

# Pieces of the Puzzle: Putting Black Culture Together

By Terrance Shawn McGill

*I was thinking about Black culture. With the generational and social gaps within the Black community, I have come up with a theory on Black culture. It is still in the developmental stage, so if it has holes in it, bear with me:*

The idea of Black culture has been kicked around for some time now. I believe that Black culture has been in an incubation process as far as history, language, values and ideals are concerned. However, due to this constant evolution of Black culture, most Black Americans find themselves trying to keep up with the times. This is nothing new. We all try to keep up on the latest fad and ideas, but due to the low exposure of the changes in Black culture by the media and other informational outlets, Blacks have had a harder time keeping up. Some have even gone as far as to say that they are trying to "discover" their culture. They feel that the holes created by this low exposure are sufficient enough to halt their progression so much that they need to go back and retrace the steps along the path of Black history and culture. More often than not, they go back to the past. But it is not yesterday where they go back to, or a week ago, or a year ago. They tend to go back centuries ago.

True, the majority of the struggles that Blacks have gone through are related (directly and indirectly) to slavery (blatant and institutional), reconstruction, and the Reagan years. Now this is not a comprehensive list, but you get the gist.

But anyway, they tend to get caught up looking in the past, and all the while, they get further and further behind with the times. They end up in a cyclic pattern. They are trying to figure out what they have missed; then they try to catch up. They then realize that they have missed some more, and they try to keep up and the cycle continues. To put it another way, it's like missing a day of class, then missing another day to catch up what you missed on the first day, and then missing another and another and so on.

I have been keeping up with the changes by pressing on, not letting those gaps hinder me from keeping my eyes on the greater prize, that is the evolving essence of Black Culture. I decided that some of the gaps were trivial and/or irrelevant when observing Black culture. Yet in my omissions, I have noticed that Black culture has been split in four different ways:

- 1) Pan-African Ideologists
- 2) Modern Black Americans
- 3) Euro-American Emulists
- 4) The Hip-Hop Nation

First, there is the Pan-African Ideologists, an Afro-centric group that is very grounded in the motherland. They have adopted different African cultures. They emulate the values, dress, and in some ways seem to have a strong direct link to Africa. Their views are more secular, looking at Black culture globally rather than just nationally.

Second, the Modern Black Americans, who focus on the American aspect. They seem to be the most grounded in the struggles of Black Americans, however, they are also conscious of other cultures as well. Furthermore, they have a communistic outlook when it comes to other Black people, wherein they have a sense of obligation to the Black community.

Third is the Euro-American Emulists, these people tend to look at European-Americans as the modicum of success. They figure that they (Euro-Americans) are successful so they can adapt their styles so that they too might have success. These people believe in bootstrapism, conservatism and capitalism. They believe that if they got theirs so should everyone else, with no handouts, no reparations.

Fourth, there is Hip-Hop Nation, which consists mainly of the next generation of Black Americans. Stefan Greenlee, the leader of the hip hop rap group Sankofa, states "[Hip-Hop] is the unofficial symbol of the Black youth of the times. If you look at hip-hop it is forever changing. From the old school rhymes to the back to Africa phase, to the West Coast "gansta" rap to the hard core phase we are now in. Hip-hop values and ideas have been intertwined with the music that has been produced therein. As the values and ideas of youth changes so too does the music. In other words, hip hop has always been a reflection of the youth of that time which simply goes along with the meaning of hip."

Most Blacks that are stuck trying to "discover" their heritage tend to fall into one of the four categories. It is O.K. to identify with one of the four. Generally people are more inclined to lean in one particular direction rather than straddling the fences. But the problem with identifying with one particular category is that they accept that category to be Black culture, and disregard the other 3.

In actuality, Black culture is the sum of the parts, not just one category but all four categories. Given the relatively young age of Black American History (200+ years), it is constantly maturing into new forms. People tend to get stuck on the gaps because they do not embrace all four categories. The end result is that they do not understand their history, their culture, and ultimately themselves.

I welcome responses and criticism. I look forward to your comments.

