

# Features

## Guilford Celebrates Af

The annual celebration of African American History Month began in 1926 when historian Carter G. Woodson launched Negro History Week through the organization he founded in 1915, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson chose February because both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln were born in February. During Negro History Week (later called Black History Month and now African American History Month) he and his organization distributed material about the achievements of African Americans to dispel racist myths and promote respect for people of African heritage. The following essays are abridged from longer works by Jaron Randall and Anthony Roman submitted for a Fall 1999 class in African-American history.--Adrienne Israel

### The Origin of Hip Hop

By Jaron Randall



What is hip hop today? I see it as a class of young trend setters who have a controversial influence on the lifestyles of this generation. Hip hop is not just music, but a culture that consists of many different forms of African-American pride. It is the way young people in this era communicate, an appreciation of the music our parents grew up listening to, the style in which we dress, and the diversity of our generation. Hip hop manifests itself through music, poetry, art, dance, acting and fashion. Simply, it is an expression of who we are, reflecting on times when we are happy and content, angry and frustrated, or just coping with reality. Hip hop is the biography of African-American life resurrected in the late 20th century as were the Negro spirituals during slavery, jazz in the Harlem Renaissance, blues to comfort in the Great Depression, and rock-n-roll to celebrate and uplift the spirit of a spawning heritage. As we continue to write this chapter in our history, we carry the remains of our musical antiquity into the next millennium, holding onto the traditions of our ancestors. Although rap is believed to have been born in 1974 in the South Bronx, it can be traced back to the Motherland where tribes would use call-and-response chants to summon gods and ancestors. Also, the tradition of story-telling is an essential element in the structure of rap music. As the Africans in America adapted to the language of those who enslaved them, they created a dialect that was their way of communicating, which was different from the norm and fit their cultural style. The next step was inspired by Cab Calloway, the "grandfather of rap music." Calloway created scat singing, a European vocal form joined to an African rhythm. He called it "give scat," and it was famous during the Depression and throughout the 1940's. Calloway created energy between the band and the audience. His vocal improvisation would become one of the foundations of rap music's distinctive freestyle where rappers create lyrical poetry at the spur of the moment to show their verbal mastery. Rap had various forms such as the love style of the sixties used by Isaac Hayes and Barry White. Millie Jackson wrote x-rated raps on men, cheating, love, and sex. Between the cool, mellow sound of Hayes and the sensual joys and hurts of Jackson, they made rap

acceptable to the black market. Another form of rap was the poetry style influenced by the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron. These message-oriented rhymes inspired the political and conscious rappers of the 1980's and 90's. The Last Poets set lyrics to a conga drum to signify the importance of black roots, black struggle, and black pride. The deejays made hip hop beats unique. Clive Campbell, known as Kool Herc, emigrated to the Bronx from Jamaica in 1967 at the age of twelve. He hooked up two turntables in the recreation room of the Sedgewick Avenue housing project and began scratching James Brown's "Give It Up or Turn It Loose." Using two identical copies of that record, he cut back and forth between the breaks, creating his own extended version which was called the break beat. Afrika Bambaataa, who also lived

in the Bronx Projects, left the Black Spades street gang, bought his own records, and began deejaying on other people's turntables. He built his own organization called Zulu Nation, which included rappers, break-dancers, and graffiti artists. Campbell and Bambaataa brought rap together and put lyrics on a new sound, used call-and-response to hype the crowd, and gave the break boys a rhythm for their martial arts based dancing. In 1983, hip hop expanded its identity when the break-dancing craze swept through inner-city playgrounds. Hip hop inherited break dancing from a Latino group, the Monterey Crew. Break dancing has faded out because of its difficulty and because it was street art. Many other elements of hip hop culture have disappeared. Graffiti art has no meaning, the role of the deejay has diminished, and rap lyrics have be-

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come very commercial. What we have maintained is the style that existed during its emergence. We still have the love style rap of Hayes flowing through Lauren Hill and the ex-rated material of Jackson expressed by Lil' Kim. There is the militant style of Malcolm X running through the veins of the group Public Enemy and the poetic style of The Last Poets represented by storytellers such as Nas Escobar, Jay-Z, and Tupac. The conscious style of rap Heron displayed is still heard through the words of the immortal KRS-ONE. The only part of the original hip hop culture we will hold onto is the music. The way we speak will constantly change, and the way we dress will eventually go out of style. Hip hop is a culture that revolves around music and will always express the people who support it. And because it is so versatile and not affected by change, it will continue to exist for years to come.

