# Hip Hop Culture

## Introduction

People from all walks of life are often connected through music. Some of the most basic aspects of life such as style fashion and culture are often influenced by the kind of music that an individual listens to on a day-to-day basis. Hip hop can be defined as a form of art often expressed in the form of music such as rap music, graffiti art or through breakdancing. However, hip hop has also evolved and is being expressed by individuals through a particular kind of fashion or style associated with hip hop. Not to mention the culture is widespread to the extent that it has entered into today’s language. Hip hop culture has become a significant part of today’s generation and the whole world in general (Pough, 2015).

The term “culture” refers to four main components namely; rapping, deejaying, graffiti art and hip hop dancing. Hip hop dancing is associated with the hip hop dance style with body movement often referred to as postural semantics. Hip hop culture can be traced to the predominantly African American South Bronx, a section in New York City in the 1970’s. Since the hip hop culture is believed to have originated for society margins, the culture is likely shrouded by myths and obfuscation. The first aspect of hip hop that caught the attention of the public is graffiti and breakdancing though they did not have a lasting effect. Specifically, the graffiti movement was started in the year 1972 by an American teenager who was of Greek origin. The teenager has often seen tagging streets with his name and the street 183 on most walls in New York. By the year 1975, most teenagers from South Bronx had started getting their way into train yards under cover of the night after which they could paint with sprays graffiti on the walls of the train yards with images from comics or with their names.

According to Mitchell (2001), hip hop art of graffiti spread to the highest social classes as most influential art figures started displaying their graffiti art in major galleries in Europe, Japan and in the U S. However, in a bid to discourage the underground movement that was already expanding, the New York’s metropolitan authority started responding with dogs, anti bathe acids and undercover police officers to disband the hip hop movement that practiced graffiti art. The beginning of the four components of hip hop was almost the time due to a shared environment in which both cultures evolved. For example, the first renowned deejay was a Jamaican immigrant who introduced his huge sound systems from his native land (Jamaica). With a combination of two turntables, the young man was able to bring together fragments from older records with some of the most popular songs to come up with a continuous flowing music. Further, on hip hop deejays such as Grandmaster and Afrika Bambatta were able to develop better dance records with stimulated dancing. Contest also came up in which the most talented dancer in breakdancing was awarded.Grandmaster Flash accepting an award in 2006.



*A photo of Grandmaster receiving an award*

Cool Herc was later applauded for his enormous contribution to the rise of modern rapping as he spoken interjections in most of his record were splendid. However, hip hop was later linked with other styles such as griots, and blues songs. Notable influence of hip hop culture was the rise of rhythm and blue deejays such as Jocko Henderson.

It is, however, crucial to note that hip hop culture is not all about music but rather an era in which culture blends with aspects such as art, music, fashions and language which is deeply rooted with metaphors that have become consistent and are widely used in the world. Hip hop is not a culture that was planned for but is rather a combination of shared truths among various people all over the world. Hip hop culture can be defined as way through which people use to express themselves or rather one of the most radical rebellions expressed through hijacking and transforming of some of the basic elements of culture and in the process creating a brand new culture owned by the modern generation fully (Alim, 2006).

Some basic factors have led to the spread of hip hop all over the world. For one, hip hop is one of the most honest cultures that individuals love to identify with. The phrase of “keeping it real” coined during hip hop’s early emergence is one of the factors that have subconsciously led to the growth of hip hop culture as people want to identify with the phrase (Alim, 2008). According to the early proponents of the culture artists often did their works of art for the love of art and as a way of expressing social, economic issue that was affecting them and not for commercial purposes. Some of these pioneers were from the ghetto an in their ache to achieve they needed a culture that would be a true reflection of themselves, something they would identify with and be proud of owning. They came up with jazz, blues, rock music. For hip hop culture by the time one thing became boring to the masses another one was already steaming ready to be introduced to the public to replace the old one.

Imagine a world without hip hop today is almost impossible especially among the young generation. The culture has been continuously resilient, and it has become expansive than ever. Hip hop is one of the most accessible cultures and one that is easy to adopt; the culture allows individuals to tell a life story or life experience through art music or fashion. For example in the US exist different types of hip hop such as the dirty south hip hop, west coast hip hop, and the east coast hip hop. These types of hip hop allow people to express their individuality at the same time being part of a collective group of people, who share a common culture. Hip hop serves as an avenue of social change as mots hip hop artist take ideas from the society and spread them to the rest of the world. In such a case there is a likelihood of spreading positive ideas which contribute to social change (Rahn, 2002).

## Hip hop fashion

In the world of fashion, hip hop is regarded as a voice of the laminated rebellious youth who feel rejected by the society. Today it constitutes a multibillion dollar fashion industry that many fashion investors are venturing. Hip hop is a culture that is multifaceted with many subcultures and has become one of the most potent cultures that has succeeded in fighting for the black social identity something that has not been achieved even by some of the hugest social movements.

However, today the hip hop culture has evolved immensely. It is not only a combination of interjections and music but has become one of the hugest forms of expression of the urban lifestyle through corporate gesture and apparel. Since the birth of hip hop culture, hip hop fashion has been in a budding journey that has now flowered into one of the hugest lines of apparel that is purchased by most people. However, most of the fashion developments have majored on men fashion wear. The fashions clothes included both functional and conventional wear such as multicoloured jackets, sheepskin coats, and car coats denim jeans (Nguyen, 2010).

Other forms of fashion that were associated with hip hop fashion were turtlenecks, sneakers, and caps, sweatshirts that are hooded other apparels that were meant for harsh weather conditions. Hip hop fashion also entailed casual items such as other accessories like belts caps, pumas and oversized sunglasses by the 1980’ hip hop culture incorporated baggy apparel that had the capability of disguising the contours of an individual’s body. In the early stages of the 21 century, the hip hop fashion look constituted of caps meant for baseball with labels of Negro leagues and football leagues. The cap is some cases carried imaged of famous hip hop musician and fashion designers. Hip hop fans could be seen teaming up hood sweatshirts with goosed jackets. White baggy t-shirts were the norm in the 1990’s coupled with basketball vests with hockey shirts being the form of expression for most people. In addition, there were hip hop fans who preferred to wear baggy denim apparel, cargo pant in a sluggish manner. However, hip hop culture elevated to incorporate other items such as backpack hiking boots and sports shoes which complemented with well-defined tattoos. The hairstyles in most cases were either a clean-shaven head, plaited hair or dreadlock styles.

On the female side women, fashion consisted of both contemporary wear and needed casual wear. Some of the women were often seen wearing bamboo jewellery, manned chains, bra tops, short skirts, high boots, braid and straight wear weaves. Other fashions styles included the use of Louis Vuitton handbags, false fingernails, and other oversized gold jewellery. At another point, some women would wear apparel that was similar to that of men in the 1990’s. In most cases, female hip hop artists revealed some of the most provocative styles of dressing that were aimed at creating sexual gestures.

From such styles, hip hop has emerged as one of the strongest articulation of the other self among many individuals. In most cases, hip hop fashion has been regarded as been outlandish especially by people who are entwined in the modernist and sophisticated western ways. Hip hop culture becomes unpopular with stylish agencies that are aimed at limiting the expression of the young people. However, most mass media agencies recognize the essence of hip hop fashion and have often exploited it as a way of linking the urban class to a situation of stagnancy. It is due to this condition that hip hop fashion has become more concerned with urban survival something that has seen it become appealing to most young adults all through, Africa, France, Japan and Great Britain. The sub trends later introduced what is now the rap influenced fashion. For example, there exists hardcore rap, gangsta rap.

Hip hop became by default what is now the hip hop fashion. For example, designers of sportswear became the major precursors to the modern trends. Today designers come up with clothing and sportswear that is targeted to the streets, nightclubs and other primary locations for the products. Hip hop has succeeded in creating its fashion trends and patterns with some of the most mutating cultural networks across the globe. It has also blended well with the mainstream fashion as many artists have authenticated the importance of wearing product by designers such as Gucci, Prada, Versace, Tommy, Burberry, Timberland, and Earl. However soon after 1998 branded fashions were later pushed out of the hip hop scene with some rap artists such as Lil Kim acknowledging the importance of designer brand in her performances, hip hop is regarded by most fashion companies as subversive arena through which they can easily influence the attitudes held by young people in the urban areas (Perkins, 1996).

Some of the hip hop moguls today are owners of some of the biggest apparel companies in a bid to promote the hip hop fashion that is almost being crowded out by designer apparels. Most of the companies produce apparels that are a reflection of their musical output synchronized to match their audience; hip hop fashion is one of the best definitions of coolness with hip hop becoming one of the most accredited fashion styles. No wonder the likes of Prince William have adopted the hip hop culture by wearing baseball caps. Cool according to most fashion stylist is well attributing to the wearer if it meets his/her fashion needs.

Multiple themes are one of the characteristics of hip hop fashion which is able to reflect the true inspiration of the people wearing them. Hip hop has had some influence on other forms of fashion. For example, breakdancing has led to dressing wear that is more inclined to breakdancing. For example, most break-dancers would often dress in sportswear such as sneakers, Adidas track pants, t-shirts and padded nylons a sometimes leather apparel (Huq, 2007).

## Hip hop music

The new school of hip hop rappers emerged in the year 1980. The trio African American was at the forefront of introducing fused rap which was a form of hard rock which defined even the mode of feelings from most rappers. Run MDC in most cases recorded for the sake of building their profile. It was one on the labels that took advantage of the growing hip hop music market in the world at the time. Def Jam featured three important innovators such as Beastie Boys, LL Cool J and Public Enemy. These were among the most popular artists at the time. At the time artist were using music and sound records that were electronically derived from other sources. The three groups of singers also invested much of political ideology in their songs. For example, Grandmaster tries to pass on social consciousness through his song, “The message.”

However, between the years 1973-1993 there were significant contributions from a renowned artist by the name De la Soul who produced an album called Tommy boy. There also emerged a section of well-developed female artists such as Queen Latifah. Later on, music from other parts of the world started to make their way into hip hop with the likes of DJ Jazzy making a mark in the hip hop industry. However, one of the hugest hip hop production hit New York in the year 1989 brought about by the dynamic album Straight Outta Compton. The music was characterized by tales of the violence that often occurred in the inner parts of New York City with the likes of Snoop Dog and Tupac Shakur. The emergence led to fuelled antagonism between the east coast hip hop musicians and the west coast pop musicians.

Though hip hop was a music genre that was popular among the urban African America hip hop later became one of the most selling genres of music in the 1990 all over the world. The effects of hip hop music were beyond the limits of America to cities such as Paris, Sydney, Cape Town and Tokyo. The hip hop also generated huge sales in other forms of business linked to hip hop music such as fashion, drinks, automobile and the electronic industry. As the 21 century turned in the hip hop music however hit a crisis which was fuelled by the introduction of digital downloading. Just like any other genres hip hop was affected massively as sales on produced music took a snow dive (Watkins, 1998).

However, unlike other genre hip hop was able to remain solid as the genre that had the most influence on the youth all over the world. Even popular band such as back street boys and the NSYNC started to rely hugely on hip hop music to make their music more popular. The likes of, Mary J Blige and Kirk Franklin also encompassed aspects of hip hop in their genres. In the 21 century, Dr. Dre became a notable figure with his legacy remaining in the air. The music later saw awesome of the greatest innovation in the 21 century through improvements of studio works. Producers were more focused on being creative and were motivated by commercial gained that were obtained from. The theory aspect of hip hop was slowly losing its promises, and the genre developed to what is now known as pop music. The accessibility and the subversive nature of the genre experience in the 1980’s were pushed underground a move that was spearheaded by rappers such as Doom and Mos Def. Later in 2006, the hip hop genre was experiencing a high level of dissatisfaction among fans such as the likes of Nas produce an album by the name hip hop is dead.

According to Perkins (1996) though the effects of hip hop music on society have been widely studied the effect of hip hop music in promoting social awareness, have been few. Hip hop is more than a jus a simple form of entertainment. It is a major part of the contemporary society. According to Purdue, hip hop is *“More than simply entertainment, hip hop is a major part of contemporary identity circuits - networks of philosophies and aesthetics based on blackness, poverty, violence, power, resistance, and capitalist accumulation.”*

Over the years music has been used as a tool of creating social awareness. On this note, hip hop music has not been left behind as it reflects the ideas and conditions of the society in which the artists come from. Hip hop music is perceived as a combination of reality and fiction. For example, most of the hip hop songs produced in America are often a reflection of the economic and social situations experienced in the country at the time the son is being produced. In most cases, groups that feel that they are being oppressed are able to use hip hop music as a way of rebelling against social injustices directed to them (Nguyen, 2017).

Hip hop music has also come a long way in refining some of the most backward cultural norms. For example, the rise of street gangs was a direct rebellion. However, such hang reinforced street education which in some part of the black population was not something that they enjoyed. Hip hop is one of the cultures in which young adults of color are able to express themselves. Hip hop is a reflection of the socio-political problems that are faced by marginalized groups of people. Hip hop music can, therefore, be said to be a driver of social awareness. For example in the early and mid-1990’s hip hop music led to the formation of a movement which communicated the extent of the discontent social climate in the communities. Till date objective of hip hop music is to communicate to the masses the various issue affecting them.

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