomi Macalalad Bragin is an assistant professor in the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington Bothell where she teaches courses in black performance theory, performance research, and dance improvisation. Her current project, *Black Power of Hip Hop Dance: On Kinetic Politics*, traces the role of freestyle street dance in the generation of Black political aesthetics.

[Tropics of Meta \(ToM\)](#) aims to offer a fresh perspective on history, current events, popular culture, and issues in the academic world. Founded in 2010, ToM has published over 700 essays by historians, social scientists, artists, filmmakers, and creative writers both within and outside the academy, giving voice to communities across the United States and the world. Unlike many academic blogs, it does not focus on a particular subdiscipline or regional or thematic

specialization. “Rather, we are open to a broad and inclusive discussion of issues ranging from cities to technology, from music, food, and film to gender, race, and sexuality. We are particularly interested in urban history, legal history, media studies, oral history, and public history. Our pieces have been republished in a wide array of outlets, including Quartz, n+1, KCET, Nursing Clio, and many others. We hope Tropics of Meta can serve as a sounding board for new ideas and new research, as well as a clearinghouse for innovative projects in digital arts and humanities.”

Alex Sayf Cummings (Editor) is an associate professor of History at [Georgia State University](#). Alex’s work deals with media, law, technology, and the political culture of the modern United States; it has appeared in [Salon](#), the [Brooklyn Rail](#), the [Journal of American History](#), [Technology and Culture](#), the [Journal of Urban History](#), [HNN](#), [Pop Matters](#), [OUP Blog](#), [Al Jazeera America](#), and the edited volumes [Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction](#) (Penn) and *The Bohemian South* (UNC). Alex’s first book, [Democracy of Sound: Music Piracy and the Remaking of American Copyright in the Twentieth Century](#), was published by Oxford University Press in 2013, and a second, *Brain Magnet: Research Triangle Park and the Idea of the Idea Economy*, is under contract with Columbia University Press for its Studies in the History of US Capitalism series. Follow Alex on Twitter at [@akbarjenkins](#).

Tony Carranza (FresCo Curator)

The son of farmworkers growing up in rural California and the political landscape around workers help mold Tony Carranza’s vision early as to the kind of artist he wanted to be. He holds a BA in Art & Design from the Academy of Art in San Francisco with an emphasis on printmaking, multimedia, branding, and design. He has worked with many design firms in the Oakland/San Francisco Bay Area and New York City. His experience as an Art Director and his dedication to social justice has allowed him to work with a long roster of community based organizations and change makers around the U.S. With more than 15 years in art/design, his knowledge and passion for Latin American/Chicano, Urban, and popular art movements have led also let to his interest as a curator. His love for the valley has led to the need for make an impact using art and culture as a driving force. In 2013 he co-founded Dulce UpFront, a multimedia arts activist collective that features an array of statewide and national organizations, community groups, and artists. He is active in the arts community and participates in many projects in and around the Central Valley and Oakland.

Material Resources

In addition to the human resources provided by key people, SOF received support from many sources. California Humanities, of course, provided a \$20,000 cash grant, which was used for staffing, equipment, marketing, and publicity support with a small portion dedicated to overhead costs. CSU Fresno provided release time for Dr. Guzmán and underwrote most of the overhead costs, totaling nearly \$17,000. Additional CSU support came from the College of Social Science (\$1,906.82), the Cross Cultural and Gender Center (\$2,500), and the President's Commission on Human Rights and Equity (\$3,000). Graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in Professor Guzmán's and Slusser's courses contributed labor for the oral history collection, exhibit development, and public programming planning and implementation valued at \$5,000. Additional support came from individuals and organizations, many associated with the project partners listed above, including thousands of dollars of in-kind contributions, including use of space for research and programming activities, donated use of equipment and supplies, assistance with publicity and marketing (copying and distribution of flyers and posters, social media support), and publication-related expenses (layout, design, editing, printing costs, etc.).

SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE OF SOF

The California Humanities grant set the groundwork for SOF in four important ways.

- First, grant funds enabled the project directors to collect 32 oral histories and scan and digitize approximately 100 photographs and flyers and 10 videos. This constitutes a significant and healthy archival collection.
- Second, they were able to print approximately 40 unique photographs on canvas, frame original art and archival posters, and frame large, removable wall-text. In short, to produce the material objects necessary for an exhibit.
- Third, and closely related to the exhibit, grant funding supported editing and printing of *Dispatches from the Straight Outta Fresno Archive*.
- Fourth, the grant provided an opportunity to build relationships with cultural institutions off-campus and with a number of crews and individual b-boys.

In the coming years, Fresno State faculty members Dr. Guzmán and Professor Slusser will be able to build on the important labor accomplished during the grant period. In the fall of 2018 the archive will be uploaded and displayed on the Fresno State Madden Library website, and students in Dr. Guzmán's future oral history and public history courses will continue to add to

the archive by conducting oral histories and scanning visual material. In short, the archive has already found a home and will continue to grow.

The project co-directors envision a similar continuity in regards to their engagement with the hip-hop community. The pop-gallery can easily be installed at any of Fresno's future dance battles and books distributed at local hip-hop events. The relationships they built over the course of the project will enable them to continue collaborations, such as organizing future battles. As a result of the California Humanities grant, they expect SOF will continue to flourish in coming years.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Guzmán and Professor Slusser began their project the fall of 2016 with no more than a few sources: YouTube video of the Electric Bogaloos on *Soul Train*, a few scattered footnotes about hip-hop in Fresno, and a book chapter by Thomas Guzmán-Sanchez. According to Dr. Guzmán and Professor Slusser, "The lack of historical writing on the subject makes it hard to know where to start, what archives to visit, sources to examine, theories to use. We quickly realized that in order to tell the history of hip-hop in Fresno we would need to find and interview folks who are and were part of this movement, to find old fliers and photographs. In short, to build the archive."

So they did. In the process of conducting SOF, they transformed how archives are created and how historical knowledge is disseminated and experienced. As the project directors state, "Perhaps, more importantly, we demonstrated that Fresno's underrepresented communities were important historical actors and contributed to the history of hip-hop in California. We hope that we also transformed how Fresno residents' image 'South of Shaw;' that they think of West Fresno and Southeast Fresno as places of struggle, cultural creativity, and as historical landmarks."

SOF demonstrated the capacity of the humanities to create knowledge that was meaningful and significant for both the public, as well as scholars, and to do so in a way that is deeply respectful of the people, cultures, and histories that were the subjects of study. By enabling community members to act as co-creators, as well as consumers of the knowledge it produced, the project transformed the traditional humanities activities of research and archiving. It also illustrated how academic institutions and scholars can collaborate with communities, particularly those that have historically been marginalized or excluded from participation in and by major social institutions of society, including academic institutions, for mutual benefits. In keeping the community at the heart of the project, SOF has demonstrated the vitality and versatility of the

humanities and provided an exemplary model of engaged and responsive scholarship and innovative and responsive public programming that merits recognition by our field.

DISPATCHES FROM THE STRAIGHT OUTTA FRESNO ARCHIVES



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DISPATCHES FROM THE
STRAIGHT OUTTA FRESNO
ARCHIVES

Dispatches from the Straight Outta Fresno Archive
By The Valley Public History Initiative:
Preserving our Stories

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INTRODUCTION

Geography is central to hip-hop culture. Academics and artists alike have referenced the importance of physical spaces like “the block”; “the streets”; or “the hood” as incubators for hip-hop culture. It is in these intimate spaces that working class youth of color sift through the rubble of post-industrial neglect and repurpose it into new forms of visual art, music, and dance. Nearly fifty years after hip-hop’s emergence into the public imagination, these narratives of place have been mapped onto a distinct hip-hop cartography fixated on nostalgic references to “the Bronx”; “Compton”; and “Oakland.” Cities like Fresno are rarely included in this hip-hop cartography largely because they exist outside of institutional networks like university archives, cultural philanthropy, and the music industry. Yet, Fresno is no stranger to rubble and Fresno working class youth have their own history of repurposing that rubble in distinctly Fresno ways. As hip-hop culture itself has best exemplified, there is much to be learned from those who suffer from neglect and institutionalized exclusion.

As such, the Fresno State Valley Public History Initiative sought to develop a public history project that would document Fresno’s hip-hop history by providing community members institutional space to document and discuss their history. Within a few months of meeting and talking with community members two things became clear: 1. Fresno nurtured a generation of innovative youth of color in the 1970 who navigated a sophisticated cultural network up and down the I-5 corridor in the process of helping to birth a new form of dance: popping and 2. succeeding generations of Fresno youth built their own local and statewide networks in support of a new generation of hip-hop innovators: b-boys. In both cases, it was clear that Fresno youth in general, and youth of color in particular, actively shaped a city and regional identity through dance, but did so with a chip on their shoulder born of dismissive attitudes towards Fresno and fewer resources than their contemporaries in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area.

Since the Fall of 2016, we’ve worked with graduate and undergraduate students, community members, and the hip-hop community to host panel discussions, b-boy battles, an exhibit, and to document the long history of hip-hop dance in Fresno. This collection of essays and photographs highlights a few of the stories that we’ve documented and narrated. In short, it’s a snapshot of our ever-growing archive.

None of this would have been possible without the guidance and collaboration of our community partners, including local b-boy legend Charles “Goku” Montgomery, who helped connect us to the local hip-hop community; Gary Yang, who further connected us to the pivotal Hmong b-boy community; Tony Carranza and the folks at Fres.Co, who helped design our flyers and promote our events; our media partners Tropics of Meta; Arte America who hosted our first dance battle; California Humanities and countless others who gently pushed us when we were heading down dead-end paths and dedicated their time, energy and stories to further flesh out Fresno hip-hop history. We are proud that Straight Outta Fresno is a public history project that genuinely privileges the public.

Romeo Guzmán & Sean Slusser

Fresno, April 6, 2018

Womb Geography

Monique Quintana

Your son's father is on Fresno PD's MAGEC's list of gang affiliated, even though you only can see the dog paw inked on his shoulder haphazardly. When he gets pulled over by the police as he's driving you to dinner, you can hear the son you share holding his breath in the back seat, tiny air filling his cheeks, his hair cropped in shiny black curls like he's an angel baby. You wonder why they call a gang task force MAGEC. If they could ever make boys like your son turn into smoke.

You met your son's father at a roller skating rink in Clovis. When you get dropped off there with your friends, there are brown boys hanging on outside the wall of the place, like they're Christmas decorations. They light up like that, because they look like they're in love with you. They look at you like you're mysterious, because all they know about you is the three dollar bills you paid to get in and the blue hand stamp on the web of your hand. Your hair's dyed drugstore burgundy black and is cut to your chin like you think you're Cleopatra or at least Mia Wallace, minus the bangs and white shirt and cigarette pants. Instead, you're wearing a black and white cropped t-shirt from the RAVE store at Manchester Mall that says "Angel" on it and black denim shorts with a metal belt buckle hanging on your hip like a smile.

You're with your friend from school, a white girl named Lisa, who talks with a fake Spanish accent and has a spiral perm and is wearing the black cherry lipstick shade from Wet N Wild. She knows she skates better than you. In fact, you realize that you don't know how to roller-skate very well at all, and you try to casually hold on to the wall, like no one will notice. Lisa finds boys to talk to, boys that will make her green eyes sparkle. You're beginning to realize that she's using you somehow, but you don't have the word for appropriation yet. You just know she's not brown or black like all the other kids in the skating rink, but she still wants to get in on the music. There's a disco ball that dots the ceiling sky with colors, and Lisa sways her hips back and forth as she skates with the swirl of kids on the rink. You watch her from a picnic table by the snack bar. Your feet are heavy and your legs feel like twigs. You want to rip the angel wings from your t-shirt and fly back home to northwest Fresno.

A group of brown boys comes and sits with you on the table. There are three skinny boys and one boy you would best describe as husky, a boy who seems like the unofficial leader of the crew. He introduces himself as Tino. He has beetle black hair cut short on top and large slanted eyes that dip into half-moons when he smiles. He has a raspy high-pitched voice when he talks and he curses a lot. He still talks like this now. You don't know that this will be your son's father someday. You

think these boys are the cholo brown boy version of the crew from *The Goonies*. But they don't like when people call them cholos, because they say that's an LA thing. You're supposed to call them Gs, they say. They all have buckles on their pants with letters. You assume these letters are for the names of their girlfriends. They go to Cooper Middle School, which isn't too far from where you live, but feels far because it's south of Shaw, and you've only seen that school occasionally when you're driving past in the back seat of your mother's car. The boys make you nervous, but the Tino boy talks so much, it's hard not to talk back. His chatter is mixed up with the strawberry taste of the licorice rope that you're chewing from and the cola that burns like a hole in your throat. When you tell him what school you go to, he asks you what a Chicana like you is doing go to a school like that, and you don't know what he really means until years later, but all you can do is say, I live out there.

These brown boys from Cooper school go out and skate on the rink. You think their baggy pants look like parachutes, like they just fell out of the sky. You think about the cursive "Angel" on your shirt and you wish you could fly like that too. Some of the girls are smiling and laughing on the rink, but some of them look stoic like they're going to take those fuzzy filter pictures at the Fulton Mall, with starburst and Smile Now, Cry Later faces in the background. Lisa comes by to check on you. You realize that you don't want to take fuzzy filter pictures at the Fulton Mall with Lisa, because when it comes down to it, she's not down for you. You're just her brown decoration, too.

Tino comes up to you and asks you for your phone number. He has to skate around the roller skating rink to find a pen to write with. He borrows one from a black girl he goes to school with. She's holding hands and skating with a boy because the lights have dimmed and the couple's dance has begun. They're playing Zapp and Roger's "I Want to Be Your Man." The pen is skinny and dotted with glitter and has a pink poof at the end of it. You write your number on a piece of paper that you fold up in a square and give to Tino, even though you don't want him to be your man. The girl skates by and claims her pen back like it's a fairy wand and you think she looks beautiful flying away like that. This boy is just a stranger to you and there's only the synthetic drumbeat and the leftover disco ball to see your way through to the exit sign and the parking lot to wait for your ride. He doesn't call you after that and you don't know that he'll be your son's father someday.

You imagine Tino and his friends walk down Echo Street to get to Fresno High. A cop car pulls over and asks them where they are going. They answer very smartly, because where else would they be going? They are not supposed to be walking in such a large group, the officer tells them. They are not campus police; they are street police. There are rules against too many boys walking together. Your pants are too khaki, the officer is saying. Your mother's womb made you brown, the officer is saying. She made your eyes a little too slanted, the officer is saying. They made you boys too free, he is saying.

You chance upon Tino again. His last name is Juarez. He says he's related to Benito Juarez. He says this proudly. You try to imagine him at a party with politcos drinking tequila. He's best friends with your cousin and they go to Fresno High together. You and your cousin walk over to Tino's pad, where he lives with his dad. His parents are divorced like yours and he tells you his dad sells used tires for extra money. When he asks you what high school you're going to, and you tell him you're going to Bullard, he laughs and tells you you're prep and that school's for white people or maybe,

you're, you know, the Hilary Banks type. He has long slicked back hair and a razor skin fade. He uses Three Flowers pomade because his cowboy grandpa wore it and because it's cheap and he thinks it smells good.

He puts on a red light bulb in his room because he thinks it's fancy and blows weed in your face because he thinks you'll like it, but you don't and you never will. He likes your long hair and your big hoop earrings and how your bell-bottom jeans drag under your sneakers. Your cousin tries to put on his *Life After Death* CD, but even though he likes it, Tino wants to hear West Coast shit, something you can be authentic too. Something from where we come from, he tells you. You fall in love with him that summer and summer turns to fall. You find out his father named him after the silent film star, Rudolph Valentino and this embarrasses him. He wears a black hooded utility jacket when he comes to see you. It has fake Sherpa lining to cut the cold and the fog, but his hair still smells like three flowers pomade. He has a friend who goes by the name Pita, who's a butch dyke and has the same hair style he does, except it swings in a long pony tail tied up in a rubber band. She sings alto soprano and hasn't seen the girl she's in love with for three weeks because the girl's mother and father forbid it. He brings her to your house and she pops in front of a large gilded mirror that hangs near the entryway. She likes that song, "My Love is The Shhh!" and she sings and pops to it in her red Mickey Mouse shirt. You sit in Tino's lap and watch her dance because there's nothing else you two want to do. She's like a swirl of red, a bandanna in her back pocket, the slow kick of denim, floating like she's in her mother's womb. She says she competed in a popping competition at a house party once, wearing a zoot suit. You imagine that the suit is white and that the room is warm and filled with longing. You imagine a drumbeat and rose petals and honeysuckle on the floor. The crowd throws it at her because this place is filled with a bunch of boys who pop, but she always wins, again and again.

You and Tino break up and he gets another girl pregnant that summer. You see him occasionally at the bus stop on McKinley and West, or you hear about him from one of your cousin's. He always asks for/about you, but they decide not to tell you, because you're living your life north of Shaw and the music is a loud drum and you're not his Pocahontas baby any more.

When you and Tino get back together, he has a new haircut, a one on top and a zero on the side. His daughter was born in 1999. She lives with her mother and wears white ruffled socks and Dora the Explorer Sneakers and talks like a gangster. She bobs her head to the car radio. The son you have with Tino cries every time you drive past Shaw, without crossing north of it. You wonder why he does this. What he thinks is on the other side.

Your son walks down Echo Street to go to Fresno High. He's fifteen and a freshman. He refuses to catch a ride with his father and you see him walking on your way to teach at Fresno City College, where you're an adjunct and teach English. You can tell that he has both of his ear buds in and you wonder if he's listening to a rap song or a podcast. He's been trying to politicize his existence, even taken to watching Fox News in the afternoons to learn the other side of things. He's wearing a grey flannel shirt. His father tells him he can wear grey, black, brown, and green flannel shirts, but never blue and never red.

Your son's father wants to send your son to another school, north of Shaw. In fact, it's your own high school alma mater. You don't want your son to go there because you know what it's like there. You remember how the kids at your high school laughed at the brown and black kids crossing Shaw on Bus 26 to come to their school. They call them the ghetto kids or hood kids, never really going to belong kids, they're lucky that we let them come here kids.

This morning when your son left for school, you can hear Tupac playing through his ear buds, and you remind him that he needs to keep one ear bud out when he's walking on the street. When he gives you an attitude, you want to remind him how your body had to make room for him for nine months, how your body made room for a brown man, and you're still learning how to do this. He walks away in his brand new sneakers that he's polished with a toothbrush and runs his hand through the pompadour in his rockabilly haircut, the look he traded his skin fade for a few years ago. You call him later to ask him why he hasn't come home from school yet and you can hear him with him friends laughing in the background and you know that he doesn't want to move schools, that his altar is set up in that place. When he gets home, you feel safe, and he burns a stick of copal like he can read your mind and he plays synthetic drum beats as an offering to the gods.

You ask yourself why you stay with your son's father despite all your differences. You ask yourself why he's the only G to ever really love you. You ask him why he wears his red fitted cap when he's driving, when he knows the cops will pull him over. You ask yourself why you all never learned Spanish, but you still tell him, "No Chingasoss" an offering whenever he goes to the cantina down the street from your house because bad shit just might happen if you go there, but you all keep going back anyway. Sometimes you get all dressed up in a mini skirt and put on black lipstick and you go with him. Why, you ask? Do you keep going back? There are people walking out on Olive Avenue, who look inside the cantina and are scared to go in, but you do. You keep going back, because you know that after nine o'clock they trade the jukebox for the D.J. and they clear the floors and there are colored lights everywhere. There are dancing skeletons on the wall and there are all the old gangsters. There are no more hand stamps, just the echo of your empty womb, all the things that you're still learning. You still haven't married your son's father. You're not his wife. You're still his old lady. You tell people you live this way for political reasons. In the morning, you'll argue with him again about what school your son should go to. But for now, the music is a loud drum, and these days, you know how to fly and to skate.



On the Front Porch:

Deborah McCoy and Fresno Streetdance

Naomi Macalalad Bragin

Hit it.

The street is Poplar, Central Fresno. The year is 1976, '77, '78. The familiar popping of a broadcast receiver hits hot summer air, locking to 1220 on the AM dial. A desert wind gusts. Stops.

Soooooul Followers. De Arthur Woodrow Miller is calling to all who listen. They gather around the sound of KLIP, Fresno's first black-owned station and one of the first in the nation. Between ads for local folks like Mell-o Ice Cream on Tulare, Graves Upholstery on Broadway and J&C House of Records on California, alongside in-house conversations with James Brown, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Ray Charles, Woody Miller keeps Fresno attuned to what and who is happening in the community—all blending together in a continuous mix of Gospel, R&B, Soul and Funk.

The wave of a laugh glittered with shouts goes gliding along a grass patch, hugging on the hood-famous two-story house at Poplar Street. Skating onto the short slope of the path, bouncing between two palm trees posted like sentries at the yard's edge, the laugh meets your feet at the street where you pause, listening. You instinctively reach in your pocket, rubbing the plastic edge of the cassette tape like a good luck charm. Echoes of rhythm touch your bones and muscles, tender from last night's practice.

Naomi: ...you would go and practice on your own?

Deborah: Oh yeah. You sure would. You would go in your room, you would go behind closed doors, and you would practice. Watch yourself in your mirror. You would practice moving. You would be the laughing stock of the world, of the street, if you got up and you didn't know how to do something. That wasn't a time for you to learn how to do it. That's show off time.

Your feet hit the path, magnetized. The two palm trees stand witness as you pass. You get up on the porch. The show's been going on and there's still time to get onstage.

Deborah: Our porch would be filled with kids in the neighborhood and it was very interesting because with us, there was never sitting around not doing anything. We were always creating. We were always dancing. Acting. Just really busy. And everybody knew that if you came around the McCoys you would have to be a part of it. A lot of people told us they felt compelled and driven.

They gather tight, posing like superheroes. They study each other studying themselves. They carry their moves like armor. Cutting and dipping. Flexing. All the baddest dancers show up to the front porch.

Gd UP! Gddonnup. GeddUP. Get. On. Up.

In 1977, Deborah McCoy was seventeen and dressed like the boys, danced like the boys.

Deborah: I was tough and I brought it hard. I was the baddest girl ever. I could jump over your head. My first karate tournament, I broke a girl’s ribs. I was the only girl with six brothers. I didn’t want to be the girl where the brothers say *go*.

Their family had just moved from King of Kings, an apartment complex on Lee Street in West Fresno where Deborah had graduated Irwin Junior High and started high school at Edison. Fifteen miles west on the town’s outskirts was American Union, the K-8 she’d attended in Caruthers during the first eight years of her life in foster care, where she says, “You could count the number of black families on one hand.”

Deborah’s story switches abruptly when she recounts reuniting with her family. Around middle school, she moved in with her father, mother, and the younger three of her six brothers. In this new community, the kids were bold. Deborah speaks with reverence.

Deborah: It was like a “wow” moment for me. It was a culture shock from my own culture. Everybody knew everybody, and we loved it. At my dad’s we’d walk to the store to get food to eat that morning. I was so shocked to see a house right next to a store, or a church! I thought I was in New York when I came to the city! I thought, “This is it!” The hoodiest things were like Disneyland to me.

In this new land within a land, the language of the streets was dance and the conversation was fresh.

Deborah: There was no verbal language. *She repeats.* There was no verbal language. It was visual language. There was no terms. The only term you heard was popping and locking. On the street there is no language. It’s not so technical and so proper. There was *none* of that used. It was just poppin, lockin...no formality. None of that kind of stuff. This is street. It’s street.

Deborah’s emphasis on non-verbal language reflects to me the way Streetdance merges into and out of the everyday—style that escapes the codified vocabulary of formal studio classes. Deborah speaks to the street as a mode of study, predicated on the ever-shifting terms of the vernacular, where everyday life is not distinct from artistic practice.

Deborah: Whatchoo mean where were we learning? From the *street! On the street.* Are you kidding me? I have to say it like this. You’re black and you’re gona go take dance lessons? It’s on the street. It’s right there. That was a release for us. It was nothing like it. It was nothing like it. *Nothing* like it. You learned by watching other dancers, what they did, what you liked. The way they hit.

This isn’t a definition of the street that corners blackness into a type of mythical physicality. Deborah reminds me what’s significant about the street—it’s an affirmation of study unaccountable to professionalized lessons and learning within the protected space of industry dance studios. In 1960s and 1970s California, the studio world hardly accepted Streetdancers as legitimate artists. Streetdance is black study and Streetdancers are students who love to “study without an end,” a phrase that turns up in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s book *The Undercommons*. “The student is not home, out of time, out of place, without credit, in bad debt.” There is no regular schedule of classes to attend or pre-determined levels of expertise to achieve. Streetdance seems “non-technical” or “natural” because the method of incorporating technique in these informal contexts is not linear. Practice is stitched intimately into everyday happen-stances—extending through sleepless nights preparing for a community talent show and improvised in tight spaces of front porches.

Deborah: It was like a way of life for us. Everybody would dance. Everybody would participate. People would get up and do solos. We would get up and we would dance. We would do our thing and they would watch. They would join in. We were learning.

Naomi: Sometimes you were choreographing but a lot of times you were also freestyling. Deborah: It was both of those. We did a lot of the Motown choreos on the front porch. It was like group dancing. That was much easier to do than the popping and the robotting. All of that was all stirred up in a pot. It was all together.

There are no starting and ending points, in time or space. Practice quickly turns to performance. Witness your mom get down to a nasty groove in the living room. Get pushed in front of the crowd at the neighbors’ house party. Study the off-balance stroll of a peg leg man at the corner store. Not unlike the hip hop social/party dances of Now—[#HITDEMFOKKS] [#NAENAE]—early hip hop dance weaves the collective rhythm of blackness into offstage contexts that make up the often overlooked black social scene. Sociologist Marcel Mauss used the expression “Techniques of the Body” to describe everyday movements like walking and eating. Streetdance technique generates knowledge through cultural tradition and social practice: “Learning and doing techniques takes place in a collective context; a context which forms and informs the social constitution of its practitioners.”

Black study, in this sense, is collective study that stays indebted to many people—named and

unnamed. Two Fresno innovators, Boogaloo Sam Solomon and his younger brother Timothy Earl Solomon aka Popin’ Pete, would eventually travel around the world, building the vocabulary and technical principles of Electric Boogaloo and poppin style and shaping the global cultural landscape of contemporary Streetdance. Yet poppin history is infinitely indebted to the street study of uncountable innovators: Fresno dancers William Green Jr. aka Tickn’ Will and Ricky Darnell McDowell; early dance groups from Oakland (The Black Resurgents, The Black Messengers aka Mechanical Devices); Berkeley (Damon Frost); Richmond (Richmond Robots, Audionauts, Androids, Lady Mechanical Robots, Green Machine); San Francisco (Deborah Johnson RIP with Granny and the Robotroids, Demons of the Mind, Close Encounters of the Funkiest Kind); San Jose (Playboy Rob RIP with Playboyz Inc.). It’s a running list. The trans-local movement of Streetdance remains, richly, in debt.

Deborah lists her debt to her father, mother, and brother Ken. Bob McCoy was born in 1922 and by the late 1940s had migrated to Fresno from Texarkana, Texas, working as a truck driver in farming and construction. A singer and self-taught musician, he raised the McCoy family in performing arts. Her brother Ken led a variety of dance groups—Soul Patrol, the Minute Men and The Puppets—the last of which Deborah joined. Together, they graced stages of schools and churches, local fairs and Fresno clubs like Rainbow Ballroom, Lucy’s, the Piccadilly Inn, and the Hacienda hotel. They created routines for weddings, fashion shows, house parties, community centers, and dance competitions—a winding resumé woven with rich patterns of Fresno dance history.

Mary R. Simmons McCoy was their mother and staunch supporter, driving the family to shows and designing their dance costumes. Her sewing gifts are captured in an old photo of Ken, posing in wide-legged red and white knickers crafted from a flag found at the former Pink Elephant thrift store on Shields and Maroa Streets. Red suspenders, bow tie and matching thick-framed sunglasses complete the outfit. His arms jut at off-kilter angles from neatly folded cuffs of a button-up white dress shirt. His head tilts in subtle agreement, accentuating the jaunty perch of the oversized red Apple cap.

Deborah details the careful selection of research sources from which the family drew as they crafted their dance and performance style.

Deborah: We studied Marcel Marceau. We would watch his videos. We looked at him as a role model. We started watching his videos and watched the isolations. We tried to polish up on those skills by watching him. To me, that was onstage. We knew, “Okay, wait a minute, we want to get closer to the stage.” Doing what we were doing was street. It was a way of life for us. Seeing Marcel Marceau dance, and he was on stage, and he was famous. We had much respect for him. That’s how we came up with the name called The Puppets. We would tell stories with our popping and our robotting. When you watched [Marceau] you were there with him in that story. He just walked over to you and grabbed your hand and took you with him.

Street and stage form and inform one another, folding into movement conversations that blur boundaries between off and onstage.

Deborah: What’s interesting too, when we danced on the street, we did not use Marcel Marceau or music from The Sting. You have to come correct. Coming correct means that you gotta do what you’re supposed to do at that moment or in your atmosphere. Do you understand what I’m saying?

Naomi: I think so. You’re saying that you’re speaking the language of the street.

Deborah: Exactly.

Naomi: You switch depending on the environment you’re in.

Deborah: Exactly. You got it.

Naomi: When you’re on the street, you’re responding to the folks where you’re at in that moment. And you’re talking a common language you all share being from this particular place, this lifestyle, this community.

Deborah: Right, because that would not impress them at all. Absolutely not. So that wasn’t the place to do that kind of dancing.

As an early or emergent form of hip hop, Streetdance draws its politics from what, where and how the streets are talking. Against a move to gain value through professional accreditation determined by formal measures of achievement and success, the black study of Streetdance remains displaced in/by/from a proper sense of place in history, because its place was never guaranteed in the first place. Streetdance, as black study, sustains a debt that’s unpayable, incalculable.

Deborah: I never left...my sense of family, that’s my success. No success in the world could compare to being able to touch my father, or my mom, or my brothers. Being separated as kids? Come on now. And I’m gonna go to LA to try and make it big? Being successful within myself. That’s for me moving up.

In 2005, Deborah opened McCoy Talent Gallery on the second floor of the Manchester Mall at the corner of North Blackstone and East Shields Avenue. Holding two black belts in Shotokan and Tae Kwon Do, she teaches classes in Karate, self-defense, and hip hop to youth and women.

The front porch stays lit...

Naomi: What was it about popping?

Deborah: Popping and robotting to me is an outer body experience. You have to be in tune to some parts and let go of the other parts. You’re in and out. You have to isolate. You have to think about, okay if I’m leading with my elbow, I can’t be thinking about my hand. The focus has to be on my elbow. So that means that my hand is hanging there like it’s about to fall off. I have no control over that hand because I’m focusing. I’m leading with my elbow. To be

able to do this and it seems real. That you do look like a robot. You're gone. When you're a robot, you're looking right through someone. You're looking right through them. You actually hypnotize that person that you're dancing for. You take them where you're going. You're both on a journey. You know? You're both on that journey.

Feet touch concrete.

Go harder.

Switch out the cassette for the one in your pocket.

The receiver pops.

Rhythm swings.

Everything starts on the front porch.

The porch is always lit.

It's a way of life.

It's not history. It's Poplar Street.

It's an everyday thing.

FOEVA
CLIMAX
PARTO
OVER!



Defying Gravity, Breakin’ Boundaries: The Rise of Fresno’s Climax Crew

Sean Slusser

In the early 1990s a ten-year-old boy sat on the roof of his grandmother’s home in Southeast Fresno, surveying the landscape of the Butler Park neighborhood below; his eyes were drawn to the sight of a boy his age three houses down puncturing the sky with successive waves of bounces, twists, and flips off of a mini-trampoline. The cliché historian angle here is to say that multiple histories intertwined in that moment to entice the boy off of the roof; there was the intimate history of grief unfairly heaved on the shoulders of the ten-year old on the roof following his father’s tragic death; the macro history of migration, geography, and neglect at the heart of working class Butler Park; histories yet to be written of two Butler Park boys who crossed neighborhood boundaries and global borders to put Fresno on the b-boy map.

While all of that is true, the reality is that the boy was drawn off the roof because seeing boys your age puncture the sky is pretty amazing; so the boy bounded down the street to meet the mysterious, gravity-defying figure. Two things happened when the boy on the roof found the boy puncturing the sky: 1. The boy on the roof learned to do a front flip off of a mini-trampoline and 2. Charles Montgomery met Pablo Flores.

By the time Montgomery and Flores entered middle school (at Kings Canyon and Sequoia, respectively), they learned from movies like *Breakin’* and *Beat Street* that they could blend the raw athleticism on display during that initial meeting with hip-hop rhythm and competition; soon, they took to calling themselves b-boys. Eventually, Montgomery and Flores found other kids in Southeast Fresno who also called themselves b-boys. Those kids have their own sets of intertwining histories that led them to calling themselves b-boys; in a nutshell, they were working class children of Hmong refugees trying to windmill and headspin their way out of inter-generational trauma and towards a sense of community in occasionally hostile environments. Starting in middle school and continuing into Roosevelt High School, Montgomery and Flores began to hone their skills in predominantly Hmong crews, Dancing in Style (DIS) and Smurfs respectively. In these crews, they learned from an older generation of b-boys who helped to establish a local “power move” tradition perfectly suited for the boy on the roof and the boy who could puncture the sky.

Montgomery and Flores were not the only non-Hmong b-boys to join mostly Hmong crews. Flores's fellow Smurf member Eric Costello was Mexican and also called Southeast Fresno home. Like Montgomery, he first met Pablo Flores in the mundane spaces of Southeast Fresno as the two had competed against each other in city baseball and football leagues. Also like Montgomery and Flores, he called himself a b-boy; unlike Montgomery and Flores, however, Costello mostly danced with relatives or kept his dancing confined to the safety of his bedroom. All of that changed in high school when he saw Flores battling Hmong b-boys at Roosevelt and was inspired to be more open about his dancing. As he danced more, Costello caught the attention of Ville Thao, a founding member of Smurfs crew. Soon, Costello and Flores were logging long practice sessions with Smurfs crew whether it was at a crew member's home or at neighborhood parks like Holmes .

Ideally, the story of a b-boy crew made up of Hmong children of refugees and working class youth of Creole, Mexican, and Filipino backgrounds would be the climax (that pun will make more sense shortly) of this story: a tale of multi-ethnic friendships smashing racism to the funky samples of Clyde Stubblefield's drums. Some of this is true; however, like so many other inner-city environments across the United States, Southeast Fresno in general and Butler Park in particular were neglected communities with few job opportunities or resources and plenty of gangs seeking to fill those voids. For Montgomery, Flores, and Costello, that meant conversations with Mexican Bulldog gang members questioning their loyalty for hanging out with "Asians." At the same time, crossing multiple gang boundaries while walking to Holmes Playground for a practice session meant a variety of suspicious stares and, on at least one occasion, a pulled pistol, from Hmong gang members. The reality of the story of a b-boy crew made up of Hmong children of refugees and working-class youth of Creole, Mexican, and Filipino backgrounds, then, is that the complex intersections of race, ethnicity, and gang-affiliation made such relationships tricky, if not outright dangerous.

However, it was not the fear of gang retribution for perceived racial transgressions that led to the departure of Montgomery, Flores, and Costello from predominantly Hmong crews. Rather, it was the easier to understand frustration that they were not getting their props—a frustration that grew over time into a desire and motivation to forge their own path.

This is the "creation myth" part of the story. Costello and Flores decided it was time to leave Smurfs; they then placed the dreaded break-up call to the head of Smurfs, who gave his blessing for the move. Costello and Flores next called Montgomery to ask if he was down to leave DIS and join their crew. He was in. They still needed a name; while moving some furniture around, Costello found a list of potential crew names that he and his homie had experimented with earlier and the name "Climax" immediately stood out to him. In later years, crew members would try to argue that "Climax" had a deeper meaning; something along the lines of "achieving a supreme result," or the more PG-13 interpretation that you can probably figure out on your own; truth is, Climax just sounded kind of cool so the name stuck.

For youth growing up in Southeast Fresno during an era of gang databases, anti-immigrant sentiments, and general hostility to youth of color, a given name could be a burden, a perpetual reminder of outsider status, of being perceived as a threat. In this context, the process of choosing a b-boy name is an individual act of self-expression and flavor; a well-chosen name signals an

individual's connection to a particular neighborhood, generation, and/or style. Just as importantly, however, for many youth of color, re-naming oneself is a defiant act of reclaiming one's identity. And so, with Climax established as the crew name, our protagonists dove into the well-spring of primordial dopeness and shed the baggage of "Montgomery," "Flores," and "Costello," coming out the other side as "Goku"; "B-boy Pablo"; and "Flip" respectively

Climax quickly expanded with the inclusion of Flip's homie Ygnacio "JR" Haro, and B-boy Pablo's brother Alex "Footloose" Flores who, along with Goku, B-boy Pablo, and Flip made up Climax's "fab five." The crew began practicing throughout Southeast Fresno, often at crew member's homes but also at local community centers like Ted C. Wills Community Center, the Mosqueda Center, Holmes Playground, and Roeding Park. Soon they began to battle throughout the Central Valley, often taking on their former Hmong crew mates.

As young upstarts, early battles often meant defeat at the hands of more experienced crews like the Smurfs. Yet, Climax kept on the grind. Fresno added to that grind; on the one hand, there were no established b-boy institutions like in the Bronx, Los Angeles, or the San Francisco Bay Area; on the other hand, if you wanted to learn from a b-boy "elder" you were talking to someone who was, at most, 2-3 years older than you. Like most Fresno b-boy crews, then, Climax found inspiration wherever they could; maybe a dubbed VHS tape of an old battle made its way into the neighborhood; maybe someone caught a glimpse of a b-boy or b-girl top-rockin' for McNuggets in a McDonalds commercial; or maybe someone had a cousin in LA who was a b-boy; sporadic snapshots translated into imperfect replications. Yet, out of these imperfections came a unique style that grew sharper with each local battle. Before long, defeats turned to victories and Climax emerged as one of the most respected b-boy crews in Fresno and the Central Valley.

Like most respected b-boy crews, Climax drew strength from the sum of its parts. Not only did different crew members have their own specialties as b-boys, they also began to immerse themselves in hip-hop culture. After suffering a series of serious injuries, Flip stopped dancing, and poured his energy into starting a Climax-branded DJ crew that threw local house parties and battled emcees in local cyphers while other crew members busted out the fat caps and dove into the local graffiti scene.

Over time, the crew had gathered fragmentary evidence of lush hip-hop pastures in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. One such fragment that made its way to Fresno was a colorful flyer beckoning the crew to *Radiotron*, a b-boy Shangri-La in Los Angeles run by the legendary Lil Cesar; complete with graffiti style lettering, boomboxes, and b-boys, the flyer promised the opportunity to see iconic b-boy crews, DJs, and emcees. Within a year, Climax was battling at *Radiotron*.

As talented as Climax was as a crew, the two Butler Park boys, Goku and B-boy Pablo, stood out for their athleticism and creativity. For the uninitiated, it's the former characteristic that gets all the attention when it comes to b-boying and for good reason: it's not everyday you see human beings defy gravity and contort their bodies into unimaginable positions while staying on beat. However, b-boying is equal parts art and science; the best b-boys blend an intimate understanding of centrifugal force with the ability to visualize the beauty of a well-placed transition or freeze. Climax co-founder Flip

would later explain that while both Goku and B-boy Pablo had a great deal of raw athletic talent, it was their scientific approach to learning moves that set them apart. By his own admission, Flip threw himself into a move, immediately trying to imitate a new move he had just witnessed often in ways that exerted violent pressure on his limbs and joints; in contrast, Goku and B-boy Pablo took their time watching and re-watching a move being performed, next, they broke the move down to its component pieces and tried to understand the move’s fundamental kinetic logic before trying to execute the move.

B-boy Pablo introduced Goku to this process when teaching him how to do a more efficient front flip during their initial meeting. Focusing on process allowed them to map fragments of moves seen in videos or battles into cohesive final products. The process helped them dissect opponents in battles and devise effective counter-moves; the process helped them unlock the hidden physics of power moves and combinations that lived only in their imagination. Process was science. Process was discipline. Process was structure. In Butler Park, where discipline and structure came with strings attached, whether it was police surveillance or gang pressure, process was survival.

Historians describe b-boying using unnecessarily complicated language like “processes” and “kinetic logic”; none of that means much in a battle. Battle is about who flies the highest; who finds ways to make the body do something you never thought possible; who brings the most flavor? Goku and B-boy Pablo brought all kinds of Central Valley flavor to Radiotron in 1996; the two Butler Park boys served b-boys from Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond with unique moves born from a community neglected by society at large and isolated from larger the b-boy networks in metropolitan hubs.

Specifically, they carried with them a Fresno power move tradition that evolved in battles with both Hmong and non-Hmong crews in Fresno and the Central Valley. In the process, they caught the attention of Soul Control, a collection of California b-boy all stars who were already leaving their mark in the b-boy world. Goku and B-boy Pablo were invited to join Soul Control and ended up dancing with bona fide legends like Sean “Mega Man” Burgess, Jacob “Kujo” Lyons, Tyrell “Tiny” Martinez, Carlos “Inferno” Alvarez, Omar “Love” Espinoza, Barmak “Floor Molester” Badei, and Babak “The Flying Monkey” Badei. As Soul Control members, Goku and B-boy Pablo found themselves at the heart of the b-boy universe, battling crews they had only seen on grainy, overdubbed VHS tapes, and visiting corners of the nation and the globe they had not even heard of.

Goku and B-boy Pablo always came home. They didn’t have to; it would have been easy to relocate to Los Angeles or San Francisco, where they could attend open practice sessions populated by other b-boy heavyweights they now counted as friends and rivals or try out for television shows, movies, and commercials looking to add some “urban flavor” to their vanilla offerings.

Instead, they chose to come home. Once in Fresno, they witnessed new generations of Climax members help the crew cement its local status. Marcio Santos came up with the idea to throw an “all elements” jam at local parks in a series of events known as Hip Hop at the Park that brought together local b-boys, DJs, graffiti writers and emcees and featured the deft DJing of Alex “A-Wax” Aranda. Climax now drew from a full roster of talented b-boys including Martin “Toxic” Hernandez, Mike “Little Mikey” Lopez, Kilo “X Man” Zaysongkhma, Erik “Este” Thurman, Rudy “Smith” Salazar, Omar “Tot” Gonzales, Nathaniel “Panthro” Lewis, Vince “Link” Gonzalez, Chris “Puma” Lewis, and Peda “Gohan” Thik who continued to

battle local crews. Goku and B-boy Pablo also brought Soul Control and other well-known b-boys to the Central Valley. In return, Fresno provided comfort and nurtured their continued growth.

One of the most important stages in that growth took place in 1998 on an empty stage at the Ted C. Wills community center. It was there that B-boy Pablo, surrounded by his Climax crewmates, methodically pieced together what would become his signature move, the continuous airflare. Airflares require a b-boy to execute a complete vertical body rotation using only their hands; needless to say, this is not easy. It requires strength, balance, and precision. B-boy Pablo wanted to up the ante by stringing together two airflares. On the Ted C. Will stage B-boy Pablo kept willing his body to defy basic laws of physics; at various points he would get through a rotation and a half only to have gravity rudely smack him down. He persisted, relying on process to overcome obstacles. In 1998, on a recreation center stage in Fresno, B-boy Pablo executed the first known continuous airflare.

B-boy Pablo repeated the continuous airflare in competition at Freestyle Sessions 3 in 1998, and continued executing it in numerous competitions. Goku also kept pushing himself to go bigger with his moves and would add his own innovative power move transitions to the b-boy dance cannon. Goku, B-boy Pablo, Climax, and Soul Control kept growing and innovating; they battled, they traveled around the world, they created a sense of brotherhood.

Then came 2004, when their world collapsed on itself. Pablo “B-boy Pablo” Flores decided to take his own life. There is no clever metaphor to describe the impact Pablo Flores’s death had on those close to him; no historical angle to provide meaning to the loss of someone you met at 10 years old; no description of the near superhero feats of the children of neglect to explain the unexplainable. Pain, anger, resentment, and sorrow in response to the tragic loss of human life, of the many chapters left unwritten.

The void will never be filled but Goku and his crew mates, his brothers, eventually had to move on. Goku took over leadership in Climax and blended it with Soul Control to create Climax/Soul Control. He became the b-boy elder that his generation never had, helping to train and mentor the next generation of Fresno b-boys and b-girls. Goku stays active in the b-boy world, rising through the ranks and often judging in the battles he built his own b-boy reputation in.

The distance between three Butler Park houses, a pre-teen’s desire to fly, neighborhood and school networks, the length and width of a community center stage; these are the mundane building blocks from which history is made. In places like Fresno these stories are too often ignored or drowned out by stories coming from bigger cities or from well-funded archives.

These stories matter. Charles Montgomery, Pablo Flores, Eric Costello, Ygnacio Haro, and Alex Flores matter; Goku, B-boy Pablo, Flip, JR, and Footloose matter. Hmong crews matter, Bulldog gang members matter. Fresno matters. All these stories matter because they speak both to the ways communities like Butler Park are left to fend for themselves in a hostile world but also because they epitomize the creativity, passion, and struggle of those who live in these communities. It is easy to miss these stories. Sometimes you need to sit on the roof and wait for someone to puncture the sky around you.



A Blaxican's Journey through Fresno's Racial Landscape

Raymond A. Rey

In the summer of 1973, DJ Kool Herc tried something new on the turntables: by extending the beat, breaking and scratching the record, he allowed people to dance longer and entertained them with his rhymes as an MC. After that moment, everything changed. The sound that emerged out of the South Bronx in New York City led to a cultural movement that changed the lives of generations around the world. For Phillip Walker, a mixed race kid from Fresno, California, hip-hop not only served as the soundtrack of his youth, but provided a way to understand his neighborhood and build a multiethnic community.

Phillip Ernest Walker Jr. was born on January 28, 1976 in Fresno, California. He is the son of a Black father from Camden, Tennessee and a Mexican mother from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. While coming from different countries, both families had backgrounds in agriculture and both found their way to the San Joaquin Valley and eventually Fresno's west side. The Walkers from Tennessee migrated to California slowly after uncle James Walker completed his service in the United States Navy. He was stationed for a time at Naval Air Station in Lemoore and upon completing his service in 1967, he convinced his brother Phillip Walker Sr. to join him in the Central Valley. There, the two black men found a lifestyle not too different from what they had experienced in Tennessee: wide open spaces, vast acres of farmland, and a slow pace. The sons of a skilled mechanic, they set down roots in Fresno.

Meanwhile, the Magdalenos crossed a border and multiple state lines before settling in the Valley. Milagros, Phillip's mother, was the daughter of Gregoria and Genaro Magdaleno. Genaro was also a mechanic and moved his family across the Southwest in search of work on farm labor camps. The tragic loss of Genaro's beloved wife led the family to the Central Valley. They arrived in Delano, where Genaro's brother and sister helped raise his children, and then they moved to Fresno. For a time the Magdalenos settled in the "golden west side," a place that the Walkers from Tennessee already called home.

Fresno's Westside is one of the city's "ghettos": a typical, low-income California neighborhood

made up of mostly Black and Chicano families. An area on the edge of town, bound by highway 99 and railroad to the east and farmland to the west, its origins were based on agriculture and farm labor. These areas developed because of the cheap affordable housing for workers and their families who toiled the fields and farms on the outskirts of town. Today, the Westside is still largely populated by Black and Latino families who work as farm laborers or in the service industry. It was in this poor and working-class multiethnic neighborhood that Milagro and Phillip Sr. met and had one son, Phillip Jr. Even though the Walker and Magdaleno families shared a history of migration and farm labor, much like the Black and Latino families of West Fresno, a young Phillip struggled to find his place.

Phillip's first encounter with race prejudice and his own identity came as a "rude awakening." He remembers it like it was yesterday. As a five year old, he enrolled at St. Therese Catholic School in Fresno's Tower District, and he recalls the tears his mother shed after a meeting with the parish priest. "I had to ask her more than thirty times, 'mom why you crying?,'" he recalled during a recent oral history. She explained that the priest did not want him to attend the school because his father was black. Phillip was a light-skinned kid with curly hair. He knew it was only a matter of time before someone would approach him and his mother in public and whisper to her "is he black?" This became so common that he began to anticipate strangers' behavior. "I would see people in public and count down the seconds till they'd ask her and want to touch my hair," he remembered during our interview. A young Phillip responded to these strangers by hiding behind his mother. These were difficult and dramatic experiences for a young child. "I felt like a damn zoo animal," he remembers. "I hated the fact that people felt the need to stop and question me and my existence. It did make me feel uncomfortable." Even now, as an adult, Phillip gets emotional as he reflects on growing up multiracial.

Unfortunately, it was not just society that was unable to accept or understand Phillip's racial make-up. "People want to categorize you and tell you to 'check the box' on ethnicity. If you're black you can't be Hispanic," he recalled. Instead of adhering to these strict racial classifications Phillip would check "other" or simply check both "Black and Hispanic." Government data collection at the time was not as reflective of people like Phillip in the late 1970s and early 1980s as it is today.

The African-American and Mexican kid found a home in the Central Valley's growing hip hop scene. "I had a front row seat from day one, at an early age," he recalled. He was introduced to hip-hop culture and music by his cousin Toy Walker (the son of his uncle James) and other friends on Fresno's west side in the early 1980s. On his visits with his "other" side of the family, the Walkers, and out of the reach of the discipline of a strict Mexican mother, the young half-black and half-Mexican kid got an education by cruising the streets "on the handlebars of his cousins bmx bike." The music and the streets of west Fresno opened up the eyes of a "knuckle-headed kid running around, in and out of the house."

Phillip felt the message within the music. It resonated with him. The lyrics narrated stories familiar to his own experiences. He related to the MCs who spoke of coming from broken homes and having absentee fathers. As a witness to the impact of the crack epidemic in the 1980s, he got N.W.A.'s "Dope Man." He compared the drugs impact on the community like seeing "characters" at

Disneyland walking the streets; the dealers, addicts, and ladies of the night, the same people who popped up in Hip Hop songs. Phillip appreciated rhymes that cut deep to the heart of the problems of areas like the Fresno's west side. Artists like Ice Cube, Phillip's personal favorite, painted the picture with songs like "Once upon a time in the projects." According to Phillip, "The words and lyrics were real, relevant and you could see everything they spoke of stepping out the house."

Hip hop didn't just provide a vocabulary and language to understand the ghetto it also transformed the streets, sidewalks, and parks. B-boys, B-girls, and poppers would all "throw down" in Roeding Park, Phillip recalls. "If you heard some Egyptian Lover or some 'Planet Rock' by Afrika Bambaataa & the Soul Sonic Force, "you knew someone was about to get blasted." Ten-year-old Phillip regularly kicked it at Roeding Park. Saturday mornings were especially on point as "200-300 kids gathered to watch dancers battle." To Phillip, the culture, the vibe, the energy was contagious. He had to be front row, but because he was so small there were consequences. He remembers a few kicks to the head from the breakers getting down on the concrete and cardboard. But that didn't bother Phillip since he found himself in the diverse crowd, one that was mixed, just like him: Black and Latino. By far the best part of it all in his recollection is that kids from all over the city met up at one location to have some fun and enjoy the hip-hop sound that made them move. He was just another face in the crowd. It didn't matter what his father looked like or where his mother was from.

However, at his high school being bi-racial was still a topic up for discussion for others. Some "friends" and classmates would ask him "why you hanging with those Mexican kids?" and "Why you hanging with those black kids?" He would have to school them on the spot, "I'm mixed, you didn't get the memo?" Other times he would tell them off with "don't question who I choose to hang out with." His remedy for some of the tension was a good old fashioned house party and hip hop. To convince his mother, he offered the possibility of making rent money—he charged three dollars per person. Phillip filled the house: "You had your stoners, bangers, hot mommas, dancers who all came to get down." They all listened to the latest hip-hop jams of the early 1990s: music from Dr. Dre and Snoop on repeat, mixed with Jodeci and Janet Jackson. When the Fresno PD showed up, Phillip would "send out the little hot mommas to talk to them." Phillip became known for hosting legit parties.

Hip-hop music and culture arrived on the music scene at a time when a Black and Brown kid from Fresno, California needed it most. It helped him navigate his childhood and adolescence and understand the changing world around him as he grew into a man. It was an escape, an outlet, for expression and frustration. It developed into a passion for a music and culture he could relate to with its diverse origin and background: a passion he has passed on to me, his younger brother, and too his own children.



It Started Here:

Jean Vang's Hip-Hop Journey

Roger Espinoza

Jean Vang is an aspiring dancer from Fresno, California. Jean was born in Fresno on October 7, 1993. He grew up in Central Fresno in the Dakota and Fresno street region just North of the Manchester Shopping Center, a multiethnic neighborhood dominated by apartment complexes. This area of Fresno was heavily patrolled by law enforcement and was often dangerous at night. Jean's parents immigrated to the United States from Vietnam during the 1970's when the country was divided by ideological conflict. The Vietnam War was characterized by political ideals which forced the communist North against the South, which was allied with the United States and favored democracy and capitalism. Many Vietnamese sought refuge from the violence by fleeing to the United States, particularly after the fall of the regime in the South in 1975. In fact, by 1979, 150,000 Vietnamese people had emigrated.

The United States welcomed many of these refugees because of their strict anti-communist views. Jean's paternal grandfather, Za Yeng Vang, assisted the United States backed South Vietnamese forces who were anti-communist, and he was allowed passage to the United States after the Vietnam War as a refugee. Za Yeng Vang, Jean's grandfather from his material side, was also involved in the conflict and came to the United States as refugees as well. They arrived in the American Midwest and eventually made it to Fresno, California. It was in Fresno, California that Jean's parents met. Jean's father is currently a member of the Hmong International New Year, a group which oversees organizing the annual New Year's celebration in Fresno. They also help to maintain culture and share Hmong values with the community.

Jean first became interested in dance as a teenager while he observed Hmong breakers on the streets perform. "I saw kids on the streets doing flips and spins. I tried to copy them but I would get hurt a lot," he reflected during an oral history. During his sophomore year of high school, one of the teachers looked to embrace the breakdancing talents of Jean and his friends and organized school sanctioned dance events. While this educator was not familiar with breakdancing, he knew a lot about popping and introduced Jean to the dance group On Point. This group was composed of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, who were eager to pass down their knowledge of dance to the next generation. The group exposed Jean to the Fresno dance style of popping.

Jean would session with the On Point dancers periodically throughout his sophomore year of high school. However, like many youngsters, he was interested in dance but not devoted to it. He played sports and thought he was going to be a video game designer.

After graduating high school, Jean realized that making video games was not for him and began to fully immerse himself in dancing. Jean began to study the physical movement of dance itself along with its history and culture. Jean was willing to learn about dance in any way possible. This young college student enrolled in dance classes at Fresno City College and received a formal education: for example, in addition to studying dances associated with urban culture such as hip hop, Jean also took classes in ballet, tap, and jazz. Now, as a devoted student of dance, he reunited with the dance group On Point. During his second stint with the dance group he came under the mentorship of Leandre Silva, one of the group's original members.

As an African American born in 1985, Silva had vast knowledge of popping and hip hop's origins, especially as it related to Fresno. Leandre believed that to fully immerse oneself within hip hop dance stylings, the study of the history and culture was necessary. It was through Silva that Jean, a Vietnamese-American dancer, learned about the history of popping in Fresno. Jean credits Leandre for "teaching him the fundamentals of popping, and to appreciate the culture of hip hop." Leandre educated Jean about the history of James Brown, Michael Jackson and the Electric Boogaloos, a dance group whose founding members Sam Solomon and Popp' in Pete grew up in West Fresno.³

Leandre also connected Jean with Los Angeles' vibrant dance scene by taking him to popping, and breaking dance competitions. On these trips, Jean got to see firsthand the extent of popping, locking, and breaking. Jean had not seen dance events or talent on this scale in Fresno. "It was mind blowing for me. It was a whole new world I did not know existed" he remembered during an oral history. The exposure to the talented Los Angeles dance scene motivated Jean to work harder. Leandre continues to influence Jean. They remain in constant communication even though Leandre joined the military and is currently living on the East Coast. Jean described a conversation with Leandre which sums up their relationship. Leandre once told him, "You are going to school for dance. Never stop pursuing what you want. Embrace the culture because it started here [in Fresno]."

Jean learned about the history of popping in Fresno primarily from his mentor Leandre and to a lesser degree word-of-mouth growing up. Jean believes that many people do not know of the history of popping because it has never received much mainstream media attention. Furthermore, most of the biggest popping and breaking events are held in larger cities who have a rich history of hip hop culture. These cities include New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. These cities attract dancers from all over the world. Jean believes that Fresno has not done a good job in maintaining a prominent hip hop culture so the most talented dancers leave for the larger market cities where dancing is a viable career choice. Meanwhile, popping and hip hop dance in general are taking off on the international stage. Jean's Mentor Leandre Silva would tell him stories of his travels as a dance instructor abroad, as he held seminars in Taiwan and Korea and attested to the global reach of popping. Yet it remains true that Fresno today has not maintained a dance culture on the same level as New York or Los Angeles.

Jean has danced in many different forms such as ballet, modern, tap, jazz, hula, Hmong cultural dancing and breaking. When performing in front of an audience, Jean describes the feeling as, "an out of body experience," as he feeds off the energy of the crowd and experiences a euphoric adrenaline rush. For Jean dance provides him with a method of artistic expression. "Dancing makes you forget about everything." Jean has said, "Suddenly, all your problems go away and for those few moments you are completely at ease." Dance has a therapeutic effect on him; there have been points in Jean's life when he was not dancing because of his busy schedule, and he describes feeling incomplete during these times without dance. No matter what he is going through dance can lift his mood and ease his mind.

As an Asian American from a multiethnic city, Jean loves the communal aspect of dance and hip hop culture. "The most attractive feature of hip hop culture is the way in which it can bring people together," he says. People from all walks of life come together to share their love of music. No matter if you are rich or poor, white or black, dance sees no color and unites; for many, it is an escape from the struggles of everyday life. Currently, Jean is a dance major at Fresno State and hopes to give back to the community by teaching dance to youth. He wants others to feel the same joy he feels from dance, which he believes is the purest form of human expression.

Contributors

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Roger Espinosa is an undergraduate student majoring in history at Fresno State. He is a Mexican American whose mother and father immigrated to the United States from Apatzingan, Michoacán and El Grullo, Jalisco, Mexico in the 1980s. He grew up in Firebaugh, California, an agrarian community about 1 hour west of Fresno. Roger credits growing up in this small town for his appreciation for the simplicity of life such as his love of history.

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Raymond A. Rey received his BA in history and Chicano studies at Fresno State. A proud Chicano. The son and grandson of immigrants from Durango, Mexico on his mother's side and third generation Mexican American migrant workers on his father's. He was born and raised in Fresno, California where he grew up in the working class and working poor neighborhoods of the city's central and east side.

Sean Slusser is a PhD candidate in History at University of California, Riverside and an adjunct at Fresno State. He is co-founder and co-director of Straight Outta Fresno and has written extensively about hip-hop culture.

