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INTRODUCTION BY DAMIEN MAHIET, BROWN UNIVERSITY

“Hip-hop can be a chess piece, absolutely.” That was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s answer in a 2010 CBS Morning News interview when asked whether organizing free concerts abroad didn’t sound “a little kumbaya.”¹ The answer stirred a controversy that, in part, has framed the past decade’s reflections on musical diplomacy (92). Making hip hop an instrument of U.S. diplomacy was not an obvious choice: it met political oppositions, both conservative and progressive; created ethical tensions for a plurality of actors; and raised operational challenges to fund, facilitate, and assess the deployment of hip hop artists in selected locations abroad.

Build: The Power of Hip Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World is at once a personal and scholarly account of this recent and ongoing history informed by over 120 interviews and personal communications gathered between 2014 and 2019. Its author, Mark Katz, is a distinguished scholar in the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology, and, among other prestigious awards, a winner of the 2016 Dent Medal of the Royal Musicological Association. In this roundtable, Katz is joined by Nicholas Cull, Danielle Fosler-Lussier, Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo, and Kendra Salois, four scholars with complementary expertise in cultural and public diplomacies, hip hop studies, and music in community building and international relations.²

In 2013, Katz took on the role of founding Director of Next Level, a U.S. Department of State–funded program that, to this day, seeks “to use hip hop music, dance, and art to foster cross-cultural creative exchange in diverse communities.”³ The program, as described in *Build*, exemplifies for Nicholas Cull four key approaches to cultural diplomacy, particularly when considering the relatively small financial commitment from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). First, the U.S. sends hip hop artists abroad as a gift with the hope of charming international audiences. Second, hip hop performers also convey information about specific aspects of American culture. Third, they can build cross-cultural capacity through feedback and equipment donations. Fourth, and most excitingly, they can foster dialogue through the collaborative creation of art. Katz foregrounds the latter dimension, Cull points out, when he proposes the concept of “building” (17-18) and the practice of the cypher⁴ (57-58) as blueprints for cultural diplomacy writ large (183-84). In this light, cultural diplomacy establishes sites of improvisation with “unwritten and evolving norms” (57) that actors enter in order to work collaboratively and “add positivity to the world” (17).

Build, which interweaves third-person narratives, extensive direct quotes, and first-person reflections, inscribes the foundation of Next Level in an institutional history that begins in the 1930s with the formation of the Division of Cultural Relations within the State Department (Chapter 1). Danielle Fosler-Lussier, the author of *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, finds “significant continuities with prior U.S. efforts in arts diplomacy.”⁵ Cold War jazz ambassadors, in particular, offer an oft-mentioned point of reference for the United States’ post-9/11 investments in musical diplomacy. Yet the comparison also reveals important changes, Fosler-Lussier observes, for example with regard to the definition of

¹ Hillary Clinton, “Interview With CBS Sunday Morning’s Tracy Smith,” June 15, 2010, U.S. Department of State, accessed 4 July 2010, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/06/143956.htm>

² I want to convey thanks to H-Diplo and its managing editor Diane Labrosse for facilitating this conversation and to each of the roundtable participants for their contribution.

³ About, Next Level, <https://www.nextlevel-usa.org/about>, accessed 10 July 2020.

⁴ The cypher is a circle gathering rappers or beatboxers or dancers in a creative collaborative space of improvisational performance

⁵ Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), reviewed for H-Diplo by Caitlin Schindler, November 2015, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=44348>.

“respectability” and the nature of the credentials that State Department officials consider when choosing African American artists.

While *Build* is an unabashed affirmation of the power of hip hop to “make a world of limited options seem like—and become—a world of infinite possibility” (184), “naïve platitudes about music as an ‘international language,’” Fosler-Lussier also points out, “are nowhere to be found.” That is well worth emphasizing. Indeed, such platitudes have been the premise of both governmental and non-governmental diplomatic actions across all kinds of musical genres. They serve as a rallying flag for international cooperation, buttressing claims for supra- or apolitical representations of humanity through musical performance.

Instead, a jam session in the southern Thai city of Surat Thani with *chakbe* performer Thirabhand Chandrachoen, DJ Dirty Digits, and beatmaker RyNea Soul evokes for Katz a “musical version of Babel” (55). “Music may be universal,” he concedes, “but there’s no singular, universally comprehensible style” (55). If the nonverbal communication and kinesthetic empathy that result from creating art together “has the potential to reduce tensions and foster understanding” (66), finding common ground calls for a shared commitment and myriad skills—listening to one another, of course, but also following and leading in turn, with an assumption of mutual respect that allows one musician to decipher a tap on the shoulder as an invitation to try something new rather than an offence (61-64).

Kendra Salois’s work sheds light on the negotiations that take place when performers do not know how to come together or can only come together at a personal cost.⁶ The roundtable continues an ongoing conversation between Katz and Salois about the conditions under which this “affective labor” takes place.⁷ Here, Salois highlights in particular “the substantial intercultural work” that “local beneficiaries of the program” must perform in order to defuse misunderstandings and oversights and make the aesthetic encounter a success. At the same time, the U.S. artists who are mobilized to engage specific populations abroad on frequently essentialist assumptions are themselves marginalized in domestic contexts. “U.S. musical diplomacy,” Salois writes, “has been built on exploiting the otherness maintained in U.S. society and domestic policy.” It’s on that ground that hip hop envoys are simultaneously welcomed as representatives of the U.S. and “kindred spirits” of the local artists.

I read Salois’s review to be asking: does hip hop diplomacy, as it seeks to reconfigure international relations through interpersonal encounters, simultaneously maintain imperial structures, replicating hierarchical divisions across space and mapping “internal sociopolitical frontiers” onto “external boundaries”?⁸ The question resonated with particular amplitude as this roundtable took shape in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the death of George Floyd, and widespread national and global demonstrations.

Katz, far from dismissing these contradictions, writes: “The possibility that hip hop diplomacy can do harm haunts me” (19). That line of thought, which he explores in depth, is a distinctive and compelling feature of the book. Next Level operates in the space between open-ended artistic pursuits and predetermined political ends. While backed by the power of U.S. financial and logistical resources, the outsider or third-party intervention it stages depends on the goodwill and labor of

⁶ See, by Kendra Salois: “The US Department of State’s ‘Hip-Hop Diplomacy’ in Morocco,” in *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, eds. Rebekah Ahrendt, Mark Ferraguto, and Damien Mahiet (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 231–49; and *Popular Music and Diplomacy: Transnational and Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Mario Dunkel and Sina A. Nitzsche (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2018), 233–254.

⁷ Katz discusses Salois’s work in the book (66).

⁸ Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 10.

local actors—and suffers from the absence of built-in mechanisms for return visits or prolonged interaction. Humility and reflexivity, thus, are watchwords for Katz.

Indeed, for Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo, “*Build*’s strength also lies in its willingness to reflect on the failures of hip hop diplomacy.” Lumumba-Kasongo writes from the dual perspectives of a hip hop performer and a scholar keenly aware of the processes that make hip hop, on the one hand, a space of self-expression and community building, and on the other, a site where “individuals, corporations, and state authorities” advance agendas detrimental to Black and Brown communities. She notes that *Build*, rather than “castigat[ing] the cultural envoys . . . as sell-outs,” foregrounds “their agency to make educated decisions about the tradeoffs of engaging in ‘subversive complicity.’” The artists appointed as Next Level ambassadors describe the program as a source of credibility, financial compensation, and even “a form of reparations for the harm inflicted on their communities.” Both artists and program officers, in the context of the Trump presidency, are seen to challenge some of the administration’s preconceptions as they work to keep the program running (45, 134-136, and 183). Lumumba-Kasongo agrees with Katz’s argument that an account of diplomacy strictly focused on state power and empire would ignore “the life-changing experiences and insights expressed by the people teaching, learning, and building on the ground together.”

In his response, Katz remains undaunted by the challenges of hip hop diplomacy even as he acknowledges the reviewers’ worries about exploitation. While recounting the life of Next Level in the era of Zoom diplomacy, Katz remains focused on the “heart work” that can take place in hip hop under the right circumstances: “a restorative, gratifying,” and “affirmative” form of labor that the artists cherish. This is possible, he reiterates, “when the interests and values of the participants, rather than their corresponding states, are centered.”

Strikingly, Katz’s injunction resonates with Jessica Gienow-Hecht’s study of German musical diplomacy before World War I. In that study, Gienow-Hecht retraces the formation of a political consensus according to which “the presentation of German culture abroad should remain confined to individual interest groups and enterprises.”⁹ Where “the German government kept a hand on the program,” she noted, “it was precisely this level of involvement that made these enterprises fail in the end.”¹⁰ While *Build* provides ample evidence of the part governmental actors must play at home and on the ground to make cultural diplomacy a reality, it also makes a clear case for why artists should be allowed to take the lead in the collaboration between hip hop and diplomacy.

Participants

Mark Katz is John P. Barker Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Founding Director of the hip hop cultural diplomacy program, Next Level. His books include *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (University of California Press, 2010 [2004]), *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ* (Oxford University Press, 2012), and *Build: The Power of Hip Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World* (Oxford University Press, 2019). He is co-editor of *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History* (Duke University Press, 2012) and former editor of the *Journal of the Society for American Music*. In 2015 Katz was recognized by the Hip-Hop Education Center in its inaugural awards ceremony, and in 2016 he was awarded the Dent Medal by the Royal

⁹ Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 31.

¹⁰ Gienow Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy*, 32. This theme is also developed in Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark Donfried, “The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance, and the Promise of Civil Society,” in *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, eds. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 13-29. Distance between the agent of the cultural diplomacy program and the economic or political agendas, they argue, “leads to greater neutrality, better reception by the foreign audiences, and more effective participation by these audiences in the programs and initiatives creates” (25).

Musical Association for his contributions to musicology. He is currently at work on a new book, *Music and Technology: A Very Short Introduction*.

Damien Mahiet is Associate Director of the Cogut Institute for the Humanities and Lecturer in Humanities at Brown University. He holds an M.A. in Political Thought from Sciences Po Paris and Ph.D. in Music from Cornell University and was a fellow at Harvard University's Mahindra Humanities Center in 2012-2013. His work appears in *History of European Ideas*, the *Journal of International Political Theory*, *Dance Research*, *Eighteenth-Century Music*, *19th-Century Music*, and several edited volumes. With Rebekah Ahrendt and Mark Ferraguto, he co-edited *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Nicholas J. Cull is Professor of Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California. He is a historian of the role of the media and communication in international relations. His books include *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Polity, 2019) and two books on US public diplomacy: *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency, 1989-2001* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). He is co-editor (with Nancy Snow) of *The Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, 2nd edition (Routledge, 2020) and with Michael Hawes of the forthcoming *Canada's Public Diplomacy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). He is a past president of the International Association for Media and History and a current board member of the Public Diplomacy Council. He is currently working on a study of the role of public diplomacy in the end of Apartheid in South Africa.

Danielle Fosler-Lussier is Professor of Music and affiliated faculty in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Ohio State University. She holds a Ph.D. in Music from the University of California, Berkeley. Her general-interest book about music, mobility, and mediation, entitled *Music on the Move*, is available as an open-access digital book and on paper (University of Michigan Press, June 2020, <https://www.press.umich.edu/9853855>). An earlier book, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (University of California Press, 2015) is accompanied by an online database of U.S. cultural presentations from the 1950s to the 1980s (<https://musicdiplomacy.org/database.html>).

Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo is a postdoctoral fellow at Brown University in the Music Department with a Ph.D. in Science & Technology Studies from Cornell University. Her research focuses on the sociotechnical dynamics that shape the development and use of "community-studios"—recording studios that provide high-quality recording tools, professional sound engineering services, and audio training to communities that often lack financial or social access to these resources. She currently teaches courses at Brown on rap songwriting and feminist sound studies and is serving as the audio director for the women of color led game studio *Glow Up Games*. In addition to her research and pedagogical practice, Dr. Lumumba-Kasongo also performs original music as a producer and rapper under the moniker Sammus. Since 2010 she has written, produced, and recorded three full-length albums, the most recent of which charted on *Billboard*; three Eps; and countless one-off collaborations with artists from a variety of genres as well as video game developers, podcasters, and filmmakers. As noted by the *Los Angeles Times*, Sammus "has a gift for getting a message across."

Kendra Salois (Ph.D. Ethnomusicology, UC Berkeley) specializes in the intersections of popular music, transnational markets, and national belonging, particularly via Afro-diasporic popular musical traditions in the Middle East and North Africa. Her work appears in *Anthropological Quarterly*, the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, the *Journal of World Popular Music*, and others, as well as the edited volumes *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), *Islam and Popular Culture* (University of Texas Press, 2016), and *Popular Music and Public Diplomacy: Transnational and Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Transcript, 2019). Her manuscript in progress, *Values That Pay*, asks how Moroccan hip hop communities perform their vision of an ethical nation while simultaneously co-producing the authoritarian state. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Performing Arts at American University in Washington, D.C.

REVIEW BY NICHOLAS J. CULL, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Mark Katz's book is an important contribution to the field of cultural diplomacy: that element of public diplomacy which seeks to advance an international actor's foreign policy objectives through facilitating the export of an element of its art or life or to engage in the cultural sphere. As both an award-winning scholar in the study of music and a veteran of U.S. arts diplomacy, Katz is perfectly placed to offer a unique portrait of the Department of State's use of hip hop in recent years. He has created a unique work that is simultaneously both a cycle of case studies of artists sent out by the State Department to share their skills in the full range of hip hop arts (MCing, DJing, Beatmaking, breakdance, and graffiti) and a reflection on issues of power, race, and the challenges of building collaboration in the twenty-first century.

I have argued that cultural diplomacy can be segmented into four key approaches: a cultural gift, whereby the best in an international actor's life is presented to a foreign audience; cultural information, whereby a less known aspect of the actor's culture is highlighted; cultural capacity building, whereby a skill such as a language is taught; and cultural dialogue, whereby the foreign and the actor's public (or other relevant group) are brought into a deeper engagement through cultural work.¹ The fascinating thing for me in Katz's book is the way in which he shows hip hop diplomacy contributing in all these areas.

Cultural diplomacy is most readily understood as a gift to charm international audiences. Gifts are where diplomacy began in ancient times, as readers of Homer will recall, and plainly international publics still appreciate the gift of culture from the United States through a troupe of hip hop artists. Success stories in the book include events in such unpromising locations as Serbia and Vietnam.

Hip hop has the additional dimension of being associated with a disadvantaged minority in the United States. Programs in hip hop diplomacy like Katz's Next Level have, for some audiences, told them something they do not know about the U.S. or, more often, added nuance to what they thought they knew. It is important to note that this book is a story of connecting with existing practitioners or communities that are interested in hip hop, not introducing the culture *ab initio*. Katz notes how much participants enjoyed meeting people who had perspectives on or who had actually participated in the history of hip hop.

Even more exciting is the role of capacity building as hip hop skills are taught to young participants in workshops, sharing a mode of expression which has flowered in part because it requires only body, voice, and spirit and not necessarily any expensive equipment, though that can be added in due course. There are examples in the book of people who are engaged in the program going on to make their living teaching hip hop, and many describing the culture as their 'life saver.' The capacity-building function is further enhanced by Next Level's practice of regularly leaving equipment behind (for DJing and Beatmaking and so forth) so local partners can continue to practice and teach after the Next Level team have returned home.

Yet the real triumph documented in this book is the element of exchange, where people who are already practicing in the global hip hop community are connected to American practitioners who they would not otherwise have met, and new bonds are forged through the process of collaboratively creating new art. Katz elevates this aspect above the others. His very title "Build" is chosen as the hip hop term for collaborative activity and the escalating mutual improvisation of two or more artists. Katz shows how hip hop can play a role in conflict resolution by bringing together people who would not ordinarily know or trust each other.

Katz does not balk at the most difficult cases. An excellent final chapter considers the role of hip hop diplomacy in the outreach associated with the Global War on Terror. It is important to be reminded that the George W. Bush administration eventually understood the value of working with artists like the LA Fusion band Ozomatli, who were critical of its foreign

¹ Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), esp. chapter 4.

policy, or Native Deen, whose members had Islamic backgrounds. Katz does well in showing the complexities of navigating these particular rapids.

Some of the most powerful portions of this book critique the role of the cultural diplomat and reflect on such challenging concerns as the asymmetry of power between the Western outsider and the artists in the developing world. Katz also problematizes the idea of the artist as a ‘tool’ of foreign policy. As a public/cultural diplomacy educator (I am proud that one of my former students helped administer Katz’s program and took the cover image) I will certainly direct prospective cultural diplomats to this book. I see particular value in Katz’s advice on the best mind-set for success in cross-cultural work. On page 104 he reproduces the accumulated wisdom of the artists he worked with on the best way to approach cultural diplomacy, which he called “The Next Level Principles: Some Suggestions for Being and Acting During International Residencies”: show respect; be humble; be self-aware; be present; be flexible; stay safe; share yourself; be professional; recognize your privilege; listen as much as you speak; learn as much as you teach; value process over product; do your homework; stay in touch. This list deserves to be on a laminated card in the pocket of every exchange student and academic visitor as well as on a document for participants in Katz’s program.

My reservations are few. As a scholar of the entire scope of public diplomacy I was always aware that this was a study of a single program, and while it does push the boundary of its scope back into history—referencing the U.S. use of Jazz during the Cold War—it does not give a clear sense of where Next Level sits in the hierarchy of State Department programs. We know that the State Department’s budget is a fraction of the Pentagon’s, and are told here that the Public Diplomacy program has a fraction of the State Department’s budget, but it is not really made clear that Next Level is a tiny corner of the State Department’s cultural work: a ‘million a year’ project in a unit—the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs—that typically spends three-quarters of a billion. In this light Next Level could be seen, to use a gambling metaphor, as a fascinating side-bet in America’s approach to the world and not where the bulk of the chips have been placed. I fear that if it were better known someone these days would have abolished it.

Reading this book in the spring of 2020, with so much international and domestic tension in the air and the world challenged by a global pandemic, hip hop diplomacy might be easily dismissed. Surely, this year’s problems are too profound to be addressed through art? Yet the principals of cultural diplomacy presented here are wholly scale-able. Our post-pandemic world will plainly need the kind of partnership and understanding inherent to Next Level. The United States will need to build and rebuild relationships with the world. Next Level is an excellent model of meeting the public where they are and through a language they already speak and in an activity they already find relevant. Other audiences might need other channels, but the confluence of creativity and foundation in listening would have to be same. Our hyper-mediated world has already made reputation an essential component of international security. In this world of reputational security, the innovative and inclusive approach described in Katz’s book is too important to ignore.

Nicholas J. Cull is Professor of Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California. He is a historian of the role of the media and communication in international relations. His books include *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019) and two books on US public diplomacy: *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency, 1989-2001* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). He is co-editor (with Nancy Snow) of *The Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, 2nd edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2020) and with Michael Hawes of the forthcoming *Canada’s Public Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). He is a past president of the International Association for Media and History and a current board member of the Public Diplomacy Council. He is currently working on a study of the role of public diplomacy in the end of Apartheid in South Africa.

REVIEW BY DANIELLE FOSLER-LUSSIER, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

It is a pleasure to recommend Mark Katz's *Build*—especially to those who are skeptical about arts diplomacy, as well as to those who are not yet familiar with the practices of hip hop musicians. This book describes Next Level, a State Department-sponsored program that offers residencies and collaborations for hip hop musicians. *Build* is at once a vitally important introduction to an often misunderstood artistic genre and a deeply informed description of the powers and limitations of music diplomacy.

People who do not participate in hip hop or listen to it may know of it primarily through unpleasant and sometimes racist stereotypes. Some critics have mistakenly described the violence and misogyny of a fraction of hip hop as representative of the whole (34-35, 160). Some of the musicians cited in *Build* have also grappled with those elements: for example, the producer Fares Forsan described “a part of hip hop I have to erase” to comply with his Muslim religious obligations (154). Yet in Katz's book the hip hop practices and values that come to the fore are constructive and aspirational; in the words of the Bangladeshi MC Mohammed Abdullah (known as ABD), hip hop conveys “positivity and love” (12). Katz's descriptions of the cypher—a method of collective improvisation in which a circle of participants take turns contributing—afford the reader a point of entry into a collaborative enterprise founded on respect for others as well as self-expression (51-52, 57-58). We hear musicians describe the feeling of “being in the pocket”—connected with others and thinking together to make art in the moment (61-62). Hip hop comprises rap and turntable music, dance, graphic arts, and fashion. Its origins among African American, Caribbean American, and Latinx youth in New York give it a distinctive association with the United States, but today hip hop is practiced all over the world. The picture of the international hip hop scene that emerges in this book will be a revelation to many readers.

This book enters an already crowded field of texts written by people who have worked for or with U.S. government cultural and information programs: Richard Arndt, Philip Coombs, Wilson Dizard, J. Manuel Espinosa, Charles A. Thomson, Hans Tuch, and others have described these programs from the practitioner's point of view.¹ Texts of this kind have a significant role to play in the crafting of our histories. They narrate not only the programs' aims, but also individuals' ambitions, sometimes calling attention to heterogeneous approaches operating within one agency or program. At times they reveal how events on a personal scale shaped diplomatic outcomes. Katz's work as a practitioner is very recent, offering a rare and useful view of cultural diplomacy after 9/11. The book also departs from these previous treatments by focusing not on Katz's own dealings with the State Department and the operation of the program, but on the practice of arts diplomacy as experienced by artists and their interlocutors.

Katz's *Build* is a cypher. Katz's own voice comes to the fore at times, but very often the voices of other musicians take a central place in the circle. This approach is especially compelling when it reveals the complexity of artists' experiences and motivations. Naive platitudes about music as an ‘international language’ are nowhere to be found in these conversations. In chapter 4 we hear the artists weighing the benefits of participation—artistic engagement, travel, pay, respect—against negative feelings about U.S. government policies and the impact of U.S. imperialism on communities of color. The artists who ultimately decided to participate in the Next Level program cited a variety of reasons—gratitude that the U.S. government chose to use resources for a positive purpose, a desire to demonstrate that individual U.S. citizens hold values that contrast with their government's priorities, the opportunity to “represent a *different* kind of America” (MC Baba Israel,

¹ Richard Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Dulles: Potomac, 2005); Philip H. Coombs, *The Fourth Dimension of Foreign Policy: Educational and Cultural Affairs* (New York and Evanston: Council on Foreign Relations and Harper and Row, 1964); Coombs, “The Past and Future in Perspective,” in Robert Blum, ed., *Cultural Affairs and Foreign Relations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 139-171; Wilson Dizard, Jr., *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004); J. Manuel Espinosa, *Inter-American Beginnings of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy, 1936-1948* (Department of State Publication 8854, International Information and Cultural Series no. 110, 1976); Charles A. Thomson and Walter H.C. Laves, *Cultural Relations and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963); Hans N. Tuch, *Communicating with the World: U.S. Public Diplomacy Overseas* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990).

126). Pioneering artist-teacher Toni Blackman claims agency and articulates the value of participation against a broad backdrop of US history: “the beginning of that history began with the brutalization of my people and my ancestors, but I come from a legacy of survivors who are also builders and contributors” (127). It is noteworthy that many Next Level artists convey strong views about social justice to the people they meet. Katz characterizes this aspect of their work as “subversive complicity,” for the artists often criticize the government that sponsored them (129-133).

Both in foregrounding artists’ voices in the book and in operating the Next Level program, the purposeful humility Katz brings to the work is intentional and appropriate. The Next Level artists do not travel to teach hip hop, for there are already hip hop artists all over the world. Instead, their residencies and workshops cultivate relationships, provide resources, and bring together people from communities in conflict. Next Level also invites some artists to the United States for further collaborative work (178). Katz recognizes that both U.S. power and personal power frame these relationships as unequal, and he names the various kinds of privilege available to him as a white professor navigating institutional and social settings in Washington and abroad (21, 98-99). In operating the Next Level program, he has also worked against his privilege at times, eventually turning the program over to be managed by the artists (21-22).

To bring the popular music of Black and Latinx Americans into diplomacy invites hazards of several kinds, including misrepresentation, co-optation, and the exercise of coercive power over economically or socially disadvantaged people. The artists and Katz face these hazards forthrightly throughout the book. They are well aware that even as they try to approach every relationship with care, “be humble; be self-aware... listen as much as you speak; learn as much as you teach...” (104), any positive impression they leave also serves U.S. government interests, some of them covert or unknown, some of them not shared by the artists. Katz explains that in many ways arts diplomacy operates in a “zone of ambiguity” and that it is not possible to resolve these concerns (83). The frankness of this description and the refusal to resolve the ambiguity are important features of the book. This clarity about the stakes of the Next Level project and the accessibility of its language make the book ideal for undergraduates or general-interest readers, even as it is also a relevant and illuminating text for scholars.

The events Katz describes demonstrate significant continuities with prior U.S. efforts in arts diplomacy. For instance, Katz acknowledges that the situation of Next Level artists resonates with the earlier tours of Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong, both of whom were delighted to win U.S. government recognition for jazz even as they knew that their presence abroad could serve as cover for civil rights abuses at home (31-32). Next Level’s routes have sometimes retraced the paths of earlier tours, as when Blackman first journeyed to Dakar, Senegal—the site of the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts, which connected musicians from across the African diaspora.² Sometimes Next Level has purposefully disrupted continuities with the past. Since the 1950s, State Department officials have often focused on ‘respectability’ when choosing Black artists, preferring musicians with degrees from prestigious educational institutions. That preference continued with the choice of credentialed artist-teacher Toni Blackman as the Department’s first sponsored hip hop artist in 2001 (34-36). Under Katz’s leadership, Next Level broke precedent by inviting a more expansive selection of contributors, including queer artists, musicians from a variety of educational backgrounds, and some who had been incarcerated (49).

Critics have questioned the value and effectiveness of State Department music programs throughout their history. As Katz notes in a concluding section entitled “What Good is Hip Hop Diplomacy?” the results of these programs are hard to quantify (171-180). Budget hawks have long protested that the arts are a waste of taxpayers’ money. Yet, since the early days of arts diplomacy programs, eyewitnesses and performers have testified to their life-changing value in the strongest terms. Next Level’s hip hop workshops offer participants of many nationalities the opportunity to acquire new skills and technical knowledge; a broadening of their artistic network; and the exchange of musical ideas. Hardest of all to measure is the experience of making art together—of being in the pocket with people who had shortly before been strangers—and the value of the human relationships forged through in-person visits (178). The collaborative spirit of the cypher is not just a

² David Murphy, ed., *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966: Contexts and Legacies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016).

good symbol for respectful public diplomacy: it is the element that builds the practical and affective connections that make the program so meaningful to its participants.

Do those experiences have consequences? I believe so, and attending to them helps us refine our thinking about how soft power works through popular music. Joseph Nye, who coined the term ‘soft power,’ is cited frequently in analyses of arts diplomacy. In his 1990 book, *Bound to Lead*, Nye both acknowledged and dismissed popular music: “Of course, there is an element of triviality and fad in popular behavior, but it is also true that a country that stands astride popular channels of communication has more opportunities to get its messages across and affect the preferences of others.”³ In his 2004 update, *Soft Power*, Nye still framed popular music as a mere conduit for messaging: “popular entertainment often contains subliminal images and messages about individualism, consumer choice, and other values that have important political effects.”⁴ Even in the updated volume, Nye continued to discount popular music’s attractiveness as mere trashy consumerism: when audiences around the world succumb to the “glitz, sex, violence, vapidness and materialism” of U.S. popular culture, he wrote, they also accidentally take in messages about capitalism and personal freedom that support the interests of the United States.⁵ These judgments reflect a limited understanding of how music works and a biased view that is out of step with current thinking about popular expressive culture.

The artists cited in *Build* make it clear that messaging is part of hip hop performance: in their art they raise concerns about human rights, discrimination, economic opportunity, and other issues. To this extent, Nye had a point. The explicit and implicit messaging described in *Build* bears a complex relationship to U.S. interests: the musicians’ freedom of expression is evident even as they use it to criticize the status quo and the actions of the U.S. government. Crucially, though, the messaging is only part of what happens when artists perform together—and Katz’s book offers us a clear vision of the specific contributions of music and the other arts that go beyond messaging. Hip hop is not one style: different musicians perform in different ways, with a variety of underlying rhythms and expectations. It is not always easy for artists to get into the pocket: in Next Level’s workshops, visiting and host artists work to connect, devise new strategies for communication across differences, and try again if their first efforts fail (60-65). Although the verbal content and the implicit messaging are important, the process of making music together seems more important for building personal connections and commitments that matter. Katz’s decision to value the art of hip hop and to allow the voices of the artists to take a central place in the book helps the reader understand that process, and in so doing productively refines our understanding of soft power.

³ Joseph Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 194.

⁴ Joseph Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 46-47.

⁵ Nye, *Soft Power*, 47.

REVIEW BY ENONGO LUMUMBA-KASONGO, BROWN UNIVERSITY

Hip hop, once a regional art form that was engineered in the mid-1970s by poor and working class black and Latinx youth from the South Bronx, is now presumably the most popular cultural formation across the globe (8). It is omnipresent in fashion, music, dance, film, visual art, literature, and everyday speech; since the emergence of the “hip-hop generation,”¹ black Americans born between 1965 and 1984, it has become the de facto expressive force through which the majority of today’s youth articulate and perform oppositional stances against everything from white middle class respectability to state actors like the police. Yet because of hip hop’s incredible cachet, it is now increasingly legible as a furtive site to advance the agendas of even those individuals, corporations, and state authorities that have been the most instrumental in creating the very material conditions of poverty and disenfranchisement that many hip hop artists have criticized and tried to escape through their music. Hip hop practitioners, community organizers, scholars, and lovers of the culture have long called attention to the problematic use of hip hop iconography by groups with no investment in the well-being of the black and brown communities that first gave rise to hip hop’s sounds and sensibilities. Tricia Rose² and Bakari Kitwana have carefully documented hip hop’s transformation into a mass-produced global commodity that has been seized by multinational corporations which benefit from the same economic policies that have completely gutted black and brown urban centers since the 1970s. And my own research has illuminated some of the creative consequences faced by rappers when they choose to record at publicly-funded “community-studios”³—studio programs that provide high-quality recording tools, professional sound engineering services, and audio training to communities that often lack financial or social access to these resources. At one such studio site, I documented the experiences of several young black rappers who were on the one hand being encouraged by the studio engineer and other administrators to tell their authentic stories through their music while on the other hand being asked to adhere to a list of restrictions on their language, content, and styles of dress given that the studio was housed within a city-funded, all-ages community center. As someone who generally believes in the creative and community-building potential of these kinds of recording studios and hip hop more generally, I found myself asking whether it is ever possible to truly foster and celebrate an art form that trades in playful and militant forms of resistance and transgression in a space that is beholden to stakeholders who do not share those values.

This is also the central question examined by Mark Katz throughout *Build: The Power of Hip Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World*. For Katz, the stakeholders in question are the U.S. Department of State and its long list of global collaborators. ‘Collaborator’ is certainly the operative word here as *Build*, which is named after the hip hop term for purposefully collaborating, explores the community building potentials and challenges of pursuing international relations through hip hop focused workshops, performances, and cultural exchanges—in short, through hip hop diplomacy. *Build* reflects the insights that Katz gleaned as a hip hop educator and a director of Next Level, a State Department-sponsored exchange program through which emcees, producers, DJs, dancers, and other hip hop practitioners engage in hip hop diplomacy with youth in underserved communities around the world; in turn, representatives from each partner country are sent to the U.S. for artistic and professional training. To examine the question of whether it is possible to build meaningful relationships between an institution like the State Department and hip hop communities around the world, Katz explores several interrelated lines of inquiry, namely: what is the history of cultural diplomacy as it has been imagined and implemented by the State Department, and what should be the role of cultural exchanges in facilitating modern diplomacy? In what ways is hip hop culture uniquely suited to foster international community-building and “conflict transformation,” a term that Katz prefers over conflict resolution (67)? And in what ways does hip hop culture present unique challenges for this kind of

¹ Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002).

² Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk about When We Talk about Hip Hop and Why it Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

³ Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo, *On the Boundaries of Multivalent Musicking: A Study on the Politics of Community-Studios* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 2019), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2299779988?accountid=9758>.

work? How do Next Level ambassadors make sense of their partnership with the State Department and their solidarity with marginalized communities across the globe that have suffered at the hands of U.S. foreign policy? What negotiations must be made by advocates of hip hop diplomacy within the State Department in order to render hip hop legible to skeptical and often antagonistic U.S. and foreign officials, and conversely to render international relations legible to hip hop practitioners? By examining these questions alongside stories about Next Level's successes and failures, Katz seeks to both honor the hard work, creativity, and diversity of thought among hip hop ambassadors, foreign partners, and particular government officials; and ultimately to argue that for all of its troubling implications, hip hop diplomacy is an important and meaningful endeavor with real potential to facilitate cross-cultural community building.

Methodologically, *Build* relies on case studies that are informed by hundreds of interviews conducted by Katz across more than thirty countries with hip hop practitioners, local workshop participants and community leaders, and State Department officials, as well as his firsthand accounts of Next Level planning meetings, workshops, performances, and social gatherings from his tenure as the director of Next Level between 2013 and 2018. In turn these case studies animate broader arguments that emerge within each chapter, beginning with the premise that hip hop diplomacy offers the State Department unprecedented opportunities to build community on a global level because of the unique cultural properties of hip hop itself. The introduction to *Build* begins with a description of the bond between two break dancers, one from Kampala, Uganda and the other from New York, New York, who forged a deep friendship through their mutual participation in a two-week Next Level collaboration in Kampala. Katz uses this and similar anecdotes in part to call attention to hip hop's unique "expressive flexibility" as a cultural form that manages to reflect local tastes and sensibilities while remaining globally relevant and engaged (8). He also highlights hip hop's accessibility as the most widely circulated culture and form of music; he further calls attention to the power of its mythology, which harnesses the rags-to-riches mythos that makes the American dream so compelling, particularly for those who see themselves in the disenfranchised yet inventive youth who first scratched records, danced during "the break," and spoke couplets over beats. The subsequent chapters each reflect additional properties that make hip hop a powerful diplomatic resource, like its effectiveness for teaching conflict transformation because of its history as an art form that directly transforms conflict into performance—whether through cyphers, breakdance battles, or DJ scratch competitions; or its value as an asset for helping to address and shift anti-U.S. sentiments held by many Muslims across the world, given the deep connection between hip hop and various forms of Islamic thought and practice. In illuminating the unique affordances of hip hop that make it ideal for effecting change on a personal and community level, *Build* reflects Katz's deep understanding of hip hop's history and its considerable potential to transform nations.

Build's strength also lies in its willingness to reflect on the failures of hip hop diplomacy. Alongside stories of interpersonal triumphs, each chapter illustrates how doing the work of cultural diplomacy is a complicated enterprise that always carries with it the risk of harming local communities both directly and indirectly. According to Katz the kind of "people-to-people" interactions exemplified by hip hop diplomacy are "a form of public relations conducted largely in private and on a small scale" (3, 14) with the goals of enhancing and often rehabilitating the image of the U.S. abroad and promoting putative American ideals like free speech and democracy. Although this sort of "soft" diplomacy may not register as particularly scalable, such exchanges are far from trivial, as the public image of a nation can often mean "the difference between cooperation and conflict with other states" (16, 39). This also means that the U.S. artists who serve as hip hop ambassadors are often tasked with the responsibility of making sense of incredibly complicated local politics and customs as well as geopolitical tensions in a relatively short amount of time with limited tools. One of the more striking examples from the second chapter highlights the challenges faced by Stringz, a breakdancer and ambassador working in Bandung, Indonesia, who found himself in the middle of a conflict between a group of LGBTQ vogue dancers and b-boys who threatened to drop out of their joint performance if the voguers were allowed to perform in full drag. Although Stringz and the group's interpreter, Iya, soon offered up a compromise that allowed the voguers to wear makeup and wigs as well as modify their all-black costumes to better reflect their preferred presentation, this case study illustrates the delicate balance between community members that ambassadors risk upsetting whenever they enter a creative space abroad. The rest of the book is rich with other instances in which the ambassadors and Katz himself are forced to confront their complicity in potentially igniting local frustrations and anxieties around other issues like resource allocation, and reproducing power dynamics that inflame old wounds inflicted by U.S. paternalism.

Finally, and to the last point, *Build* is a book that thoughtfully engages with questions of contradiction and complicity by exploring different forms of artistic and organizational agency. As Katz argues, it is easy to castigate the cultural envoys who participate in programs like Next Level as sell-outs; after all, history is rich with stories of U.S. state actors terrorizing most of the groups now seated closer to the proverbial table through hip hop diplomacy, particularly given the significant representation of triply marginalized groups like queer black women in programs like Next Level. However, by including the ambassadors' reflections about their reasons for participating in hip hop diplomacy and making a connection with the ambivalence expressed by jazz ambassadors in the 1950s and 1960s, *Build* emphasizes their agency to make educated decisions about the tradeoffs of engaging in "subversive complicity" given the broader economic, political, and social constraints (130). For some ambassadors, programs like Next Level offer credibility and financial compensation that enables them to continue making their art at a higher level than they would have been able to do otherwise. The experience of being compensated to educate and learn about hip hop is not necessarily easy to come by outside of limited spaces in academia. These appointments therefore represent important personal and professional accomplishments.

Other ambassadors, with personal experiences of racism at home and deep knowledge of U.S. imperialism abroad, argue that being commissioned by the U.S. government to share their music is in some ways a form of reparations for the harm inflicted on their communities. Further, as many of the ambassadors reflect, participating in hip hop diplomacy has not necessarily meant having to censor themselves and express pro-U.S. sentiments in their art; in fact, many of the artists who have been identified as excellent ambassadors have been those whose work is the most critical of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Again speaking to the concept of subversive complicity, *Build* reveals how this is made possible thanks to the invaluable strategizing of particular State Department officials, who have to translate the importance of Next Level into outcomes-driven verbiage that resonates with uninterested and suspicious supervisors across different administrations. They also field public concerns about widespread associations of hip hop with misogyny, crime, and drug abuse and the artists' justified suspicions that hip hop in this context is being exploited. By also making sure to account for the stories of State Department proponents of hip hop diplomacy, Katz avoids painting state actors with broad strokes. More broadly, this portrayal forces readers to acknowledge that "diplomacy cannot be reduced to a tool whose sole function is to advance state power and expand empire" and that to do so would mean ignoring the life-changing experiences and insights expressed by the people teaching, learning, and building on the ground together (5).

As a hip hop lover, practitioner, and scholar, I found *Build* to be well-organized, accessible, nuanced, and provocative. I was pleasantly surprised by how many artists I not only recognized in Katz's acknowledgements but have also worked with and in some cases befriended. This provided an important 'cosign' and speaks to the overall tone that Katz strikes—it is clear he is invested in celebrating the brilliance of hip hop artists and artistry, while speaking to those unfamiliar with hip hop's history and impact, and other policy makers who might be invested in developing similar kinds of programs. His engagement with his positionality as an older, white, male academic in hip hop spaces and in foreign countries is important not only because it illuminates how whiteness affords people different proximities to power depending on the context, but also because it demonstrates how other senior academics who teach about hip hop might use their power to create space for young black and brown practitioners. The book's companion website, which provides additional photos, maps, text, videos, and interview transcripts, among other resources, further reflects Katz's commitment to embodying hip hop rather than simply writing about it.

That said, I would have appreciated a deeper engagement with some of the contemporaneous discourses regarding the appropriation of hip hop as a cultural "tool" in other spaces. Within the landscape of new media, these conversations have largely focused on phenomena like "digital blackface,"⁴ a term for the caricatured performance and physical presentation of blackness by non-black people through social media platforms like Tik-Tok, Twitter, and Instagram. And within the space of public education, these conversations have largely emerged around the recent success of "hip hop based education

⁴ Lauren Michele Jackson, "We Need to Talk About Digital Blackface in Reaction GIFs," *Teen Vogue*, 2 August 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/digital-blackface-reaction-gifs>.

(HBBE)⁵ programs as well as products such as study guides, educational music CDs, flash cards, hip hop themed children's books, and web-based learning tools. As Travis Gosa and Tristan Fields argue, such programs and tools must be critically examined in order to ensure that their creators are not simply using the gloss of rap music and culture to sell a "relevant" product to educators without much thought toward the artistry utilized by real hip hop practitioners as well as the rigor and cultural sensitivity of the content being sold. While these discourses may have fallen outside the purview of Katz's analysis, bringing them into focus might have invited other hip hop practitioners and thinkers into the conversation who may not recognize the relevance of hip hop diplomacy for working through their own questions. At the heart of *Build* is an appeal to engage in meaningful collaborations. In the context of hip hop diplomacy, meaningful collaboration is what makes the difference between a transformative experience and a soured international relationship, and in some cases, it can even be the difference between life and death. In other spaces the quality of a collaboration can be the difference between work being seen as appropriative or appreciative, culturally sensitive or exploitative. *Build's* message is a powerful one to share at a moment when meaningful collaboration between both disparate and allied groups seems impossible. At the time of this publication, the U.S. has entered into its fourth month of a politically fragmented response to the pandemic caused by COVID-19, and the second week of national uprisings against racist policing and carceral systems more generally. At the very least, speaking to these other discourses, would have underscored the timeliness of this text.

This suggestion aside, *Build* is a thoughtful testament to the power of hip hop in action that sits nicely alongside the work of scholars like Chérie Rivers Ndaliko,⁶ who also wrestles with the promise and impossibility of art produced at the intersections of humanitarianism and international relations.

⁵ Travis Gosa and Tristan Fields, "Is Hip Hop Education Another Hustle? The (Ir)responsible Use of Hip Hop as Pedagogy," in B.J. Porfilio and M. Viola, eds., *Hip-Hop(e): The Cultural Practice and Critical Pedagogy of International Hip-Hop* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 195-210.

⁶ Chérie Rivers Ndaliko, *Necessary Noise: Music, Film, and Charitable Imperialism in the East of Congo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

REVIEW BY KENDRA SALOIS, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Since 2014, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the State Department has sponsored Next Level, a diplomatic exchange program that sends teams of American hip hop artists to several countries each year for multi-week residencies. *Build: The Power of Hip Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World* is the story of Next Level, told by its first director, musicologist Mark Katz. *Build* is a rare full-length work on a U.S. diplomatic program written from the perspective of a scholar-administrator. Throughout each chapter, Katz describes the constitutive tensions of hip hop and other popular music diplomacy programs with clarity, sensitivity, and searching honesty. Yet his declared position as a proponent introduces another tension for his readers. Katz seeks to “argue for the value of hip hop diplomacy” while also “mak[ing] clear that state-sponsored cultural exchange is a difficult, often fraught enterprise” (22-23). To do this, he presents the “ambiguity” (83), “contradictions” (19) and “complicity” (109) created by Next Level in a nuanced way, without attempting to resolve them. Below, I bring up several examples of this approach in order to demonstrate how difficult Katz’s tasks, as an author and a director, have been. First, I discuss the ways in which the State Department and its programs depend on audiences—foreign and domestic—perceiving simultaneously the unity and separation of the U.S. government and its citizens. Second, I explore how Next Level’s participants, including local beneficiaries of the program, engaged in substantial intercultural work and may have been put at risk. Finally, these two points lead to a more general observation about the State Department’s musical diplomacy programming: the reliance upon artists who are othered within U.S. domestic policy and society to connect with foreign audiences. Each of these tensions, I argue, is depicted as being unavoidable, leading Katz to focus on moments when Next Level participants negotiated generous and humane responses to them instead of interrogating the immutability of the tensions themselves.

Throughout the book, the structures within which Next Level operates are occluded. One of Katz’s key observations, which he finds many ways to illustrate, is that “[t]here is no singular US government agenda, or State Department Agenda, or even ECA agenda. The bureaucracies that execute US foreign policy are never wholly unified. They are complex and opaque, guided by ever-evolving and sometimes contradictory pressures” (5-6). As Katz notes in his capsule history of U.S. cultural diplomacy, from its beginnings diplomats and influential citizens debated what music to send abroad and even which agency should plan the programs (28). Though it is not his main goal, the level of detail Katz brings to the inner workings of the ECA is unparalleled in recent scholarship on musical diplomacy. His emphasis on individual employees, especially the three female ECA officers who proposed Next Level and shepherded it to approval (34-35), is an important contribution to diplomatic histories made possible by his ability to work alongside normally anonymous bureaucrats in real time. Their story demonstrates how thoughtful, dedicated, and well-intentioned State Department employees often are, just as other anecdotes from Algeria and India demonstrate how little some know or care about hip hop culture. Even better, Katz is disarmingly funny about his own role in the planning, as when he discusses choosing a name for the program: “I requested additional names from ECA and was offered this one: ‘American Street Beat Academy.’ I despaired” (47).

To demonstrate how disunified U.S. foreign policy can be, Katz applies the core concept of chapter 4—Ramón Grosfoguel’s “subversive complicity” (129)—to the fast-tracking of Next Level by ECA personnel in order to ensure its funding under the Trump administration (133).¹ If it is difficult to comprehend that the creation of a new musical diplomacy program involving hundreds of people in dozens of countries could effectively fly under the radar, that is part of the point. For Katz, the “careful negotiation and maneuvering” required to anticipate and contend with concerns that Next Level might have provoked within Congress and the State Department itself demonstrates “the myth of the monolithic State Department” (45). While this is no doubt the case, this interior turmoil is to some degree irrelevant to the success of Next Level and other programs once established. The State Department makes many attempts to be understood as being unified in its presentations to foreign audiences across the world, as Katz points out when he reasons that “[i]f US cultural diplomacy is to promote the country’s image abroad, its programs must be readily identifiable as American” (47). Katz and several artists

¹ Ramón Grosfoguel, “The Divorce of Nationalist Discourses from the Puerto Rican People: A Sociohistorical Perspective,” in Frances Negrón-Mutaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 68-69.

who are quoted throughout the book note that such audiences can readily distinguish between the U.S. government and the citizens it sends abroad (e.g. DJ 2-Tone Jones, 114). Yet when it suits their purposes, audiences also underscore the purported unity of state and nation evoked by the diverse individuals representing the U.S., whether to question (127-8) or to claim renown (178).

For me, the most acute “ambiguities” of the book are cases in which Next Level was inserted into long-running ethnic and social conflicts. “In seeking to transform conflict, we were also courting it,” Katz summarizes after discussing potential physical harm for participants and a police presence in Kampala, Harare, and Cartagena (71). Why would embassies risk stoking tensions with an effort meant to give workshop participants the tools to avoid them? U.S. artists are sent by the government because foreign audiences perceive them as valuable visitors—as sources of prestige as well as musical knowledge. Leveraging the capital that U.S. artists bring has occasionally meant putting U.S. and foreign participants at risk. I have no doubt that the artists were informed of the risks they might face. However, knowing that many Next Level participants are identified with groups who are at disproportionate risk of harm in the U.S. as well as elsewhere—women, BIPOC and LGBTQ artists—I wanted to know whether and how the State Department considered their potentially heightened safety concerns.

More likely than sparking an altercation in the moment, Katz suggests, Next Level’s presence may create a situation that would not exist otherwise, in which there is a “possibility for future conflict” (71). Katz relates how a dance workshop in Bandung brought together “stereotypically aggressive” b-boys with queer-identified dancers who practiced what they called “lady style,” filled with “traditionally feminine” voguing moves (73). The workshop interpreter, Iya, was the only person willing to explain to the American instructors and program manager that a potentially violent conflict was growing between the two groups. Iya had to recognize that the authority figures in this situation—the American artists—would not be able to perceive the conflict, nor to address it without his help (75). In fact, none of the Americans knew until later that Iya negotiated between the groups up to the moments before the final performance (78).

Katz writes about this episode with warmth and humility, ensuring that we as readers recognize the contributions of both Iya and the American artists with whom he worked, and foregrounding the difficult truth that the Americans were unprepared for the ways Indonesians are socialized to express themselves. He concludes that “those seeking to build bridges with communities abroad will almost always lack the local knowledge to fully understand and productively transform existing conflicts, conflicts that they themselves might have set in motion or exacerbated” (80). While Katz, the Next Level team, and *Build* readers learn a lot from this example, it is Iya’s intercultural expertise and communication skills that we learn from. In the next chapter, Katz shows us that this is a feature, not a bug, of U.S. diplomacy more broadly, with stories about how dependent U.S. embassies and consulates are on locally-employed staff (LES) (88).

This sobering realization provokes a basic question: why does the State Department think this kind of risk is appropriate? Why does the U.S. have to leverage young people’s desire for the recognition and new experiences Next Level promises, and put them in potentially difficult situations, in order to generate goodwill? By asking these questions, I am in no way seeking to undermine the virtuosity, generosity, and courage of the artists and administrators from diverse countries whom Katz describes throughout the book. But as Katz himself puts it, with the precision born of sustained reflection, “the ironic combination of power and vulnerability is a legacy of centuries of colonialism” (95). It is reasonable to ask what pressures people are under, and what situations obtain, that make these risks normal and even attractive.

The fifth and final chapter, “Build and Destroy: Hip Hop, US Diplomacy, and Islam,” distills the problematics of U.S. hip hop diplomacy most forcefully. In chapter 5, Katz discusses the foreign policy establishment’s pivot to cultural diplomacy after 9/11. Quoting a report from the time, he cites the Arab-Israeli conflict and the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq as provoking unfavorable responses throughout “many Arab and Muslim countries.”² Katz follows with “short of changing

² Advisory Committee on Public Diplomacy, *Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2005), 3.

policy, what could be done?” (143-144). This rhetorical question reveals a fundamental choice that is not just adjacent to U.S. cultural diplomacy—it powers the field and provides its rationale. What, in fact, can be done? Why not seek to change policy instead of hoping to mitigate its profoundly negative effects with two-week residencies? To be sure, it is not the author’s job to provide an answer. However, in this and other moments, he does not appear to acknowledge the question.

Chapter 5 also opens a fuller discussion of the essentialist assumptions that underpin the ways in which U.S. musical diplomacy is targeted towards specific populations. In chapter 2, when narrating Next Level’s predecessors, Katz references Penny von Eschen’s foundational work on the “paradox” of African-Americans jazz serving to legitimize the U.S. to audiences who were aware of the country’s legal and structural racism.³ “This paradox, however, did not seem to undermine the effectiveness of the program,” Katz writes (32). He makes a similar statement while discussing the success of Ozomatli, whose critical lyrics he argues would have been known or understood by Middle Eastern youth during performance. “Ironically,” he writes, “the United States was so hated [in 2007] that perhaps the only way to gain the trust of its detractors was to send Americans who agreed with their criticisms” (42). But the paradox von Eschen describes did not undermine the Jazz Ambassadors program; the dissonance and dissidence African-American artists evoked was a goal of the program. Underwriting the performance of Ozomatli’s critiques was not ironic; it was the purpose of the event. Since the beginning of the Cultural Presentations Program, U.S. musical diplomacy has been built on exploiting the otherness maintained in U.S. society and domestic policy. As Katz observes, “[artists] often find they are treated not so much as representatives of their country...but as kindred spirits...because [local artists] are often similarly marginalized in their homelands” (115-116).

Chapter 5 returns to this constitutive tension between marginalization and legitimation with respect to Muslim youth who are targeted by contemporary cultural diplomacy. Attempts to connect run the risk of backfiring precisely because they show that the U.S., as a government, conceptualizes all Muslims as fundamentally similar. “The ‘We have Muslims, too!’ approach demonstrates understanding and tolerance no more than white people prove that they aren’t racist when they proclaim that they have black friends,” Katz quips (164). Rather than conclude here that the State Department’s uses of differentially marked Americans’ expressive culture is structured by exactly this move, Katz uses moving stories from several Muslim artists to show that individual connections can transcend this structure. Near the end of this chapter, after a thoughtful recitation of the potential clashes within and between groups of Muslims that targeted cultural diplomacy might provoke, Katz asks again: “can hip hop diplomacy facilitate ... meaningful collaboration with Muslim communities around the world?” (166). In answering how it can do that safely and successfully, Katz falls back on the capacities of Muslims themselves: “Islam can be part of the conversation [among participants], but it should emerge from the artists themselves, built out of a mutually respectful call and response” (167). In effect, he calls for intensified person-to-person diplomacy, in which the state is more invisible and the artists’ individual affective labors are even more centered.

While I have focused here on how difficult it is to make one’s way through the contradictions generated by U.S. popular musical diplomacy, I want to underscore the timeliness, usefulness, and intellectual generosity of this book. Every page makes clear that Katz’s argument grows out of respect for Next Level participants and his colleagues, whether they are artists or State Department personnel. He writes in a direct, lively way that is aimed at a wide readership, while weaving difficult questions throughout each chapter. But syntax and idiom would not matter if Katz still centered himself as the expert on either hip hop or diplomacy. Instead, he effectively positions himself as a student who grows in understanding throughout by analyzing his own experiences and iterating the book’s core concerns. For example, in chapter five, Katz realizes “I have served as a stand-in for my country’s perspective on Islam” with his well-intentioned curiosity and unexamined assumptions (141). He also ensures that Next Level and foreign artists are understood as theorists of their work not just by quoting them on their process and reflections, but by placing those quotations alongside the voices of other scholars. These narrative choices are a service of their own with potential to make a significant impact on undergraduate readers.

³ Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Build reads as an extended rejoinder to both the assumptions of the post-9/11 diplomacy establishment and critiques of state-sponsored programming. Katz refuses to join either side, instead arguing that hip hop diplomacy—like hip hop itself—not only withstands a full accounting of its contradictions, but is made better by it. Central to this argument is the recognition that Next Level explicitly incorporates the values its practitioners hold for their genre and their conduct (see, for example, “The Next Level Principles,” 104). Among these are knowledge of self, mutual respect, and constructive criticism in pursuit of artistic excellence. All encourage practices of continuous self-reflection that make Next Level’s teacher-artists unusually well-suited to their tasks, and clearly inspire Katz to perform the same work on himself and the entire program. The result is a remarkably transparent discussion of the “zones of ambiguity” that underpin the enterprise. In the conclusion, Katz argues that hip hop’s values are better organizing principles for encounters with the other than those baked into traditional U.S. cultural diplomacy. Next Level and *Build* then become as much about transforming home, by promoting an anti-essentialist set of diplomatic tactics, as they are about influencing others through the value of hip hop to youth abroad.

 RESPONSE BY MARK KATZ, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

In June of this year, twenty hip hop artists gathered for the two-and-a-half day Next Level orientation. It was the seventh such orientation in the life of this hip hop–focused cultural diplomacy program, funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). The artist-educators, as they are called, attended sessions on conflict transformation, entrepreneurship, and program evaluation. They met in breakout sessions to discuss pedagogy by discipline (beatboxing, beatmaking, dancing, DJing, graffiti art, rapping) and spent time getting to know the members of their five-person teams (four artists and a manager), which will be visiting Ghana, Haiti, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine for two-week residencies. A few ECA representatives offered greetings and made short presentations. A group dinner launched the orientation and a jam session ended the second evening, with artists performing for each other in an informal, largely improvisatory setting.

As in the past, it was an intense, emotional experience for the artist-educators. They spoke of being with “my people” or “my family.” When one described hip hop as a literal life saver, the others responded with solemn, knowing nods. There were also small moments of friction, generated by the clash of strong personalities and arising around differing perspectives on conflict transformation. (The latter was a potent topic given that many actively participated in the ongoing national protests following George Floyd’s murder). Some expressed reservations about working with the federal government, an issue that gets discussed every year. One participant proclaimed, “Am I going to have to hold back? No, I’m gonna turn it up!” I am always moved by how quickly the artists connect with each other. Just a few hours into orientation, someone called out, “I barely know you, but I already love y’all!”

There was one notable change this year: everything I described happened over Zoom. It was the pandemic, of course, that kept us from gathering in Washington, DC. Many lamented that they could not connect “in the analog,” as one person put it, and the usual distractions and fatigue that accompany multi-hour video meetings affected everyone. Many things couldn’t happen: a visit to the State Department and the Lincoln Memorial, late-night jam sessions in hotel rooms, dancing at the Eighteenth Street Lounge, and simply being in the same space and time zone. By the end of the program, however, the orientation accomplished what I see as is its main goal, which is to build community among the U.S. artist-educators. In doing so, it is meant to model the type of collaborative, generous, respectful, and thoughtful interactions needed to build strong and lasting relationships with the communities Next Level engages around the world.

It is a fascinating moment for the study of cultural diplomacy, one that prompts us to reflect and refine our understanding of what the work is, what it does, what it demands. My experience with this year’s orientation eases some of my doubts about the prospect of Zoom diplomacy, though I still believe that virtual programming is best deployed *after* in-person engagement as a means to sustain relationships and continue the capacity-building that starts on the ground. Scholars of diplomacy, and especially cultural diplomacy, will certainly be paying attention to how governments around the world explore the possibilities and practicalities of virtual cultural exchange—especially through synchronous videoconferencing—in the coming months and years.¹ Next Level’s first residency of the new cycle is still slated to be in person, in Ukraine, in November 2020. This may well change. But more broadly, a rethinking of the whole enterprise of cultural diplomacy might be in the offing.

In a sense, *Build: Hip Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World* offers a modest rethinking of this enterprise. What if we analyze power in international relations from the perspective of an economically dominant artform created by historically (and

¹ To be sure, scholars have been writing about “digital diplomacy,” “e-diplomacy,” “net diplomacy,” and “virtual diplomacy” for many years. Examples include Barry Fulton, ed., *Net Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2002), <https://www.webharvest.gov/peth04/20041017080700/http://www.usip.org/virtualdiplomacy/publications/reports/14.html>; Sheryl J. Brown and Margarita S. Studemeister, “Virtual Diplomacy” in *Encyclopedia of International Media and Communications*, ed. Donald Johnston (San Diego: Academic, 2003); and Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes, eds., *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

currently) oppressed communities? What would it mean to understand cultural diplomacy through the lens of hip hop practice and ideology? What if hip hop diplomacy, which currently flies under the radar so as to avoid being eliminated by unsympathetic or uninformed legislators, could openly serve as a model for ethical, effective cultural diplomacy? These are some of the questions that guided my thinking.

This roundtable continues the discussion, with each of the four reviews posing penetrating questions about the intersections of hip hop and cultural diplomacy in the post-9/11 world. It's hard for me to express just how grateful I am to these scholars—Nicholas Cull, Danielle Fosler-Lussier, Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo, and Kendra Salois—as well as to Damien Mahiet for convening the roundtable. What an honor and pleasure it has been to read such generous, insightful, and wise essays. I'm in the somewhat awkward position of having no quibbles, no disagreements, no concerns about any of these reviews. To be clear, this is neither because *Build* is without shortcomings, nor because the reviewers engaged uncritically with the book. Sharp-eyed but not sharp-tongued, these four scholars came in the spirit of dialogue and collaboration. In other words, they came to build. That, more than any specific words of praise, is perhaps the greatest compliment I can take from these reviews.

In that spirit, I want to build on some of many keen observations coming from these reviews. I'll start with Nicholas Cull. He correctly notes that hip hop diplomacy programs take up a tiny fraction of the State Department's spending on cultural exchange—to give some perspective, the annual budget for ECA's flagship Fulbright program is more than 200 times that of Next Level's. He then muses: "Next Level could be seen, to use a gambling metaphor, as a fascinating side-bet in America's approach to the world and not where the bulk of the chips have been placed. I fear that if it were better known someone these days would have abolished it." This is one of the abiding tensions I have seen in the six years this program has existed. If ECA truly believes in hip hop diplomacy—which seems to be the case given that it has renewed the grant that supports Next Level six times—why not expand it, why not showcase it to the leadership at State and to the legislators who approve their budget? The answer is simple: those who oversee Next Level within ECA are worried that the wrong type of attention will get it killed. That is why, for example, ECA's program officers moved a Next Level performance originally planned to take place within the State Department to the Lincoln Memorial. The risk that the wrong person within State would catch wind of it is just too great in their estimation. U.S. hip hop artists may fly around the world as cultural ambassadors on the State Department's dime, but ECA has been careful not to let these programs fly *too* high.

Danielle Fosler-Lussier identifies another perennial tension within hip hop diplomacy when she notes: "Hardest of all to measure is the experience of making art together—of being in the pocket with people who had shortly before been strangers—and the value of the human relationships forged through in-person visits." The State Department wants clear and compelling data to justify its funding, but the most readily available numbers—of participants and audiences, of "excellent" ratings in the participant evaluations, of Facebook likes and YouTube views—tell us little about what matters most: human connection across cultures and nations. This tension is itself part of the broader friction between the goals and values of art and diplomacy. However, I've seen it as a productive tension. ECA's cultural programs officers, some of whom have artistic backgrounds, accept that this work is about planting seeds (a common metaphor) and push only lightly when it comes to metrics. On the other hand, it's useful for artists to develop more robust forms of evaluation and depend less on hazy memories and warm feelings. In fact, since the publication of *Build*, dancer and Next Level alum Rizqi Rachmat—by day a data scientist—developed a new evaluation strategy, one that "aims to provide an evidence-based framework to enable more systematic strategies toward the improvement of artist educator training, residency participation, and student performance tracking."² What is compelling about Rachmat's framework is that it is built around hip hop values and voices—the categories and criteria come from the artists—and that it facilitates the kind of thoughtful, sustained long-term engagement that ECA seeks.

² This statement comes from an internal report assessing the Next Level residency in Jordan in 2019.

Labor, and particularly affective labor, is a key concern in Kendra Salois's scholarship on hip hop diplomacy.³ Writing in her review about my recommendation for engagement with Muslim communities through Next Level, she notes that I call for "intensified person-to-person diplomacy, in which the state is more invisible and the artists' individual affective labors are even more centered." She is right, and her work has prompted me to reflect on the demands—on both U.S. and international participants—of these exchange programs. In doing so, I have come to see two different types of affective labor, one that is draining and stressful and one that is joyful and rejuvenating. When, as I relate in *Build* (139–40), I pestered a group of Algerian beatmakers to tell me about the connections between hip hop and Islam, I was demanding the first type of affective labor. ("Why do you keep asking about Islam?" one of the weary Algerians called out.) This is also the type of labor that well-meaning programs insist on when they assign people to create art based on their past or current traumas. This enervating form of labor must be avoided, or minimized as much as possible. More commonly, and fortunately, I see the artists engaging in a restorative, gratifying form of labor. I've noticed that the hip hop artists I know talk a lot about labor, and its attendant pleasures and rewards. Here are some of the statements and phrases that I heard just during the most recent Next Level orientation: "It's about the work," "When we're called, the work can be hard," "I'm here for the work," "I can't wait to get to that work." Next Level Director Junious Brickhouse uses a term to describe the labor that he most cherishes, and it perfectly captures this form of affective labor: "Heart work." Although any type of affective labor may be exploited to promote state agendas, the relationship between the State Department and hip hop diplomats is at its most equitable and mutually beneficial when the artists' labor can be restorative and affirming, when their art work is allowed to be heart work.

Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo asks a key question in her review, one that should haunt anyone who oversees hip hop diplomacy programming: "[Is it] ever possible to truly foster and celebrate an art form that trades in playful and militant forms of resistance and transgression in a space that is beholden to stakeholders who do not share those values?" This question connects to Salois's worries about exploitation, and it also, like Cull's and Fosler-Lussier's reviews, names an enduring tension within hip hop diplomacy. My answer is that yes, it is possible to foster and celebrate hip hop within the space of government-funded diplomacy programs. It is possible, I believe, when hip hop, rather than diplomacy, and when the interests and values of the participants, rather than their corresponding states, are centered. "Success requires compromise," I write in *Build*. "The compromise between hip hop and diplomacy, however, should not be an equal one. It is diplomacy that needs to yield (103)." This approach has risks—as Salois has noted, it can problematically obscure the state's role in this work—but centering hip hop strikes me as the only way to answer Lumumba-Kasongo's provocative question in the affirmative.⁴

Each of the four reviews highlights significant challenges that face the practice of hip hop diplomacy. Although the authors may not have intended this, I gratefully read their essays not only as reviews of my book, but as implicit advice on how to run a hip hop diplomacy program. (In fact, their observations and concerns rang in my head as I observed Next Level's orientation just a week before writing this response.) Scholars of cultural diplomacy often draw on the writings of practitioners as source material (Fosler-Lussier cites several fine examples), but as a practitioner I can attest to the great practical value of the scholarship on cultural diplomacy.⁵ Following the model of respectful collaboration that I have so

³ See, for example, Kendra Salois, "The Ethics and Politics of Empathy in US Hip-Hop Diplomacy: The Case of the Next Level Program," in Mario Dunkel and Sina A. Nitzsche, eds., *Popular Music and Public Diplomacy: Transnational and Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), 233-253.

⁴ Although Lumumba-Kasongo rightfully worries about cultural appropriation within the field of hip hop based education, I have found that the methodologies that certain scholars deploy in the classroom can be fruitfully applied to the practice of hip hop diplomacy in the field. See, for example, Antwi Akom, "Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy as a Form of Liberatory Praxis," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 42 (2009): 52-66 and Daniel Banks, "Hip Hop as Pedagogy: Something from Something," *Theatre Topics* 25:3 (2015): 243-259.

⁵ This includes Fosler-Lussier's excellent *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), which she did not cite in her list.

often witnessed within and among hip hop communities, scholars and practitioners of cultural diplomacy would do well to build together.