



The Real Hiphop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground

Marcyliena Morgan

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Project Blowed is a legendary hiphop workshop based in Los Angeles. It began in 1994 when a group of youths moved their already renowned open-mic nights from the Good Life, a Crenshaw district health food store, to the KAOS Network, an arts center in Leimert Park. The local freestyle of articulate, rapid-fire, extemporaneous delivery, the juxtaposition of meaningful words and sounds, and the way that MCs followed one another without missing a beat, quickly became known throughout the LA underground. Leimert Park has long been a center of African American culture and arts in Los Angeles, and Project Blowed inspired youth throughout the city to consider the neighborhood the epicenter of their own cultural movement. *The Real Hiphop* is an in-depth account of the language and culture of Project Blowed, based on the seven years Marcyliena Morgan spent observing the workshop and the KAOS Network. Morgan is a leading scholar of hiphop, and throughout the volume her ethnographic analysis of the LA underground opens up into a broader examination of the artistic and cultural value of hiphop.

Morgan intersperses her observations with excerpts from interviews and transcripts of freestyle lyrics. Providing a thorough linguistic interpretation of the music, she teases out the cultural antecedents and ideologies embedded in the language, emphases, and wordplay. She discusses the artistic skills and cultural knowledge MCs must acquire to rock the mic, the socialization of hiphop culture's core and long-term members, and the persistent focus on skills, competition, and evaluation. She brings attention to adults who provided material and moral support to sustain underground hiphop, identifies the ways that women choose to participate in Project Blowed, and vividly renders the dynamics of the workshop's famous lyrical battles.

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