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Introduction to MIAP - Final Project

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## H2O Project: Research, Assessment, and Planning

### *Introduction*

The Hip-Hop Odyssey (H2O) Project is the initial research, assessment, and planning phase for the H2O International Film Festival Collection that was donated to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture by the Hip-Hop Education Center in September 2013. My goal is to begin working on the collection in order to prepare for a semester-long internship in spring 2014.

### *Research*

In order to understand the value and preservation needs of the collection, I must begin my project by researching the institution that has accepted the collection and surveying the collection. According to *Assessing Preservation needs: A Self-Survey Guide*<sup>1</sup>, the field of library and archives preservation has been developing new standards and practices with an “emphasis on preservation issues related to the rapid expansion of electronic and digital media” (Patkus 2003). Since the Self-Survey Guide was released ten years ago by Northeast Document Conservation Center, libraries and archives have been slowly adapting to a new state of the art 21st century model.

The two biggest issues facing these institutions is the backlog of processing collections, and finding an affordable and simple archival system

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<sup>1</sup> Assessing Preservation needs: A Self-Survey Guide by Beth Patkus. Northeast Document Conservation Center. 2003

that will them to provide access to their collections. The New York Public Library is currently undergoing a network and website upgrade that will affect all of its library branches and research centers. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is one of those research centers getting a facelift.

### Background History - The Schomburg Center

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture located in Harlem, New York is a research unit of The New York Public Library system. It is recognized as one of the leading institutions focusing exclusively on African-American, African Diaspora, and African experiences. The Schomburg Center began with the collections of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg 88 years ago. Schomburg was a Puerto Rican-born Black scholar and bibliophile, who collected more than 5,000 books, 3,000 manuscripts, and 2,000 etchings and paintings. Prior to being named the Schomburg Center, the 135th Street branch was a special collections library named the Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints.

The Schomburg has five divisions: Jean Blackwell Huston Research and Reference; Art and Artifacts; Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books; Photographs and Prints; and Moving Image and Recorded Sound. I am mostly concerned with the latter division, as the H2O collection is a moving image project, although, it contains material that can be preserved across all divisions.

The Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division (MIRS) offers a broad range of audiovisual documentation of black culture including music, oral history

recordings, motion pictures, and videotapes. Its resources include early radio broadcasts and recordings of statements by celebrated personalities such as Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver. Musical documentation ranges from African chants to American jazz<sup>2</sup>. The MIRS Division has a librarian, an assistant librarian, an archivist, a cataloger, and a curator.

The MIRS Division is accessible by the New York Public Library's online public access catalog, and it is also made available through the VIM and REC files of the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), available via the Internet, and OCLC. The Hip-Hop Collection at the Schomburg is small compared to more endowed institutions such as Cornell's Hip-Hop Collection and the Harvard Hip-Hop Archives. Nevertheless, they carry a little over 500 items that include books, periodicals, and video recordings. The Schomburg recently hired Curator Shola Lynch to work in the MIRS Division after not having a curator for four years. Lynch is very interested in the H2O collection, and wants to make associative and educational links to their extensive vinyl collection.

### Background History - H2O Collection

The Hip-Hop Odyssey International Film Festival (H2O) was launched November 13, 2002 at the Bronx Museum of the Arts by a group of filmmakers, educators, activists and entrepreneurs determined to develop a platform to

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<sup>2</sup> The Schomburg Center Website - <http://www.nypl.org/locations/schomburg>

counter the stereotypical narratives produced by Hollywood studios and corporate media. The H2O Festival made it a point to showcase an array of narrative and documentary films from around the world, many with social justice themes.

The largest festival of its kind, H2O featured the best in Hip-Hop Cinema and promoted the use of Hip-Hop culture as a tool to teach media literacy and social awareness. Altogether there are three hundred media pieces that capture hip-hop history, music, art, politics, and spirituality. The collection covers Hip-Hop Cinema in its formative years from 1983 until 2010. The Hip-Hop Education Center (HHEC) inherited the H2O Collection from the Hip-Hop Association when the non-profit organization became inactive. The HHEC housed the H2O Collection at the New York University Metropolitan Center for Urban Education in the Steinhardt School for Education, Culture, and Human Development until September 2012, when it was moved to the Schomburg Center.

In addition to the H2O festival collection, the HHEC has been acquiring new titles for the purpose of archiving and education research. The H2O Collection also includes footage documenting the H2O Festival and its signature event, the Odyssey Awards, where winners of the festival were announced and tributes to Hip-Hop filmmakers, industry professionals and pioneers were interwoven. This H2O Festival featured appearances and performances by Hip-Hop heavyweights such as, Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, MC Lyte, Swizz

Beats, Kanye West, Mos Def, Medusa, ?uestlove, and Ice T.

The festival attracted emerging and seasoned entertainment industry professionals, artists, grassroots activists, and the media consumers who want to respond, engage and develop their voice and express themselves. The majority of the filmmakers were of people of color and white males. The majority of the submissions derived from the United States, however, over a dozen international countries have represented in the H2O Festival. The patrons were filmmakers, hip-hop pioneers and artists, professionals, high school and college students, and aficionados between the age range of 14-55.

### *Content*

The H2O Film Festival screened short and feature narratives, documentaries, as well as music videos, experimental, and public service announcements, which served as the competitive categories. The collection contains a variety of magnetic and digital media formats of audio and video, including Betacam (SP), DVcam, MiniDV, and CD-R.

### *What is Hip-Hop Cinema?*

The organizers of the H2O Film Festival defined the films in Hip-Hop Cinema as films that represent Hip-Hop's culture, aesthetic, and influence. The Festival's Producer Gabriel Tolliver called the filmmakers "Visual MC's." The films were either about the history and elements of Hip-Hop culture (djing,

b-boying, mcing, and writing a.k.a. graffiti); narratives of those identifying as being part of the Hip-Hop generation and community (personal style, mission/role, lens, sensibilities); and films that were influenced by Hip-Hop music and aesthetics (majority being experimental and public service announcements).

### *Significance*

1. Largest Hip-Hop Film Festival – Although there have been other attempts at developing Hip-Hop film festivals and series, primarily in California, no one has been able to create a full-fledge festival in the likes of Sundance and TriBeCa Festivals.
2. Community Agency – The H2O Film Festival has significance importance because it demonstrates the Hip-Hop community’s effort and self-determination to counter negative stereotypical images and narratives. Contrary to the notion that Hip-Hop culture is poisoning young people’s minds, here we see how Hip-Hop can instill self-esteem, critical thinking, transformative and responsive creativity, and other positive behavior and role models.
3. Development of Hip-Hop Filmmakers - The H2O Festival was instrumental in developing, supporting, and breaking in new filmmakers. Some of the now famous filmmakers who were featured at the Festival include, Byron Hurt (Beyond Beats and Rhymes), Jeff Zimbalist (Favela Rising), Michael Wanguhu (Hip-Hop Colony), Nuala Cabral (Who’s That Girl: Women of Colo and Hip-Hop), and Manauvaskar Kublall (American

Beatboxer) premiered their films at H2O.

4. Educational Value - Researchers, scholars, teaching artists, and teachers will find this collection unique and beneficial to their work. Although I have not conducted an extensive research at other hip-hop archives and repositories, I am almost certain that there is no other collection like this one that exists. Hip-Hop Cinema has only recently gained traction within the academy and collecting institutions. In thirty years of the development of Hip-Hop cinema there are only three scholarly publications written about Hip-Hop cinema: *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* by Craig S. Watkins (University of Chicago Press 1999); *Hip-Hop in American Cinema* by Melvin Donalson (Peter Lang 2007); *Hip Hop on Film: Performance Culture, Urban Space, and Genre Transformation in the 1980s* by Kimberly Monteyne (University Press of Mississippi 2013).

### *Assessment*

The next step in my project is to provide a snapshot of the H2O Collection by making a general assessment of the condition of the media items, and begin organizing the data that exists.

### Sampling

I started by selecting twenty-five films from the collection. I only chose films that were screened during the festival. The collection includes films that were added after the festival ended. The Festival discarded the films that did

not make it into the program. The collection contains a variety of magnetic and digital media formats of audio and video, including betacam, DVCam, MiniDV, VHS, DVD, and digital files that are in good in conditions. Although some of the earlier films were made with film stock, many were later transferred to VHS and DVD. The Festival never screened actual “films”. There were a number of international submissions that were in PAL format. I used three separate excel spreadsheets that the HHEC had created in order to purge and merge the collection.

### Cataloging

I then created a new inventory list on an excel spreadsheet that included descriptive information such as length, synopsis, director, country of origin, format, and contact information. I also added a column with subject categories. My objective is to develop a document that will provide basic metadata and later expand when I learn about the Schomburg’s cataloging system and controlled fields. One of the things I want to emphasize is keeping as much provenance information in the database. By this I mean, I would like to make sure that users of the collection know the original format in which films were made and distributed. I have attached the excel document to this report.

### *Planning*

In the final step in completing this assignment, I summarize my brief analysis and include a list of recommendations to continue processing the H2O collection during my spring 2014 internship. Although I am in a disadvantage



because the MIRS Division is undergoing a complete renovation of their physical and virtual space, I will only offer simple activities and concepts.

The H2O Collection is an important one that fits in perfectly with the Schomburg Center's mission and history. Being that Hip-Hop culture is the most popular youth culture in the world created by black and brown youth, it makes perfect sense to acquire such collection and use it to connect young people to Black history and legacy, globally. In order to continue the processing effort, I offer the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1

Continue media Inventory and merge existing spreadsheet documents to get an actual count of what exists, making sure to parse those films that were not part of the festival. This will provide an accurate list of the H2O Collection.

Recommendation #2

Add a list of ephemeral material connected to the Collection to the inventory. These materials include, both the festival programs, and media posters, flyers, and curricula. There are over 100 ephemeral items.

Recommendation #3

A number of media titles need to be replaced with new casings that meet preservation standards, as well as need to be digitize.

Recommendation #4

Create a collection guide that can be used for education and programming purposes related to the mission of the Schomburg Center.

For example, the collection can be used to study:

- a. Hip-Hop history and music
- b. Artistic elements and aesthetics of Hip-Hop
- c. Artists, activists, entrepreneurs, industry executives, and educators
- d. Hip-Hop and politics
- e. Hip-Hop and spirituality
- f. Hip-Hop and entrepreneurship
- g. Hip-Hop and education
- h. Hip-Hop and race

Through the Public Engagement and Strategic Initiative Division, The Schomburg can expand its Hip-Hop 4.0 initiative by programming film screenings from the collection that include pop-up exhibitions using the ephemeral materials. It can also produce educational activities with the Junior Scholars program such as panel discussions, media literacy workshops, and performances. The collection can serve as pedagogical tool and can be integrated in the Schomburg's new hip-hop history curricula that is being developed.

### *Conclusion*

The H2O project is essentially the preliminary research stage of processing the H2O collection at the Schomburg Center. I have mapped out some of the important elements and significance of the collection. I have created a workflow agenda to continue processing and preserving the H2O Collection during the spring 2014. More importantly, I have begun to develop the language and information to catalog and describe the metadata. Lastly, before starting my internship, I will share this paper with Shola Lynch at the Schomburg Center's Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division so that she may have a

better understanding of the collection.