

BREAKDANCING

cal history at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. Brawley wrote several religious texts, including a book on evangelism entitled *Sin and Salvation*, and edited the *Baptist Tribune* and *The Evangel*. Brawley died on January 13, 1923, ending a long career in the ministry, education, publishing, and writing.

See also Baptists

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SABRINA FUCHS (1996)
PREMILLA NADASEN (1996)
Updated by publisher 2005

BREAKDANCING

An elaborate social dance form originated by teenage African-American males in the South Bronx of New York City, breakdancing appeared during the early to mid-1970s. It began as a form of gang fighting, a mixture of physically demanding movements that exploited the daredevil prowess of performers and stylized punching and kicking movements directed at an opponent. A descendant of *capoeira*, the Brazilian form of martial arts disguised as dance, breaking developed as the movement aspect of rap music when breakdancers—"B-Boys"—filled the musical breaks between records mixed by disc jockeys at parties and discotheques. Breakdancing was part of a young urban culture built upon innovations in language, hip-hop music, fashion (unlaced sneakers, hooded sweatshirts, nylon windbreakers), and visual arts (graffiti).

The elaborate spins, balances, flips, contortions, and freezes performed by breakdancers required extreme agility and coordination. Real physical danger surrounded movements such as the "windmill," in which dancers spun wildly, supported only by the shoulders, or the "suicide," in which an erect dancer would throw himself forward to land flat on his back. The competitive roots of breakdanc-

ing encouraged sensational movements such as multiple spins while balanced on the head, back, or one hand. Dancing "crews" met on street corners, subway stations, or dance floors to battle other groups with virtuosity, style, and wit determining the winner. Breakdancing came to be divided into several classifications of movement, including "breaking" (acrobatic flips and spins with support by the head and arms, with the shoulders as a point of balance), "uprocks" (fighting movements directed against an opponent), "webbo" (extravagant footwork that connected breaking movements), and "electric boogie" (robotlike dancing movements borrowed from mime). The electric boogie style, reminiscent of a long tradition of eccentric African-American dances, developed in Los Angeles concurrent with electronically produced disco music. In this style dancers typically appeared to be weightless and rubber limbed, performing baffling floating walks, precise body isolations, and pantomimed robotic sequences. This form includes the "moonwalk," popularized on national television by Michael Jackson, in which the dancer's feet appear to be floating across the floor without touching it. Other boogie moves include the "wave," in which the body simulates an electric current passing through it, and "poplocking," a series of tightly contained staccato movements separated by freezes. An "Egyptian" style, which imitated ancient wall paintings, was also briefly popular.

Breakdancing found a mainstream audience through several films that cashed in on its sensational aspects and minimized its competitive format. Charlie Ahearn's *Wild Style* (1982), the first film to document emergent hip-hop culture, was eclipsed by a thirty-second breaking sequence in *Flashdance* (1983), which brought the form to international attention; *Breakin'* (1984), which starred Shabba Doo (Adolfo Quinones), an important breakdance choreographer from Chicago; and Harry Belafonte's *Beat Street* (1984), which featured the New York City Breakers. Breakdancing dropped out of the public limelight in the late 1980s, only to reemerge as a social dance form practiced by teenagers in nightclubs during the 1990s. By 2004 the form had become a component aspect of codified hip-hop dance, practiced by teams in international competitions, popular in music videos, and once again featured in Hollywood films, including Chris Stokes's *You Got Served* (2004).

See also Capoeira; Hip Hop; Rap; Social Dance

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THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ (1996)
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BREEDLOVE, SARAH

See Walker, Madam C. J.

BRIGGS, CYRIL

1888

OCTOBER 18, 1966

Cyril Valentine Briggs was a radical publicist of the New Negro movement and one of the black charter members of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA). As the political organizer of the African Blood Brotherhood for African Liberation and Redemption—better known as the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB)—a semisecret propaganda organization founded in September 1919 in reaction to the unprecedented racial violence of the Red Summer of 1919, Briggs was the first to enunciate in the United States the political principle of armed black self-defense.

A native of the tiny island of Nevis in the Leeward Islands chain of the British West Indies, Briggs was the son of a planter-manager for one of the island's absentee landlords. Of an extremely light complexion, he was later dubbed the "Angry Blond Negro" by George W. Harris of the *New York News*.

Briggs received his early start in journalism working after school with the Saint Kitts *Daily Express* and the Saint Christopher *Advertiser*. As a young man in Saint Kitts, he was influenced by the published lectures of the great American orator Robert Green Ingersoll, whose irreverent wit and questioning of the tenets of Christian belief earned him the sobriquet "the great agnostic."

Briggs came to the United States in July 1905. His involvement in the fight for African-American rights began in earnest in October 1915 when he was appointed editor of the *Colored American Review*, mouthpiece of the Harlem black business community, which stressed black eco-

nomie success and racial pride. When his editorship came to an abrupt end with the second issue, Briggs resumed work with New York's *Amsterdam News*, which had hired him as an editorial writer shortly after it began publication in 1912.

During and after World War I, Briggs's outspoken *Amsterdam News* editorials, directed against what he perceived to be the hypocrisy of U.S. war aims in view of U.S. mistreatment of black soldiers and the continuing denial of democracy to African Americans at home, came under increasing official censorship. It culminated in the detention by the U.S. Post Office of the March 12, 1919, issue containing Briggs's editorial denouncing the League of Nations as a "League of Thieves." Two months later, Briggs finally severed his ties with the newspaper for which he had been not only editorial writer but also city editor, sports editor, and theater critic.

His resignation from the *Amsterdam News* enabled Briggs to devote his entire time to the *Crusader*, which he had begun publishing in September 1918. With a free hand to promote the postwar movement through the *Crusader*, Briggs joined such black radical figures as Hubert H. Harrison, Marcus Garvey, A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen, William Bridges, and W. A. Domingo in giving voice to the era's black militancy.

Initially emphasizing the racial theme of "self-government for the Negro and Africa for the Africans," the *Crusader* proclaimed itself in its early issues as the publicity organ of the Hamitic League of the World, which had been started by the brilliant young racial vindicationist author George Wells Parker in Omaha, Nebraska. By the first anniversary of its publication, however, the editorial line of the *Crusader* had changed radically. Whereas its original focus had been on postwar African issues, it now espoused the revolutionary ideology of Bolshevism.

Starting with the October 1919 issue, the *Crusader* became the official mouthpiece of the ABB, which at the time functioned clandestinely as the CPUSA's first black auxiliary. In keeping with the group's ideological position, Briggs emerged during 1921 and 1922 as the most outspoken critic of the leadership of Marcus Garvey, against whom he supplied some of the critical evidence that would lead eventually to the federal government's successful prosecution of Garvey for mail fraud.

When the *Crusader* ceased publication in early 1922, Briggs set about organizing the Crusader News Agency. In February 1924, he was involved in the formation of the Negro Sanhedrin movement, under the leadership of Kelly Miller, with the aim of creating a federation of black organizations. Briggs had by this time become a full-time functionary of the CPUSA. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s,