

THE RISE OF HIP HOP

Hip hop music and culture has become one of the most far-reaching and influential movements of the 20th century and beyond

Hip hop culture began in the Bronx, New York City, in the early 1970s - an area mainly inhabited by Black Americans, Latino Americans and Caribbean immigrants.

Although sometimes used to describe rap music, the term 'hip hop' actually refers to an all-encompassing culture made up of four key elements: DJing, or 'turntabling' - music made with record players and mixers; MCing, or 'rhyming' - a rhythmic and rhyming vocal style; B-boying, or breakdancing - encompassing movement, dance, style and attitude; and graffiti, also known as 'writing'. There is sometimes a fifth element added to the list, especially by artists and scholars who consider themselves socially conscious, and that is 'knowledge', referring to a certain kind of street knowledge, awareness of historical roots and 'realness' that the hip hop culture aspires to.

THE BEGINNING

In the early 1970s, against a backdrop of the glitzy disco scene happening in the wealthier areas of New York City, Black people in the Bronx were hosting DJ parties, playing predominantly Black-made funk and soul records. Here, the art forms of DJing, dancing, and rapping evolved alongside each other. DJ Kool Herc, an 18-year-old Jamaican immigrant, blew people's minds at a now legendary house party in 1973 when he used two turntables (and two copies of the same record) to meld together the percussive breaks of dance tracks, creating a continuous flow of music. This innovation inspired an explosion of improvisational dancing and soon contests developed at which 'breakdancing' - a dazzling combination of acrobatic and sometimes airborne moves, complete with gravity-defying headspins - was born.

DJ Herc, along with two other pioneers - Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash - form what some people refer to as 'the Holy Trinity' of hip

hop history. They were among the first to isolate and extend the break beat, laying the foundation for the hip hop beats we know today. In 1973, Bambaataa, a Bronx-born son of Caribbean activists, formed Zulu Nation with a group of gang members who wanted to turn their lives around. Together they brought the community together through music. Meanwhile, over on the south side of the Bronx, son of Barbadian immigrants, Grandmaster Flash, was perfecting the art form - after studying other DJs' techniques and the experimentation as a teenager. He added style to DJing, connecting groundbreaking technique with technical knowledge to make the turntables into an instrument. At these early parties, it was common for the DJs to have a microphone where they would say things to the crowd to get people pumped up. Grandmaster Flash found it difficult to speak whilst DJing, so he started leaving a microphone out for others.

RAP, 'SCRATCH' & INFLUENCES

The young people picking up those microphones at parties were likely influenced by the musical and cultural icons who are now recognised as central to the formation of hip hop. One of these was the boxer Muhammad Ali, who in 1963 released a comedy spoken-word album, demonstrating his unique poetic 'trash talk'. *I Am the Greatest* included some of the rhymes Ali would often recite before his fights.

The Last Poets, a collective of spoken-word artists who performed on the New York television programme *Soul!* in 1968, released their debut self-titled album in 1970. In 1971, the jazz poet and



Gil Scott-Heron (1949-2011), one of hip hop's early influences, performing in February 1976



Grandmaster Flash, DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa and Chuck D pose at Columbia University's Rap Summit in New York City, 1993



© Getty



Grandmaster Flash, focusing intently on the turntables while performing, circa 1980



De La Soul's early releases were characterised by witty, innovative lyrics and creative sampling



Public Enemy performing in Hamburg, Germany in 2000

soul singer Gil Scott-Heron released *Pieces of a Man*. The record features classic tracks such as 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised', a beautifully rhythmic critique of mass media and governments.

Other musicians often identified as influencing elements of hip hop include the 1950s rock 'n' roll pioneer, Bo Diddley; 1960s funk legend, James Brown; and the entertainer Pigmeat Markham, particularly his 1968 single, 'Here Comes the Judge'.

In 1975, Kool Herc was hired to play music at the Hevalo Club in the Bronx and got his friend Coke La Rock to deliver crowd-pleasing rhymes ("DJ Riz is in the house and he'll turn it out without a doubt"). The same year, Grand Wizzard Theodore was trying to hold a spinning record in place so he could hear what his mother was shouting at him, and accidentally caused the record to produce the 'shigi-shigi' sound now known as 'the scratch'.

THE 1977 BLACKOUT

A blackout affected most of New York City over two days in July 1977, resulting in widespread looting. Following the blackout there was no shortage of mixers, turntables and speakers in the Bronx. At the time, the hip hop genre was still barely known outside of the area, but following the blackout its reach and popularity began to grow at an extraordinary rate.

Although the word 'rap' (meaning 'converse'), had been used in African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) for decades (along with 'hip', from the Wolof verb 'hepi' meaning 'to see'), it wasn't widely known until the years following the 1977 blackout. It was around this time the music industry coined the

term 'rap music' and the focus shifted away from DJs and towards MCs.

OLD SCHOOL

The term 'old-school hip hop' generally refers to the first commercially recorded hip hop music - approximately 1979 to 1983. Before this, the music had been performed live or occasionally recorded on tapes from PA systems and then distributed at parties.

In 1979, The Sugarhill Gang's 'Rapper's Delight' - which is now widely regarded as the first rap hit - reached number 36 on the Billboard Charts. The same year, Grandmaster Flash formed supergroup the Furious Five, who went on to become one of the most influential rap outfits ever. By this time, hip hop had spread from the confines of New York City, and in 1979, Lady B in Philadelphia became the first female solo hip hop artist to commercially record music with her single 'To the Beat Y'All' - which went on to become a stock rap phrase.



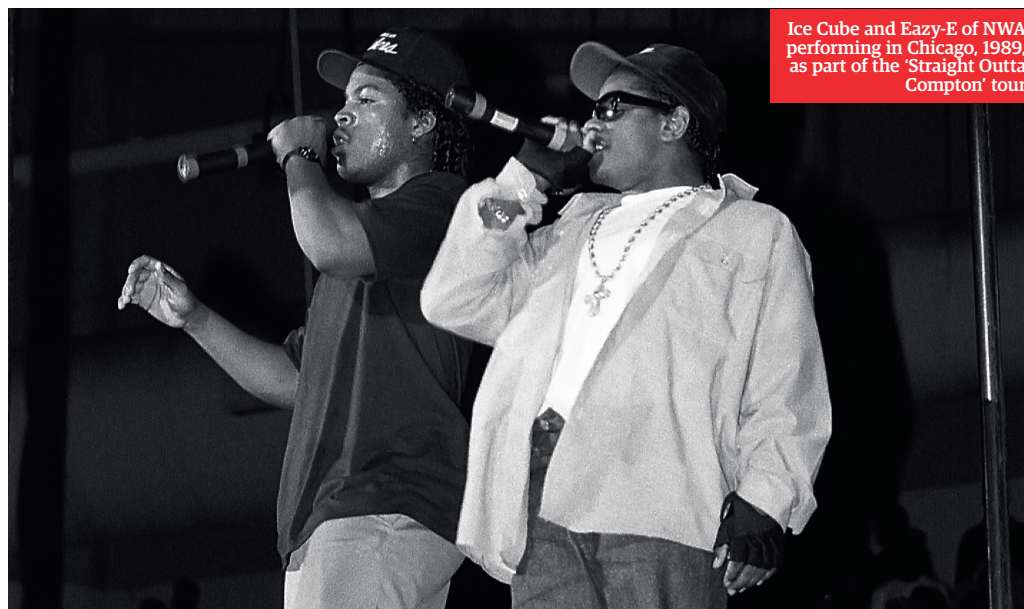
Run-DMC hit the mainstream after teaming up with rock group Aerosmith on 'Walk This Way'

In 1980, after meeting hip hop pioneers like Fab 5 Freddy, Blondie released their hit single 'Rapture', which was the first number-one single in the US to feature rap-style vocals. In 1982, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released their single 'The Message'. Now widely regarded as one of the most important tracks in hip hop history, 'The Message' provides social commentary on inner-city poverty, with hooks such as "It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder / How I keep from going under", the genre makes a shift from party to protest and lays the foundations for conscious hip hop.

A NEW SOUND

The second wave of hip hop in the early 1980s, known as 'new school', was still predominantly being made in New York City. It was characterised by drum machine-led sampler technology, and introduced artists like Run-DMC and LL Cool J, who exuded a tough, cool, street b-boy image and attitude, with boastful self-assertive raps. While acts like KRS-One and Chuck D continued on the route of socio-political commentary, combining hip hop with pro-Black activism.

In 1984, Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin launched the hip hop label Def Jam Recordings, releasing 'It's Yours' by T La Rock & Jazzy Jay, followed by 'I Need a Beat' by LL Cool J. Both



Ice Cube and Eazy-E of NWA performing in Chicago, 1989, as part of the 'Straight Outta Compton' tour

tracks sold well, leading to a distribution deal with CBS Records through Columbia Records. That year at the Grammy Awards, Michael Jackson borrowed elements of b-boy dance moves he'd seen performed by LA breakdancers, showing off his now infamous 'moonwalk'.

THE GOLDEN AGE

Hip hop music produced between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s is referred to as the 'golden age'. With sample-heavy music dominating the scene, many of the albums released during this time period wouldn't have received legal clearance today.

Afrocentrism and political militancy are lyrical themes associated with the era. In 1987, Public Enemy stunned the world with their debut album *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*. Although largely ignored by radio stations, due to controversy around its radically pro-Black lyrical content, the politically charged album went on to become one of the fastest-selling hip hop records, selling 400,000 copies in the US by 1989.

The golden age is known for its innovation and was described by *Rolling Stone* as a time "when it seemed that every new single reinvented the genre". Artists associated with the era include De La Soul, Gang Starr, A Tribe Called Quest and Pete Rock and CL Smooth. In 1988, MTV launched a new hip hop show called *Yo! MTV Raps*.

GANGSTA RAP

Schoolly D's 1985 single 'P.S.K. What Does It Mean?' is often considered to be the first gangsta rap song, followed by Ice-T's '6 in the Mornin'', from 1986.

In the early days of the golden age, gangsta rap hit the mainstream with NWA's pioneering gold album *Straight Outta Compton* (1988), which featured the track 'F**k tha Police'. Their second album, *N***z4Life*, followed in 1991 and was the first hardcore rap album to reach number one on the pop charts. The group's explicit lyrics, which were often misogynistic and hinted at homophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments, saw them banned from mainstream radio stations. Despite this, several members of the original lineup, such as Dr Dre, Eazy-E and Ice Cube, went on to become platinum-selling solo artists in the 1990s.

The gangsta rap subgenre was male-dominated and often featured misogynistic lyrics, with music



GOING GLOBAL

The creativity and innovation of hip hop has inspired new scenes all over the globe

Hip hop culture formed from a DIY approach and an attitude of resistance against authority - a message and energy that has resonated with, and appealed to, people all around the world.

Caribbean and Latin American people played an integral part in the early development of hip hop in the Bronx, so it's no surprise that the style and culture spread to almost every country in those regions, such as Haiti, Cuba and Brazil. Just as with the US, in many Latin American and Caribbean countries hip hop has been a tool in which the Afro-descendant population can celebrate their blackness and articulate their demands for racial equality. Reggaeton is a style of music developed in Puerto Rico that has a lot of similarities with US-based hip hop, both being influenced by Jamaican music and incorporating rapping and call and response.

It's also possible to find vibrant hip hop scenes all over Europe, Africa, and Asia, with UK hip hop becoming a genre all of its own, with many new subgenres such as garage and grime. Notable artists from the UK scene include Dizzee Rascal, The Streets, Ms Dynamite, Foreign Beggars, MIA, Akala, Lowkey, Lady Leshurr and Stormzy. In the 1990s in France, Senegalese-born MC Solaar became the first non-American rap superstar.

Every October in Braunschweig, Germany, 8,500 hip hop fans from around the world attend the biggest global hip hop dance competition, the Battle of the Year. Elimination competitions for the event are held in 20 different countries around the world. In Kenya, young rappers tend to speak in 'sheng', a creolised language that includes English, Swahili, and Kikuyu words, and rap about joblessness, poverty, and failures of the older generation. There are lively and growing scenes in China ('xi ha') and Ghana ('hip-life'), as well as in Sweden, Norway, New Zealand, Chile, Indonesia and many other countries worldwide.



Contestants perform at a regional elimination round in China, for the 2005 Battle of the Year hip hop dance contest



Kendrick Lamar performing in Boston in 2017 on the 'DAMN' tour

videos that sexualised and objectified women. This disregard for female voices and perspective grew to define much of mainstream hip hop, with the recording industry often placing emphasis on female rappers' sexuality over their artistic abilities - if they were willing to back them at all.

GOING MAINSTREAM

It was in 1990 that hip hop music really hit the mainstream, in part due to the success of Public Enemy's album, *Fear of a Black Planet*, which was met by rave reviews. In 1991, Cypress Hill released their self-titled debut, selling two million copies in the US alone, and following up with a second album (*Black Sunday*) in 1993, which went straight to number one on the Billboard 200. Also in 1993, Dr Dre's debut from the previous year, *The Chronic* attained multi-platinum status.

Other hip hop albums that burst into the mainstream in the early 1990s include: MC Hammer's 1990 release *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em*; Wu Tang Clan's 1993 release, *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*; and the all-female TLC's *CrazySexyCool* (1994), which was hugely successful, earning four top five singles including two number ones - 'Creep' and 'Waterfalls' (1995).

In 1996, The Fugees breathed new life into socially aware hip hop with *The Score*, which

debuted at number one, almost immediately becoming the best-selling hip hop album of all time, and earning them two Grammys. With roots in reggae and soul, *The Score* has a warm and intimate sound. In 1998, Missy 'Misdemeanor' Elliott redefined hip hop and R&B further, with her first album, *Supa Dupa Fly*. She went on to become the highest-selling female rapper of all time.

EAST COAST VS WEST COAST

During the 1990s, a feud developed between artists and fans of the East Coast and West Coast hip hop scenes in the United States. The focal points of the rivalry were Tupac Shakur (West Coast) and his LA label Death Row Records, and the Notorious BIG (East Coast) and his New York label Bad Boy Records. In 1991, Bronx rapper Tim Dog voiced his anger at record companies rejecting East Coast rappers in favour of West Coast ones on his track 'F**k Compton', which featured shots at the whole LA rap scene. From

here, a conflict erupted that continued for over five years and saw many members of the scene on both sides caught up in violence. The media got involved, continuously reporting on the 'coastal rap war' in 1995-96, and fans began picking sides. The feud reached a peak when Tupac Shakur and the Notorious BIG were both killed by unknown assailants, in 1996 and 1997 respectively.

"A CONFLICT ERUPTED THAT SAW MANY MEMBERS OF THE SCENE ON BOTH SIDES CAUGHT UP IN VIOLENCE"

BLING ERA

A new commercial hip hop sound materialised in the late 1990s, often referred to as the 'bling era' (referencing Lil Wayne's single 'Bling Bling', 1999) or sometimes the 'jiggy era' (derived from 'Gettin' Jiggy Wit It' by Will Smith, 1997). Sean 'Puff Daddy' Combs' 1997 album *No Way Out* signalled a stylistic change in gangsta rap, and mainstream hip hop generally, as it became more accepted and commercially successful. Producers of this era favoured R&B-style hooks and production, often using samples of soul and pop tracks from the 1970s and 1980s, with materialistic lyrics.

However, in 1998, Lauryn Hill (from The Fugees) released her solo debut album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. It incorporated several musical styles - such as neo soul, gospel and reggae - to create a unique sound, with lyrics exploring motherhood, love and religion. The album received critical acclaim, 11 Grammy nominations (with five wins), and left a lasting legacy. In 2018, Sony Music reported it to have sold 20 million copies worldwide. In 1999, The Neptunes (a production duo of Chad Hugo and Pharrell Williams) dominated the airwaves with a string of hit singles featuring a variety of vocalists, such as Kelis and ODB. Other pop-orientated acts of this time period include Nelly, Ja Rule, and Fabolous, while others - such as DMX, 50 Cent, G-Unit and The Game - found success with a grittier sound. Hip hop was also influencing nu-metal artists such as Korn and Limp Bizkit, and heavily impacting mainstream pop with artists like Destiny's Child, Usher and Erykah Badu.

ALTERNATIVE SOUND

In the early to mid 2000s, there was a resurgence of 'alternative hip hop', first introduced in the 1980s with artists such as De La Soul and The Pharcyde. The sub-genre began to find a place in the mainstream, due to acts like Gnarls Barkley, MF Doom and Mos Def. Outkast's *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* (2003) appealed to a wide audience as it included elements of several other genres, including rock, R&B, punk, jazz, country and electronica, and went on to be one of the best-selling hip hop albums of all time.

PROGRESSIVE

Sometimes termed 'the blog era', partly due to the increased use of social media and blogging for music distribution and promotion, the 'progressive' era was a continuation of the success of alternative hip hop, which was outselling gangsta rap by the late 2000s. The success of Kanye West's 2008 album *808s & Heartbreak* - full of songs about love, loneliness and heartache - had a significant effect on hip hop, and inspired future generations. An avant-garde approach to production became popular, with wide-ranging influences from jazz, rock and soul. Artists associated with this subgenre include Drake, Lupe Fiasco and Kendrick Lamar.

Around this time, the popularity of Auto-Tune vocal effects increased with the rapper T-Pain.

Nicknamed the 'T-Pain effect', it was a prominent fixture in late 2000s and early 2010s hip hop, used by artists such as Snoop Dogg, Lil Wayne and the Black Eyed Peas.

THE RISE CONTINUES

From the underground beginnings of Bronx house parties, hip hop has grown into a global movement and cultural phenomenon, influencing many aspects of popular culture - such as fashion, art, theatre and radio - both in the United States and around the world. In 2017, Forbes reported that hip hop/R&B (MRC Data classified them as one genre) had taken over rock as the most consumed musical genre. In recent years, hip hop lyrics have also gained legitimacy in academic and literary circles, with studies of hip hop linguistics now offered at several institutions. Artists like Jay Z and P Diddy have huge presences in fashion and media, as well

as music, while the entrepreneurial success of many hip hop artists have gone on to inspire many young Black Americans.

There have been many subgenres added to hip hop over the years. In addition to the ones mentioned, there's also crunk, glitch-hop, country rap, emo rap, lofi hip hop and trap, among others. In the 2020s, the storytelling rap of the past seems to be less popular and there is less emphasis on lyrical content in much of the rap that makes it into the charts. However, there are some current artists, such as Kendrick Lamar, who keep the 1990s sensibilities alive with political and emotional lyricism.

Hip hop artists all over the world are breaking down the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' art, in order to make truth-telling work to reflect their generation, and courageously leading the way towards transformation and empowerment.



Wyclef Jean, Lauryn Hill and Pras of The Fugees in Chicago, 1996

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