

**Culture, Industry, and Hip Hop History: The Corporate World's Role in the  
Development of Hip Hop**

Daniel J. Balaban

*An honors thesis submitted to the History  
Department of Rutgers University,  
written under the supervision of  
Dr. Minkah Makalani.*

Rutgers College  
New Brunswick, NJ  
May 2010

## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Chapter One. The Generation Before “Rapper’s Delight”: 1973-1979.....	20
Chapter Two. Hip Hop’s First Corporate Influence: The Robinson family, the rise and fall of Sugar Hill Records, and The Sugar Hill Gang’s classic “Rapper’s Delight”.....	37
Chapter Three. Kurtis Blow, Independent Record Companies, and Subtle Corporate Investments .....	55
Chapter Four. Def Jam Recordings and the Russell Simmons Empire.....	69
Chapter Five. Yo! MTV Raps and Hip Hop Publications.....	75
Chapter Six. The Expanded Marketability of Hip Hop Culture.....	86
Chapter Seven. The Effects of Corporate Investment in Hip Hop Culture.....	92
Bibliography.....	101

## Introduction

Over the last thirty-seven years Hip Hop has slowly but surely become a staple of American society and has achieved notoriety all over the world. Not only is Hip Hop music consistently one of the highest selling genres of music of any kind on the market today, but Hip Hop as a whole is highly influential in dictating trends of all kinds as well. On a macro level, large corporate entities use Hip Hop as a productive means of product promotion, marketing, and advertising. On a micro level Hip Hop dictates fashion, hairstyle, dialect, car choice, everyday mannerisms, musical preference, and even common greetings. The term Hip Hop itself has almost become a synonym for popular culture. Hip Hop is not a phenomenon. As it enters its fifth decade in existence, it is safe to say that Hip Hop is here to stay. With this in mind, the question becomes what is Hip Hop and where did it come from?

As a child, as a teenager, and as a young adult growing up during the end of the twentieth century and during the beginning of the twenty-first century in an urban fringe town in Essex County, New Jersey, I lived through a very unique time in American cultural history in a very interesting environment. Although I did not think much of this period or my surroundings at the time, during my first year of college I began reflecting on my preteen and teenage years. I began to wonder if I had been a product of the Hip Hop generation. More importantly, I also began to wonder what exactly the Hip Hop generation was. Throughout my four years at Rutgers University, I have been fortunate enough to acquire a superb formal education in modern American history, specifically urban American history. However, I did not have this historical education when I was in middle school and high school and as a result, I simply accepted the world around me without much questioning. I grew up and went to school during a time when people wore fitted hats, oversized throwback jerseys, baggy Jeans, and Timberland boots

because they were the popular fashion styles at the time. However, I did not question how they became popular fashions. It was a time when people greeted each other with dap handshakes and half-hugs, played street-basketball every day after school, and participated in freestyle rap battles at lunchtime and at school football games. Most importantly, it was a time when the majority of the people around me listened exclusively to Hip Hop and gangsta rap music. I never really questioned why people lived these kinds of lifestyles, partook in these activities, and chose to listen to these genres of music. At the time I was completely unaware of the historical circumstances that produced the cultural conditions conducive to these types of lifestyle decisions. I did not understand the history of Hip Hop and the complexities of its culture. I simply lived with its effects.

I decided to write this honors thesis through the Rutgers University History Department because I wanted to understand the origins of the popular culture that played a large role in shaping my youth. After conducting extensive research on Hip Hop culture, a variety of facts have become clear. Hip Hop originated in the South Bronx in 1973, developed slowly throughout the decade, and existed as a musical, social, and cultural localized youth phenomenon and performance art form confined to the Bronx and parts of Uptown Manhattan until the fall of 1979. Hip Hop culture aficionado Bill Adler claims that although “the Bronx in the late 70s was the American poster-child for urban decay,” the youth living in the area at the time “came from poverty and conquered the world” through Hip Hop.<sup>1</sup> In order to truly understand the essence of Hip Hop culture, it is necessary to comprehend the fact that Hip Hop was born in the southwestern section of the Bronx borough of New York City in the fall of 1973. This youth street culture, which was not actually officially dubbed Hip Hop until pioneer Afrika Bambaataa

---

<sup>1</sup> This quote is from an interview with Bill Adler recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

went to Europe in 1981 and began calling the South Bronx youth lifestyle and performance art Hip Hop, formed as both a product of and a response to the adverse environment of the South Bronx during the 1960s and early 1970s. Throughout this ten to fifteen year period, the South Bronx was arguably the most neglected, decayed, and dangerous area in the entire United States of America.

The region known as “the South Bronx” is actually not a specific singular neighborhood but rather it is a group of neighborhoods located in the southwestern portion of New York City’s Bronx borough. While there is debate over which neighborhoods exactly constitute the South Bronx, it is clear that sections of the borough such as Hunts Point, Mott Haven, and Port Morris each make up the South Bronx. According to former Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer, “the term ‘the South Bronx’ did not exist before the 1960’s.” He contends that in reality the term “was really just an invention, a shorthand way to describe physically decaying neighborhoods, rising crime and rising poverty.”<sup>2</sup> Before the 1960s, the Bronx was divided into the West Bronx and East Bronx. In essence, the term “South Bronx” originated during the 1960s as a racial construct used to define areas in the southern portion of the borough containing nearly homogeneous populations of low-income African Americans and Latinos. Therefore, most of the borough south of the Cross Bronx Expressway and west of the borough’s Castle Hill section is designated as the South Bronx for geographically, socioeconomic, and racial reasons.

Beginning in the 1960s and escalating during the 1970s, the South Bronx declined rapidly and its residents fell victim to horrendous, borderline inhumane living conditions. Throughout this period, urban decay and neglect plagued the area and residents suffered at the hands of

---

<sup>2</sup> This quote is from an interview with former Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer published in a The New York Times article: "NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT - SOUTH BRONX - NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT - SOUTH BRONX - Mapping the Lower Bronx - It's South, but South of What? - NYTimes.com." *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia*. Web. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/19/nyregion/neighborhood-report-south-bronx-mapping-lower-bronx-it-s-south-but-south-what.html?pagewanted=1>>.

systemic poverty, street gang terrorism, and drug infestation. In his community development case study entitled Organizing the South Bronx, Jim Rooney argues that unemployment caused by urban deindustrialization, flawed federal governmental public policy initiatives such as high-rise public housing projects, and failed local political leadership caused the South Bronx to rapidly decline during the 1960s and 70s. He also blames racism, persistent arson, high levels of crime, the creation of the Cross Bronx Expressway, and the rise of a ‘ghetto underclass’ for crippling the structure of the South Bronx.<sup>3</sup> The urban destruction that haunted the South Bronx throughout the 1960s and early 1970s produced the localized adverse social, economic, and political conditions that facilitated the development of Hip Hop culture beginning in 1973.

In *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* author Robert Caro illustrates the magnitude of the physical destruction of the South Bronx in 1972, one year before Hip Hop’s inception. In his book, Caro describes the state of East Tremont, a section of the South Bronx, after the Cross Bronx Expressway had been completed that year. According to Caro, East Tremont as a whole was “carpeted so thickly with pieces of shattered glass that they [shined] in the sun” and “garbage, soaked mattresses, bits of broken furniture and, everywhere small pieces of jagged steel [filled] the gutters.” He also writes that during the construction of the highway the neighborhood “had had the look of blitzkrieged London” and after construction it “looked as if London might have looked, if after the bombs, the troops had fought their way through it from house to house. It had the look of a jungle.”<sup>4</sup> During the same period, 1970 to 1975 to be exact, “there were 68,456 fires in the Bronx- more than 33 each night. Most of these were the South Bronx burning.”<sup>5</sup> The African American and Latino youth that remained in this

---

<sup>3</sup> Rooney, Jim. *Organizing the South Bronx*. Albany: State University of New York, 1995. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Caro, Robert. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> Jenson, Robert. “Introduction.” *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx*. New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1979

area after the construction of the expressway was complete in 1972 formed Hip Hop out of the rubble one year later.

The poverty that ravaged the South Bronx enabled youth in the area to begin experimenting with alternate forms of entertainment. Chuck D, social activist and founding member of Public Enemy, remembers that Hip Hop was born when impoverished South Bronx “people started to look at old turntables and say ‘maybe we can actually make music out of the records that happen to be laying around’ and they made something out of nothing.”<sup>6</sup> According to often-controversial Hip Hop figure Ice T, “Hip Hop would have never been invented if everybody around it was rich because it was a music made with existing music.”<sup>7</sup> Hip Hop formed spontaneously in the aftermath of an extended period of urban destruction in New York City that is not comparable to many other periods or historical events in the developed world. Hip Hop developed as a local party scene, form of artistic self-expression, and as an outlet for the marginalized New York City generation that grew up amidst severe urban decay and poverty that engulfed the majority of their borough. The South Bronx in 1973 was a virtual war zone where gangs ruled the streets, drugs were easier to find than jobs, and apartment buildings went up in flames daily. Hip Hop was born under extreme social duress but thrived nevertheless and developed into both a lifestyle and the dominant youth culture in the South Bronx during the 1970s.

How did a local party culture and an African American and Latino youth lifestyle born in the most impoverished urban area of the United States of America in the 1970s drastically transform beginning in 1979, become commodified, and spread worldwide as a popular music

---

<sup>6</sup> This quote is from an interview with Chuck D recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip Hop Part One*, 4 Oct 2004. DVD.

<sup>7</sup> This quote is from an interview with Ice T recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip Hop Part One*, 4 Oct 2004. DVD.

genre, corporate marketing tool, and highly influential form of popular culture? I originally conceived the idea for this project around this question because for years I had more questions about Hip Hop than answers. For instance, I always wondered where Hip Hop originated? Did Hip Hop develop as a social movement with any similar characteristics to the Civil Rights Movement or Black Power Movement? I had always been under the impression that Hip Hop was supposed to be socially conscious music, although I soon learned otherwise, and I wanted to find the point in time when this changed. After preliminary research on the subject, I began to wonder how a localized South Bronx party culture invented by marginalized African American and Latino youth in the early 1970s became a marketable music genre that is still seen in the Bronx, but now can also commonly be heard playing in BMWs in affluent White suburbs, on satellite radio stations in rural Nebraska, and by anyone across the globe that has access to a cable television set. It has become clear that several key historical events throughout the last four decades caused this radical transformation. It has also become clear that although a multitude of factors have facilitated the development of Hip Hop culture since 1973, the most significant and fundamental changes to the culture have been made via various corporate entities and their decisions to invest in Hip Hop beginning in late 1979.

Over the years many scholars have written about Hip Hop and its multifaceted, dynamic, and often controversial nature. Some of these scholars have included a discussion on the commercialization of Hip Hop and the impact of corporate investment in their works. For example, in Hip Hop America, author, music critic, and former Billboard magazine music editor Nelson George argues that Hip Hop is “the ultimate capitalist tool.” He cites multiple examples of Hip Hop culture’s influence over popular fashion and demonstrates the viability and sustainability of Hip Hop as a corporate marketing tool. George describes in depth how



corporate America uses Hip Hop to promote various products and appeal to youth of all races.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars provide historical evidence of long-term corporate investment in African American musical genres such as Hip Hop. In “Sold Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music,” Mark Anthony Neal argues that over forty years ago music mogul Berry Gordy set the stage for the eventual corporate utilization of Hip Hop culture when he “institutionalized black popular music as a viable and profitable fixture across America’s popular landscape in the form of the Motown Corporation.”<sup>9</sup> He cites historical instances of corporate involvement in various African American cultural practices and forms of music and emphasizes the important role that corporations have played in Hip Hop’s development.<sup>10</sup>

In Other People’s Property: A shadow history of Hip Hop in White America, author Jason Tanz offers a different scholarly perspective by writing as a white Hip Hop consumer. He discusses the commercial, mainstream, and economic success of the culture and argues that corporations use Hip Hop as a marketing ploy in an attempt to appeal largely to white audiences, which Tanz believes are on a “never-ending quest to be down.”<sup>11</sup> Tanz also gives an excellent synopsis of corporate Hip Hop marketing strategies. In Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation, which is a literary work that most consider to be the definitive book on Hip Hop, Jeff Chang traces the history of Hip Hop culture, early independent record companies, Hip Hop’s commercialization, and the reasoning behind corporate utilization of Hip Hop culture. For example, he states that beginning in the late 1980s large companies such as “Nike, Adidas, and Pepsi searched for new markets” and found that appealing to young, urban, African American,

---

<sup>8</sup> George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Viking, 1998. Print.

<sup>9</sup> Neal, Marc Anthony. "Sold Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music." *Popular Music and Society* (1997): 117-35. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Tanz, Jason. *Other People's Property: a Shadow History of Hip-hop in White America*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2007. Print.

and Latino consumers through Hip Hop marketing strategies generated new revenue and in time young white people also joined this market as Hip Hop increased in popularity amongst mainstream audiences.<sup>12</sup> In The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture, Bakari Kitwana writes about issues within contemporary African American culture. Although he does not write about Hip Hop culture exclusively in his book, Kitwana discusses the effect of mainstream Hip Hop's perpetuation of negative themes and imagery on African American culture as a whole. He also claims that in order to be of the "hip hop generation" individuals must have been born between 1965 and 1984, which is important because it indicates that Hip Hop enthusiasts born later than 1984 are of a different generation.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these scholars views on the corporate utilization of Hip Hop culture, in To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic author Dr. William Jelani Cobb focuses on the artistic elements of Hip Hop culture and in large part views artists as being responsible for Hip Hop's development over the years.<sup>14</sup> However, author, activist, and Hip Hop author Kevin Powell argues that, "as a result of a corporate stranglehold" on the culture, "Hip-hop, which was once vibrant, energetic, and fresh, is now materialistic, hedonistic, misogynistic, and as shallow as some of the films and TV shows created in Hollywood."<sup>15</sup> More importantly Powell claims, "The corporate takeover of hip-hop has taken away much of the creativity and genius" of the culture and states, "the real challenge is to understand why hip-hop has deteriorated from the golden era into what we have now and how corporate interests have played

---

<sup>12</sup> Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print, p. 417

<sup>13</sup> Kitwana, Bakari. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*. New York: Basic Civitas, 2002. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Cobb, William Jelani. *To the Break of Dawn: a Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic*. New York: New York UP, 2007. Print.

<sup>15</sup> Powell, Kevin. "My Culture at the Crossroads." *Newsweek* 9 Oct. 2000: 66. *Wilson Web*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

a role in that.”<sup>16</sup> Each of these scholars present claims about the relationship between Hip Hop culture and America’s corporate sector that are important to consider in light of the main argument of this thesis.

Virtually all notable Hip Hop scholars recognize that beginning with Sugar Hill Records in late 1979 small independent record companies, some previously in existence and others newly formed, began signing MCs and releasing rap records on vinyl, which allowed audiences outside of the South Bronx to consume Hip Hop as a recorded, tangible commodity for the first time. Most also acknowledge that the culture has become completely commercialized over the years by corporations and used as a marketing tool. However, few scholars spend significant time in their books describing the earliest stages of corporate investment in the culture between 1979 and 1986 and the sequence of events that spurred the process of commercialization. Most do not see small independent record companies as corporate investors and few make the direct connections between the earliest independent record companies and later, larger corporate investors such as Warner Brothers, Quincy Jones Entertainment, and Nike. I see all record companies regardless of their size as being corporate entities and recognize the undeniable importance of early independent record companies’ initial corporate investments in Hip Hop culture. I also see the history of corporate investment in Hip Hop culture as being a chronological process in which independent record companies in the early 1980s transformed Hip Hop from a South Bronx performance art, unadulterated form of artistic self expression, and youth cultural phenomenon into an easily consumable popular form of entertainment, enabling the culture to be commercialized by corporate giants in the future.

---

<sup>16</sup> Powell, Kevin. "Hip-Hop Is the Most Important Youth Culture on the Planet" Interview. *Time* 22 Sept. 2000. Print.

In addition, several other elements of this thesis differ from traditional scholarly arguments. For example, most Hip Hop scholars do not discuss in depth the achievements of early independent record companies and do not address how the success of labels such as Sugar Hill Records, Enjoy Records, and Spring Records eventually enabled individuals such as Rick Rubin and Tom Silverman to establish more powerful independent record companies such as Def Jam and Tommy Boy. Also, most scholars do not outwardly argue that early 1980s Hip Hop films such as *Wild Style* and *Beat Street* played the same role in spreading Hip Hop to audiences outside of New York City as independent record companies at the same time did. Few credit other subtle investments in Hip Hop culture during the early 1980s with proving that Hip Hop could be sustainable long-term as a form of international popular culture and as a highly effective corporate marketing tool. I recognize the importance of scholars' arguments throughout this thesis and refer to them at times but my primary arguments draw on my own analysis of primary source materials.

This thesis contends that initial investments in Hip Hop by local New York City and New Jersey based independent record companies and other small corporate entities paved the way for large corporate conglomerates to use Hip Hop for profit as well. Between 1973 and 1979 Hip Hop culture, with the exception of graffiti art, was not visible outside of New York City. DJing, MCing, and breakdancing were restricted to the Bronx and parts of Upper Manhattan. At first, youth in these areas experienced Hip Hop by attending DJs' parties at local Boys and Girls Clubs, school gymnasiums, community centers in public housing projects, and multipurpose rooms in apartment buildings. As Hip Hop expanded, DJs began to perform at outdoor block parties, in parks, and at local nightclubs. According to Hip Hop's first photographer Joe Conzo Jr., during this period the goals of Hip Hop had nothing to do with making money. In fact on a

telephone interview from his home, Conzo stated, “it was a young group of kids rebelling” and “playing their mom’s records” at local jams throughout the desolate South Bronx.<sup>17</sup> Michael Holman, creator of the television show *Graffiti Rock*, a show that got cancelled after one episode, furthers Conzo’s claim by contending, “Hip Hop was truly a response to these kids being marginalized. It was a way of them saying ‘we are not nobodies, we are somebody.’ Hip Hop is really ‘look at me’.”<sup>18</sup> Hip Hop was a lifestyle aimed at having fun, garnering respect on the streets, and indulging in inexpensive forms of artistic self-expression. It had no connections to the corporate music industry whatsoever. However, in 1979 this all changed when Sylvia Robinson of Sugar Hill Records conceived the idea of recording MCs’ raps and distributing them nationwide as a new genre of popular music. This moment served as the first corporate investment in Hip Hop culture. In this honors thesis I am tracing various forms of corporate investment in Hip Hop culture and the effects that such investments have had on facilitating the development and transformation of Hip Hop as a whole. Specifically, I am arguing that the achievements of several independent record companies between 1979 and 1986, as well as a variety of other small-scale corporate investments in Hip Hop culture during the same period, proved Hip Hop to be profitable thus leading corporate conglomerates to utilize Hip Hop as an economic investment throughout the next two and a half decades, which in turn accelerated and ultimately completed Hip Hop’s transformation from a South Bronx artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon into a highly marketable, commodified, commercialized form of popular entertainment.

The issues of realness, legitimacy, and authenticity have always played an integral role in Hip Hop culture. These issues have sparked controversy and have been at the core of many Hip

---

<sup>17</sup> Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.

<sup>18</sup> This quote is from an interview with Michael Holman recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip Hop Part One*, 4 Oct 2004. DVD.

Hop debates since the 1970s. Scholars, fans, music critics, and artists have engaged in formal and informal philosophical discussions about the authenticity of different aspects of Hip Hop. Throughout this project I argue that contemporary Hip Hop music and culture are fundamentally dissimilar from the youth street culture that was born in the Bronx in 1973 and flourished as a performance art until late 1979. As a result, questions of authenticity revolving around Hip Hop have drastically changed over time. Nevertheless, as long as people have spun records and rapped over sampled music, questions of authenticity have persisted. For the purpose of this project such questions are viewed in two contexts; authenticity as it applies to the South Bronx Hip Hop scene throughout the 1970s and early 1980s and authenticity as it applies to the commercialized, mainstream form of Hip Hop culture that has persisted since the late 1980s.

In order to understand the argument that beginning in 1979 independent record companies, most notably Sugar Hill Records, commodified Hip Hop culture by recording MCs' raps onto 12-inch vinyl records for retail distribution and damaged the culture's authenticity in the process, it is necessary to comprehend the importance of authentic 1970s cultural institutions in the Bronx and Harlem. For example, Hip Hop was born in an apartment building located at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx. The building, which was erected in 1969, served the Bronx community by providing affordable housing to low-income residents and keeping them off the waiting lists for high-rise public housing projects. According to the spokesperson for Save 1520, an organization founded to combat gentrification efforts threatening to make the building's affordable housing status obsolete, throughout the early 1970s 1520 Sedgwick Avenue "made it possible for working families like DJ Kool Herc's to thrive and create the communities that gave rise to hip-hop."<sup>19</sup> It is clear that this apartment building served a very important purpose to its South Bronx community during the 1970s, a decade in which the Bronx witnessed

---

<sup>19</sup> *Save1520 - Filesharing, Digital Media, Music Downloading*. Web. 28 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.save1520.org/>>.

unparalleled urban decay. 1520 Sedgwick Avenue existed as an authentic Bronx cultural institution by providing both the socioeconomic and physical settings that made Hip Hop's creation possible and by standing as a strong, private-sector affordable housing complex that did not fall victim to arson or condemnation during the most turbulent of years.

In addition, nightclubs and local parks functioned as authentic cultural institutions in the Bronx and Harlem during the mid to late 1970s as well. In 1974, a variety of clubs throughout sections of the Bronx and Harlem began to embrace Hip Hop as a performance art and contracted DJs, most notably Kool Herc, to hold jams in their establishments. In Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation, Jeff Chang describes this process. After becoming well known for his house parties on Sedgwick Avenue and the surrounding neighborhood, Chang writes that local clubs such as Twilight Zone, which was located on Jerome Avenue, and The Hevalo Club often featured DJ Kool Herc and his crew of MCs.<sup>20</sup> Soon other local Hip Hop DJs, who had built their reputations up throughout the house party scene in the Bronx as Herc had before them, began spinning at clubs such as Harlem World, Savoy Manor, Your Spot, Plaza Tunnel, and many others.<sup>21</sup> These clubs were cultural institutions within their Bronx and Manhattan communities. They provided neighborhood DJs, which were Hip Hop's central figures throughout the 1970s, with a place to hold organized jams, demonstrate their artistic skills, and solidify their reputations within the close-knit Hip Hop community. In order to be allowed to deejay in such a cultural institution, DJs had to be established within the inner circle of the local Hip Hop community. If not, people would not attend the functions. The arduous process of becoming well known and respected as a DJ on the local Bronx house party circuit

---

<sup>20</sup> Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print, p. 81-82

<sup>21</sup> "Hip Hop Music." *Mrwiggles.biz*. Web. 12 Mar. 2010. <[http://www.mrwiggles.biz/hip\\_hop\\_music.htm](http://www.mrwiggles.biz/hip_hop_music.htm)>.

granted DJs a sense of authenticity. Once established, playing in the clubs gave Bronx DJs a further sense of authenticity, legitimacy, and notoriety within their communities.

Soon, as Chang explains, Hip Hop jams moved to outdoor parks in the South Bronx, most notably Cedar Park, which was located at the corner of Cedar Avenue, Sedgwick Avenue, and West 179<sup>th</sup> Street. This occurred during the summer months both because of the nice weather and because gangs made club jams unsafe.<sup>22</sup> In order to hold a highly attended, successful park jam at a cultural institution such as Cedar Park, DJs had to have a well-established, positive reputation within the South Bronx Hip Hop community. At first, DJ Kool Herc dominated the outdoor jams at Cedar Park because of his impeccably large sound system and status as Hip Hop's founder. However, over time other DJs learned from Herc and began holding large outdoor jams as well. During the mid to late 1970s, the Hip Hop community bestowed authenticity upon DJs based on the size and volume of their sound systems, the rarity of their records and quality of their breaks, and the crowd excitement generated by their MCs. Performing in parks like Cedar Park granted a sense of authenticity to DJs and MCs. These performers' statuses became even more authentic if their jams garnered large crowds, if their parties lasted for long-periods, and if their names were well known throughout the community. This authenticity was central to Hip Hop culture between 1973 and 1979. Without it, it would be nearly impossible to become recognized within the culture.

Since its inception as a genre of popular music, the idea of realness in Hip Hop has been quite complex. In his 1999 publication "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened With Assimilation," author Kembrew McLeod writes about how Hip Hop artists deal with this issue and the paradox of being "inside a mainstream culture they had, in part, defined

---

<sup>22</sup> Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print, p. 79



themselves as being against” originally.<sup>23</sup> He points out that Hip Hop artists stay true to “this identity by invoking the concept of authenticity “ and seek to “draw clearly demarcated boundaries around their culture.”<sup>24</sup> McLeod conducts research on the commonly used phrase “keeping it real” and concludes that its “meaning changes depending on the context in which it is evoked.”<sup>25</sup> He finds that concepts such as staying true to one’s self, being black, being involved in underground Hip Hop culture, embracing the culture’s old school roots, and claiming to be hard and from the streets are each characteristics of being “real.”<sup>26</sup> On the other hand he finds that following mass trends, being white, identifying with the commercial aspect of the industry, embracing the mainstream aspects of the culture, and being soft and from the suburbs to be “fake.”<sup>27</sup>

Hip Hop scholars almost always include a discussion of these types of artistic inner-turmoil concerning the question of “realness.” For instance, scholar Michael Eric Dyson has studied Hip Hop’s authenticity issues in-depth and continues to be perplexed by them.<sup>28</sup> Mark Anthony Neal has gone as far as to argue that “the literal demise of viable commercial venues for Hip-Hop performance” has ultimately “rendered questions of authenticity, as related to mass commodification, obsolete” and contends, “contemporary notions of authenticity within Hip-Hop have little to do with aesthetic quality, and more to do with narrative commitments to the realities of urban life-the more vivid, the more real.”<sup>29</sup> Neal also worked with co-editor Murray Forman to compile eight essays on Hip Hop’s authenticity questions, written by scholars such as

---

<sup>23</sup> McLeod, Kembrew. "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened With Assimilation." *The Journal of Communication* 49.4 (1999): 134-50. Wiley InterScience. Web. 12 Mar. 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Herbert, Wray. "The Making of a Hip-Hop Intellectual." *U.S. News and World Report* 4 Nov. 1996: 48-49. *Wilson Web*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Neal, Marc Anthony. "Sold Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music." *Popular Music and Society* (1997): EBSCOhost. Web. 24 Oct. 2009, p. 130

Alan Light, Paul Gilroy, and Michael Eric Dyson, and published them in That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader. In an overview of part two of the book focused on authenticity entitled "No Time for Fake Niggas: Hip-Hop Culture and the Authenticity Debate" Neal ponders what the value is in "living in the most insidious crucible of urban disaffection" and concludes that in current Hip Hop culture such claims are extremely valuable when such identification "translates into CD unit sales and regular rotation on the video channel of your choice."<sup>30</sup> Also, in "It's a Family Affair," Gilroy is troubled by the term "the hood" and asks, "If the hood is the essence of where blackness can be found, which hood are we talking about? How do we weigh the achievements of one hood against the achievements of another?"<sup>31</sup> In reality, there are countless questions such as these related to the concept of authenticity. The concepts of authenticity and realness have played crucial roles throughout the five decades of Hip Hop's existence. The many authenticity issues surrounding Hip Hop's history resonate strongly in the central argument of this project as well.

In order to understand the overarching argument of this project, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the term "corporate." Throughout this thesis I will be arguing that the corporate world has been responsible for developing and transforming Hip Hop culture since late 1979. Economic corporate entities take a variety of forms. They can be small independent record companies such as Sugar Hill Records and Enjoy Records or they can be music industry giants such as MCA Records and Universal Records. Corporate can also refer to all sorts of businesses such as publishing companies, film and television production studios, and media conglomerates. Corporations take the form of Fortune 500 companies such as PepsiCo, General

---

<sup>30</sup> Neal, Mark Anthony. "No Time for Fake Niggas: Hip-Hop Culture and the Authenticity Debates." *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony. Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print, p. 58.

<sup>31</sup> Gilroy, Paul. "It's a Family Affair." *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print, p. 89.

Motors, and Chevron as well. Corporate investment in Hip Hop culture refers to the act of corporations of all kinds using Hip Hop as an economic tool for monetary profit. These large-scale investments in turn transformed the African American and Latino youth party culture and artistic lifestyle as it existed in the South Bronx and several other small areas of New York City between 1973 and 1979 into a highly marketable, commodified, commercialized form of popular entertainment available worldwide. This project is broken down in chapters both thematically and chronologically and is designed to explore Hip Hop's history, development, and most significant transitions with specific emphases on corporate utilization of the culture.

## Chapter One

### The Generation Before “Rapper’s Delight”: 1973-1979

Joe Conzo Jr., the grandson of civil rights activist and South Bronx community organizer Dr. Evelina Antonetty, grew up in the South Bronx and should be universally recognized as being one of the most important figures in the history of Hip Hop culture. Unfortunately little is known of Conzo outside of New York City. Most people continue to be unaware of the contributions he made to the culture by visually recording Hip Hop functions and figures during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In his October 4, 2005 piece in the New York Times, staff-writer David Gonzalez claimed that Conzo is “the man who took Hip-Hop’s baby pictures.”<sup>32</sup> Joe Conzo Jr. first took up photography as a reserved, chubby pre-teen in 1972. He remembers that he quickly became enthralled by his new hobby because it was an excellent “communication tool, and it was great because women-girls at that time-loved to be photographed.”<sup>33</sup> Conzo’s skills progressed steadily throughout the decade, and he eventually became Hip Hop’s first photographer. By 1978 he had become well known throughout South Bronx High School for his photos and Cold Crush Brothers member DJ Tony Tone, who he had met the previous year, approached him about photographing his up and coming group at a jam. Conzo photographed the Cold Crush Brothers at *Your Spot*, a club and Hip Hop cultural institution located at Webster Avenue and 181<sup>st</sup> street, became the group’s official photographer, and went on to capture the earliest days of Hip Hop in the South Bronx through his lens.<sup>34</sup> Joe Conzo Jr. photographed Hip Hop jams at school gymnasiums, local Boys and Girls Clubs, public housing projects, and clubs.

---

<sup>32</sup> Gonzalez, David. "The Man Who Took Hip Hop's Baby Pictures." *New York Times* 4 Oct. 2005. Print.

<sup>33</sup> Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 193.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

He also captured DJs, MCs, breakdancers, graffiti artists, and his South Bronx surroundings. Without his photographic accounts, the history of Hip Hop would be incomplete.

Before various corporate entities realized the high marketability of Hip Hop, enabled its commercialization, distributed it as a tangible commodity, and transformed it into one of the most popular music genres and forms of entertainment in the world, Hip Hop existed as a localized artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon born in the South Bronx and eventually spreading to other areas of New York City. The culture's beginnings date back to 1973 when eighteen year old Jamaican immigrant Clive Campbell, better known as DJ Kool Herc, threw a back to school party for his little sister Cindy in the recreation room of an apartment building located in the far western portion of the South Bronx. As Chang indicates, by the time DJ Kool Herc threw this party he had already been heavily influenced by the sociopolitical and musical cultures of his native Jamaica. He grew up in Jamaica between 1955 and 1967, a period in which the country endured severe political conflict, violence, and unrest. However, through all of this turmoil, music remained a critical part of Jamaican culture. Musicians often threw outdoor parties and concerts where they showed off their tremendous sound systems. These parties gave young people the opportunity to temporarily escape from the violence around them. As a young boy, Clive Campbell witnessed all of the struggles plaguing his native Jamaica and learned from the island's sound system operators and musical traditions.<sup>35</sup> An analysis of Chang's arguments makes it is clear that both his experiences as a young boy growing up in an extremely turbulent sociopolitical climate and his exposure to unique Jamaican musical traditions prepared him for life in the South Bronx and enabled him to create an innovative musical culture in his new environment.

---

<sup>35</sup> Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print, p. 21-39

On August 11, 1973 DJ Kool Herc created Hip Hop in the recreation room of an apartment building located at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx and deejaying became the first element of Hip Hop culture. DJ Kool Herc moved to the South Bronx in 1967, three years before street gangs composed of misguided, marginalized youth began to terrorize the area, which had already suffered from the effects of deindustrialization, arson, and other socioeconomic and physical ills of urban decay<sup>36</sup>. These gangs made many aspects of life in the South Bronx difficult for youth, including recreational and social activities. For example, teenagers often frequented disco-oriented clubs throughout the city beginning in the late 1960s. However, according to Hip Hop author and journalist Peter Shapiro, street gangs had a serious, detrimental effect on this club scene after 1970. He argues that gangs made disco clubs “intolerable with their menacing presence.”<sup>37</sup> Discos failed to draw large crowds from the South Bronx and other low-income African American and Latino neighborhoods, not only because many of the teens in the area did not identify with the culture surrounding disco, but more importantly because many of the most prominent clubs’ cover charges were too expensive for South Bronx youth to afford.<sup>38</sup> It is evident that as of 1973, adolescents and young adults from the area were eager for a new musical culture and affordable recreational activity to embrace. Therefore, when DJ Kool Herc threw his back to school party in August of 1973, a party with cheap admission and no disco music, teenagers from all over the predominantly African American and Latino, low-income sections of South Bronx were excited to attend. They were not disappointed.

---

<sup>36</sup> This information is from a Hip Hop timeline constructed by Jeff Chang published in: Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Shapiro, Peter. *The Rough Guide to Hip-hop*. 2nd ed. London: Rough Guides, 2005. Print, p. 212

<sup>38</sup> *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

The success of Kool Herc's first party garnered him a substantial following, led him to throw many more parties throughout the South Bronx, and created a new youth party scene. Kool Herc became a local celebrity overnight after performing with his Mic Controller, also known as a master of ceremonies, an emcee, or an MC, Coke La Rock at what Cold Crush Brothers member Jerry Dee Lewis referred to as the first and "most prolific jam in the history of Hip Hop."<sup>39</sup> At this party Herc hooked up his sound system, which consisted of his personal set of turntables and an amplifier commonly used with guitars, and played twelve-inch vinyl records for the crowd of youth in attendance.<sup>40</sup> The combination of an extremely loud sound system, a superb musical selection, Herc's captivating Jamaican-influenced style, and entrance fees of 25 and 50 cents for girls and guys respectively made this first party a tremendous success. Herc's sound system in particular garnered the jam extensive positive publicity. Jerry Dee Lewis recalls that at his first party DJ Kool Herc "had these really big speakers that had the bass in your stomach and you could hear every instrument clearly".<sup>41</sup> Lewis also remembers, "everybody that was somebody was there. You had Eldorado Mike, the Original Clark Kent, the Nigga Twins, Sa-Sa, Bo-Bo, James Bond, Rossy, Trixie, Miss Ann, Sister Bu, Li'l Bit, Phase 2, The Nine Crew- all the hustlers, players, and everybody else that had heard about the jam."<sup>42</sup>

Over the course of the next several years DJ Kool Herc's parties became weekend traditions for youth growing up in the South Bronx. Herc's reputation expanded as he became well known for his oversized sound system and his superb musical selection and people from all

---

<sup>39</sup> This quote is from an interview with Jerry Dee Lewis published in: Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p.194-197

<sup>40</sup> Shapiro, Peter. *The Rough Guide to Hip-hop*. 2nd ed. London: Rough Guides, 2005. Print, p. 212

<sup>41</sup> This quote is from an interview with Jerry Dee Lewis published in: Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 194-197

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

around began to flock to his parties. His following grew rapidly and Herc soon began playing at larger establishments, such as the 183<sup>rd</sup> Street PAL, clubs like the Executive Playhouse and the Hevalo Club, and eventually outdoor parks, most famously Cedar Park.<sup>43</sup> He played songs such as “ ‘It’s Just Begun,’ ‘Bongo Rock,’ ‘Apache,’ ‘The Mexican,’ ‘Get Ready’ by Rare Earth, ‘Yellow Sunshine,’ ‘Listen to Me,’ ‘Get Into Something,’ ‘Voodoo,’ ‘Hijack,’ and the James Brown classic ‘Give it Up or Turn it Loose’ ”.<sup>44</sup> However, DJ Kool Herc’s greatest and most lasting accomplishment came when he began utilizing what become known as “breakbeats” at his jams. As more and more people began attending his parties, Herc realized that the majority of the audience members reacted strongly to certain sections of each record he played. Specifically, he noticed that as the part of a record known as the break hit, the dancers in the crowd began to dance aggressively and the party got better for the few moments that that particular part of the record played. Herc witnessed his audience’s reactions to the break in each record and decided that he should emphasize his records’ breaks more at his parties. After coming to this realization, DJ Kool Herc started using two turntables and playing breaks continuously for long periods at his parties. Herc’s revolutionary use of the breakbeat set the stage for b-boys, which were the people in the crowd that danced in a unique manner during his breaks, to become an integral part of Hip Hop culture.

DJ Kool Herc’s emphasis on the breakbeat at his jams allowed breakdancing to blossom and eventually become the second element of Hip Hop culture in the greater South Bronx Hip Hop community. According to Herc, “I noticed that people used to wait for a particular part of the record, and I started two records, I started prolonging the records and breaks. For instance

---

<sup>43</sup> Shapiro, Peter. *The Rough Guide to Hip-hop*. 2nd ed. London: Rough Guides, 2005. Print, p. 212

<sup>44</sup> This quote is from an interview with Jerry Dee Lewis published in: Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 194-197



James Brown ‘clap your hands, stomp your feet, clap your hands, stomp your feet,’ then I get another one to extend that part ‘clap your hands, clap clap your hands.’ I called that part of the record the merry-go-round.”<sup>45</sup> Beginning in the 1970s these deejaying techniques utilized first by Kool Herc and then by his successors allowed breakdancing to flourish as a localized performance art and critical component of Hip Hop culture. B-boys, also known as breakers, break boys, and breakdancers, played a very important role in Hip Hop during the 1970s and early to mid-1980s. After developing their skills at early jams throughout the South Bronx, b-boys and b-girls formed crews and traveled to different parts of the city to attend jams or battle other crews. At battles, b-boy crews, the most famous of which were the Rocky Steady Crew, the New York City Breakers, and the Crazy Commanders, would form large circles and take turns showing off their dance moves in an effort to out-perform rival crews. Hip Hop historian Jorge “Popmaster Fabel” Pabon argues that b-boys had very innovative, unique, and aggressive styles and “were on a mission to terrorize the dance-floor” whenever they performed.<sup>46</sup> According to South Bronx DJ and b-boy DJ Jazzy Jay, “we used to b-boy right in the middle of the park with broken glass everywhere! And you’d get up and you’d be all scratched and bruised and bleeding everywhere and you would be ready to go right back in the circle.”<sup>47</sup> B-boys added to the Hip Hop lifestyle that many African American and Latino youth from the Bronx and Harlem participated in during the 1970s and 80s. Like deejaying, breakdancing gave these young people a recreational outlet for artistic self-expression.

In addition, as Hip Hop steadily developed throughout the 1970s MCing, or emceeing, became the culture’s third element. When DJ Kool Herc threw his first jam he brought along

---

<sup>45</sup> "DeeJays | Hiphop.sh." *Hiphop.sh | The Four Elements That Shaped a Movement*. Web. <<http://hiphop.sh/dj>>.

<sup>46</sup> This quote is from Jorge “Popmaster Fabel” Pabon and is published in: Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print, p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> This quote is from DJ Jazzy Jay and is published in: Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print, p. 115.

Coke La Rock to be his MC. According to DJ AJ, an aspiring DJ during Hip Hop's early stages of development that followed Herc around at his parties in the hopes of having his name shouted-out by the South Bronx legend, "the DJ was the man. The MC was just the help, hundred dollar a night man."<sup>48</sup> The MC was the man that controlled the microphone while the DJ was playing the music. Hip Hop artist Ice T recalls that the original DJs such as Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and DJ Grandmaster Flash would tell their MCs to "take the mic, tell everybody how great I am."<sup>49</sup> The MC simply functioned as the DJ's assistant and worked as a glorified announcer. The MC's responsibilities were to talk to the crowd during the jam and keep them energized, to make sure that everyone in the crowd knew that their DJ was the best in the borough, and to promote their DJ's upcoming parties.

As Hip Hop culture as a whole continued to develop in the Bronx throughout the mid 1970s, the function of the MC slowly began to change as well. MCs began to experiment on the microphone as their DJs spun records for hours at a time at jams. Kool Moe Dee, a member of the early rap group the Treacherous Three, remembers that DJ Hollywood was the first MC he ever heard rhyme while talking on the microphone at a jam.<sup>50</sup> Other well-known MCs at the time such as Busy Bee, Lovebug Starski, and Eddie Cheeba began experimenting with rhyming on the microphone as well. In many cases MCs would come up with very basic rhymes to announce to the crowd when they ran out of things to say.<sup>51</sup> These rhymes usually got the crowd energized and involved more with the jam. Over time, MCs throughout the borough began

---

<sup>48</sup> This quote is from an interview with DJ AJ recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>49</sup> This quote is from an interview with Ice T recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>50</sup> This quote is from an interview with Kool Moe Dee recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>51</sup> *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

incorporating rhymes into their routines. This use of rhyming by MCs at Hip Hop jams was the beginning of rap music.

In addition, although rapping grew out of simplistic MC rhyming at DJ jams, transitioned into the third and core element of Hip Hop culture, and went on to become an alternate commercialized popular music genre itself, some scholars trace the origins of rapping further than the party scene in the Bronx and Harlem during the 1970s. For example, Yale anthropology and African American studies professor John F. Szwed argues that rap's origins are rooted in a variety of African America traditions. In his article "The Real Old School" published in The Vibe History of Hip Hop, he contends that disco "buried an emotionally charged, folk-based 60s soul music which spoke in the victorious poetic rhetoric of civil rights and black power" and the development of rap "meant liberation and a return to the real stuff."<sup>52</sup> He also argues that, when broken down, rap's musical elements are remarkably similar to some speech patterns associated with children's songs, trends in musical chanting, and cheering.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, although most MCs in the South Bronx may not have actually been aware of it at the time, Szwed argues that rapping developed as an extension of many earlier musical and artistic forms of expression such as square dancing's chanted instructions, bebop, and even the speech patterns of great African American orators such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.<sup>54</sup> He also points out that MCs' raps bear significant resemblances to 1960s African American poets' toasts, which were "rhymed monologues" that often told adventurous tales."<sup>55</sup> It is very clear that the rise of African-American poetry in the 1960s and early 1970s and the contributions of poets such as

---

<sup>52</sup> Szwed, John F. "The Real Old School." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. p. 4. Print.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 4-5

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 8-9

Amiri Baraka, Gil Scott-Heron, and Stanley Crouch served as a bridge to the creation of the MC and ultimately rap music.

In addition to DJs, b-boys, and MCs, graffiti artists played integral roles in the greater South Bronx Hip Hop community during the 1970s as graffiti art became the fourth and final element of Hip Hop culture. It is possible to argue that during the 70s graffiti culture actually functioned as its own culture separate from Hip Hop throughout New York City because graffiti artists began tagging, which is a term that refers to the act of spray-painting public surfaces with graffiti, throughout the city several years before Kool Herc's first jam. However, most elements of graffiti art helped to define Hip Hop throughout the 1970s and Hip Hop's most influential pioneers consider it to be a core element of their culture. Graffiti originated in Philadelphia during the 1960s and appeared in New York City shortly afterwards. Artists typically used graffiti as a means of artistic self-expression, which made it very similar to the other elements of Hip Hop culture, and as a way to make their names known and build up their reputations throughout their communities. Although graffiti was a multifaceted art form, generally artists would tag their nicknames onto random walls, light-poles, buildings, subway cars, and surfaces throughout the city. Artists usually created creative, one-phrase nicknames such as Zorro and often times included the number of the street they lived on, such as Taki 183. In Graffiti Kings: New York City Mass Transit Art of the 1970s, author Jack Stewart contends, "Subway graffiti altered the environment of New York City and left its mark on the consciousness of millions of subway riders in the 1970s."<sup>56</sup>

As graffiti art grew and more youth from the Bronx became involved with the movement, subway trains turned into murals capable of spreading an individual's tag throughout the entire

---

<sup>56</sup> Stewart, Jack. *Graffiti Kings: New York City Mass Transit Art of the 1970s*. Abrams: Melcher Media, 2008. Print, p. 19

city. Although many people viewed graffiti as vandalism and criminal activity, especially the city's commuters, frequent subway passengers, and elected officials, graffiti's proponents argued that the art actually benefited the city because it kept kids from participating in more dangerous criminal activity and was an artistic use of public space. However, despite the controversy it generated, graffiti art brought attention to youth and young artists living in New York City's most blighted, marginalized neighborhoods. Graffiti gave individuals living in the extremely violent South Bronx during the height of gang infestation the opportunity to pursue an alternative, non-violent activity. Taki 183, whose real name is Demetrios, set the stage for New York City graffiti art and became one of the best-known and most respected taggers during the 1970s. He recalls that he started utilizing graffiti because he "didn't want to get involved with drugs," which plagued Harlem and the South Bronx for decades.<sup>57</sup> He also remembers that graffiti "was what you did when you were sixteen" and while "other guys would go drinking or break into cars," he and his crew chose to "go out writing at night" instead.<sup>58</sup> People such as Taki 183, Tracy 168, Angel 136, and countless others used graffiti to avoid trouble, boredom, and illegal gang activity and did not view their art as vandalism despite the negative publicity it usually received from city officials and the media. Throughout its earliest years, graffiti art contributed to Hip Hop's appeal amongst youth from the Bronx and Harlem and graffiti artists played a significant role in the culture's development.

DJ Kool Herc built a solid foundation for the musical, social, and artistic South Bronx cultural phenomenon that would eventually be named Hip Hop by Afrika Bambaataa in 1981. However, Herc did not act alone. Throughout the mid and late 1970s many individuals studied his techniques and built off of his successful formula of playing funk and soul records through an

---

<sup>57</sup> This quote is from an interview with Taki 183 published in Stewart, Jack. *Graffiti Kings: New York City Mass Transit Art of the 1970s*. Abrams: Melcher Media, 2008. Print, p. 20

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23

extraordinarily loud sound system, isolating break beats, and creating an ecstatic atmosphere at jams. Joseph Saddler, better known as DJ Grandmaster Flash, added to the culture that DJ Kool Herc created through innovative deejaying techniques. Flash's innovations to the art of deejaying cannot be understated. For example, although DJ AJ idolized Kool Herc as a teenager growing up in the South Bronx, he admits that after learning from Herc, Flash became a much more skilled DJ. According to AJ, "One thing about Flash, Flash was a DJ. Kool Herc was a record player."<sup>59</sup> DJ AJ's riveting insight illustrates the fact that although he came after DJ Kool Herc, throughout the mid to late 1970s DJ Grandmaster Flash played a pivotal role in progressing Hip Hop culture by perfecting the art of deejaying.

Grandmaster Flash revolutionized deejaying, Hip Hop's first element. Through unique and intricate systems of record manipulation, which he referred to as Clock Theory and Quickmix, Jeff Chang writes that Flash "perfected the art of mixing and blending breakbeats."<sup>60</sup> Flash learned everything he could from Bronx DJs that performed throughout the borough between 1973 and 1974, especially DJ Kool Herc, and advanced the art form dramatically beginning in early 1975. Flash remembers that, "to every great record there was a great part," usually lasting approximately five seconds, which he termed "the get-down part."<sup>61</sup> He also recalls saying to himself, "if I can figure out how to take the music that I love where the break was so short, extend them particular sections, and make them as long as I chose to, that would be the way to go."<sup>62</sup> Flash's masterful use of the breakbeat and superb mixing techniques quickly earned him a stellar reputation throughout the South Bronx, the rest of the borough, and several

---

<sup>59</sup> This quote is from an interview with DJ AJ recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>60</sup> Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> This quote is from an interview with DJ Grandmaster Flash recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

other small African American and Latino neighborhoods in New York City such as Harlem. DJ Grandmaster Flash soon became the main attraction of the local party scene and his performances at local clubs garnered him a large following. In a short period of time, Grandmaster Flash took DJ Kool Herc's place as the king of Hip Hop in the South Bronx and Upper Manhattan.

Afrika Bambaataa sits alongside Hip Hop's father and son, DJ Kool Herc and DJ Grandmaster Flash, as the so-called "eternal spirit" of the culture's holy trinity.<sup>63</sup> Afrika Bambaataa is truly a unique individual. Everything about Bambaataa is unconventional. There is great debate concerning his real name and year of birth. However, the consensus is that his real name is Kevin Donovan and he was born in the eastern portion of the South Bronx in 1957 and raised in the neighborhood. He grew up in the infamous Bronx River Houses, a federally funded public housing project in the Soundview section of the borough consisting of nine fourteen-story buildings, and helped to establish the Savage Seven street gang, which later became known as the Black Spades.<sup>64</sup> Author, curator, and Hip Hop historian Johan Kugelberg reports that during the first five to six years of the 1970s, "gangs ruled the Bronx." He claims that during this period there were "between 250 and 300" gangs in the borough "with a total of more than 20,000 members." The Black Spades evolved as one of the most viscous and dangerous gangs during this period and "waged continual turf wars" with rival gangs.<sup>65</sup> As a teenager, Donovan climbed the ranks of the Black Spades and eventually became a division

---

<sup>63</sup> "The Man Who Invented Hip Hop - Forbes.com." *Forbes.com - Business News, Financial News, Stock Market Analysis, Technology & Global Headline News*. Web.

<sup>64</sup> "Afrika Bambaataa | Hiphop.sh." *Hiphop.sh | The Four Elements That Shaped a Movement*. Web. <<http://hiphop.sh/afrika>>.

<sup>65</sup> Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 38.

leader.<sup>66</sup> However, after returning from a trip to Africa, Donovan decided there was more to life than gangbanging, changed his name to Afrika Bambaataa, and became involved with the cultural phenomenon that DJ Kool Herc had recently brought to the South Bronx.

Afrika Bambaataa's powerful personality, natural leadership ability, and established reputation, which demanded respect throughout the South Bronx, allowed him to leave the Black Spades and make monumental contributions to the blossoming culture in the area. Throughout the 1970s, Bambaataa helped Hip Hop evolve in a multitude of ways. He is best known for creating the Universal Zulu Nation in an effort "to turn those involved with the gang life into something more positive for the community."<sup>67</sup> His organization originally consisted of "socially and politically aware rappers, B-boys, graffiti artists" from the South Bronx and has expanded over time to include a multitude of Hip Hop enthusiasts from all over the world.<sup>68</sup> The Universal Zulu Nation continues to exist today as a highly complex social organization with written core beliefs, guiding principles, and branches in nations across the globe. Although its structure and leaders are quite eccentric, some city officials have deemed it to be a gang, and many aspects of the organization seem cult-like, the Universal Zulu Nation has played an integral role in promoting peace, knowledge, and high-quality music since the mid 1970s.

In addition to creating the Universal Zulu Nation, Afrika Bambaataa made contributions to Hip Hop as a DJ and as an MC, by being heavily involved with neighborhood graffiti artists and b-boys, as a local promoter, and as Hip Hop's international ambassador. Although Bambaataa first became involved with Hip Hop in 1973, Jeff Chang writes that his "first official

---

<sup>66</sup> "Afrika Bambaataa | Hiphop.sh." *Hiphop.sh | The Four Elements That Shaped a Movement*. Web. <<http://hiphop.sh/afrika>>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid



party as DJ at the Bronx River Community Center” took place in early 1976.<sup>69</sup> He threw parties just as Herc, Flash, and other DJs had done but became well known for inviting gang members in an effort to quell violence in the community. Although Hip Hop did not solve the social problems that plagued the South Bronx in the 1970s, Bambaataa attempted to lessen the area’s violent gang problem through music, dance, and positive artistic expression. Afrika Bambaataa is also famous for bringing Hip Hop to white audiences in Downtown Manhattan after 1979 and traveling around the globe in order to inform the world about Hip Hop. Esteemed Hip Hop artist KRS-1 contends that on one of his trips abroad, Bambaataa called the South Bronx cultural movement “Hip Hop” and the name stuck.<sup>70</sup> Chang validates this argument by stating that in early 1981 Bambaataa began “using the term ‘hip hop,’ popularized by Lovebug Starski, to refer to the street youth cultures emerging from the South Bronx and other New York communities of color.”<sup>71</sup> It is evident that Afrika Bambaataa played an integral role during the first six years of Hip Hop’s development.

DJ Kool Herc, DJ Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa defined the generation before Rapper’s Delight, the period 1973-1979. However, countless other individuals throughout the South Bronx, Manhattan, and even parts of Brooklyn and Queens helped to perpetuate Hip Hop culture during the time as well. Individuals such as Grand Wizard Theodore, who came up with the concept of scratching in 1975, and Lee Quinones, who reached legendary status in the South Bronx for his graffiti art, characterized the period. DJs such as DJ Breakout, DJ Baron, and DJ Flowers all made their marks during these six years and MCs such

---

<sup>69</sup> Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 58

<sup>70</sup> This quote is from an interview with KRS-1 recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>71</sup> Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 59

as Eddie Cheeba, Busy Bee, and Jerry Dee Lewis inadvertently laid the foundation for contemporary rap music and became household names in the South Bronx. To describe every individual throughout New York City that affected, took part in, and facilitated the development of Hip Hop culture between 1973 and 1979 is a monumental, impossible, and downright unnecessary task. This is because an amount of people that is impossible to estimate lived Hip Hop during this six-year span. Hip Hop could not be touched, bought, or sold. Rather it needed to be experienced, heard, and witnessed. Starting in the South Bronx, every week youth looked forward to weekend jams at local PALs, school gymnasiums, and apartment building recreation rooms in the same neighborhood where burnt-out apartment building frames stood, junkies hobbled through streets looking for the next fix, and gang members fought and killed one another regularly. Individuals deejayed, emceed, breakdanced, and tagged up subway cars, walls, and bridges for recreation, enjoyment, and escape. From the summer of 1973 until the summer of 1979, Hip Hop culture existed as both a popular youth lifestyle and as an unadulterated art form.

Today, Joe Conzo Jr. works for the New York City Fire Department. Over thirty years after photographing The Cold Crush Brothers and documenting his culture step by step as it evolved, Mr. Conzo continues to serve the city that he has always loved. Although throughout his life Conzo has never made even a minute fraction of the money that contemporary individuals such as Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, and 50 Cent make on a single album, he is not bitter. On the contrary, he is quite satisfied with the contributions he made to his culture; a culture that had no connection to the music industry or the corporate world and revolved exclusively around an unadulterated youth art form. Conzo maintains that in the 1970s Hip Hop was all about respect and had nothing to do with monetary gains. He admits that people usually paid a few dollars for

admittance into a local DJ's jam<sup>72</sup>. Also, Kool Herc's MC Coke La Rock admits that he used to sell marijuana to make a few bucks at parties.<sup>73</sup> However, this was the extent of the Hip Hop economy. Monetary goals did not drive DJs, MCs, b-boys, and graffiti artists. These people derived motivation intrinsically. Cold Crush Brothers MC Jerry Dee Lewis argues, "It wasn't about gettin' paid and all that, it was about something you loved, something we did from the heart."<sup>74</sup> Conzo shares JDL's sentiments and recalls that the goals of these original Hip Hop heads revolved around gaining respect on the rough streets of the South Bronx, building up a reputation, and pursuing happiness.<sup>75</sup>

In fact, many of Hip Hop's founders attest to the lack of a monetary purpose within the Hip Hop community. For example, in an interview with Johan Kugelberg, Grandmaster Casanova Fly of the South Bronx based Cold Crush Brothers recalls that when the infamous New York City Blackout of 1977 occurred countless young people from the South Bronx "broke in everything in the city, especially the electronics stores." They did so "because they knew 'We can sell turntables-the DJs is hip, people want to be DJs and stuff.' And so many DJs popped up the next day and week after that blackout, it was ridiculous."<sup>76</sup> The fact that many young people that lived in the Bronx and loved Hip Hop culture were often times too poor to afford sound systems but still did not attempt to profit off of Hip Hop is not as astounding as it appears. This is because during the 1970s, it was more important to have respect, live the Hip Hop lifestyle,

---

<sup>72</sup> Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.

<sup>73</sup> This information is from an interview with Coke La Rock published in: "40th Anniversary - How the Rec Room Where Hip-hop Was Born Became a Battleground for Affordable Housing -- New York Magazine." *New York Magazine* -- *NYC Guide to Restaurants, Fashion, Nightlife, Shopping, Politics, Movies*. Web. <<http://nymag.com/anniversary/40th/50665/index1.html>>.

<sup>74</sup> This quote is from an interview with Jerry Dee Lewis published in: Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 194-197

<sup>75</sup> Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.

<sup>76</sup> This quote is from an interview with Grandmaster Casanova Fly published in: Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print, p. 198-200

and survive on the streets of the South Bronx, a place that DJ AJ says, “was a very dangerous place.”<sup>77</sup> As of the summer of 1979, the people involved in the Bronx-centric youth social, artistic, musical, and cultural phenomenon had no idea what their art would eventually become. However, as late as September of 1979 DJs, MCs, b-boys, graffiti artists, and partygoers did know one thing: Their culture had nothing to do with making 12-inch vinyl rap records for wholesale distribution.

---

<sup>77</sup> This quote is from an interview with DJ AJ recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

## Chapter 2

### **Hip Hop's First Corporate Influence: The Robinson family, the rise and fall of Sugar Hill Records, and The Sugar Hill Gang's classic "Rapper's Delight"**

In the fall of 1979 Sylvia Robinson, the wife of Sugar Hill Records' founder Joseph Robinson, took a trip to a pizza parlor in Englewood, New Jersey that set in motion a series of events that changed American popular culture, music, and society as a whole forever. By 1979 the still unnamed Bronx-centric youth street culture had been flourishing for six years. DJs, MCs, b-boys, and graffiti artists ruled the South Bronx and parts of Upper Manhattan. Parks, public housing project community centers, street corners, nightclubs, and apartment buildings each provided prime locations for jams and youth from the area lived the Hip Hop lifestyle everyday. However, as the fall of 1979 approached, most of the world still had no idea what was going on in these places.

Throughout the early 1970s Joseph Robinson worked arduously in the music industry promoting various rhythm and blues artists, producing records, and managing his record company All-Platinum Records. However, Robinson struggled financially during the mid 1970s as his record company rapidly became unprofitable. A Bergen Record article entitled "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music," describes in depth the process Robison undertook in an attempt to save his name and his company. According to the article, he filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and asked his old friend Morris Levy, a music industry insider well known for having connections to organized crime, to assist him in his time of need. Levy acquiesced and loaned him a relatively substantial sum of money in order to pay for lawyers.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, Robinson's business accountant also began introducing him to a variety of interested investors

---

<sup>78</sup> Locklin, Bruce. "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music." *The Record* [Bergen County New Jersey] 6 Apr. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

that could possibly invest in All-Platinum to keep Robinson's independent record company from going under.<sup>79</sup> Robinson connected with one investor in particular named Milton Malden, a Yugoslavian businessman and former soldier, formed a relationship with him, and eventually introduced him to Morris Levy.<sup>80</sup> In 1979, Malden and Levy decided to go into business together, invested \$300 a piece to create a new independent record company named Sugar Hill Records out of the remains of Joseph Robinson's All-Platinum Records, and kept the Robinson family involved in the business by utilizing Sylvia Robinson as a producer.<sup>81</sup> This minuscule \$600 investment by a former Yugoslavian soldier and a cunning businessman with known mafia ties created the independent record company responsible for commodifying a previously unadulterated art form and South Bronx cultural phenomenon. Levy and Malden's seemingly insignificant \$600 decision to form Sugar Hill Records with the Robinsons set the stage for the first and most significant corporate investment in Hip Hop to transpire.

As the newly formed Sugar Hill Records' producer, Sylvia Robinson's chance encounter with a man named Henry Jackson at an Englewood pizzeria in autumn 1979 brought the worlds of the six year-old South Bronx youth street culture and the music industry together in a way that would ultimately change the landscape of popular American culture forever. Days before entering through the doors of the pizzeria, Sylvia Robinson attended a birthday party that laid the foundation for her ultimate pizzeria discovery. According to Robinson, "I never knew anything about rap at that time. But my niece was giving a birthday party for me and I saw this DJ playing music and he was saying things to the kids and they would answer him back. And I says 'oh my God that's a great idea' and I felt a spirit in me that said 'you put a concept like that on

---

<sup>79</sup> Locklin, Bruce. "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music." *The Record* [Bergen County New Jersey] 6 Apr. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

record and you'll go to the moon'."<sup>82</sup> Shortly after hearing this DJ, listening to her 'spirit,' and conceiving the idea of putting some sort of similar sound onto record, Sylvia Robinson stopped at a pizzeria in Englewood, a suburban town in upscale Bergen County, New Jersey, and met Henry Jackson. At that point in time Jackson, better known as Big Bank Hank, worked for Grandmaster Casanova Fly, Caz for short. Joe Conzo, who at the time worked as the official photographer for Caz's group The Cold Crush Brothers, describes Hank as "a hanger-on to Caz" and as being a man "not really big in Caz's life."<sup>83</sup> Hank was a club bouncer at a club called Sparkle and also worked for Caz and The Cold Crush Brothers as a promoter and manager of sorts. He spent a lot of time around Grandmaster Caz and learned a lot about Hip Hop culture through him. However, he also delivered pizzas in Englewood to make some extra money on the side because his Associate's degree in oceanography did not qualify him to do much else at the time.<sup>84</sup>

According to S.H. Fernando Jr., who is a Hip Hop author and writes for publications such as The New York Times, The Source, and VIBE, one night while working at the pizzeria and "rapping along to a show tape of Cold Crush," an enthralled customer, Sylvia Robinson, approached Big Bank Hank and asked what he was doing.<sup>85</sup> Hank replied that he was rapping and Sylvia asked him if he would be willing to record his rhymes on record. A perplexed Henry Jackson replied that in theory he could, Sylvia asked him "if he was interested in joining a rap group she was putting together," and Jackson said yes.<sup>86</sup> This moment in early autumn of 1979

---

<sup>82</sup> This quote is from an interview with Sylvia Robinson recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>83</sup> Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.

<sup>84</sup> "Big Bank Hank - News, Pictures, Reviews, Biography, Videos, Best Songs, Discography, Concerts, Gossip, Pictures and Tour Dates." *Music News and Reviews, Concert Tickets, Videos, Pictures and Free MP3s - NME.COM*. Web. <<http://www.nme.com/artists/big-bank-hank#biography>>.

<sup>85</sup> Fernando Jr., S.H. "Back in the Day: 1975-1979." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. Print, p. 21.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

marked the first true corporate investment in the localized South Bronx youth street culture that had existed as an unmarketable, unadulterated art form since 1973. Working on the behalf of her newly formed independent record company's owners, a Yugoslavian investor and a sheisty music business insider, Sylvia Robinson made the most significant corporate investment in Hip Hop culture ever. Her decision to approach Henry Jackson at a pizzeria in Englewood, New Jersey had profound, long-term, permanent effects on the lives of MCs, DJs, and every individual that lived Hip Hop in New York City between 1973 and 1979. Sylvia Robinson's actions set in motion Hip Hop culture's transformation.

After meeting Big Bank Hank, Sugar Hill Records producer and eventual co-owner Sylvia Robinson introduced him to Michael Anthony Wright, and Guy O'Brien. According to Robinson, Wright, Jackson, and O'Brien "had their own names like Master Gee and Wonder Mike but they didn't know each other."<sup>87</sup> Sylvia Robinson found and organized Big Bank Hank, Wonder Mike, and Master Gee into a rap group and named them the Sugar Hill Gang. This record company-manufactured rap group exposed the world outside of the Bronx and Harlem to rapping through their fall 1979 hit "Rapper's Delight," which Hip Hop scholar Michael Eric Dyson refers to "as the signal breaker, birthing Hip Hop" as a recorded music genre.<sup>88</sup> However, although not done maliciously, the manner in which Robinson formed the group and drafted "Rapper's Delight" did not sit very well with individuals from the South Bronx and other areas of New York City that had been living the Hip Hop lifestyle for years. The New York City Hip Hop community resented the Sugar Hill Gang and "Rapper's Delight" because both severely lacked Hip Hop authenticity.

---

<sup>87</sup> This quote is from an interview with Sylvia Robinson recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>88</sup> Dyson, Michael Eric. "The Culture of Hip-Hop." Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony. Neal. *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004 Print, p. 61



It is critical to remember that in the fall of 1979 when Sylvia Robinson formed the Sugar Hill Gang, the issue of authenticity had been central to Hip Hop culture for six years already. DJs and MCs in particular spent years building up their reputations within the Hip Hop community. To be viewed by the community as a truly skilled DJ or MC, artists had to meet a variety of unwritten requirements. DJs and MCs had to perform at a high level at well-known, reputable neighborhood cultural institutions such as public housing project community centers, PALs, nightclubs, and parks in order to be respected. At such establishments, these artists had to demonstrate their abilities and receive positive responses from the crowds in attendance in order to make their names known. Some of the most famous establishments where DJs and MCs earned their reputations were the 183<sup>rd</sup> Street PAL, The Hevalo Club, the T Connection, Cedar Park, and the Bronx River housing projects. If artists did not perform well at venues such as these, it would be nearly impossible to be recognized as authentic DJs or MCs.

For years several other factors had served as barometers to measure DJ and MC authenticity as well. Partygoers and the greater Hip Hop community judged DJs performing at cultural institutions by the rarity of their record collections and the uniqueness of their breakbeats and evaluated MCs by their crowd-pleasing personalities and often times their rhyming skills. In a group interview with Nelson George, Hip Hop's founders DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash further these claims by discussing the issue of authenticity and the process of attaining respect in their community between 1973 and 1979. According to Flash, "it took years to get a little bit of respect."<sup>89</sup> For example, he recalls that block parties in the South Bronx could sometimes last up to twelve hours. However, regardless of the duration of a jam, the most authentic DJs were able to deejay the entire event without ever playing the same record

---

<sup>89</sup> George, Nelson. "Hip-Hop's Founding Fathers Speak the Truth." *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony. Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print, p. 51

twice.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, the most authentic MC crews had the ability to keep crowds enthusiastic, energized, and focused on the DJ throughout such performances. These performances allowed DJs and MCs to expand their reputations and become well known. Only authentic artists excelled at these types of venues.

From their inception, The Sugar Hill Gang struggled to be viewed as legitimate and respectable by the greater South Bronx Hip Hop community and especially by Hip Hop's most influential pioneers. According to Hip Hop connoisseur and former Def Jam Records staff member Bill Adler, "There was no Sugar Hill Gang. They had no history."<sup>91</sup> Also, Grandmaster Flash contends that throughout the 1970s he "knew all crews, what they were doing, and when they were doing it" but he had never heard of the Sugar Hill Gang and was dumfounded when he heard "Rapper's Delight."<sup>92</sup> Adler and Flash express these sentiments because the Sugar Hill Gang's three members did not meet any of the qualifications necessary to be considered authentic. During the mid 1970s when Hip Hop developed and flourished as a performance art, Henry Jackson, Michael Anthony Wright, and Guy O'Brien were not DJs, MCs, b-boys, or graffiti artists. They did not impress crowds with rare records or unique breakbeats, they had no reputation on the streets, and they did not emcee jams at cultural establishments and captivate crowds. In fact, they did not perform at any reputable nightclubs, parks, or other neighborhood cultural institutions throughout the 1970s at all because record company producer Sylvia Robinson did not create the group until late 1979. The Sugar Hill Gang was never a crew of MCs; they were a record company manufactured group of rappers.

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 54

<sup>91</sup> This quote is from an interview with Bill Adler recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>92</sup> This quote is from an interview with Grandmaster Flash recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

Furthermore, the group's creation itself made it impossible for them to be authentic. Robinson found club bouncer and deliveryman Henry Jackson at a pizza parlor and paired him up with two other individuals that had never been MCs before either. They did not grow up in the same neighborhood, attend the same school, or meet while performing in the Bronx. They were simply three people that Sylvia Robinson believed could be marketable to audiences outside of the South Bronx that had no prior knowledge of Hip Hop and could not judge MCs on their authenticity. Robinson's plan made it impossible for DJs and MCs throughout the Bronx that had spent years perfecting their respective crafts to view the Sugar Hill Gang as a respectable crew. Prior to the release of "Rapper's Delight," individuals in the South Bronx Hip Hop community would only have known Henry "Big Bank Hank" Jackson if they had been to Sparkle, the club where he worked the door, or if they had eaten a pizza he delivered. His group never earned credibility as authentic artists in the community that gave birth to Hip Hop. However, in late 1979 the Sugar Hill Gang's hit single "Rapper's Delight" changed Hip Hop and popular culture forever by introducing rap music to mainstream American society via Sylvia Robinson and Sugar Hill Records. The group's lack of authenticity did not matter on the national level because no one outside of New York City's most impoverished neighborhoods knew anything about the essence of Hip Hop culture's first six years.

Like the members of the Sugar Hill Gang themselves, the history of "Rapper's Delight" is extremely complex, controversial, and multi-faceted. It all began on the same night that Sylvia Robinson strolled into Henry Jackson's pizzeria. After agreeing to become a part of her proposed rap group, Big Bank Hank contacted Grandmaster Caz for assistance. He informed him that Robinson approached him on behalf of Sugar Hill Records and asked him to make a record using Caz's raps. Joe Conzo remembers this incident very clearly. Conzo says that Hank

asked Caz if he could borrow his raps in order to make a rap record for Sugar Hill Records, a company owned by Morris Levy and Milton Malden. Caz agreed to Hank's request and provided him with his rhymes for a variety of reasons, mainly because he had no interest in making rap records.<sup>93</sup> As a member of the Cold Crush Brothers in 1979, Grandmaster Caz's sole focus revolved around performing live and living the Hip Hop lifestyle in the Bronx. Caz, his crew, and other reputable MC crews had no interest in making nationally distributable records. In fact, Grandmaster Flash had been approached by a record company spokesperson about making a rap record two years before Sylvia Robinson met Hank. Grandmaster Flash recollects that in 1977 he denied the opportunity to make a rap record without much consideration because he "didn't think people would want to hear a record re-recorded onto another record with talking on it" and recording raps on records did not correlate with the Hip Hop lifestyle.<sup>94</sup> The only recording that occurred in the late 1970s happened when MCs distributed homemade tapes of their raps around the borough and parts of the city in an effort to build up their reputations. MCs such as Jerry Dee Lewis gave roughly-made recordings of jams on tape to cab drivers to play to customers on their trips around the city and Caz occasionally sold tapes to people that could not make it to his jams.<sup>95</sup> However, authentic MCs had no interest in making official rap records in 1979 because at that time jams were the essence of Hip Hop culture in the Bronx and Harlem and they could attract anywhere from five hundred to two thousand people or more. Therefore, when

---

<sup>93</sup> These facts concerning this event come from a variety of sources:

- a.) Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.
- b.) *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.
- c.) Fernando Jr., S.H. "Back in the Day: 1975-1979." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. Print, p. 21

<sup>94</sup> This quote is from an interview with Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, and DJ Kool Herc published in: George, Nelson. "Hip-Hop's Founding Fathers Speak the Truth." *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony. Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print, p. 52

<sup>95</sup> This information is from interviews with Jerry Dee Lewis and Grandmaster Caz published in: Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print.

Henry Jackson asked if he could borrow his raps Caz agreed and “figured if something comes out of it I guess we’re next.”<sup>96</sup> Something did come out of the rhymes Hank borrowed but Grandmaster Caz and the Cold Crush Brothers were not next. Big Bank Hank and the Sugar Hill Gang soon achieved worldwide stardom with Caz’s rhymes and, according to Conzo, “forgot all about Caz.”<sup>97</sup>

In October of 1979 Sugar Hill Records’ Sugar Hill Gang, a group that Joe Conzo refers to as a “bubble gum rap group,” recorded and released the hit single “Rapper’s Delight” sampling Chic’s “Good Times” and using Grandmaster Caz’s rhymes.<sup>98</sup> The Sugar Hill Gang regurgitated Grandmaster Casanova Fly’s rhymes so blatantly that at one point in “Rapper’s Delight,” Big Bank Hank actually raps the line, “check it out, I’m the C-A-S-an-the-O-V-A and the rest is f-l-y.”<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, Caz allowed this and individuals living outside of the local greater South Bronx Hip Hop community did not know the difference between Big Bank Hank and Grandmaster Casanova Fly and certainly did not know that Henry Jackson, Michael Anthony Wright, and Guy O’Brien had been absent from Hip Hop culture during its birth and did not play a role in its maturation. Although Hip Hop purists recognize the little known fact that The Fatback Band recorded and released the first rap record, King Tim III (Personality Jock), via Spring Records earlier in 1979, author Peter Shapiro argues that the Sugar Hill Gang’s hit record “Rapper’s Delight” marked the moment “when hip-hop moved outside the South Bronx and Harlem” and is therefore always remembered as being the first real rap record.<sup>100</sup> According to author, Grammy-nominated producer, and record company executive Steve Greenberg,

---

<sup>96</sup> This quote is from an interview with Grandmaster Caz recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>97</sup> This quote is from an interview with Joe Conzo: Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> a.) Shapiro, Peter. *The Rough Guide to Hip-hop*. 2nd ed. London: Rough Guides, 2005. Print, p. 352

b.) *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>100</sup> Shapiro, Peter. *The Rough Guide to Hip-hop*. 2nd ed. London: Rough Guides, 2005. Print, p. 351-352

“Rapper’s Delight” became extremely popular “with the public, shipping 75,000 copies per day after its October 1979 release” and climbed to number four on Billboard’s R&B chart.<sup>101</sup> Sugar Hill Records’ investment in the emceeing element of Hip Hop culture and the popularity that “Rapper’s Delight” quickly garnered with fans far removed from the South Bronx permanently changed the dynamics of the culture.

“Rapper’s Delight’s” national record sales and high positioning on Billboard’s R&B chart indicate that in late 1979 national audiences that never even heard the names DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, or Afrika Bambaataa quickly became enamored with rapping because of the Sugar Hill Gang. The contributions of Hip Hop’s holy trinity and original DJs, MCs, b-boys, and graffiti artists were irrelevant in the eyes of such audiences. DJ AJ was born and raised in the South Bronx and describes many unfavorable conditions of his neighborhood saying, “no one wants to come here, no one wants to live here.”<sup>102</sup> Sugar Hill Records made it so no one had to come to his neighborhood or attend jams at South Bronx cultural institutions to experience Hip Hop. By commodifying the area’s youth cultural phenomenon via rap records, Sugar Hill Records exposed the world to a counterfeited form of Hip Hop; a form of Hip Hop without live eight to ten hour performances, without graffiti-covered subway cars, and without b-boys. Nevertheless, people on the other side of the country did not know or care that the Sugar Hill Gang had done nothing to earn credibility in New York City during Hip Hop’s earliest stages. According to Steve Greenberg, “although the original rappers of the Bronx scoffed at the Sugar

---

<sup>101</sup> Greenberg, Steve. "Sugar Hill Records." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. Print, p. 26

<sup>102</sup> This quote is from an interview with DJ AJ recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

Hill Gang, they knew that this record by a bunch of outsiders from New Jersey had opened a door that they too could storm through, and an industry was born.”<sup>103</sup>

Although for years after the 1979 release of “Rapper’s Delight” original DJs and MCs continued to hold jams while b-boys and graffiti artists engaged in their artistic practices, Sugar Hill Records’ concept of distributing rap on record to audiences outside of New York City permanently altered Hip Hop culture. Outside audiences wanted more rap records similar to “Rapper’s Delight” and as a result many individuals from the South Bronx and Harlem that had been involved in the culture since 1973 began to drastically change their goals. The success of “Rapper’s Delight” made individuals involved with Hip Hop pursue the goal of recording raps onto records for large-scale distribution because the Sugar Hill Gang proved that such an endeavor could be tremendously worthwhile, profitable, and successful. Sugar Hill Records’ corporate influence and the successful implementation of their concept of rap on record “changed the game of Hip Hop” according to Grandmaster Flash.<sup>104</sup> He argues, “This just set the goal to a whole other level. It wasn’t rule the Bronx or rule Manhattan. It was now how soon could you make a record.”<sup>105</sup> Bill Adler furthers Flash’s claim. He recalls, “The minute Hip Hop turned into a record the culture changed. What had been this little homegrown cottage industry all of the sudden could go anywhere a record went. The making of rap records changed everything.”<sup>106</sup> Sugar Hill Records, which existed as a small corporate entity in late 1979, caused this transformation entirely and ultimately became a highly successful independent record company. The company’s influence on Hip Hop culture and the greater South Bronx Hip Hop

---

<sup>103</sup> Greenberg, Steve. "Sugar Hill Records." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. 23-33. Print.

<sup>104</sup> This quote is from an interview with Grandmaster Flash recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> This quote is from an interview with Bill Adler recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

community continued to be extensive throughout the early 1980s. Between 1979 and 1984 Sugar Hill Records dominated this new era of recorded rap music.

After witnessing the success of “Rapper’s Delight,” individuals from the South Bronx and other African American and Latino neighborhoods in New York City where Hip Hop once existed strictly as a performance art and recreational pastime began to sign with Sugar Hill Records. Ironically, they did so in the hopes of achieving the same success that the Sugar Hill Gang, a group that most criticized for their lack of authenticity and poor MC skills, achieved through “Rapper’s Delight.” For example, shortly after Sugar Hill Records manufactured the Sugar Hill Gang and “Rapper’s Delight” hit the airwaves, Grandmaster Flash signed with Harlem’s Enjoy Records, another small independent record company, and recorded a single of his own on record entitled “Superrappin’.” However, Enjoy Records could not promote Flash’s record effectively enough and Flash became quite frustrated asking, “What power do Sugar Hill have to get something like that on the radio and we can’t get ours on it? Ours sounds better than theirs.”<sup>107</sup> Like many of his peers, Flash felt that the emceeing on “Rapper’s Delight” was of low quality and he could not understand why new audiences embraced the group. His resentment combined with the success that Sugar Hill Records achieved between October of 1979 and December of 1980 as they released ten additional singles on record, two of which turned out to be hits, forced Grandmaster Flash and his MC crew the Furious Five to cut ties with Enjoy Records and sign with the Robinson family and Sugar Hill Records.<sup>108</sup> His decision turned out to be a very good one. Over the course of the next several years, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five turned into recording superstars as Sugar Hill Records clients and according

---

<sup>107</sup> This quote is from an interview with Grandmaster Flash published in: Greenberg, Steve. "Sugar Hill Records." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. Print, p. 24

<sup>108</sup> Greenberg, Steve. "Sugar Hill Records." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. 23-33. Print.



to Steve Greenberg, demonstrated “that rap music might actually be more than a quirky novelty” in the process.<sup>109</sup>

Between 1980 and 1984 Sugar Hill Records achieved monumental success by distributing rap music to large audiences outside of New York City’s Hip Hop community. As the Sugar Hill Gang and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released a consistent flow of hit records that rose up the Billboard R&B chart, a variety of Hip Hop groups signed with Sugar Hill Records. Groups from Harlem and the Bronx such as Crash Crew, the Treacherous Three, and Funky Four Plus One signed with Sugar Hill Records and put out hit singles, which further solidified the company as a force to be reckoned with. Additional groups from areas outside of Hip Hop’s epicenter in the South Bronx like West Street Mob, Positive Force, and The Sequence all signed with Sugar Hill and released records between 1980 and 1984. During this period Sugar Hill Records achieved success with many of their records. However, none had as much of an impact on the music industry as a whole as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s 1982 social commentary on the reality of ghetto ills, “The Message,” which marked the first instance in which rap music illustrated its potential to be more than happy-go-lucky party music.

The lyrics in “The Message,” a song that Sylvia Robinson admits to writing herself “two years before [she] ever met Grandmaster Flash,” describe all the socioeconomic problems plaguing struggling urban communities.<sup>110</sup> Although, at first Flash and his crew had serious reservations about participating in a project that deviated so far from the norm of recorded rap music at the time, “The Message” became a tremendous hit. The single reached the number four position on Billboard’s R&B chart and eventually sold over one million copies during a time when the end of the disco era had catapulted the music industry into a period of severe racial

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

<sup>110</sup> This quote is from an interview with Sylvia Robinson recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

segregation and Black artists simply did not reach the pop Top 40 chart.<sup>111</sup> “The Message” and several Sugar Hill Records follow-up hits throughout 1983 led Joseph Robinson to seek out a way to expand his business. It is important to remember that originally investors Morris Levy and Milton Malden bailed Robinson’s All Platinum Records out of bankruptcy and created Sugar Hill Records with a \$600 investment. However, as Bergen Record staff writer Bruce Locklin wrote in an article entitled “Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music,” by 1980 “Malden and the Robinsons decided that because the three of them were operating Sugar Hill, they should own it” and decided to “negotiate with Levy and agreed to pay him \$1.5 million for his interest in annual payments of \$300,000 over five years.”<sup>112</sup> So as owner of the thriving Sugar Hill Records in 1983, Joseph Robinson took a trip to California in an attempt to expand his business by seeking out a major record company willing to sign a distribution deal with his burgeoning company.<sup>113</sup> Robinson’s ambitious trip to California marked the beginning of the end for Sugar Hill Records.

Between 1985 and 1986 prominent newspapers such as The Record, The Wall Street Journal, and Newsday released a stream of articles covering an alleged fraud involving music industry giant MCA Records and independently owned Sugar Hill Records that ultimately caused the small Englewood, New Jersey record company to stop releasing rap records. It all began in 1983 when Joseph Robinson’s business started to grow faster than he had ever anticipated it would and he realized that the best way to maximize his profits would be to acquire a distribution deal with a major record company. Robinson traveled to California and met with Capitol Records while his lawyer attempted to broker a deal with MCA Records, two music

---

<sup>111</sup> Greenberg, Steve. "Sugar Hill Records." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. Print, p. 29

<sup>112</sup> Locklin, Bruce. "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music." *The Record* [Bergen County New Jersey] 6 Apr. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*

industry powerhouses. Their attempts failed as both individuals could not convince the major labels to invest in Sugar Hill Records. However, Robinson's frustration quickly changed as he ran into a familiar face while eating at his hotel. Robinson saw an acquaintance he had known fifteen years earlier from his days hanging around New York City's nightclub scene. The man's name was Salvatore Pisello and he had once owned a restaurant in Manhattan.<sup>114</sup> As they began talking, Robinson informed Pisello about his successful endeavors with Sugar Hill Records but complained to him about his inability to broker a distribution deal with a major record company while in Los Angeles. Pisello listened to the story and then told Robinson that he might be able to speak with MCA Records' executives and work out a deal.<sup>115</sup> According to Bergen Record staff-writer Bruce Locklin, within a few weeks "Pisello came up with a written offer from MCA, a standard distribution agreement" and received "3 percent of MCA's future payments to Sugar Hill" for his efforts.<sup>116</sup> Robinson's peculiar encounter with Salvatore Pisello produced groundbreaking results. Sugar Hill Records' distribution deal with music industry giant MCA Records marked the first time that a major record company decided to distribute records from an independent label that produced exclusively rap music. However, this deal would ultimately financially cripple Sugar Hill Records.

Less than two years after magically landing a major MCA distribution deal for Sugar Hill Records, a federal grand jury indicted Salvatore Pisello on a number of counts and he was ultimately found guilty of income-tax evasion. In the process, the courts revealed that Pisello had been a long-time high-ranking member of the infamous Gambino crime family based out of

---

<sup>114</sup> Locklin, Bruce. "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music." *The Record* [Bergen County New Jersey] 6 Apr. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*

New York City.<sup>117</sup> Coincidentally, as Pisello dealt with his legal troubles, the once highly successful exclusively Hip Hop oriented Sugar Hill Records faced significant financial woes. Joseph Robinson learned the news of Pisello's conviction and mafia ties for the first time as his company closed in on rock bottom. This rapid financial decline occurred after Sugar Hill signed the distribution deal with MCA because, according to Milton Malden, "Pisello conned MCA into believing he was Sugar Hill's man, while convincing Sugar Hill that he was an MCA insider."<sup>118</sup> While under contract with MCA, the independent record company accrued almost two million dollars worth of debt. In a last ditch attempt to break even, Sugar Hill Records' owner Joseph Robinson reluctantly signed away the rights to the master recordings of many of the highly successful R&B artists that he managed while he owned and operated All Platinum Records decades earlier.<sup>119</sup> Pisello's masterfully orchestrated con did not end when Robinson agreed to turn over the rights to these recordings. The matter ended up in court as Sugar Hill Records ultimately decided to sue MCA Records for a sum of \$240 million. In the suit, Robinson alleged that MCA intentionally hired a known Gambino crime family con artist to infiltrate and bankrupt his independent record company. Sugar Hill Records' lawyers argued to the courts that MCA used Pisello to con Sugar Hill into signing a corrupt distribution deal in order to set up a situation in which MCA executives could eventually bankrupt Sugar Hill and seize control over the relatively small company and Robinson's assets.<sup>120</sup> However, the complex, drawn-out scandal and ensuing litigation ultimately destroyed Sugar Hill Records. The small independent record company that introduced the world outside of New York City to Hip Hop via "Rapper's

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid

<sup>118</sup> This is a quote from Milton Malden published in: Locklin, Bruce. "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music." *The Record* [Bergen County New Jersey] 6 Apr. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

<sup>119</sup> Locklin, Bruce. "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music." *The Record* [Bergen County New Jersey] 6 Apr. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Pinsley, Elliot. "MCA Records Plotted to Ruin Sugar Hill, Suit Says." *The Record* [Bergen County, New Jersey] 20 Nov. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

Delight” in a highly controversial fashion six years earlier permanently stopped releasing new records in 1985.

Sugar Hill Records’ six year long affair with Hip Hop produced a variety of unforeseen yet tremendously significant results. When Sylvia Robinson first found Henry Jackson at a suburban New Jersey pizzeria, Hip Hop was still confined to a local New York City scene. MCs from the South Bronx did not have recording contracts with record companies and the idea of distributing party raps to the world seemed quite improbable. However, Robinson immediately recognized Hip Hop’s potential, specifically rapping, for commercial success and took full advantage of the opportunity by creating the Sugar Hill Gang, buying back her record company from Morris Levy, and producing and distributing a tremendous amount of hit rap records between 1979 and 1985. Although Sugar Hill Records ended Hip Hop’s six-year existence as an unadulterated art form and local cultural phenomenon, in the process the small independent record company exposed the world to rap music in a financially successful fashion. Before Sugar Hill Records investment in Hip Hop culture, major record companies and other corporate conglomerates had no idea that Hip Hop could ever be profitable or marketable on a national and even international scale. Why would corporate executive elitists believe that a youth performance art born in the most neglected urban area of the nation could possibly be a sound business investment? Sugar Hill Records’ success, before being destroyed by mafia infiltration allegedly at the hands of MCA Records, proved to the world that Hip Hop was in fact marketable and if utilized the right way could be highly profitable. Sugar Hill’s immensely positive experiences with Hip Hop over a six-year period ultimately illustrated to more powerful corporate entities such as major record companies, media conglomerates, and many corporate decision-makers that Hip Hop had the potential to be a sound business investment. This

illustration marked both the end of Hip Hop as a local cultural phenomenon confined to decaying, impoverished New York City neighborhoods and the beginning of Hip Hop as a commercialized popular music genre and commodified piece of American popular culture.

### Chapter 3

#### **Kurtis Blow, Independent Record Companies, and Subtle Corporate Investments**

In a September 12, 1982 New York Times article entitled “Pop Music’s Establishment is Ripe for Change,” staff writer Robert Palmer wrote quite critically about the state of the mainstream music business as of the fall of 1982. He contended, “pop music’s established artists and groups and the business that has grown up around them are ripe for a change” but in order for change to occur “it is going to take some younger performers, some committed pop music businessmen, and a shakeup in the patterns of radio programming to bring this about, and the people who are going to make the change are probably among us right now.”<sup>121</sup> Palmer also briefly mentioned that “black rap music and the hard funk rhymes that go with it are a potential source for a new trend” and “one suspects that much more can be done with it.”<sup>122</sup> It is reasonable to hypothesize that he based his claim partially on the fact that in 1981 a white punk rock band named Blondie released a popular rap single entitled “Rapture” after becoming acquainted with and learning from a Hip Hop veteran from the Bronx scene named Fab Five Freddy. However, “Rapture” was nothing more than an anomaly. Blondie was not a rap group and had no meaningful involvement in Hip Hop culture. Therefore, the most logical explanation for Robert Palmer’s prediction that rap music might become the next big thing lies in the fact that between 1979 and 1982 an abundance of independent rap record companies sprouted up and rappers signed to these labels released many hit singles on record that garnered popularity amongst black audiences. Also, a rapper named Kurtis Blow released several influential records

---

<sup>121</sup> Palmer, Robert. "Pop Music's Establishment Is Ripe for Change." *New York Times* 12 Sept. 1982, Late City Final ed., Arts and Leisure sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*

through Mercury Records during this period as well. Regardless of his reasoning, Palmer's prediction turned out to be amazingly accurate.

Although Sugar Hill Records' commodified Hip Hop culture and put rap music on a national stage by creating the Sugar Hill Gang and releasing "Rapper's Delight," the record company's most long-term significant achievement was their illustration that an investment in Hip Hop culture could be a financially sound business strategy. However, beginning in late 1979, many other independent record labels followed Sugar Hill's lead and illustrated Hip Hop's potential profitability as well. For example, at the end of 1979 Enjoy Records, an independent record company first created by Bobby Robinson in 1962 and operated out of Bobby's Record Shop on 125<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, began signing MCs, recording their raps, and releasing rap records. In fact, Enjoy Records released over thirty rap records during the three-year period between the time that "Rapper's Delight" and "The Message" hit the charts for Sugar Hill. Enjoy signed well-known artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, the Treacherous Three, and the Funky Four Plus One More. Although, each group eventually left Enjoy and signed with Sugar Hill, all three of these highly influential rap groups started their recording careers off as Enjoy artists. Enjoy Records also signed lesser known Hip Hop artists such as the Fearless Four, Kool Kyle The Starchild, Doctor Ice, The Packman, and many more. Doug E. Fresh even got his start at Enjoy before switching labels numerous times and eventually going on to a highly successful recording career.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> "About.com: [Http://www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy Records.](http://www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy%20Records)" *Music Careers - Music Industry Careers - Finding Music Business Careers.* Web. <[http://musicians.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=musicians&cdn=careers&tm=274&gps=392\\_914\\_1345\\_564&f=00&su=p554.12.336.ip\\_&tt=11&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http%3A//www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy%2bRecords](http://musicians.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=musicians&cdn=careers&tm=274&gps=392_914_1345_564&f=00&su=p554.12.336.ip_&tt=11&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http%3A//www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy%2bRecords)>.



Enjoy Records continued releasing rap records for three years after Sugar Hill Records fell victim to mafia infiltration allegedly at the hands of MCA Records in 1985 and should be remembered for their monumental investments in Hip Hop culture between 1979 and 1988. Although Enjoy did not have the same large-scale commercial and financial success as Sugar Hill Records, the small Harlem-based record company altered South Bronx Hip Hop culture just as Sugar Hill did. Like Sugar Hill, Enjoy Records capitalized on the record-making phenomenon beginning in 1979 and played a key role in transforming the localized South Bronx performance Hip Hop culture into a national recording industry. Before the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," Enjoy Records owner Bobby Robinson (no relation to Sugar Hill's Robinson family) signed and recorded strictly R&B artists out of his Harlem record shop and had a fair amount of success. However, as a strictly rap oriented record label, Enjoy made a permanent mark on popular culture and American society as a whole, which is not often justly acknowledged, by releasing forty-seven rap records between 1979 and 1988. Some of the most influential recording Hip Hop artists such as Grandmaster Flash and Doug E. Fresh started their careers at Bobby Robinson's Enjoy Records. Like Sugar Hill Records, Enjoy Records stopped releasing records rather abruptly. However, unlike Sugar Hill, Enjoy did not fall victim to a scandal involving a major record company and an organized crime family. Rather, Enjoy Records ceased operation when the landlord of the building that housed Bobby's Record Shop in Harlem closed Robinson's 125<sup>th</sup> Street store.<sup>124</sup> During the eight-years it stayed in business as an exclusively rap-oriented independent record company, Enjoy Records signed many MCs from the Bronx and Harlem that had been involved in Hip Hop culture in the area before the era of recorded rap, distributed hit rap records to a national audience, and assisted in Hip Hop's

---

<sup>124</sup> "Enjoy Records - Profile of Record Label Enjoy Records." *Music Careers - Music Industry Careers - Finding Music Business Careers*. Web. <<http://musicians.about.com/od/indielabels/p/enjoyrecords.htm>>.

transformation. Enjoy Records' contributions to Hip Hop during the first years of commercially recorded rap music ultimately allowed corporate conglomerates to safely invest in the culture.

After the release of "Rapper's Delight" in October of 1979, over 50 raps records were released by a variety of independent record companies during the year's remaining few months. This trend continued throughout the early 1980s as well. Some of these labels such as Funky Constellation Records, Tree Line Records, Razzberri Rainbow Records, New Wave Dis-Go Records, and several others only released one record ever. Others such as TEC Records, ROTA Records, and D & K Records released less than five records over the course of their existence. Still other independent records companies such as Reflection Records, Vogue Records, Paul Winley Records, and others released many rap records during late 1979 and throughout the early 1980s.<sup>125</sup> Recording artists like the Jazzy 4 MCs, Funky Constellation, and Lady B recorded records for these fleeting labels during this period. Although all of these early independent records companies eventually faded away, while they stayed in business they had the same effects on Hip Hop culture as a whole as well-known independent labels from the period like Sugar Hill and Enjoy. Through the mid-1980s, these independent record labels proved Hip Hop culture could be commodified for national sale. Record labels such as First Class Records and PDJ never achieved the same significant financial gains as Sugar Hill Records. However, all of these early independent labels illustrated that rap on record was not a fleeting phase. The fact that miniscule, one-hit-wonder, independent rap-oriented record labels continued to release records, some of which reached the charts, throughout the mid-1980s earned rap music a permanent place in American popular culture. Many corporate conglomerates eventually learned from these tiny record labels and invested in Hip Hop culture.

---

<sup>125</sup> "Raphistory.net | Records." *Raphistory.net | RAP HISTORY ... Because Rappin Ain't No Thang...* Web. <<http://www.raphistory.net/index.php?inc=records&lang=en&ID=&offset=0&sortby=year&sorder=asc&operation=&year=1979&entries>

While Sugar Hill Records, Enjoy Records, and numerous other independent record companies invested in Hip Hop, one major record company made an interesting investment of their own. Shortly after the release of “Rapper’s Delight,” Mercury Records, a major record company, signed Harlem MC Kurtis Blow, who had been well known throughout the mid 1970s on the local South Bronx and Harlem Hip Hop scene. This signing was completely uncharacteristic of major record companies at the time because they simply did not sign rappers. In fact, after Kurtis Blow no other rapper signed to a major label for years. Nevertheless, as a Mercury recording artist, Kurtis Blow released a variety of records that further moved Hip Hop away from being strictly a localized South Bronx performance art and youth cultural phenomenon. Kurtis Blow first signed to Mercury Records in late 1979 when his manager Russell Simmons, who would eventually go on to completely transform Hip Hop culture throughout the 1980s, recorded Blow’s “Christmas Rappin’.” According to Simmons, “we put it on vinyl because no one wanted to buy it. We put the vinyl in the street and when it got hot in the street Mercury Records called us.”<sup>126</sup> Through Mercury Records Kurtis Blow later released “The Breaks,” which sold many copies and became such a sensation that a reputable rock and roll critic actually voted for it to be awarded the honor of ‘single of the year’ in 1981.<sup>127</sup> Although his contract with Mercury Records made him an anomaly, Kurtis Blow’s success with a major record company may have served an even greater purpose than the success of Sugar Hill Records “Rapper’s Delight.” The fact that a major record company profited for years off of a risky investment in Hip Hop culture clearly illustrated that the culture could produce tangible economic gains.

---

<sup>126</sup> This quote is from an interview with Russell Simmons recorded for the documentary: *And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

<sup>127</sup> Palmer, Robert. "The Pop Life; Grammys: Honoring Art or Commercial Success?" *New York Times* 25 Feb. 1981, Late City Final ed., Cultural Desk sec. *Factiva*. Web. 4 Mar. 2010.

In addition, in the early 1980s Tommy Boy Records emerged as an independent rap-oriented record company and achieved success comparable to Sugar Hill Records. In 1981 twenty-seven year old Tom Silverman formed Tommy Boy Records a few years after dropping out of graduate school at Western Michigan University and moving to New York City.<sup>128</sup> In an interview for a Newsday article entitled “Sounds of a Street-Level Approach to Pop Music,” he claims he named his company after “a brand-name [he] saw on a carton of grapes in his grandfather’s basement.”<sup>129</sup> In its first four years of operation, Tommy Boy Records became a premier rap-oriented independent record company by signing ten artists including the Force M.D.s and Hip Hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa.<sup>130</sup> In fact, as a Tommy Boy recording artist Afrika Bambaataa recorded “Planet Rock,” a hit single that sold over 600,000 units and ended up being the highest grossing rap record of 1982.<sup>131</sup>

Between its 1981 inception and October of 1985 Tommy Boy signed exceptional talents and produced and distributed eight singles that each sold a minimum of 80,000 units.<sup>132</sup> According to Tommy Boy’s founder Tom Silverstein, he originally created his record company and invested in Hip Hop culture in an effort “to buck trends,” which clearly worked as his company “averaged \$2 million to \$3 million in gross revenues each year” between 1981 and 1985 by recording and distributing rap music.<sup>133</sup> In 1985, in an attempt to cater to non-Hip Hop fans, Tommy Boy Records released a greatest hits album entitled “Greatest Beats,” which, according to New York Times staff-writer Robert Palmer, “provided just what many curious

---

<sup>128</sup> Connor, William S.D. "Sounds of a Street-Level Approach to Pop Music." *Newsday* [New York City] 7 Oct. 1985, City Business sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid

<sup>130</sup> Van Matre, Lynn. "Rappers Break Toward Mainstream with a 'Hip-Hop' Beat." *Chicago Tribune* 9 June 1985, Final ed., Arts sec.: 6. *ProQuest*. Web.

<sup>131</sup> Connor, William S.D. "Sounds of a Street-Level Approach to Pop Music." *Newsday* [New York City] 7 Oct. 1985, City Business sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid

<sup>133</sup> Ibid

rock fans were waiting for-solid album-length collections of hip-hop's most significant innovations and greatest hits."<sup>134</sup> Tommy Boy achieved tremendous financial success via rap music throughout the early to mid 1980s and, unlike other independent record companies from the time, continues to operate in 2010. As a small corporate entity formed in 1981 by a business-savvy college dropout, Tommy Boy Records contributed to Hip Hop's transformation and served the same function as Sugar Hill Records, Enjoy Records, and all the other miniscule independent record companies that existed throughout the early 1980s.

Independent record labels were not the only small corporate entities invested in Hip Hop culture between 1979 and 1986 leading corporate conglomerates to utilize the culture as an economic investment throughout the next two and a half decades. Throughout this seven-year period a variety of corporate entities invested in Hip Hop culture. For example, in a January 31, 1984 Omaha World-Herald article entitled "Break Dancing...Craze of the Coasts Spins its Way into the Midlands," staff writer Phil Johnson wrote about how breakdancing became extremely popular in Omaha, Nebraska starting when two students at a local community college saw an episode of the 'Donahue' show in which host Phil Donahue explored the art of breakdancing.<sup>135</sup> It is important to note that in 1984 the large media corporation Multimedia Inc. owned and distributed "Donahue," also known as "The Phil Donahue Show." After this nationally syndicated, corporately owned television talk show aired a special on breakdancing, one of the original four elements of South Bronx Hip Hop culture, youth throughout the Midwest became fascinated with it. In his article Johnson writes, "While it can be seen in the hallways of schools across the Midlands as students experiment with the latest craze, it has reached a nearest form in

---

<sup>134</sup> Palmer, Robert. "The Pop Life; A New Label, Landmark, Records Jazz." *New York Times* 20 Feb. 1985, late ed.: C.17. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Catlin, Roger, and Phil Johnson. "Break Dancing... Craze of the Coasts Spins Its Way Into the Midlands." *Omaha World-Herald* 31 Jan. 1984, Youth sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

the Bluffs. The recently formed 52<sup>nd</sup> Street Breakers, after a couple months of practice, says it has received an offer to show off its Midwestern breaking to national audiences.”<sup>136</sup> This group of Omaha, Nebraska breakdancers regularly showcased their acquired skills using rap cassettes as background music on weekends at a local shopping mall in front of relatively large crowds.<sup>137</sup> By utilizing one of the culture’s core elements to attract a new demographic of young viewers and boost ratings the corporately owned “Phil Donahue Show” subtly invested in Hip Hop. Multimedia Inc. and the producers of “Donahue” chose to air a special on breakdancing and as a result a group of young people from Omaha, Nebraska learned all about the art form that originated in the neglected, impoverished South Bronx in 1973 and in the process actually become b-boys. Multimedia Inc.’s miniscule corporate investment in 1984 illustrated that Hip Hop could appeal to audiences far removed from New York City’s poorest, most troubled African American and Latino neighborhoods and larger, more powerful corporate entities eventually started to take notice.

In addition, in the early to mid 1980s a variety of corporate publishing companies invested in Hip Hop. In 1984 two publishing firms in particular invested in Hip Hop culture. In September of 1984, St. Martins Press, a company owned by publishing giant Macmillan Publishers Ltd., published a book by Steven Hager entitled Hip Hop: The illustrated history of break dancing, rap music, and graffiti. Macmillan operates in over seventy countries worldwide and refers to itself as “a distinctive conglomerate of leading publishing imprints” whose main goal focuses “on educating the leaders and thinkers of tomorrow.”<sup>138</sup> In her September 1984 book review, critic Rosellen Brewer describes the fact that in Hip Hop: The illustrated history of

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid

<sup>137</sup> Ibid

<sup>138</sup> “Macmillan :: About.” *Macmillan - Distinguished & Award Winning Global Publisher in 41 Countries*. Web. <<http://us.macmillan.com/splash/about/index.html>>.

break dancing, rap music, and graffiti Hager chronicles the history of the core elements of Hip Hop culture and offers his readers worldwide “a dictionary of slang” and “how-to’s on select moves.”<sup>139</sup> It is clear that Macmillan Publishers Ltd and their subsidiary St. Martin’s Press took a keen interest in Hip Hop and decided that publishing Hager’s book, and distributing it to bookstores for sale at a price of \$8.95, would be a sound business investment. Their decision spread knowledge of Hip Hop culture to readers worldwide and demonstrated that selling items pertaining to Hip Hop leads to monetary gains. Contemporary Books Inc.’s decision to publish William H. Watkins and Eric N. Franklin’s book entitled Breakdance had the same effect as well. Rosellen Brewer stated in September of 1984 that Breakdance “appears to be one of the first how-to’s on breakdancing” containing “ ‘The Official Breakdance Dictionary’ ” and illustrating to its readers “how to dress like a breaker.”<sup>140</sup> This is a subtle yet clear example of corporate investment in Hip Hop culture. The fact that a publishing company chose to distribute a piece of literature giving step by step instructions for readers everywhere to follow in order to become a b-boy clearly illustrates the growing corporate interest in Hip Hop culture. By September of 1984 independent record companies had already been distributing rap records to national audiences for five years with great success. By this time Macmillan Publishers Ltd. via St. Martin’s Press and Contemporary Books Inc. realized that breakdancing would appeal to consumers in areas far removed from New York City and would ultimately result in financial gains when commodified. By investing in Hip Hop culture these companies made sound business decisions and furthered Hip Hop’s commercialization.

One year later, a much larger corporate publishing firm invested in Hip Hop culture as well. In 1985, Random House, which is now “the world’s largest trade-book publisher,”

---

<sup>139</sup> Brewer, Rosellen. "Book Review." Rev. of *Hip Hop: the Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti*. *Library Journal* 15 Sept. 1984. EBSCO. Web

<sup>140</sup> Brewer, Rosellen. "Book Review." Rev. of *Breakdance*. *Library Journal* 15 Sept. 1984. EBSCO. Web

invested in Hip Hop culture by publishing a book about the elements of the culture entitled Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop.<sup>141</sup> A privately held corporation called Advanced Publications Inc. had bought Random House five years earlier and caused Random House to experience “a period of significant growth” in which the company bought up a variety of smaller companies.<sup>142</sup> By the time Random House published Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop, they had become quite a large corporation. The fact that during a period of significant corporate expansion, Random House chose to publish a book about a culture that had left the South Bronx six years earlier and entered into the process of becoming a commercialized popular music genre demonstrates that the company believed Hip Hop to be a profitable business endeavor. Random House's investment in Hip Hop culture via their publication of Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop spread Hip Hop culture to widespread audiences and proved Hip Hop to be a profitable commodity.

In addition to publishing companies making early corporate investments in Hip Hop culture, during the early 1980s two films emerged that exposed audiences all over the world to Hip Hop culture and further solidified Hip Hop's future as a highly marketable and desirable commodity. In 1982 Charlie Ahearn, who was originally from Binghamton, New York, wrote, directed, and produced the first of these two groundbreaking films entitled *Wild Style*. Ahearn's creation was extremely unique in a variety of ways. For instance, many of the individuals that originally created Hip Hop culture between 1973 and 1979 in the South Bronx played the roles of the main characters in *Wild Style*. Grandmaster Flash, the Cold Crush Brothers, graffiti artist Lee Quinones, and many well-known b-boys and their crews such as the Rock Steady Crew all appeared in the film. *Wild Style's* plot, although fictitious, was also unique because of its meaningful representation of the conflicts plaguing Hip Hop culture as a whole in 1982. At the

---

<sup>141</sup> "Random House - About Us." *Random House - Bringing You the Best in Fiction, Nonfiction, and Children's Books*. Web. <<http://www.randomhouse.com/about/history.html>>.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid



time, independent record companies had been in the process of transforming emceeing into a recorded popular music genre for three years, which had been affecting local South Bronx Hip Hop culture as a whole. According to Washington Post movie critic Richard Harrington, the film's plot "serves as a metaphor for Hip Hop culture in general" as long-time South Bronx graffiti artist Lee Quinones "is caught between the ambitions of a featherbrained cultural reporter (Patti Astor) who wants to popularize and legitimize his outlaw art" and his feelings about staying true to his graffiti art.<sup>143</sup> *Wild Style's* greatest effect lies in the fact that it presented the world with an authentic visual representation of all elements of South Bronx Hip Hop culture.<sup>144</sup>

The extremely subtle point that must be considered in the case of *Wild Style* has to do with the question of distribution. Although Charlie Ahearn wrote, directed, and produced *Wild Style* in the most authentic possible fashion, he did so in an effort both to visually record the beauty of Hip Hop culture and to distribute his work to the masses. Therefore, to accomplish his goal of distributing *Wild Style*, Hip Hop's first feature-length film, Ahearn relied on finding a corporation to invest in his project. First Run Features, an independent film distribution company founded four years before *Wild Style's* 1983 completion, signed on with Ahearn and released the film in theaters. First Run Features' distribution of *Wild Style* provided audiences outside of New York City with access to an authentic visual representation of Hip Hop culture, much like small independent record companies had been doing for three years prior to 1983. Later Rhino Entertainment Company, a company owned by music industry giant Warner Music Group, decided to invest in Hip Hop culture as well by signing a contract with Ahearn to distribute *Wild Style* on VHS. Through Rhino, VHS copies of Charlie Ahearn's masterful film reached even more audiences. First Run Features and Rhino Entertainment enabled *Wild Style* to

---

<sup>143</sup> Harrington, Richard. "'Wild Style': Art to Go." *Washington Post* 26 Jan. 1984. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>144</sup> *Wild Style*. Dir. Charlie Ahearn. Prod. Charlie Ahearn. By Charlie Ahearn. First Run Features (Theaters) and Rhino Entertainment (VHS), 1983. Videocassette.

achieve long-term notoriety and commercial success. Like its contemporary independent record labels, publishing companies, and media outlets, these two corporate entities made successful business decisions to invest in Hip Hop culture and as a result *Wild Style* became a tremendous success and visual artistic achievement that exposed worldwide audiences to Hip Hop culture in the most authentic possible fashion.

Two years later, the film *Beat Street* followed up *Wild Style*'s success and presented the world with yet another strong visualization of South Bronx Hip Hop culture. *Beat Street*'s production history is quite intricate. Steven Hager, author of Hip Hop: The illustrated history of break dancing, rap music, and graffiti, wrote the story for the film. According to an article entitled "Belafonte Auditions 'Breakers' for Film" that appeared in the January 20, 1984 issue of The Globe and Mail, after becoming "fascinated by the gang warfare-like elements" of breakdancing, Harry Belafonte, decided to produce a film on Hip Hop culture, specifically its breakdancing element.<sup>145</sup> Belafonte released the film, which turned out to be remarkably similar to *Wild Style*, in June of 1984. Like *Wild Style*, *Beat Street* starred many of the original pioneers of South Bronx Hip Hop culture. DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, the Treacherous Three, the Rock Steady Crew, and many others all appeared in the film. *Beat Street*'s storyline also slightly resembled that of *Wild Style* in the fact that it chronicled the lives of New York City b-boys, graffiti artists, DJs, and MCs in a fictitious plot but in a factually accurate fashion. However, *Beat Street*'s most important similarity to *Wild Style* was the effect it evoked on popular culture.

Singer and actor Harry Belafonte produced *Beat Street* in an effort to expose the world to the intricacies of breakdancing and Hip Hop culture as a whole just as Charlie Ahearn had done two years earlier with *Wild Style*. However, like Ahearn, Belafonte and the film's other

---

<sup>145</sup> "Belafonte Auditions 'Breakers' for Film." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 20 Jan. 1984, Features Movies sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

producers needed to find a way to distribute their artistic visual representation to the masses. They decided on Orion Pictures Company, a production company whose movie *Amadeus* won the Academy Award for Best Picture the same year *Beat Street* premiered. Orion Pictures achieved significant success over the years, before eventually falling victim to bankruptcy, by distributing hit movies such as *Hoosiers*, *Platoon*, and *Dances with Wolves*. With *Beat Street*, Orion Pictures Company made a subtle, yet important, investment in Hip Hop culture. Through their distribution of *Beat Street*, Orion Pictures Company contributed to Hip Hop culture becoming a worldwide sensation. Interestingly, Atlantic Records, a major music industry company, also contributed to *Beat Street's* success by distributing the film's soundtrack years before major record labels began significant investments in Hip Hop. Orion Pictures Company and Atlantic Records' significant involvement with *Beat Street* enabled the film to spread to areas far away from the South Bronx and the New York City Hip Hop community. Like other independent record companies, publishing companies, and media outlets before them, these two corporate entities proved an investment in Hip Hop culture to be a profitable financial endeavor and helped spread Hip Hop as a commodity to audiences far removed from the South Bronx.

During the seven-year period between 1979 and 1986 the world outside of New York City gained exposure to Hip Hop culture due to the fact that a variety of corporate entities invested in the culture for financial reasons. The corporations that chose to invest in Hip Hop culture during this period made highly effective business decisions despite the fact that their investments were subtle and relatively small-scale compared to contemporary corporate influence in Hip Hop. Independent record companies released rap records that enabled people that had never been to a Bronx Hip Hop jam to hear the art of emceeing. Large and small publishing companies released books that clearly explained the dynamics of Hip Hop culture and

made it so they were available for consumption at bookstores around the globe. Television shows such as “The Phil Donahue Show” aired specials on breakdancing and as a result kids in Nebraska formed their own b-boy crews and performed at rural malls. Insightful producers manufactured films using actual Hip Hop pioneers that clearly illustrated the Hip Hop lifestyle and corporate entertainment companies distributed them to the masses. The period of 1979 to 1986 witnessed the rise of corporate investment in Hip Hop culture. As a result of these investments, Hip Hop began to transition from a South Bronx artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon into a highly marketable, commodified, commercialized form of popular entertainment. The success of early independent record companies such as Enjoy and Sugar Hill and the effectiveness of small-scale corporate investors such as Random House and Rhino Entertainment Company during this period proved Hip Hop to be profitable. These success stories ultimately led corporate giants to utilize Hip Hop as a mode of efficient economic investment throughout the next two and a half decades.

## Chapter 4

### Def Jam Recordings and the Russell Simmons Empire

Over the course of the last twenty-five years Def Jam Recordings and Russell Simmons' multifaceted business empire has completely transformed Hip Hop culture. The histories of Russell Simmons and Def Jam are extremely detailed and complex. However, Def Jam and Simmons' effect on popular culture and American society as a whole is much easier to comprehend. When 1984 began, one relatively large independent record company, Sugar Hill Records, had been dominating the business of recorded rap music for five years. The smaller Enjoy Records and countless miniscule and lesser-known independent labels such as TEC Records and ROTA Records had been releasing rap records since 1979, each contributing to making recorded rap music a success and demonstrating its profitability. Also, by 1984 corporate entities such as media outlets, publishing companies, and entertainment distribution companies had begun spreading Hip Hop culture to audiences outside of New York City through their early investments in the culture. These investments set the stage for Def Jam Recordings to take over Hip Hop. The multiple independent labels that preceded Def Jam Recordings clearly demonstrated that, if utilized the right way, Hip Hop had a huge potential for profit. As a Hip Hop promoter and manager between 1979 and 1984 Simmons witnessed the rise of these independent record labels and understood the concept of corporate investment in the culture and as a result, since its inception, Def Jam Recordings has achieved more success through its sole investment in Hip Hop culture than any of the labels that had come before. An analysis of the evidence reveals that Def Jam Records revolutionized Hip Hop and permanently transformed the

culture into a multimillion-dollar music industry. Def Jam Recordings is responsible for creating an immensely profitable, sustainable business through investing in Hip Hop culture.

In order to understand the effect Simmons and Def Jam Recordings has had on Hip Hop culture over the last twenty-five years, it is first necessary to understand the brief history of Def Jam's formation. Rick Rubin, who moved from an affluent section of Long Island to lower Manhattan to attend New York University as an eighteen year old in 1981, created Def Jam Records from his dorm room in 1984. In his first three years at New York University Rubin spent much of his time becoming familiar with the local punk rock and Hip Hop scenes throughout the city. Rubin became fascinated with Hip Hop culture and began experimenting with producing beats. At one point in his first three years at NYU, Rubin met DJ Jazzy Jay, a local DJ from the Bronx. The two formed a relationship and eventually Rubin produced DJ Jazzy Jay and T La Rock's collaborative 1984 hit "It's Yours." According to Def Jam's former director of publicity Bill Adler, "There's no overstating the importance of 'Its Yours.' It was the record that brought together the producer Rick Rubin and the entrepreneur Russell Simmons. It forged the creation of Def Jam Recordings as we know it."<sup>146</sup> Shortly after the release of "It's Yours," DJ Jazzy Jay introduced Rick Rubin to Russell Simmons, who had become well-known as a Hip Hop promoter and manager since he brokered Kurtis Blow's deal with Mercury Records in late 1979. Between 1979 and 1984 Simmons continued to build his reputation throughout New York City's Hip Hop community as an up and coming businessman focusing strictly on investments in Hip Hop culture. When he met Rubin in 1984 he was juggling a variety of business endeavors, such as managing the newly formed group Run D.M.C. Shortly after

---

<sup>146</sup> "Interview With Def Jam's First Artist T La Rock l." *The Urban Daily*. Web. <<http://theurbandaily.com/music/the-urban-daily-staff/why-wasnt-def-jams-first-artist-at-hip-hop-honors/>>.

meeting, Rubin and Simmons decided to go into business together through Def Jam Recordings. This decision led to the advancement of Hip Hop as a business.

Throughout the last twenty-five years Russell Simmons has undertaken a wide array of successful business endeavors that have revolutionized Hip Hop. Def Jam Recordings, Simmons' first major business endeavor, turned out to be unbelievably financially successful. Despite the fact that, like most Hip Hop purists, Joe Conzo Jr. contends, "DJ Jazzy Jay and Rick Rubin started Def Jam" without him, when Russell Simmons became involved with Rubin and Def Jam, the small label quickly transformed into a large record company.<sup>147</sup> After its 1984 formation as an independent rap label, Def Jam Recordings quickly became a premiere record company under Simmons and Rubin by signing marketable artists and recording and releasing a constant stream of hit records. Beginning in 1984, Def Jam signed LL Cool J and the Beastie Boys and both artists released hit singles entitled "I Need a Beat" and "Rock Hard" respectively. In fact, these singles became so popular with mainstream audiences that music industry giant CBS Records signed a truly historic distribution deal with Def Jam Recordings through Columbia Records, a company that CBS owned at the time. One year earlier MCA Records signed a distribution deal with Sugar Hill Records that ultimately ended with Sugar Hill falling victim to bankruptcy allegedly at the hands of MCA coordinated mafia infiltration. However, no such scandal happened with Def Jam and CBS/Columbia Records. Through their historic deal with this major record company Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin established Def Jam Recordings as a premiere record company and solidified Hip Hop's status as a highly marketable, profitable business investment.

---

<sup>147</sup> This quote is from an interview with Joe Conzo: Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.

Between 1984 and 1994, the year in which Simmons sold the rights to distribute his company's music for \$33 million, Def Jam Recordings redefined Hip Hop culture.<sup>148</sup> During this ten-year span Def Jam, the original piece of Russell Simmons' Hip Hop empire, completely innovated the dynamics of Hip Hop and solidified the structure of Hip Hop as a business. After becoming the first independent rap record company to sign a successful distribution deal with a major record label, throughout the 1980s, Def Jam executives discovered and signed an assortment of talented, innovative, and highly marketable artists. After initially signing artists such as the Beastie Boys, LL Cool J, and Run D.M.C., Def Jam proceeded to make insightful business decisions by signing Slick Rick, Method Man, Redman, Warren G, and many others. Def Jam also diversified its investments by signing controversial acts such as EPMD, Public Enemy, and even a demonic rock band called Slayer. These artists each released tremendously profitable hit records. For example, Warren G's 1994 album entitled "Regulate...G Funk Era" eventually sold three million copies. By 1994 Def Jam Recordings had become a force to be reckoned with in the music industry by marketing Hip Hop to the masses at a rate that its predecessors had never been able to reach during the early 1980s.

An in-depth analysis of the cover story of the December 1992 issue of Black Enterprise entitled "Russell Simmons' Rush for Profits" clearly illustrates the fact that by 1992 Russell Simmons had built a Hip Hop empire and had achieved immense financial success by making a variety of hugely profitable investments in Hip Hop culture. Through his investments and by marketing what he referred to as "today's black culture," Simmons turned Hip Hop culture into a

---

<sup>148</sup> "Def Jam Changed Music Business, Still a Power at 25 - CNN.com." *CNN.com - Breaking News, U.S., World, Weather, Entertainment & Video News*. Web. <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/Music/11/02/def.jam.anniversary/index.html>>.



marketable commodity available to mainstream audiences everywhere.<sup>149</sup> Although many independent record company owners tried this tactic during the early 1980s, none of them ever managed to reach the status that Simmons reached by 1992. Unlike his predecessors' independent record companies, Def Jam did not fall victim to bankruptcy or financial instability of any kind. In fact, Russell Simmons' Def Jam Recordings became so profitable that he established a company called Rush Communications to house his additional investments, which Black Enterprise staff writer Christopher Vaughn reported consisted of a variety of record labels, management firms, and even film, television, and radio businesses by December of 1992.<sup>150</sup> According to Vaughn, by this time Simmons' investments in Hip Hop culture earned him an annual income of \$5 million and Rush Communications became so profitable that he began to seriously contemplate ways to bring his \$34 million Hip Hop conglomerate to Wall Street.<sup>151</sup> The fact that Russell Simmons considered bringing Rush Communications to the New York Stock Exchange speaks volumes of the state of Hip Hop culture during the first ten years of the Def Jam era. Nineteen years earlier when DJ Kool Herc gave birth to Hip Hop the concept of owning shares of Hip Hop stock was unheard of. However, Russell Simmons made this concept a reality. His deep convictions concerning the potential worldwide appeal of Hip Hop culture allowed him to pick up where Sugar Hill and other independent companies had left off and truly transform Hip Hop into a multimillion-dollar business.

The creation and sustained success of Def Jam Recordings served as a turning point in Hip Hop's transition from a South Bronx artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon into a highly marketable, commodified, commercialized form of popular entertainment. Before Def

---

<sup>149</sup> Vaughn, Christopher. "Russell Simmons' Rush For Profits." *Black Enterprise* Dec. 1992. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid

<sup>151</sup> Ibid

Jam, small independently owned rap record companies released rap records to the public. These records, some of which sold very well, introduced the world outside of the South Bronx to Hip Hop culture. However, none of these record companies signed artists and produced hit records at Def Jam's pace. Between 1984 and 1992 Def Jam Recordings became a multimillion-dollar premiere record company simply through insightful investments in Hip Hop culture. Russell Simmons' Rush Communications also demonstrated Hip Hop's financial sustainability. Since 1994 Def Jam has undergone many transformations, corporate mergers, and executive transitions. Some of the most profitable Hip Hop artists to ever pick up a microphone such as Jay-Z, Kanye West, and DMX have all been Def Jam Recording artists over the years. Russell Simmons and Def Jam Records turned Hip Hop culture into a permanently profitable industry and laid the foundation for major corporations to invest in Hip Hop culture as well.

## Chapter 5

### Yo! MTV Raps and Hip Hop Publications

In 1988, Hip Hop entered into an era in which many large corporations began to learn from the success of entities that successfully invested in Hip Hop culture during the last few months of 1979 through the mid 1980s. Although many small companies invested in Hip Hop culture during these years, some of the more successful ones included Def Jam Recordings, Sugar Hill Records, and Rhino Entertainment Company. The year 1988 marked the fifteenth anniversary of DJ Kool Herc's first Hip Hop jam and the ninth anniversary of the release of the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight." By this time Def Jam Recordings had been operating for four years and had been signed to CBS-owned Columbia Records for three years. Several large corporations such as CBS-owned Columbia Records, Atlantic Records, and Mercury Records had already made relatively small yet significant investments in Hip Hop culture and had been rewarded financially for their efforts. By 1988, Hip Hop had proven itself to be much more than an artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon restricted to the streets of the South Bronx and Harlem. Independent investors such as Sylvia Robinson and Russell Simmons illustrated to national and international audiences that Hip Hop culture could produce revenue for any company willing to gamble on it. In 1988, MTV and two Harvard University students took notice of this reality and within a few years Time Warner followed suit.

An analysis of an assortment of newspaper articles published between 1988 and 1989 reveals the impact that MTV's Yo! MTV Raps exerted on Hip Hop and popular culture as a whole. On August 7, 1988 San Francisco Chronicle staff writer Chuck Ross began his article entitled "MTV Tries to Keep Grooving" with the question, "Does anyone still want his

MTV?"<sup>152</sup> At the time this seemed like a very appropriate question for the revolutionary music television network that launched seven years earlier promising to only play music videos.

However, by 1988 MTV's President and CEO Tom Freston admitted to The San Francisco Chronicle that because of its structure as strictly a music video oriented television network, MTV had to begin to strive "to move from a radio station with random videos to a TV network where we have half-hour and hour programs" in order "to increase the time spent watching MTV."<sup>153</sup> In an effort to accomplish this goal, Freston and his executive colleagues decided to follow the likes of Sugar Hill Records, Def Jam Recordings, and CBS Records and attempt to remedy the problems facing their station by investing in Hip Hop culture.

In August of 1988 the pilot episode of Yo! MTV Raps aired on MTV and quickly earned a weekly half-hour slot on the network. According to an October 16, 1988 Orange County Register article, Yo! MTV Raps received such positive feedback and high ratings from MTV viewers that the network decided to award the innovative show a permanent spot on Saturday mornings and during primetime on Saturday evening.<sup>154</sup> The immediate positive response to Yo! MTV Raps, a show dedicated to broadcasting Hip Hop culture to its audiences, illustrated the same points that Def Jam and earlier independent rap record companies had been demonstrating for years. From the very beginning Yo! MTV Raps proved that audiences outside of the most impoverished streets of New York City could be enthralled by Hip Hop culture. However, Yo! MTV Raps had a much greater effect than these record labels. By nature of the fact that it aired on a nationally broadcasted television station, Yo! MTV Raps offered consumers the Hip Hop experience in a much more accessible fashion. Anyone that owned a television set with a cable

---

<sup>152</sup> Ross, Chuck. "MTV Tries to Keep Grooving." *San Francisco Chronicle* 7 Aug. 1988, Sunday ed., TV Week sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid

<sup>154</sup> Darling, Cary. "Riffs." *The Orange County Register* [Santa Ana] 16 Oct. 1988, Evening ed., Show sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

box could experience Hip Hop culture. Therefore, MTV's investment in Hip Hop culture became much more expansive than all of the corporate entities that invested in Hip Hop years earlier. MTV's investment in Hip Hop culture via Yo! MTV Jams enabled countless people to consume Hip Hop without going to the store and purchasing a record or a book and without going to the movie theater to watch a movie such as *Wild Style* or *Beat Street*. It is also important to remember that as of 1988, mainstream radio stations still refused to air rap music. Therefore, as soon as it premiered in August of 1988 Yo! MTV Raps revealed itself to be an entirely new kind of corporate investment in Hip Hop culture.

Before experimenting with Hip Hop, producing Yo! MTV Raps, and hiring Hip Hop legend Fab 5 Freddy as the show's host in 1988, MTV had never embraced African American music or culture. Despite promoting itself as an all-encompassing music television network and not as specifically a rock-oriented station, throughout its first seven years in existence, MTV executives and producers focused primarily on rock music and catered most of their programming to white, teenaged audiences. Their choices outraged many African American musicians but few spoke out against the network publicly. In fact Rick James was one of the few artists that continuously challenged MTV's blatant refusals to air black artists' music videos. In a 1983 interview James complained, "blacks are missing exposure and sales" because of MTV's seemingly racist agenda. James referred to himself as, "a crusader without an army" because of the fact that other African American artists refused to publicly condemn MTV and predicted that such artists would allow him to "do all the rapping and get into trouble" but in the end would "reap the benefits" of his hard work.<sup>155</sup> Ultimately James's prediction turned out to be accurate.

---

<sup>155</sup> These quotes are from an interview with Rick James published in: "Why It Took MTV so Long to Play Black Music Videos | Jet | Find Articles at BNET." *Find Articles at BNET | News Articles, Magazine Back Issues & Reference Articles on All Topics*. Web. 22 Mar. 2010. <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1355/is\\_14\\_110/ai\\_n16807343/?tag=content;coll1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1355/is_14_110/ai_n16807343/?tag=content;coll1)>.

MTV eventually embraced Hip Hop in 1988, four years after Def Jam Recordings enhanced rap music's mainstream appeal, and African American Hip Hop artists enjoyed tremendous exposure on an internationally televised show that aired daily for over a decade.

Ted Demme and Peter Dougherty created *Yo! MTV Raps*, a show dedicated to broadcasting rap music videos, live artist performances, and all elements of Hip Hop culture to cable television audiences and MTV hired Hip Hop legend Fab 5 Freddy to host the show. Freddy came to MTV with an extensive background in Hip Hop. During the 1970s, he was a graffiti artist as part of Brooklyn's Fabulous 5 crew and became well known within the New York City Hip Hop community for his subway car tags and artistic abilities. He worked with Afrika Bambaataa to spread Hip Hop to the downtown Manhattan punk rock clubs during the early 1980s and formed relationships with many punk rock groups such as Blondie. Fab 5 Freddy also worked with Charlie Ahearn to create *Wild Style* in 1982 and contributed to Hip Hop's development throughout the mid-1980s. By tagging up subway cars that rode around New York City, bringing Hip Hop culture to downtown Punk audiences, and assisting in the production of *Wild Style*, Fab 5 Freddy spread Hip Hop culture to new audiences for over fifteen years before receiving MTV's offer. Therefore, by selecting him to host their show, MTV executives gave Freddy another medium to spread his culture and ensured that *Yo! MTV Raps* would provide its viewers with an authentic daily Hip Hop experience.

An in-depth analysis of several articles from spring 1989 editions of The Washington Post reveals MTV's astounding effects on Hip Hop culture and American popular culture as a whole. In his April 19, 1989 Washington Post article entitled "MTV, Doing its Homework," staff writer Richard Harrington reported that since the premier of its pilot episode, *Yo! MTV*

Raps had become “MTV’s most-watched program.”<sup>156</sup> The fact that in less than a year a television show focusing specifically on Hip Hop culture had become the most popular show on a nationally syndicated station, a station that Harrington reports had traditionally been “widely criticized for its minimal exposure of nonsuperstar black acts,” illustrates the indisputable fact that by 1989 Hip Hop had become a nationally embraced form of mainstream entertainment.<sup>157</sup> MTV’s investment in Hip Hop culture made this a reality. Not only did Yo! MTV Raps provide Hip Hop veteran Fab Five Freddy with a national platform to introduce the world to the culture that he helped develop over a decade earlier, but the show also gave every Hip Hop artist that appeared on it the opportunity to present their work to television audiences everywhere. Because of the massive exposure MTV gave Hip Hop culture, Harrington reported that the corporate network “was greatly responsible for Living Colour’s” 1989 “commercial breakthrough” and “helped Tone Loc’s ‘Loc-ed After Dark’ become the first rap album by a black artist to reach the top of the Billboard charts.”<sup>158</sup>

An analysis of several USA Today articles published the year after Yo! MTV hit the airwaves also illustrates the monumental effects of MTV’s investment in Hip Hop culture. After publishing an article entitled “Yo! Forbes raps for MTV” in which Malcolm Forbes of Forbes Magazine claimed to be an avid Yo! MTV Raps viewer and fan, USA Today printed an extremely insightful follow-up article entitled “The Big Rap Attack; In 10 Years, its become mainstream but purists put down the pop appeal.”<sup>159</sup> In this August 22, 1989 article USA Today staff writer James T. Jones IV describes the increasing presence of Hip Hop culture in

---

<sup>156</sup> Harrington, Richard. "MTV, Doing Its Homework." *Washington Post* 19 Apr. 1989. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid

<sup>158</sup> Harrington, Richard. "MTV, Doing Its Homework." *Washington Post* 19 Apr. 1989. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>159</sup> "Yo! Forbes Raps for MTV." *USA TODAY* 9 Aug. 1989, Final ed., Money sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

mainstream American popular culture. He discusses the importance of Yo! MTV Raps, a show he claims produces “some of MTV’s highest ratings,” and interviews LL Cool J about the success of the show.<sup>160</sup> According to LL Cool J, who had sold millions of albums as a Def Jam Recordings artist by the time of the interview, “people are hearing the music for the first time because of MTV.” He goes on to say that Hip Hop is “new, for instance, to the kids in Nebraska” and “they’re eating it up.”<sup>161</sup> The fact that a man worth over \$500 million, Malcolm Forbes, and a kid living on a farm in Nebraska both became fans of Hip Hop culture within a year of Yo! MTV Raps’ debut speaks volumes of MTV’s investment and utilization of the culture.

It is also clear that corporate entities that invested in Hip Hop culture prior to MTV benefited from MTV’s investment as well. For example, Bill Adler of Rush Communications claimed that between August of 1988 and August of 1989 Yo! MTV Raps helped to progress the business of Hip Hop as a whole and contended, “If it wasn’t for MTV Raps, we would be in trouble.”<sup>162</sup> By the time James T. Jones IV of USA Today interviewed LL Cool J and Bill Adler, Yo! MTV Raps had moved to the 4:30 pm after-school time slot, which allowed the network to captivate young audiences with Hip Hop. Although Def Jam made Hip Hop available to tremendous audiences by signing a historic distribution deal with CBS Records in 1985, MTV took their investment in Hip Hop a step further by transforming the culture into a mainstream form of easily accessible and readily consumable entertainment available to any individual with a cable television set. Yo! MTV Raps immediate success illustrated the undisputable truth that

---

<sup>160</sup> USA Today “The Big Rap Attack; In 10 Years, its become mainstream but purists put down the pop appeal” 08-22-1989

<sup>161</sup> These quotes are from an interview with LL Cool J published in: USA Today “The Big Rap Attack; In 10 Years, its become mainstream but purists put down the pop appeal” 08-22-1989

<sup>162</sup> This quote is from an interview with Bill Adler published in: USA Today “The Big Rap Attack; In 10 Years, its become mainstream but purists put down the pop appeal” 08-22-1989



by 1989 Hip Hop had completed its transition from a South Bronx artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon to a highly marketable, commodified, commercialized element of American popular culture. This transition allowed all sorts of corporate investors to utilize Hip Hop for monetary gains throughout the coming years.

In addition, two young, white, Harvard undergraduate students named David Mays and Jon Schechter created The Source magazine in 1988 in an effort to spread Hip Hop culture. The Source ultimately had the same effect on Hip Hop and American society as a whole as Yo! MTV Raps. However, its creation and first few years in circulation made it very different from the MTV show. Unlike Yo! MTV Raps' creators Ted Demme and Peter Dougherty, David Mays and Jon Schechter started The Source with absolutely no corporate backing. They conceived the idea of producing and distributing a weekly Hip Hop-oriented newsletter to Harvard students while deejaying a weekly rap show that aired on campus radio. In a September 25, 1991 Wall Street Journal article entitled "Little Rap-Music Magazine Has Big Aims" staff writer Meg Cox recounts the history of The Source. According to Cox, in 1988 David Mays wrote a one-page newsletter that he called The Source in an effort to promote his radio show, printed out one thousand copies, and handed them out around Harvard's campus.<sup>163</sup> By 1990, the newsletter had turned into a bi-monthly magazine, usually consisting of thirty to forty pages of Hip Hop content and corporate advertisements, and Mays and Schechter routinely printed as many as ten thousand copies for distribution.<sup>164</sup> After graduating, moving to New York City, hiring two additional business partners, and saving up \$70,000 worth of advance payments from corporations interested in buying advertisement space, Mays and Schechter officially launched The Source as

---

<sup>163</sup> Cox, Meg. "Little Rap-Music Magazine Has Big Aims." *Wall Street Journal* 25 Sept. 1991: B1. *Factiva*. Web. 9 Dec. 2009.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*

an independently owned Hip Hop magazine.<sup>165</sup> However, unlike Yo! MTV Raps, which instantly attracted huge national audiences and quickly became MTV's highest rated show, The Source struggled for years to establish a positive reputation and garner a substantial following.

Despite its initial struggles, during the mid to late 1990s The Source became known nationwide as the premier publication for all things Hip Hop and continues to circulate today as the so-called "Bible of Hip Hop music, culture, and politics." During the 1990s, The Source spread Hip Hop culture to national audiences in the same manner as Yo! MTV Raps. As it transformed into a monthly magazine, The Source became an easily accessible Hip Hop reference available at newsstands across the country. In her February 23, 1998 Advertising Age article entitled "Music Royalty, Advertisers Turn Up 'Source's' Volume" Kathryn Drury reports on the magazine's ten year anniversary banquet, an event attended by some of the most influential Hip Hop figures such as Russell Simmons, Fab 5 Freddy, and Queen Latifah.<sup>166</sup> Drury also reports that large corporations' such as DKNY, VISA, Coco-Cola Company, Pepsi-Cola Company, and many other large corporate entities each bought advertising space in the magazine throughout 1997.<sup>167</sup> Drury states that in 1998 The Source expanded exponentially and its founders even considered merging with Rolling Stone.<sup>168</sup> Although the magazine has experienced lawsuits, constant controversy, and significant negative publicity throughout recent history, The Source continues to contribute to Hip Hop culture by allowing people everywhere to consume and learn about Hip Hop.

---

<sup>165</sup> Cox, Meg. "Little Rap-Music Magazine Has Big Aims." *Wall Street Journal* 25 Sept. 1991: B1. *Factiva*. Web. 9 Dec. 2009.

<sup>166</sup> Drury, Kathryn. "Music Royalty, Advertisers Turn Up 'Source's' Volume." *Advertising Age* 69.8 (1998): 10. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid

<sup>168</sup> Ibid

In addition, four years after Yo! MTV Raps became a hit and Harvard University students David Mays and Jon Schechter founded The Source, another corporate giant decided that an investment in Hip Hop culture would be in their company's best financial interests. An analysis of several articles published in the journal Advertising Age throughout 1992 and 1993 reveals the continued marketability of Hip Hop culture during the period. In an article published on September 14, 1992 entitled "New Hip-Hop Magazine Attracts Mainstream Ads; Strong support hastens launch of 'Vibe'," staff writer Scott Donaton reports, "Media giant Time Warner and music legend Quincy Jones this week are planning to distribute a test issue of Vibe, a national hip-hop magazine."<sup>169</sup> The fact that one of the nation's largest media outlets and a highly accomplished musician and entrepreneur chose to invest their time and money in the pursuit of creating a magazine chronicling Hip Hop for national sale further establishes Hip Hop's marketability. In fact, Hip Hop had become so marketable by 1992 that Donaton reported that Time Warner and Quincy Jones sold fifty-four pages of advertisements in the first issue of Vibe to extremely well established corporate "marketers including Levi Strauss & Co., Nike, The Gap, Reebok International, Nintendo of America, TDK Electronics Corp., Swatch Watch USA and Quaker Oats Co.'s Gatorade."<sup>170</sup> This revelation is truly astounding. Before an issue of Vibe had ever been sold, all of these major companies decided that purchasing an advertisement in a Hip Hop magazine would be a superb business decision. Ten years earlier Sugar Hill Records' owner Joe Robinson could not even convince one major record company to invest in his brand of Hip Hop. It turned out that these companies made great marketing decisions as a March 1, 1993 Advertising Age article entitled "Media Moves" reported that the first issue of Vibe sold well and led Time Warner and Quincy Jones to publish four more issues in 1993 and

---

<sup>169</sup> Donaton, Scott. "New Hip-Hop Magazine Attracts Mainstream Ads; Strong Support Hastens Launch Plans for 'Vibe'" *Advertising Age* (1992): 3. *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid

ten more in 1994.<sup>171</sup> By 1993 Hip Hop had become a commodity worth investment by some of the most profitable corporations in the country.

National Hip Hop publications such as The Source and Vibe and even smaller magazines such as Rap Pages had similar effects as Yo! MTV Raps did on Hip Hop and popular American culture. Just as Yo! MTV Raps had done, these magazines offered audiences outside of New York City and other urban areas the opportunity to experience Hip Hop culture. Although magazines are slightly less accessible than daily television shows, these publications still made information pertaining to Hip Hop culture easily attainable to anyone willing to spend a few dollars. Also, the founding of Vibe in particular served as one of the first examples of a large-scale corporate investment in Hip Hop culture by a non-record company corporate entity. Time Warner executives, who sold black and white advertisements for \$4,800 per page and sold color advertisements for \$5,760 per page in Vibe's first issue exposed Hip Hop to other large corporations such as Nike and Reebok, who in turn made similar investments in the culture by acquiring advertisement space in Vibe.<sup>172</sup> The creation of publications such as Vibe ushered in an era of increased marketability of Hip Hop culture throughout the 1990s.

Yo! MTV Raps ran on MTV from 1988 to 1995 and then from 1996 to 1999 and had tremendous long-term effects before the network decided to go in a different direction and stopped producing new episodes of the show as the new millennium began. According to MTV.com's Yo! MTV Raps' commemorative 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary website, "the moment that pilot aired hip-hop transcended the 'hood and dived head first into the mainstream" and over the years the show gave its audiences "an insider's access to the most important youth movement in

---

<sup>171</sup> "Media Moves." *Advertising Age* (1993). *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

<sup>172</sup> Donaton, Scott. "New Hip-Hop Magazine Attracts Mainstream Ads; Strong Support Hastens Launch Plans for 'Vibe'" *Advertising Age* (1992): 3. *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

decades.”<sup>173</sup> Yo! MTV Raps capitalized directly off of the momentum corporate entities such as Def Jam Recordings garnered with their investments in Hip Hop culture and took Hip Hop to a whole new level. By allowing anyone with a cable television to consume Hip Hop, an art form that could have only been consumed by attending jams in crime-ridden New York City neighborhoods during the 1970s, on a daily basis, MTV advanced Hip Hop culture in a way that no one had ever been able to do before. Black Entertainment Television soon followed suit by producing another Hip Hop music video show called “Rap City,” in September of 1989. However, BET was only able to do so because MTV demonstrated over a year earlier that such a concept would appeal to diverse audiences and be financially successful. MTV’s investment in Hip Hop in 1988 had the single greatest impact on the culture of any corporate entity ever at the time. Yo! MTV Raps transported Hip Hop from the streets of the Bronx and other urban areas where Hip Hop developed throughout the mid 1980s to living rooms all across the country and even the world. In the process, MTV completed Hip Hop’s transformation from a South Bronx artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon to a highly marketable, commodified, commercialized form of popular entertainment available to the masses. By completing Hip Hop’s transformation into a popular music genre and form of entertainment, MTV allowed other corporations to utilize Hip Hop as a highly effective marketing tool.

---

<sup>173</sup> “Yo! MTV Raps 20th Anniversary | About Yo! | MTV.” *New Music Videos, Reality TV Shows, Celebrity News, Top Stories* | MTV. Web. <[http://www.mtv.com/music/yo\\_mtv\\_raps/about.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/music/yo_mtv_raps/about.jhtml)>.

## Chapter 6

### The Expanded Marketability of Hip Hop Culture

As the 1980s closed and the 1990s began, Hip Hop entered into both a “Golden Age,” a period in which artists produced a wide array of innovative and diversified music, and into a new era of corporate marketing, a period in which large corporations expanded on earlier investments and increased their utilization of Hip Hop culture as a marketing tool. Between 1988 and 1992 MTV’s *Yo! MTV Raps* and a variety of national Hip Hop publications, most notably Time Warner and Quincy Jones Entertainment’s Vibe and David Mays and Jon Shecter’s The Source, exposed diversified audiences around the world to Hip Hop culture for the first time. This exposure occurred at a rapid rate and quickly proved Hip Hop to be popular amongst a wide array of diversified audiences. Corporations and marketers took notice of this and began to make significant investments in Hip Hop culture beginning in the late 1980s during the Golden Age. As Hip Hop became well known and accepted throughout the country during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the culture that had once offered an artistic means of expression to youth from impoverished New York City neighborhoods during the height of 1970s urban neglect began to offer elite corporate institutions the opportunity to accumulate revenue from new sources. During the six-year span between 1989 and 1995 Hip Hop culture became highly marketable, commercialized, and embraced by diverse audiences. As a result, Hip Hop, which had been slowly developing as a popular music genre since late 1979, transformed into a tool for corporate economic advancement while still retaining artistic qualities. An analysis of a variety of newspaper and trade magazine articles published between 1989 and 1995 reveals the extent to

which corporate entities utilized Hip Hop culture during this period for monetary gains and indicates the expansion of Hip Hop as a business.

Hip Hop's Golden Age began during the 1980s, lasted for the first few years of the 1990s, and is generally recognized as being the greatest period in the history of commercialized rap music. Specifically, according to Dr. William Jelani Cobb, the era began in 1984 and ended in 1992. He argues that these years marked Hip Hop's Golden Age because of "the sheer number of stylistic innovations that came into existence" and because artists such as Big Daddy Kane, LL Cool J, NWA, Rakim, KRS-One, and many others "literally [created] themselves and their art form at the same time."<sup>174</sup> Kevin Powell also characterizes the Golden Age as a period when rap "was incredibly exciting, fresh, def, and diverse."<sup>175</sup> The fact that during this time Hip Hop fans could enjoy high-quality music from progressive, conscious, political, commercial, light-hearted, and gangsta rappers all at the same time made the eight-year period truly a golden age. No one subcategory of Hip Hop dominated the genre as a whole. People could choose to embrace Public Enemy, they could choose to identify with the Fresh Prince and Jazzy Jeff, or they could listen to both and appreciate each groups' unique qualities and artistic contributions to Hip Hop culture. Cobb writes in To the Break of Dawn: a Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic that "the Golden Era witnessed the ascent of female artists like MC Lyte and Queen Latifah as both artistically and commercially significant" while the increased use of technologically-advanced equipment, such as the SP12 electronic drum simulators, and innovative sampling techniques enhanced the actual sound of the music.<sup>176</sup> Cobb also states that during the Golden

---

<sup>174</sup> Cobb, William Jelani. *To the Break of Dawn: a Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic*. New York: New York UP, 2007. Print, p. 41-47

<sup>175</sup> Powell, Kevin. "Hip-Hop Is the Most Important Youth Culture on the Planet" Interview. *Time* 22 Sept. 2000. Print.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48-50

Age of Hip Hop rap “music evolved into a mature art form.”<sup>177</sup> It is clear that the Golden Age was a period in which the artistic elements of rap music drastically improved and the genre as a whole became extremely commercially successful. Large corporations noticed these changes and the increasing popularity of Hip Hop amongst mainstream audiences and began to increase their investments in the culture by the late 1980s.

Beginning in December of 1989, a variety of articles appeared in newspapers and trade journals throughout the country that indicated the continuing trend of large-scale corporate investment in Hip Hop and foreshadowed the increasing marketability of the culture heading into the 1990s. St. Petersburg Times staff writer Eric Snider recounted the major commercialized rap success stories of the 1980s in a December 23, 1989 decade-wrap-up article. In his article, Snider recalled that Def Jam’s Run DMC went double-platinum in 1986 with their highly-acclaimed album Raising Hell. He also stated that as the 1980s came to an end, he had no doubt that rap music would “build on its dominance well into the next decade.”<sup>178</sup> A few months later in a Los Angeles Times article entitled “Rap at the Top of the ‘90s,” staff writer Duff Marlowe furthered Snider’s claims by insisting that ten rap albums in particular would have a significant effect on the music industry as a whole as the decade began. However, the most interesting aspect of this article was the fact that the album Marlowe predicted to make the biggest impact was The Jungle Brothers’ “Done by the Forces of Nature,” an album released by music industry giant Warner Brothers Record Company.<sup>179</sup> In fact, several of the ten albums he predicted to become hits in the first year of the decade were released by other major record companies such

---

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p. 62

<sup>178</sup> Snider, Eric. "A Material World// In Pop Music, Money Dominated Melodies Series: THE 80s: A LOOK BACK." *St. Petersburg Times* 23 Dec. 1989. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

<sup>179</sup> Marlowe, Duff. "Rap at the Top of the '90s." *Los Angeles Times* 4 Feb. 1990: 67. *ProQuest*. Web.



as Capitol Records and Virgin Records.<sup>180</sup> These articles illustrated that corporate investment in Hip Hop culture would definitely continue to increase over time. Also, a November 9, 1992 article published in the journal Advertising Age entitled “Reebok trots out City Jam; New exercise system backs shoes, clothes,” discusses Reebok’s plans to create a Hip Hop oriented workout regiment distributable to exercise facilities and gyms nationwide.<sup>181</sup> This type of marketing strategy aimed at using Hip Hop to promote a corporate agenda was used frequently throughout the first few years of the 1990s and became exceedingly prevalent in 1993 and 1994.

A January 18, 1993 Marketing News article entitled “Marketers tap into rap as hip-hop becomes ‘safe,’” illustrates the depth of corporate investment and utilization of Hip Hop culture at the time. In the article Marketing News associate editor Cyndee Miller discusses the high marketability that Hip Hop offers its investors and describes numerous examples of increasing corporate investment in Hip Hop culture. According to Miller, by 1993 notable mainstream Hip Hop artists such as Jazzy Jeff, Queen Latifah, Hammer, and Marky Mark had signed endorsement deals with Starter Line, The Gap, Taco Bell, and Calvin Klein respectively. Even rappers such as Arrested Development and Ice T, who did not appeal to mainstream audiences, signed deals with Stolichnaya Vodka and DC Comics.<sup>182</sup> These corporations invested in these artists, their lifestyles, and their culture in an effort to sell their products in part because numerous market research firms had reported during the early 1990s that an investment in Hip Hop would be financially sound. For example, according to director of event marketing for Entertainment Marketing Communications International Robert Brissette, “rap is reaching mass

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid

<sup>181</sup> Magiera, Marcy, and Pat Sloan. "Reebok Trots out City Jam; New Exercise System Backs Shoes, Clothes." *Advertising Age* (1992): 3. *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

<sup>182</sup> Miller, Cyndee. "Marketers Tap into Rap as Hip-hop Becomes 'safe'" *Marketing News* 18 Jan. 1993: 10. Print.

acceptance. It's safe. White kids have started buying it.”<sup>183</sup> Also, a survey conducted by the firm Teenage Research Unlimited reported that eighty percent of teenagers in a groundbreaking study favored rap music over all other popular music genres.<sup>184</sup> These results combined with the large-scale success of Def Jam Records, Yo! MTV Raps, and numerous Hip Hop publications demonstrated to these large corporations that marketing products through Hip Hop would yield positive financial gains. Miller also adds that in 1993, clothing manufacturers, marketers, and distributors such as J.C. Penney and Spiegel started to produce entire lines of fashion around Hip Hop styles such as “baggy pants, oversized shirts and jackets, baseball caps, hooded shirts, [and] Starter jackets”.<sup>185</sup> Cyndee Miller’s “Marketers tap into rap as hip-hop becomes ‘safe,’” provides a variety of clear examples of the supreme level of comfort many major corporations felt with the prospect of incorporating Hip Hop culture into their marketing strategies.

An analysis of a variety of articles published throughout the 1994 calendar year reveals extensive mainstream corporate Hip Hop marketing strategies as well. For example, a Chain Drug Review article published on June 20, 1994 entitled “Panasonic Rechargeables Meet Exacting Standards,” describes Panasonic’s efforts to reach younger Panasonic battery-consumers by creating “the Hip Hop Power-Up Kidz Club”<sup>186</sup> while an article published in the business journal Inside Media entitled “Taking a Ride with Vibe,” describes how Discover Card Services Inc. decided to “sponsor the Vibe launch of a national 50-campus college tour”.<sup>187</sup> A September 26, 1994 New York Times article entitled “Advertising: With Garth Brooks’ help, McDonalds’ succeeds at its first attempt to sell music with food” describes how McDonalds

---

<sup>183</sup> Ibid

<sup>184</sup> Ibid

<sup>185</sup> Miller, Cyndee. "Marketers Tap into Rap as Hip-hop Becomes 'safe'" *Marketing News* 18 Jan. 1993: 10. Print.

<sup>186</sup> "Panasonic Rechargeables Meet Exacting Standards." *Chain Drug Review* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

<sup>187</sup> "Taking a Ride with Vibe." *Inside Media* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

worked out a deal with EMI Records to distribute Hip Hop CDs in their establishments as well.<sup>188</sup> A company called Rap Snacks Inc. undertook one of the most interesting Hip Hop marketing endeavors as described by the journal Food Research and Development in their November 11, 1994 article entitled “All Rapped Up.” According to the article, Rap Snacks Inc. came out with a brand of Hip Hop potato chips boasting a character named “M.C. Potato.” The chips came in a variety of different flavors such as “Plane Jane” and “Bar-B-Quing with My Honey” and were imprinted with messages such as “Stop the Violence” and “Stay in School.”<sup>189</sup> Finally, in the fall of 1994 the journal Video Store reported that Capcom USA spent \$35 million producing the film “Street Fighter” and relied heavily on Hip Hop for its soundtrack.<sup>190</sup> These examples of the corporate use of Hip Hop are clear, astounding, and even tend to be comical in some instances, as in the case of M.C. Potato. However, each example serves as a testament to the expanded marketability of Hip Hop culture during the Golden Age of Hip Hop and the few years that followed.

---

<sup>188</sup> "Advertising: With Garth Brooks' Help, McDonalds' Succeeds at Its First Attempt to Sell Music with Food." *New York Times* 26 Sept. 1994. Print.

<sup>189</sup> "All Rapped Up." *Food Research and Development* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

<sup>190</sup> "Capcom Rides Licensing Juggernaut to TV and Film." *Video Store* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

## Chapter 7

### The Effects of Corporate Investment in Hip Hop Culture

Since 1979 many of the most significant, tangible, and consequential transitions in Hip Hop culture have occurred as a result of corporate investment and influence. Although it is impossible to discredit individual artistic contributions and achievements, which are at the core of Hip Hop, without the corporate world's interventions Hip Hop culture would never have left the Bronx. As a result of people like Sylvia Robinson, Russell Simmons, and Thomas Silverman, and companies such as MTV, Quincy Jones Entertainment, and Warner Brothers, today Hip Hop is a multifaceted commercialized, commodified, form of mainstream entertainment, which also consists of genuine artistic content. It is one of the most popular music genres in existence and is available to people in every country across the globe. Hip Hop dictates fashion, hairstyle, dialect, car choice, everyday mannerisms, musical preference, and even common greetings. Corporations continue to find the culture to be a highly effective means of marketing, advertising, and product promotion and it is nearly impossible to convey the prevalence of Hip Hop culture in American society.

In 1973, Hip Hop was born at a party in an apartment building located in the most impoverished urban setting in the United States of America. Between 1973 and 1979 this local South Bronx youth lifestyle, party scene, and street culture expanded, developed, and thrived as a performance art and artistic outlet. However, as a result of Sugar Hill Records' investment in the culture, Hip Hop left the South Bronx and slowly began to become a profitable commodity. Since the fall of 1979 Hip Hop has undergone many changes as a result of corporate investment. Hip Hop has grown exponentially over time and its transitions have affected American society as a whole. As Hip Hop has become a commercialized entity over the years, trends have emerged,

controversy has arisen, and an abundance of literature has been written on the dynamics of the culture. Although contemporary commercialized rap music is a drastically distinct entity from the performance culture that thrived on the streets of New York City in the 1970s, Hip Hop still functions as an artistic form of self expression and many talented artists continue to produce and distribute quality music. However, when studying the history, development, and continued transformations of Hip Hop it becomes apparent that the most significant transitions in the culture have been the results of corporate utilization of Hip Hop as a profitable tool for economic gains.

Today, Joe Conzo Jr. continues his work as a photographer. He helped to establish Cornell University Library's Hip Hop Collection by donating his astounding photographic account of the emergence of Hip Hop culture, the defining popular youth culture of our time, to the university. He often gives guest lectures at different universities and claims that his greatest joy comes from sharing his stories about the early days of his culture with young people. Also, in 2004 producers from VH1 approached Conzo and asked if they could use his photographs for their inaugural Hip Hop Honors event. VH1 designed the event, which eventually became an annual show, in an effort to honor Hip Hop's most influential figures in an awards show format. Conzo agreed and VH1 used his photographs as visuals throughout the show to expose the world to the South Bronx and Hip Hop in the 1970s and early 1980s. The show was a hit in part because of Conzo's photos of Hip Hop's pioneers, South Bronx cultural institutions, and various jams. Five years later VH1 hosted their Sixth Annual Hip Hop Honors to honor Def Jam Recordings, a record company that perpetuated the transition and commercialization of Hip Hop. VH1 denied Conzo's requests to photograph the event and did not even invite him to attend the show. VH1's refusal to allow the first individual to visually chronicle Hip Hop to attend an

event that he actually helped make a success five years earlier while honoring a record company that commodified Hip Hop culture is typical. In reality, VH1's decision not to allow Conzo to attend the event is a microcosm for the corporate world's investment in Hip Hop culture as a whole since late 1979. Although its roots are in the South Bronx, Hip Hop has not been strictly a localized artistic musical, social, and cultural phenomenon since late 1979. Since then Hip Hop has increasingly become just a small piece of the larger economic infrastructure of the United States.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, major record companies have been the most prevalent investors in Hip Hop and have caused the most meaningful effects on the culture as a whole. For the first six years of its existence, recorded and distributed rap music was not a part of Hip Hop culture. Recorded rap began to become a commodity in late 1979 and has been the main element of Hip Hop ever since. As independent records companies and small-scale corporate investments enabled recorded rap to become widely accepted and embraced throughout the 1980s, many large corporations took notice and began to view the music as a new direction for their businesses. In 1985, CBS Records' Columbia Records signed a major distribution deal with Def Jam Recordings, which proved to be a highly successful business decision. This deal was the first time a major record company made a sizeable investment in Hip Hop. The continued growth and expansion of Def Jam following the deal led other major record industry giants to become involved with Hip Hop as well.

During the 1990s the country's biggest record companies bought up independent labels, which had been putting rap music out for years, and signed Hip Hop artists of their own. According to Jeff Chang, after 1996, "media monopolies went on a buying binge" leaving independent labels with only three options: "cut deals with major label distributors if they could,

get comfortable with reaching a niche market through a crazy-quilt of smaller distributors, or go under”.<sup>191</sup> Today the structure of the music industry is very intricate. Basically four major corporations, Sony, Warner, Universal, and EMI, dominate the business. Each one of these companies owns hundreds of smaller record labels, which each have their own artists. All four of these gigantic companies own record companies that have Hip Hop artists signed to their labels. In effect, since the second half of the 1990s, virtually every mainstream rapper has been signed to one of the four major labels. The fact that the biggest record companies in the world have released all of the mainstream recorded Hip Hop albums over the last fifteen years is quite significant. A limited amount of record companies control the market for Hip Hop and as a result a variety of trends have appeared over time.

As a popular music genre distributed to worldwide audiences by record industry giants, throughout the last two decades Hip Hop has been characterized for its ability to set and standardize trends in popular culture. People of all ages, races, and ethnic groups listen to rap music and often make personal stylistic and lifestyle decisions based on popular Hip Hop trends. Although the issue of Hip Hop’s trend-setting capabilities is a highly complex issue that most prominent Hip Hop historians and scholars have studied in depth, the rise and standardization of gangsta rap music in particular has characterized Hip Hop culture since the mid 1990s.

According to former Def Jam President Carmen Ashurst-Watson, during the 1990s when the largest and most profitable record companies “bought up small labels, Hip Hop turned to gangsta rap and was no longer conscious,” diversified, or artistically innovative music.<sup>192</sup> During Hip Hop’s Golden Age, rap increased in popularity as artists produced a wide array of diversified

---

<sup>191</sup> Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print, p. 444

<sup>192</sup> This is a quote from an interview with Carmen Ashurst-Watson recorded for the documentary: *Hip-Hop: Beyond the Beats and Rhymes*. Dir. Byron Hurt. By Byron Hurt. Prod. Byron Hurt. God Bless the Children Productions, 2006. DVD.

kinds of Hip Hop, such as political, conscious, light-hearted, and gangsta rap music. However, as the Golden Age came to a halt in 1992 and a limited amount of major record companies slowly seized control over rap music as a whole, gangsta rap music became the most widely distributed and popular type of Hip Hop music. Gangsta rap's proliferation, increased popularity, and worldwide spread exerted a variety of effects on popular culture and American society as a whole. It negatively altered Hip Hop's already controversial public image, minimized artists' creativity, and made Hip Hop one-dimensional.

Major record companies' large-scale promotion of gangsta rap and other forms of non-innovative, one-dimensional rap music caused Hip Hop to become less artistic and more standardized. As virtually all Hip Hop scholars have noted, since the mid-1990s the corporate executives that control all mainstream rap music have profited greatly by distributing a product that glorifies violence, mistreatment of women, drug culture, gang life, and other socially undesirable traits that have plagued low-income African American communities for decades. In Hip Hop: Beyond the Beats and Rhymes, filmmaker Byron Hurt analyzes these problems within contemporary Hip Hop culture in depth. Hurt argues that as Hip Hop lost many of its innovative, nonconformist, and artistic qualities during the 1990s, aspiring artists and male Hip Hop enthusiasts suffered. He claims that men that identify as being part of Hip Hop culture are in a box and "in order to be in that box you have to be strong. You have to be tough. You have to have a lot of girls. You have to have money. You got to be a player or pimp." He also contends, "you have to dominate other men" and "if you aren't any of those things, the people call you soft or weak" or other disparaging names.<sup>193</sup> Hip Hop has become a widespread, highly available commodity that promotes a product with almost exclusively negative, socially

---

<sup>193</sup> These quotes are from Byron Hurt's narrative recorded for the documentary: *Hip-Hop: Beyond the Beats and Rhymes*. Dir. Byron Hurt. By Byron Hurt. Prod. Byron Hurt. God Bless the Children Productions, 2006. DVD.



undesirable messages. The culture that began as a unique, innovative performance art and form of self-expression in the South Bronx slowly transitioned into a tool for corporate economic gains and now exists as a moderately artistic but one-dimensional genre of popular music that perpetuates negative stereotypes and other themes that are not acceptable in American society.

A startling documentary entitled “Straight Outta Hunters Point” released in 2005 serves as an excellent case study illustrating the severely negative effects of corporately warped Hip Hop culture. In this horrifying exposition, filmmaker Kevin Epps chronicles the everyday experiences of individuals living in the most notorious public housing projects in Hunters Point, a crime-ridden, impoverished neighborhood in San Francisco, and their experiences with an extremely altered form of Hip Hop culture. The film reveals the extent that Hip Hop culture, which became extremely popular in the area as a result of major record companies’ massive national distribution of Hip Hop, affects the lifestyle decisions of people living in Hunters Points’ public housing projects and the community as a whole. Like in many federally neglected inner city neighborhoods throughout the nation, Hunters Point’s residents live in an extremely adverse socioeconomic environment. These negative socioeconomic circumstances, such as poor living conditions, insufficient public education, and widespread poverty cause Hunters Point to continually struggle. The magnitude and severity of the community’s socioeconomic problems make it impossible to argue that Hip Hop culture alone causes the continued decline of the neighborhood. However, the warped Hip Hop culture prevalent in Hunters Point exacerbates the community’s problems and clearly contributes to the inability of its residents to overcome their dire circumstances. “Straight Outta Hunters Point” follows the lives of young gang members from the neighborhood’s two largest gangs, West Point Mob and Big Block Gang, as they produce Hip Hop records and release them through local independent rap labels. These

misguided gang members replicate the trends of mainstream gangsta rap artists and are under the impression that by doing so they will earn contracts with major record companies. However, the artists' labels such as Blaze of Glory Productions, Off the Hook Records, and Get Paid Entertainment are virtually unknown outside of the Bay Area and their extremely violent music is not distributed in other parts of the country. In effect, extremist gangsta rappers in Hunters Point are only contributing to the continued demise of their community by continually producing music that glorifies the worst elements of their neighborhood.

Interviews with the "CEOs" of these labels and the rappers themselves also reveal the absolute disconnect between the area's Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop culture as it existed in the South Bronx in the 1970s and early 1980s. Hip Hop music in Hunters Point revolves around the glorification and perpetuation of drugs, gang activity, and violence. Hunters Point's rival gang members constantly fight and kill each other and use Hip Hop culture as a means to support their illegal gang-related endeavors. According to a local San Francisco CBS Channel 5 news report, "police say the violence begins when rival gangs argue over who is the best rapper."<sup>194</sup> These feuds almost always end in bloodshed and Hunters Point Hip Hop is in large part to blame. The extremely adverse socioeconomic factors in the community cannot be discounted when looking for a way to explain the state of the Hunters Point. However, Hip Hop in the area does nothing to remedy the circumstances. Hunters Point Hip Hop only contributes to the community's demise, which makes Hunters Point Hip Hop culture completely different from 1970s South Bronx Hip Hop culture. In the 1970s, Hip Hop's pioneers did not intend their culture to be used for the glorification of their community's worst characteristics and certainly did not outwardly utilize Hip Hop jams as a place for violence. On the contrary, many pioneers such as Afrika

---

<sup>194</sup> This quote is from a local San Francisco CBS News Report used in the documentary: *Straight Outta Hunters Point*. Dir. Kevin Epps. Mastamind Productions, 2005. DVD.

Bambaataa denounced the South Bronx's severe gang culture and sought to use Hip Hop as a means of positive self-expression and as a way to diffuse incessant gang violence. Although ultimately Hip Hop did not change the socioeconomic problems prevalent in the South Bronx, it certainly did not perpetuate them. The culture that is prevalent in Hunters Point and many other areas of the country with similar characteristics to the San Francisco neighborhood is a severely deviated form of Hip Hop and corporate entities are largely responsible for spreading such a warped version of Hip Hop culture. The giant record companies, media conglomerates, and publishing firms that mass-produced Hip Hop as it became increasingly popular amongst diversified audiences throughout the late 1980s and entire 1990s did not intentionally market Hip Hop to places such as Hunters Point with the intent that it would harm consumers. In fact, individuals must ultimately be held accountable for their choices and use of Hip Hop culture. However, by negligently marketing a brand of Hip Hop absolutely distinct from the culture's roots, corporate entities enabled individuals in Hunters Point to utilize Hip Hop in a way that is harmful on a large scale and contributed to the area's preexisting significant social problems.

Hip Hop history is largely a success story and its lessons are applicable to many contemporary American issues. It is a story of monumental achievement in the midst of governmental negligence and urban decay. It is also a narrative of long-term cultural development influenced by capitalistic ambition. The intricate history of Hip Hop's development illustrates the importance of art and the power of the corporate sector. Hip Hop culture, which is the defining popular youth culture of our time, has transformed significantly since its 1973 inception. While Hip Hop artists are ultimately responsible for the products they produce, both small and large corporate entities have caused Hip Hop to transition from a street culture and youth lifestyle unknown outside of New York City into a worldwide genre of

controversial popular music. The most significant and long-term transitions in Hip Hop have come at the hands of corporate entities. Sugar Hill Records transformed Hip Hop from a performance art into a recorded, distributable commodity and created commercial rap music. Without Sugar Hill Records, it is conceivable that emceeing may never have developed into distributable rap music and Hip Hop may have never left the streets of the Bronx and Harlem. Independent record companies such as Enjoy Records increased the distribution of rap music before Def Jam Recordings and Tommy Boy Records solidified rap's permanent place in popular culture. Corporately owned Hip Hop publications such as Vibe made Hip Hop culture accessible to interested readers everywhere and MTV's Yo! MTV Raps enabled anyone with a television and a cable box to learn about Hip Hop and embrace the culture's pivotal figures and core elements. As large corporations such as Nike and Pepsi expanded their use of Hip Hop as a marketing tool during the culture's Golden Age, the country's largest record companies seized control of Hip Hop and began dictating the culture's trends, many of which became negative. Without corporate involvement, Hip Hop would not exist in its present form. Corporations created commercialized rap music, spread Hip Hop to worldwide audiences, and have continually transformed the culture since 1979.

## Bibliography

### Newspaper, Magazine, and Journal Articles

"A Critic's Report Card." *Dallas Morning News* 9 Apr. 1989, Arts and Entertainment sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

"Advertising: With Garth Brooks' Help, McDonalds' Succeeds at Its First Attempt to Sell Music with Food." *New York Times* 26 Sept. 1994. Print.

Aikman, Becky. "Vintage Rock Recordings Are at Center of Fraud Suit." *Newsday* [New York City] 21 Nov. 1986, Business sec.: 47. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

"All Rapped Up." *Food Research and Development* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

Anastasia, George, and Murray Dubin. "MOB Linked to Top 40? Music Industry Probe Looks at Crime Figures." *The Record* [Bergen County, New Jersey] 24 Mar. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

"Audit Reveals MCA's Financial Dealings with Alleged Crime Figure." *Associated Press* 10 May 1985. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

"Belafonte Auditions 'Breakers' for Film." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 20 Jan. 1984, Features Movies sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Berrier Jr., Ralph. "Rap: Who'd Have Thought...?" *Roanoke Times* 7 Apr. 2001, EXTRA sec.: 3. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

"Best Hiphop Effect." *New York Press*. 1 Oct. 2002. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.nypress.com/article-6448-best-hiphop-effect.html>>.

""The Birthplace Of Hip-Hop" To Be Deemed A City Landmark." *HHPulse - The Heartbeat Of HipHop*. Web. 28 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.hhpulse.com/news/1/ARTICLE/192/2007-07-18.html>>.

Blatt, Wendy. "Rap-Voice of Social Responsibility." *Los Angeles Times* 19 July 1987: 92. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Branch, Shelly. "How Hip-Hop Fashion Won Over Mainstream America." *Black Enterprise* June 1993. *Business Source Complete*. Web.

Brewer, Rosellen. "Book Review." Rev. of *Breakdance*. *Library Journal* 15 Sept. 1984. EBSCO. Web

Brewer, Rosellen. "Book Review." Rev. of *Hip Hop: the Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti*. *Library Journal* 15 Sept. 1984. EBSCO. Web

Britton, Kevin. "Caught? The Rest of the Story on Hip-hop Payola." *Dayton City Paper* 31 Aug. 2005: 24. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Catlin, Roger, and Phil Johnson. "Break Dancing... Craze of the Coasts Spins Its Way Into the Midlands." *Omaha World-Herald* 31 Jan. 1984, Youth sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

"Capcom Rides Licensing Juggernaut to TV and Film." *Video Store* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

Chideya, Farai. "All Eyez on Us." *Time* 24 Mar. 1997: 47. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.

Cieply, Michael. "New Spin: MCA Records' Chief Turns the Firm around by Being Aggressive--Irving Azoff Signs New Acts, Sells Sound-track Discs, Excels at Making Deals---pained by the Pisello Affair." *The Wall Street Journal* 31 Mar. 1986. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

Connor, William S.D. "Sounds of a Street-Level Approach to Pop Music." *Newsday* [New York City] 7 Oct. 1985, City Business sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Cox, Meg. "Little Rap-Music Magazine Has Big Aims." *Wall Street Journal* 25 Sept. 1991: B1. *Factiva*. Web. 9 Dec. 2009.

Darling, Cary. "Riffs." *The Orange County Register* [Santa Ana] 16 Oct. 1988, Evening ed., Show sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Donaton, Scott. "New Hip-Hop Magazine Attracts Mainstream Ads; Strong Support Hastens Launch Plans for 'Vibe'" *Advertising Age* (1992): 3. *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Donaton, Scott. "Publishers Test Icy Launch Waters." *Advertising Age* (1992): 4. *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Drury, Kathryn. "Music Royalty, Advertisers Turn Up 'Source's' Volume." *Advertising Age* 69.8 (1998): 10. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.

"Experts Probe Major Influences in Marketing to Minorities." *Discount Store News* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

Ferguson, Kristen. "Stepping Out of the Arena." *Metroland* [Albany] 25 May 2006, LISTEN HERE sec.: 24. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Frost, Don. "Reaching the Hip-Hop Generation." *American Demographics* 15.5 (1993). *Business Source Complete*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Gissen, Jesse, and Adam Fleischer. "XXLmag.com -." *XXLmag.com HIP-HOP ON A HIGHER LEVEL*. Web. 29 Oct. 2009. <<http://www.xxlmag.com/online/?p=58416>>.

Gitell, Seth. "Too Late to Celebrate the 'Thug Life'" *Foward* [New York City] 9 May 1997: 14. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Gonzalez, David. "Will Gentrification Spoil the Birthplace of Hip-Hop?" *New York Times* 21 May 2007. *Nytimes.com*. Web. 28 Sept. 2009.

Granatstein, Lisa. "Rappers' Delight." *Media Week* 11 May 1998: 29. *Business Source Premier*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.

Harrington, Richard. "MTV, Doing Its Homework." *Washington Post* 19 Apr. 1989. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Harrington, Richard. "Pop Music." *Washington Post* 30 Dec. 1984. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Harrington, Richard. "Rap's Pulse, Taken on the Front Lines; KRS-One's Hard-Hitting Attack on Injustice." *Washington Post* 21 Sept. 1989, Final ed., Style sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Harrington, Richard. "The Rap Jive From MTV." *Washington Post* 24 May 1989, Style sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Harrington, Richard. "'Wild Style': Art to Go." *Washington Post* 26 Jan. 1984. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Herbert, Wray. "The Making of a Hip-Hop Intellectual." *U.S. News and World Report* 4 Nov. 1996: 48-49. *Wilson Web*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Holden, Stephen. "Rap Music: Kurtis Blow." *New York Times* 2 Sept. 1982, Late City Final ed., Cultural Desk sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Hunter, Aina. "The Self-Proclaimed 'Bible of Hip-Hop' Fights Lawsuits, Criminal Charges, Blood Fueds- And Itself." *Village Voice* [New York City] 23 Nov. 2005: 26. *Alt-Press Watch*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

- Jones IV, James T. "The Big Rap Attack; In 10 Years, Its Become Mainstream, but Purists Put down the Pop Appeal." *USA TODAY* 22 Aug. 1989, Final ed., Life sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 1989.
- Keno, Marci. "Hip-Hop." *Billboard* 13 May 2000: 82. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.
- Kitwana, Bakari. "A High-Tech Lynching: Rap Music and the 1996 Presidential Election." *The Gaither Reporter* 30 July 1995: 3. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.
- Konrad, Rachel. "Advertisers Need to Target Black Media, Publisher Says." *Detroit Free Press* 10 Nov. 1995. *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.
- Lacey, Liam. "Bronx Deejay Raps on 'Hip-Hop Culture'" *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 18 Apr. 1984, Features Music sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.
- Lacey, Liam. "Rap Keeps Krush Groove Hip-hopping along." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 26 Nov. 1985: C3. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.
- Leblanc, Larry. "Major Labels Increase Commitment to R&B/Hip-Hop." *Billboard* 29 Aug. 1998: 71. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.
- Leland, John. "Recordings; Rap as a Public Forum on Matters of Life and Death." *New York Times* 12 Mar. 1989, Late City Final ed., Arts and Leisure sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.
- Leland, John, and Allison Samuels. "Taking to the Streets." *Newsweek* 02 Nov. 1998: 70. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.
- Locklin, Bruce. "Mobster Called Tune Bergen Firm Faces Music." *The Record* [Bergen County New Jersey] 6 Apr. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.
- Magiera, Marcy, and Pat Sloan. "Reebok Trots out City Jam; New Exercise System Backs Shoes, Clothes." *Advertising Age* (1992): 3. *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.
- Marlowe, Duff. "Rap at the Top of the '90s." *Los Angeles Times* 4 Feb. 1990: 67. *ProQuest*. Web.
- McLeod, Kembrew. "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened With Assimilation." *The Journal of Communication* 49.4 (1999): 134-50. *Wiley InterScience*. Web. 12 Mar. 2010.
- "Media Moves." *Advertising Age* (1993). *LexisNexis*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.



- Miller, Cyndee. "Marketers Tap into Rap as Hip-hop Becomes 'safe'" *Marketing News* 18 Jan. 1993: 10. Print.
- Mills, David. "Another Round of White Rappers in Search of 'Black Authenticity'" *Washington Post* 30 Aug. 1992, Final ed., SHOW sec.: G.10. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.
- Moldea, Dan E. "MCA and the Mob." *Regardie's The Business of Washington* 8.10 (1988): 54. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.
- Music Lyrics and Interstate Commerce* (1994) (testimony of Nelson George). Print.
- Neal, Marc Anthony. "Sold Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music." *Popular Music and Society* (1997): 117-35. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.
- Palmer, Robert. "The Pop Life; Grammys: Honoring Art or Commercial Success?" *New York Times* 25 Feb. 1981, Late City Final ed., Cultural Desk sec. *Factiva*. Web. 4 Mar. 2010.
- Palmer, Robert. "The Pop Life; A New Label, Landmark, Records Jazz." *New York Times* 20 Feb. 1985, late ed.: C.17. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.
- Palmer, Robert. "Pop Music's Establishment Is Ripe for Change." *New York Times* 12 Sept. 1982, Late City Final ed., Arts and Leisure sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.
- "Panasonic Rechargeables Meet Exacting Standards." *Chain Drug Review* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.
- Pinsker, Bree, and Robert Jackson. "The Lowdown on Hip-Hop: Kids Talk about the Music." *Newsweek* 29 June 1992. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.
- Pinsley, Elliot. "MCA Records Plotted to Ruin Sugar Hill, Suit Says." *The Record* [Bergen County, New Jersey] 20 Nov. 1986, News sec. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.
- Powell, Kevin. "'Hip-Hop Is the Most Important Youth Culture on the Planet'" Interview. *Time* 22 Sept. 2000. Print.
- Powell, Kevin. "My Culture at the Crossroads." *Newsweek* 9 Oct. 2000: 66. *Wilson Web*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.
- Powers, Ann. "In Honor of a Disk Jockey Who Does It His Way." *New York Times* 16 Dec. 1997, Arts/Cultural Desk sec.: 2. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.
- "Rap Music: Record Distributors Openly Promote Their Albums' Explicit Lyrics Instead of Playing Them down Intentionally Provocative Marketing." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 28 Nov. 1990. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

Richburg, Chris. "1520 Sedgwick Avenue to Be Recognized as Official Birthplace of Hip-Hop." *Allhiphop.com*. Track Entertainment Media, 18 July 2007. Web. 28 Sept. 2009. <<http://allhiphop.com/stories/news/archive/2007/07/18/18277644.aspx>>.

Rimer, Sara. "Trendies Know the Rules." *New York Times* 29 Oct. 1985, Fashion sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Roberts, Johnnie L. "The Rap on Rap." *Newsweek* 01 Mar. 1999: 44. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.

Ross, Chuck. "MTV Tries to Keep Grooving." *San Francisco Chronicle* 7 Aug. 1988, Sunday ed., TV Week sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Smith, Shawnee. "Lost Boyz Find Following for 2nd Set." *Billboard* 21 June 1997: 7. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.

Snider, Eric. "A Material World// In Pop Music, Money Dominated Melodies Series: THE 80s: A LOOK BACK." *St. Petersburg Times* 23 Dec. 1989. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Sokol, Brett. "Gangster Marketing; South Beach Conventioneers Get a Lesson in the Lucrative Business of Hip-hop." *Miami New Times* 28 July 2005. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Spiegler, Marc. "Marketing Street Culture." *American Demographics* 18.11 (1996). *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 23 Oct. 2009.

Sprout, Alison L., and Will Crocke. "Products of the Year." *Fortune* 28 Dec. 1992: 64-69. *Business Source Complete*. Web.

"Sugar Hill Records Claims MCA Forced It Into Chapter 11." *Wall Street Journal* 21 Nov. 1986. *Factiva*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

"Taking a Ride with Vibe." *Inside Media* (1994). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

"Targeting Young Consumers: Go to Where They Are." *EPM Communications* (9 Oct. 1995). *RDS Business Suite*. Web. 24 Oct. 2009.

Turnquist, Kristi. "Cool Rules for School." *The Oregonian* [Portland] 1 Sept. 1989. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Van Matre, Lynn. "Rappers Break Toward Mainstream with a 'Hip-Hop' Beat." *Chicago Tribune* 9 June 1985, Final ed., Arts sec.: 6. *ProQuest*. Web.

Vaughn, Christopher. "Russell Simmons' Rush For Profits." *Black Enterprise* Dec. 1992. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Vozick-Levinson, Simon. "Do You Remember 1520 Sedgwick Ave.? | EW.com." *Entertainment Weekly's PopWatch Blog | PopWatch | EW.com*. Web. 28 Sept. 2009. <[http://popwatch.ew.com/2007/05/21/kool\\_dj\\_herc/](http://popwatch.ew.com/2007/05/21/kool_dj_herc/)>.

Whalen, Jeanne. "Rap Defies Traditional Marketing." *Advertising Age* 65.12 (1994): 12. Print.

"XXLmag.com -." *XXLmag.com HIP-HOP ON A HIGHER LEVEL*. Web. 28 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.xxlmag.com/online/?p=12307>>.

"Yo! Forbes Raps for MTV." *USA TODAY* 9 Aug. 1989, Final ed., Money sec. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

Zbar, Jeffrey D., and Jeanne Whelan. "Rap Still Dogs Time Warner." *Advertising Age* (1995): 32. *Factiva*. Web. 17 Nov. 2009.

#### Documentaries, Films, and Television

*And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip-Hop*. Dir. Richard Lowe and Dana Heinz Perry. 2004. DVD.

*Hip-Hop: Beyond the Beats and Rhymes*. Dir. Byron Hurt. By Byron Hurt. Prod. Byron Hurt. God Bless the Children Productions, 2006. DVD.

*The N Word: Divided We Stand*. Dir. Todd Williams VI. Medialink Entertainment LLC, 2004. DVD.

*Revolution '67*. Dir. Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno. Prod. Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno. Bongiorno Productions Inc., 2007. DVD.

*Straight Outta Hunters Point*. Dir. Kevin Epps. Mastamind Productions, 2005. DVD.  
"VH1 Hip Hop Honors 2009: Def Jam." *VH1 Hip Hop Honors*. VH1. 13 Oct. 2009. Television.

*Whiteboyz*. Dir. Marc Levin. Bac Films, 1999. DVD.

*Wild Style*. Dir. Charlie Ahearn. Prod. Charlie Ahearn. By Charlie Ahearn. First Run Features (Theaters) and Rhino Entertainment (VHS), 1983. Videocassette.

## Books

Caro, Robert. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print.

Cobb, William Jelani. *To the Break of Dawn: a Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic*. New York: New York UP, 2007. Print.

Forman, Murray, and Mark Anthony. Neal, eds. *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

- Dyson, Michael Eric. "The Culture of Hip-Hop." Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony. Neal. *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 61-68. Print.
- George, Nelson. "Hip-Hop's Founding Fathers Speak the Truth." *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony. Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 45-55. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. "It's a Family Affair." *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 87-94. Print.
- Neal, Mark Anthony. "No Time for Fake Niggas: Hip-Hop Culture and the Authenticity Debates." *That's the Joint! the Hip-hop Studies Reader*. Ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony. Neal. New York: Routledge, 2004. 57-60. Print.

George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Viking, 1998. Print.

Kitwana, Bakari. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*. New York: Basic Civitas, 2002. Print.

Kugelberg, Johan, Joe Conzo, and Bambaataa Afrika. *Born in the Bronx: a Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York: Rizzoli, 2007. Print.

Light, Alan, ed. *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. Print.

- Fernando Jr., S.H. "Back in the Day: 1975-1979." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. 13-21. Print.
- Greenberg, Steve. "Sugar Hill Records." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. 23-33. Print.
- Szwed, John F. "The Real Old School." *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. Ed. Alan Light. New York: Three Rivers, 1999. 3-11. Print.

Rooney, Jim. *Organizing the South Bronx*. Albany: State University of New York, 1995. Print.

Shabazz, Jamel, 5. Freddy Fab, and Ernie Paniccioli. *Back in the Days*. New York: PowerHouse, 2001. Print.

Shapiro, Peter. *The Rough Guide to Hip-hop*. 2nd ed. London: Rough Guides, 2005. Print.

Stewart, Jack. *Graffiti Kings: New York City Mass Transit Art of the 1970s*. Abrams: Melcher Media, 2008. Print.

Tanz, Jason. *Other People's Property: a Shadow History of Hip-hop in White America*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2007. Print

#### Internet Sources

"40th Anniversary - How the Rec Room Where Hip-hop Was Born Became a Battleground for Affordable Housing -- New York Magazine." *New York Magazine -- NYC Guide to Restaurants, Fashion, Nightlife, Shopping, Politics, Movies*. Web. <<http://nymag.com/anniversary/40th/50665/index1.html>>.

"About Us." *First Run Features*. Web. 06 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.firstrunfeatures.com/about.html>>.

"About.com: [Http://www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy Records](http://www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy_Records)." *Music Careers - Music Industry Careers - Finding Music Business Careers*. Web. <[http://musicians.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=musicians&cdn=careers&tm=274&gps=392\\_914\\_1345\\_564&f=00&su=p554.12.336.ip\\_&tt=11&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http%3A//www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy%2bRecords](http://musicians.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=musicians&cdn=careers&tm=274&gps=392_914_1345_564&f=00&su=p554.12.336.ip_&tt=11&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http%3A//www.discogs.com/label/Enjoy%2bRecords)>.

"About Us | Island Def Jam | Island Def Jam." *Island Def Jam*. Web. <<http://www.islanddefjam.com/about.aspx>>.

"Afrika Bambaataa | Hiphop.sh." *Hiphop.sh | The Four Elements That Shaped a Movement*. Web. <<http://hiphop.sh/afrika>>.

"Amazon.com: Beat Street: Original Soundtrack: Music." *Amazon.com: Online Shopping for Electronics, Apparel, Computers, Books, DVDs & More*. Web. <<http://www.amazon.com/Beat-Street-Original-Soundtrack/dp/B0007KLVKG#moreAboutThisProduct>>.

"Amazon.com: Def Jam Music Group Inc.: 10th Year Anniversary: Various Artists: Music." *Amazon.com: Online Shopping for Electronics, Apparel, Computers, Books, DVDs & More*. Web. <<http://www.amazon.com/Def-Jam-Music-Group-Inc/dp/B0000024JJ>>.

"Big Bank Hank - News, Pictures, Reviews, Biography, Videos, Best Songs, Discography, Concerts, Gossip, Pictures and Tour Dates." *Music News and Reviews, Concert Tickets, Videos*,

*Pictures and Free MP3s - NME.COM.* Web. <<http://www.nme.com/artists/big-bank-hank#biography>>.

"Cedar Playground :." *New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.* Web. 13 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/X111/>>.

"DeeJays | HipHop.sh." *HipHop.sh | The Four Elements That Shaped a Movement.* Web. <<http://hiphop.sh/dj>>.

"Def Jam Changed Music Business, Still a Power at 25 - CNN.com." *CNN.com - Breaking News, U.S., World, Weather, Entertainment & Video News.* Web. <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/Music/11/02/def.jam.anniversary/index.html>>.

"Enjoy Records - Profile of Record Label Enjoy Records." *Music Careers - Music Industry Careers - Finding Music Business Careers.* Web. <<http://musicians.about.com/od/indielabels/p/enjoyrecords.htm>>.

"Fab 5 Freddy." *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb).* Web. 22 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0292735/>>.

"Hip Hop Music." *Mrwiggles.biz.* Web. 12 Mar. 2010. <[http://www.mrwiggles.biz/hip\\_hop\\_music.htm](http://www.mrwiggles.biz/hip_hop_music.htm)>.

"Interview With Def Jam's First Artist T La Rock I." *The Urban Daily.* Web. <<http://theurbandaily.com/music/the-urban-daily-staff/why-wasnt-def-jams-first-artist-at-hip-hop-honors/>>

"Macmillan :: About." *Macmillan - Distinguished & Award Winning Global Publisher in 41 Countries.* Web. <<http://us.macmillan.com/splash/about/index.html>>.

"The Man Who Invented Hip Hop - Forbes.com." *Forbes.com - Business News, Financial News, Stock Market Analysis, Technology & Global Headline News.* Web. <<http://www.forbes.com/2009/07/09/afrika-bambaataa-hip-hop-music-business-entertainment-cash-kings-bambaataa.html>>.

"Master Gee Discography at Discogs." *Discogs - Database and Marketplace for Music on Vinyl, CD, Cassette, MP3 and More.* Web. <<http://www.discogs.com/artist/Master+Gee>>.

"NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT - SOUTH BRONX - NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT - SOUTH BRONX - Mapping the Lower Bronx - It's South, but South of What? - NYTimes.com." *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia.* Web. <<http://www.nytimes.stcom/1995/02/19/nyregion/neighborhood-report-south-bronx-mapping-lower-bronx-it-s-south-but-south-what.html?pagewanted=1>>.

"The New York Times Log In." *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia.* Web. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/04/nyregion/04wide.html>>.

*Save1520 - Filesharing, Digital Media, Music Downloading*. Web. 28 Sept. 2009.  
<<http://www.save1520.org/>>.

"Orion Pictures Corporation [us]." *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. Web.  
<<http://www.imdb.com/company/co0001995/>>.

"Random House - About Us." *Random House - Bringing You the Best in Fiction, Nonfiction, and Children's Books*. Web. <<http://www.randomhouse.com/about/history.html>>.

"Raphistory.net | Records." *Raphistory.net | RAP HISTORY ... Because Rappin Ain't No Thang...* Web.  
<<http://www.raphistory.net/index.php?inc=records&lang=en&ID=&offset=0&sortby=year&sorter=asc&operation=&year=1979&entries>>

"The Real History of The Source - Part One." *Hip Hop Music*. Web.  
<<http://www.hiphopmusic.com/archives/000334.html>>.

"South Bronx HistorySam & Jen Lake." *The Lake FamilySam & Jen Lake*. Web.  
<<http://www.samandjenlake.com/south-bronx-history:5024>>.

"What Sections Are Considered The "South Bronx"? (Bedford: 2009, Felony) - New York City - New York (NY) - Page 16 - City-Data Forum." *Stats about All US Cities - Real Estate, Relocation Info, House Prices, Home Value Estimator, Recent Sales, Cost of Living, Crime, Race, Income, Photos, Education, Maps, Weather, Houses, Schools, Neighborhoods, and More*. Web. <<http://www.city-data.com/forum/new-york-city/151259-what-sections-considered-south-bronx-16.html>>.

"White Flight - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary." *Dictionary and Thesaurus - Merriam-Webster Online*. Web. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white+flight>>.

"Why It Took MTV so Long to Play Black Music Videos | Jet | Find Articles at BNET." *Find Articles at BNET | News Articles, Magazine Back Issues & Reference Articles on All Topics*. Web. 22 Mar. 2010.  
<[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1355/is\\_14\\_110/ai\\_n16807343/?tag=content;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1355/is_14_110/ai_n16807343/?tag=content;col1)>.

"Yo! MTV Raps 20th Anniversary | About Yo! | MTV." *New Music Videos, Reality TV Shows, Celebrity News, Top Stories | MTV*. Web.  
<[http://www.mtv.com/music/yo\\_mtv\\_raps/about.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/music/yo_mtv_raps/about.jhtml)>.

#### Other

Amos, Shawn. *The Tale of the Tape: There's New School, There's Old School, and There's the Orginal School*. Rhino Entertainment Company, 1999. Print.

Conzo, Joe. "Joe Conzo Interview." Telephone interview. 30 Nov. 2009.

Jenson, Robert. "Introduction." *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx*. New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1979