

By Trisha McWilliams



Stefan Greenlee, a member of the local Hip-Hop band Sankofa, describes modern popular rap as "entertainment gone sour."

Rap's marketing and economic success within America's commercial pop culture threatens to force its Black urban roots into extinction. Hip-hop finds itself in the center of a campaign to revitalize and preserve this politically nuanced and educational rap; a campaign focused towards rescuing Hip-Hop from the

depths of a profit-hungry music industry ripened with media and corporate powers.

Mighty Hip-Hop rightfully stakes claim for the creation of popular rap, record mixes, breakdancing, and the art of graffiti. Conceived from Black urban poverty, Hip-Hop crashed onto the underground social scene in the mid-to-late 70s. Blending self-education and self-reliance (two concepts necessary to survive the streets) Hip-Hop transcended a distinct cultural movement, thriving in Black and Latino neighborhoods. The eccentricity of disco life and the isolation and economic depression of inner cities are two direct influences to hip hop's birth.

It started with a DJ named Kool Herc who demonstrated his creative talents on 1600 Riverside in the Bronx—catalyzing the practice of the unique double-turntable mixing style that radiant breakdancers grooved to. Despite gaining an enthusiastic audience, in its toddler years, Hip-Hop failed to gain mainstream recognition and success. However, the crazy 80's came and brought with it, a culture digging rap's hype, new sound.

Rap's grooving vibe increased Hip-Hop's success in the more commercialized city culture. People simply enjoyed its flow and wanted to hear more. So the inevitable power of supply-and-demand took over and rap sky-rocketed into mainstream

America. Over the past decade, record labels have continued to seize the economic opportunities spawned by consumers' growing obsession with rap. While it is true a culture requires a commerce element to survive, Hip-Hop culture's success strips the urban streets of its social and political power. Some Hip-Hoppers argue however, to ensure groundbreaking success, rap had to conform to corporate practices.

Many legendary Hip-Hoppers hope a campaign to preserve and revive true Hip-Hop brings it back to its roots. KRS-One, a 15 year veteran of hip hop, launched a shrine and learning center called The Temple of Hip-Hop Kulture. Based in Harlem, this center aims to paralyze the decline of hip hoppers authentic legacy. The music industry has taken its defiling blows for years. Now the pioneers and real lovers of hip hop are starting to swing back. Rap's tendency to project drug-use, violence, and extreme vulgarity is now under fire by the Hip-Hop industry itself. Hip-Hop has many preserving communities throughout the country, striving to portray the original style.

On the campus of UNC-CH, a few student groups consider themselves a part of the Hip-Hop community separate from the corporate sectors. The list includes performing groups such as Hip-Hop Nation, Sankofa, Hip-Hop Opeyo!, and Ebony Readers Onyx Theater. Sankofa, (an outlet group of the club Hip-Hop Nation) strives to incorporate the fun, entertaining and, educational elements into their hip hop music and performances.

Stefan Greenlee—Sankofa's primary vocalists—describes modern popular rap as, "entertainment gone sour." He prefers to define Hip-Hop by its old-school characteristics of "just chillin' and hangin' out;" when its purpose was to provide music for the breakdancers and test a DJ's skills. According to Greenlee, modern rap "glorifies the drug game with hypocritical lyrics about protecting the community." He also attributes Hip-Hop's decline to rappers' lack of originality. "Nowadays, rappers are straight up jackin' beats." Through Sankofa's music, Greenlee and the rest of the group goes back to Hip-Hop's roots using jazz and true instruments. They also perform original music, starting with another piece, but mixing it with their own beats and lyrics.

Hip-Hop Opeyo! tends to perform more mainstream Hip-Hop. Junior member, Courtney Lynn, comments, "our dances show little resemblance to the old breakdancing style, but we still groove on stage." Lynn agrees that Hip-Hop lacks its original flavor due to commercialization. However, she adds that not all modern hip hop is bad. "Our performances definitely portray modern styles but through an integration of old and new, we are able to appeal to all audiences," says Lynn.

Perhaps with the unwavering efforts of KRS-One and devoted Hip-Hop performers and lovers such as Sankofa, Hip-Hop will find its roots, once again. The political and social power of Hip-Hop lies dormant, but it appears that its authentic, grooving style will soon erupt throughout the music industry. Will this bring an end to mainstream gansta rap?

