

The Evolution Of The Hip Hop Subculture

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Staff

Introduction

Hip hop is a term that encompasses a wide variety of aspects of African-American culture. Hip hop is often used as a synonym for rap, but it actually goes beyond that. The hip hop subculture has become an important part of black culture. It is called a subculture because it exists outside of the so-called mainstream or ordinary culture. Many of those involved directly in the hip hop are not considered the most important or most intellectual people in society. The subculture has emerged in response to society's rejection of oppressed people of African descent.

The Rise of the Hip Hop Subculture

Hip hop mainly involved the black underclass trying desperately to make its impact on the world. It is difficult to have any voice, when an oppressed minority group lacks economic, social and political power. After the gains of the civil rights movement, masses of black people still lagged behind whites in the nation. Elite and educated African-Americans found their voice in the world. Consequently, the masses of black people began to channel their energies into a positive art form that became the hip hop subculture. Many of the black people involved in hip hop were concentrated in ghettos in the urban United States. Unemployment, death and poverty were all many of them knew; yet, out of this pain and despair emerged a genuine subculture.

Brian Austin, a visiting professor of Radio TV & Motion Pictures, said hip hop became a fascination among black people because it excluded no one. Mr. Austin will teach a class in the Spring of 1991 on popular music.

"Hip hop can be placed into the larger context of black culture because it gave everybody a chance to shine. You didn't have to have a lot of money or fine clothes, as long as you had creativity and energy. Anyone could take part in the hip hop subculture."

Margo Crawford, director of the Black Cultural Center, said the hip hop subculture is a legitimate response to the plight of oppressed black people everywhere. She was exposed to the hip hop subculture, while working among poor blacks in a Chicago housing project.

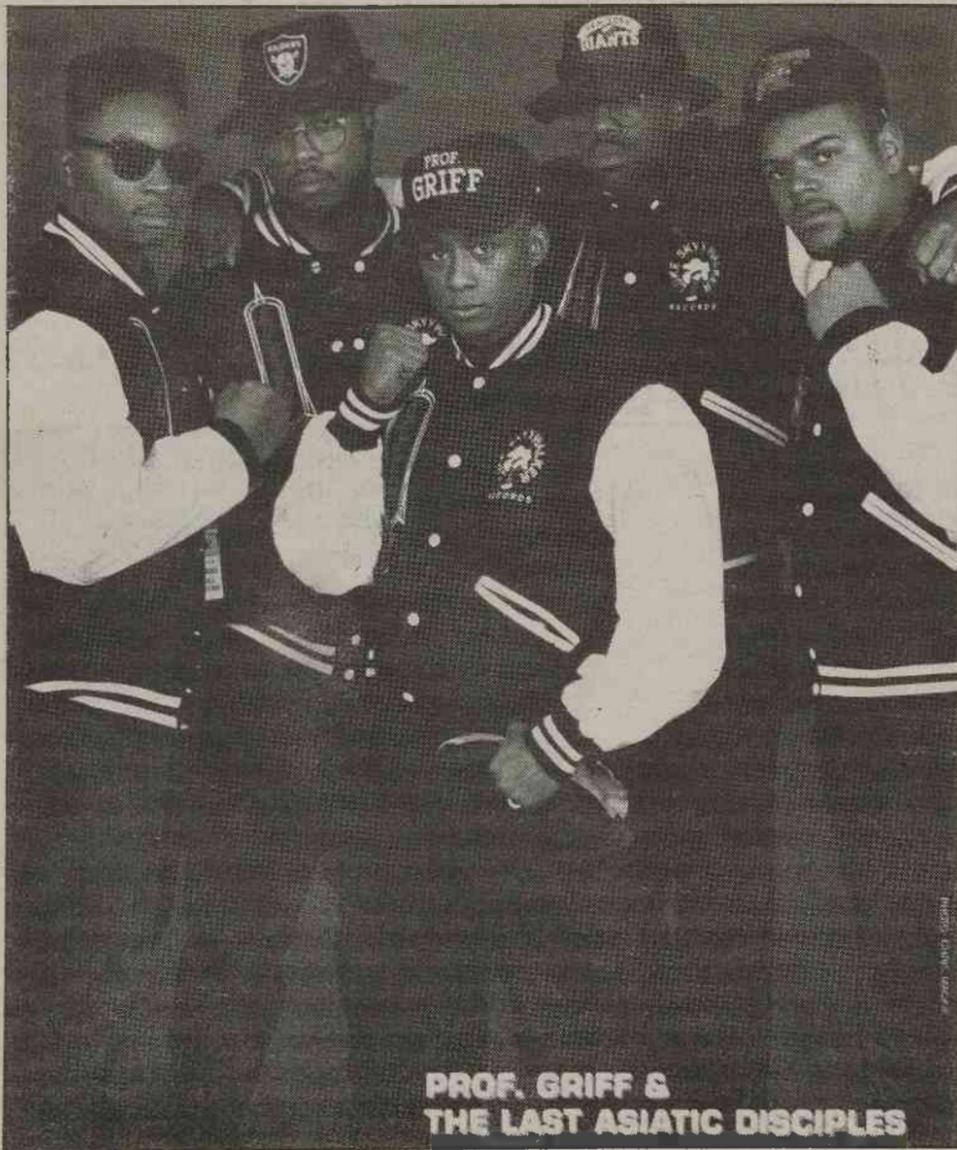
"When the masses of black people were not experiencing progress, then they heard a voice, and that voice was hip hop. It was nothing like they had ever seen before. That was an authentic voice, which they embraced. Once the masses of blacks got a voice, they began to deal with all kinds of things in this subculture."

When oppressed blacks began to respond to their conditions, they did so in a variety of ways. Consequently, the hip hop subculture can be divided into several areas. All of the areas can be seen within the large context of the hip hop subculture. The first area involves *graffiti*, which most people don't consider an art form but vandalism. However, no one should be arrested for this crime because it can truly be a beautiful art form. Graffiti in terms of the hip hop subculture involves extensive art work on sidewalks, walls, subways and buildings. Graffiti has definitely become an important part of the hip hop scene. Artists in the past, such as "Revolt", have used felt tip pens and oil-based paint to paint pictures all across the inner cities. "Tagging", the art of signing one's name anywhere possible, became an important part of graffiti art. Graffiti art involves using colors and making the pictures move, which is why so much graffiti has been done in subways and on trains. Although their work may never appear in a museum, graffiti

artists found their place in society as geniuses within the hip hop subculture.

A second area of the subculture is *dancing*, and hip hop artists have always been involved in this aspect. Of course, not all graffiti artists or rappers are dancers, but dance is an important part of hip hop. Many rappers dance, but a lot of the time, dancers emerge from within the hip hop subculture. Many of them create their own dances, which carry over into the larger society. During the early 1980s, break dancing arrived on the scene to enhance the forces of hip hop. Break dance involved acrobatic stunts, spinning on the head, back flips, and all other types of twisting and turning. By 1984, it was so popular that it inspired several movies including, "Breaking", "Breaking II" and "Beat Street". Break dancers performed almost anywhere they could draw a crowd, including street corners. One of the most famous break groups, the New York Steady Crew, began to earn recognition and respect for its talent. Several medical experts declared that break dancing was dangerous and could cause death or harm to participants. But what these medical experts did not realize was that break dancers were releasing the pains and frustrations they faced everyday by participating in a very unique part of the hip hop subculture. Although breaking passed, the creativity and influence can still be seen among hip hop artists today, such as MC Hammer and Kid N Play.

A third area of the subculture is *clothing and fashion*. Those in the hip hop subculture have their own style of dress, which has influenced dress styles within the larger black culture. Teenagers especially watch the way others dress and want to imitate it. Graffiti dancers sport the latest in athletic fashion from Nike to Reebok. Rappers have diversity among their dress, which sets them apart from others in the subculture. Some rappers dress in "street" attire such as leather jackets and boots. Others wear more casual attire such as suits or whatever is hot in fashion. Some rappers have been known to sport big, gold chains and rings on every finger. However, no matter what they wear, hip hop artists



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