

The Peter Beste and Lance Scott Walker Houston Rap Collection

By Stacey Lavender

From hip hop music's earliest days, Houston has contributed greatly to the genre's development. In the 1990s Houston icon DJ Screw gave us "chopped and screwed," arguably the city's most notable contribution, but Houston can claim

many others. A handful of Houston-area rappers, like Geto Boys, Bun B and Pimp C of UGK, and Paul Wall, have risen to national prominence, but the overarching contributions of Houston to the rap scene often remain overlooked. To preserve and highlight Houston's rich hip hop legacy, the University of Houston Libraries Special

*"Texas tatted on my arm,
got Houston on my back
Cause I love the city I'm from,
hands up if you feel that"*

— Slim Thug, "Houston"

Collections began collecting primary source materials on the genre in 2010 when curator Julie Grob established Houston Hip Hop as a collecting area.

The newest accession, acquired in the spring of 2015, is the Peter Beste and Lance Scott Walker *Houston Rap* Collection, which contains materials gathered and

produced during the creation of Beste and Walker's book *Houston Rap*. This large and varied collection documents the rise of Houston hip hop and the people and communities behind the music, making it an exciting addition to the Houston Hip Hop Collections. These materials will connect with and complement the existing UH hip hop collections in unique ways, providing greater insight into Houston hip hop than they could on their own or in another repository.

Houston Rap, published in 2013 by Sinecure Press, is the joint creation of photographer Peter Beste and writer Lance Scott Walker.¹ The product of nearly a decade of work, it documents Houston's hip hop community, particularly in the Third Ward, Fifth Ward, and South Park neighborhoods, and sheds new light on Houston's rap legacy, which has been often overshadowed by the narratives of rap development in New York and on the West Coast.

Comprised of photographs by Beste interspersed with excerpts from interviews conducted by Walker, the book features a wide swath of rappers, producers, and other members of the hip hop community. The rappers run the gamut from the very famous, like Bun B and Geto Boys, to the virtually unknown. The photographs often show the subjects in unguarded personal moments, revealing a world very unlike what the public sees on album covers and promotional materials. The interviews provide further insight into the communities and stories described in the artists' lyrics. In discussing his interviews Walker states, "Voices in rap music tell those stories [of their communities], but the interviews allow you to talk about deeper stuff than what might appear in the lyrics."²

A second function of the book, which the authors discussed explicitly, is to document several rapidly changing Houston neighborhoods at a specific moment in time. Since gentrification forces many to leave their neighborhoods and causes the subsequent destruction of



Cover of *Houston Rap* by Peter Beste and Lance Scott Walker.

All photos courtesy of Houston Hip Hop, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.



Pimp C (1973-2007) and Bun B of UGK, photographed by Peter Beste for Houston Rap.

homes and buildings, Beste and Walker sought to capture the people and places that made up these neighborhoods during a rich period in the history of Houston rap.

Getting to the heart of these neighborhoods and communities was no small feat. Beste and Walker spent years developing personal relationships with several prominent members of the Houston rap community to get the kind of access necessary to create the intimate portrait they had in mind. In their respective roles Beste and Walker attempted to act as unobtrusive observers, Beste as a fly-on-the-wall photographer and Walker as the interviewer allowing his subjects to tell their stories in their own words. This approach gives the book authenticity and allows the personalities of the people and the places to shine through.

Slowly making inroads into an insular community was not a new experience for Beste, who had previous success

in documenting a subculture. In the early 2000s, he spent six years working on his book *True Norwegian Black Metal*, for which he photographed several Norwegian black metal bands. Similar to his work with the Houston hip hop community, Beste had to develop relationships with members of a group known to be tightly knit and often unreceptive to outsiders, and his photographs depicted them in a candid, natural light. After that project, bringing this documentary approach back to his hometown of Houston to explore the development of a musical genre he grew up listening to offered a logical next step in his career.

Walker, a native Texan from just down the road in Galveston, remembers listening to Houston rap artists in his youth. A well-established journalist, he has written for many publications, including the *Houston Chronicle*, *Houston Press*, *USA Today*, and *RollingStone.com*. Extended versions of the oral histories conducted by Walker for *Houston Rap* can be found in its companion book, *Houston Rap Tapes*.³

Over the years as Beste and Walker worked on *Houston Rap*, local hip hop artists and other community members gave them a wide variety of materials that make up a significant portion of the collection, consisting of artifacts and ephemera promoting local Houston rappers, neighborhoods, and the city itself. A large selection of traditional promotional materials includes cards, flyers, stickers, and signed photographs. Dozens of t-shirts feature artists such as UGK, Z-Ro, and Fat Pat, who are either interviewed or discussed extensively in the book. Some, like a South Park Coalition t-shirt, represent specific neighborhoods while others celebrate the city as a whole with slogans like “Keep Houston Dirty!” Other unique items found in the collection are a grill, or jeweled mouthpiece, from Grills by Paul Wall, a car air-freshener adver-



Bobble head doll of Houston rapper Paul Wall.



Houston rapper KB da Kidnappa, photographed by Peter Beste for Houston Rap.

“Grills by Paul Wall” grill.



tising the Houston-based Swishahouse rap label, and a lighter promoting the hip hop group Coughie Brothaz. This part of the collection also contains a handful of more personal items given to Beste and Walker, including letters from prison and handwritten lyrics as well as a large selection of recorded music on vinyl records, cassettes, and CDs.

The second major component of the collection consists of materials created by Beste and Walker during the development and production of the book. These include a hard drive containing over 2,000 of Beste's photos, 1,300 photo prints used during the editing process, interviews (audio and/or transcripts) with nearly 100 people in the Houston hip hop community, dummy copies of the book, and promotional *Houston Rap* stickers and t-shirts. After processing, all of these items and many more will be available in the Special Collections reading room so that hip hop scholars, researchers, and interested members of the public can take a closer look.

The Peter Beste and Lance Scott Walker *Houston Rap* Collection offers a fitting and significant addition to the University of Houston's Houston Hip Hop Collections. The preservation of these materials will help further the same goals as the book itself: highlighting an important hip hop genre and community and



Contact sheet from photoshoot with Houston rapper K-Rino. Photographs taken by Peter Beste.



Cover of Houston Rap Tapes by Lance Scott Walker and Peter Beste, the companion book to Houston Rap.

documenting several rapidly changing Houston neighborhoods. Beyond these benefits, the Beste and Walker materials will positively impact the Houston Hip Hop Collections at the University of Houston, which focus on the same communities and neighborhoods as *Houston Rap*. Several hip hop collections already held by the UH Libraries relate to artists or producers featured prominently in the book, including DJ Screw, HAWK, and Steve Fournier.

When asked why the University of Houston was the right repository for these materials Peter Beste explained, "Lance and I spent many years documenting Houston rap because we believe that it is a one of a kind phenomenon that has long-term cultural value. I can't think of a better place for our collection to live than the University of Houston. It's the perfect place within the community and has the capability to store these things for generations to come."⁴ Lance Scott Walker echoed those sentiments saying, "UH is a good fit for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is that it's right there in Third Ward. And while people might go there to read interviews or see pictures about Houston hip hop, they're really learning about Houston, and it teaches them something about their city that they might not have known or expected. And my hope is that this inspires students to get involved in writing about Houston from a perspective that doesn't normally get covered."⁵

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