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# TheROOTS : Bridging the Gap Between Africa, Minstrelsy and Hip Hop

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**TheROOTS:**

Bridging the Gap between Africa, Minstrelsy and Hip Hop

By

Danisha Nicole Bailey

A thesis submitted to the Department of Dance  
of the State University of New York College at Brockport  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in Fine Arts

May 2006

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by Danisha Nicole Bailey

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## RESEARCH QUESTION

How did the formation of specific “slave cultures” impact the early development of black music and dance in the United States and how did the descendants of “slave cultures” in the United States and abroad, i.e. Puerto Rican, Jamaican and Afro-Brazilian, shape the Hip Hop movement, making it an expressive medium of resistance and rebellion against the hegemony of American society?

## ABSTRACT

### **TheROOTS:** *Bridging the Gap between Africa, Minstrelsy and Hip Hop*

is a thesis project written to look at the effects minstrelsy had on the early development of black dance in the United States, to pay tribute to Professor Sterling Stuckey's research on "slave culture," and the African-based tradition of the "Ring Shout," which is performed in the Southern United States, as well as examine the contributions that African American, Jamaican, Afro-Brazilian and Puerto Rican culture, dance and music had on the early development of hip hop. The root of Hip Hop shows how artistic movements can be a vehicle for social change, cultural identity and passive/aggressive resistance against oppression.



The events which transpired five thousand years ago;  
Five years ago or five minutes ago, have determined  
what will happen five minutes from now; five years  
From now or five thousand years from now.  
All history is a current event.

- Dr John Henrik Clarke

## CHAPTER ONE

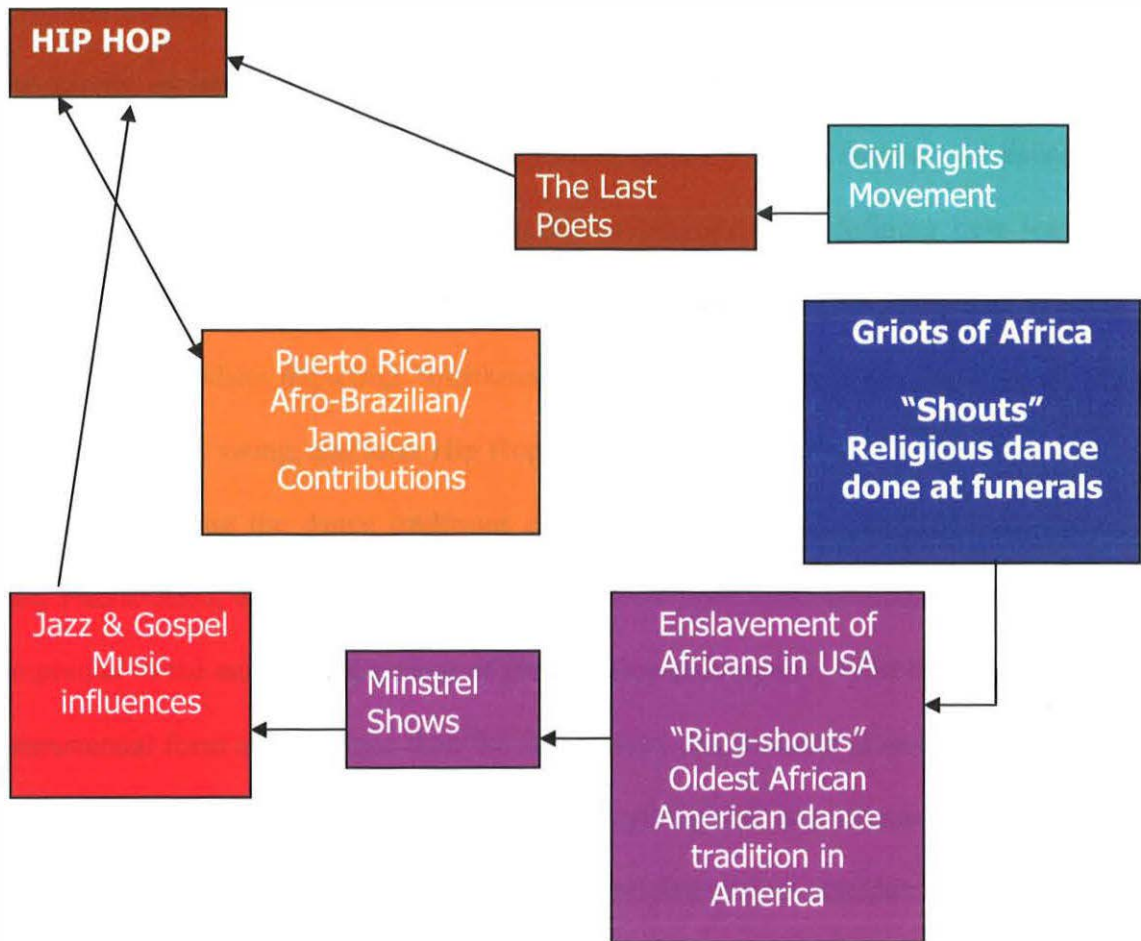
### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

What is Hip Hop? The term ‘Hip Hop’ is used to describe a cultural movement, which includes four major elements; *Break-dancing, Graffiti, DJing, and Rap music* (Light, 1999, p.2). The lack of the Hip Hop phenomenon being incorporated within the academic dance curriculum has fueled my desire to learn the complete history of this culture and share my experience with others. My objectives are to accurately document specific dance and musical forms created out of the slave culture experience here in the United States, to study the influence of slave culture on the dancing bodies ability to liberate itself (using the music and dance), and how this later impacted on the formation of Hip Hop. Katherine Dunham, in her forward to Lynn Emery’s book *Black Dance*, states, “The dance by and large has been an instrument of black survival under the most depressing economic and social circumstances, and continues to be so” (Medearis & Medearis, 1997 p.13). Both survival and cultural identity has been an underlying theme within black dance, from slavery to break-dancing.

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction. The second chapter, *Culture: From Ring shout to Minstrelsy*, documents certain African dance and music aesthetics that were retained in the new world which evolved into new social, political, and artistic forms of rebellion and resistance in the United States. The third chapter, *Last Poets: Hip Hop is Born*, shows the effects slave culture and various oppressed cultures had on the Hip Hop movement. The final chapter

will document the creative process of creating a Hip Hop work leading to my thesis concert. For the research I created a Genogram of Hip Hop roots:



### Statement of Purpose

The main focus of this paper examines how slave cultures, in retaining certain African aesthetics within music and dance, laid the foundation for the development of the Hip Hop movement. I believe the response to oppression can always be found in the music and dance of the oppressed people. Hip Hop was inevitable because it was the vehicle of self expression used by those socially and economically oppressed in New York City. According to Nelson George (1998) in *Hip Hop America*, "Hip Hop has brought America a new language of rhythm, speech, and movement that has inspired a

generation to take to verse to say what was too long unspoken about this nation” (xiii). Thus, my research will show Hip Hop was not an isolated event; it has a legacy.

The history of Hip Hop is deeper than a couple of emcees getting together to throw parties or scratching records back and forth to make the crowd dance. The true history of Hip Hop lies within the oppressed black dancing body’s ancestry of resistance, liberating its self from hegemonic control by inventing and re-defining new ways to move in a new world. In the body’s quest for liberation, blacks surpassed limiting negative racial epithets depicting “blackness” by shaping the early development of tap, jazz, blues, gospel, swing, and later Hip Hop.

In examining the dance traditions of blacks specifically in the Southern United States, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Brazil, I will show how these interconnected cultures were pivotal to the early development of the Hip Hop movement. Who better to usher in a controversial form of resistance than the 20<sup>th</sup> century descendants of enslaved Africans? I believe Hip Hop mirrors the culmination of everything that is good and bad within the black experience here in the United States. My creative project scheduled for Fall 2004, will pay tribute to Sterling Stuckey’s coined phrase, “slave culture” and the Hip Hop movement.

### **Rationale**

Hip Hop is a complex matrix of subcultures and movements that exist in the United States. Whether directly or indirectly, these subcultures left a residue in the black performance aesthetic within the United States, juxtaposing passive and aggressive forms of rebellion, in music and dance, which expresses cultural identity and resistance against oppression.

I felt it was necessary to research the historical lineage of Hip Hop because with the avant-garde movements of MTV and BET videos, one is left with its commercialization. Being a part of Hip Hop culture, I am often surprised with the debasement it is given within Institutions of Higher Learning, labeling it merely as an “after school” activity, not worthy of being incorporated into any academic dance curriculum at the collegiate level.

In researching Hip Hop I discovered oppression is the greatest motivator for change. I was fortunate to meet and speak with one of Hip Hop’s prolific writers, Bakari Kitwana at SUNY Fredonia’s Black Student Unions Conference in February 2003. Bakari Kitwana, author of The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture (2002), spoke on the role Hip Hop must take in creating its own political agenda reflective of the political, economical and social crisis surrounding black America.

I adhere to a Ghanaian principal that encapsulates everything I believe in; that principal is *Sankofa*. Visually and symbolically "Sankofa" is expressed as a bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth, or as a heart-like symbol. Sankofa in the Akan language from Ghana, West Africa, and means: "*se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenki,*" which is translated, "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot." In the spirit of *Sankofa* I use my research to inform others of the history of Hip Hop.

### **Delimitation**

This research looks at Hip Hop through historical and ethnographic lens. This scope of study traces specific dance and musical movements such as the Ring Shout,

Minstrelsy, Gospel, Jazz & Blues (as it relates to Hip Hop) and specific cultures (Puerto Rican, Jamaican and the Afro-Brazilian Capoeira) that helped in the early development of Hip Hop. Although the minstrel shows began American Musical Theatre, I will not trace the entire history of this event. Regarding Puerto Rican and Jamaican cultures, I examine specific contributions those cultures made to the Hip Hop movement. For example the musical form of “toasting” is a Jamaican aesthetic implemented into the Hip Hop rap culture by DJ Kool Herc. I will further show how break dancing, one of the four elements of Hip Hop, shaped its earlier movement styles from the Afro Brazilian form of martial arts, Capoeira, and how head spins, cart wheels, kicks, etc are still used today.

Lastly, I chose not to devote a chapter to *underground rap* (non-mainstream music, such as conscious rap) or *gangster rap* (rap songs on murder, money and mayhem) because that is beyond the scope of this research. I will look at how cultures use dance and music as a form of rebellion and resistance and how this shaped the Hip Hop movement.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Acculturation-** The process of systematic cultural change of a particular society carried out by an alien, dominant society (Winthrop, 1991 p.82-83). Through this process, individuals of a foreign or minority culture learn the language, habits, and values of the standard or dominant culture.

**Assimilation-** The process whereby a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture. These individuals enter the social positions, as well as acquire the political, economic, and educational standards of the dominant culture, and become integrated within the standard culture (Thompson, 1996, p.112).

**Bomba-** Bomba is a folkloric Puerto Rican music/ dance form that is part of foundation of contemporary Puerto Rican music and modern day Salsa. Bomba came directly from Africa- specifically, the Ashanti, where many black Puerto Ricans came from originally. The musical form is a call and response between the leader and the chorus over the many rhythmic patterns that comprise the Bomba. The instruments used to play Bomba are two barrel-shaped drums, a single maraca, and a pair of sticks called *cuá* or *fuá*.

**Capoeira-** has its roots in the Bantu tradition and was used by the enslaved Africans of Brazil as a form of revolution. In keeping with African war strategies, Capoeiristas masked the art's effectiveness from plantation overseers. Then and today, to uninformed onlookers the art appeared to be a harmless demonstration of dance, acrobatics, play and music.

**Culture-** The predominating mores, attitudes, beliefs, customs and behavior that characterize the functioning of a group or organization.

**Diaspora-** [Greek *diaspor*, *dispersion*, from *diaspeirein*, *to spread about* : *dia-*, *apart*; see **dia-** + *speirein*, *to sow, scatter*; see *sper-* in Indo-European Roots.] A dispersion of a people from their original homeland.

**Diffusion-** the process by which discrete cultural traits are transferred from one society to another, through migration, trade, war, or other contact (Winthrop, 1991, p.82).

**Four Elements-** Rap, DJing, Graffiti art and break dancing are the Four Elements of the Hip Hop culture.

**Hegemony-** The predominant influence, as of a state, region, or group, over another or others.

**Hip Hop-** An artistic response to oppression. A way of expression through dance, music, word/song. A culture that thrives on creativity and nostalgia. As a musical art form it reflects stories of inner city life, often with a message, spoken over beats of music. The culture includes rap and any other venture spawned from the hip-hop style and culture (Westbrook , 2002, p. 64).

**Maafa-** This term from the book, Let the Circle Be Unbroken, by Dr. Marimba Ani, is a Kiswahili term for "Disaster" or "Terrible Occurrence". This word best describes the more than 500 hundred years of suffering of people of African descent through Slavery, Imperialism, Colonialism, Invasions and Exploitation. Dr. Marimba Ani introduced it into contemporary African-American scholarship as a preferred reference to the period in world history, identified as the Middle Passage or Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Ani, 1997, p11).

**Master Juba-** (William Henry Lane), Born a free man in 1825, Lane, as a teenager, became a well-known dancer in New York City. A superb Irish jig and clog dancer, Lane created such rhythmically complex dances that he was declared the champion dancer of his time. Performing in black face, Lane was featured billing above white minstrel entertainers.

**Minstrel Shows-** Minstrel Shows marked the beginning of American Musical Theatre. It began around the 1830's with white performers darkening their faces with burnt cork or greasepaint, dress in outlandish costumes, and performing in songs and skits that mocked African Americans. These shows gave rise to such negative caricatures as the Mammy, Pickaninny, Zip Coon, Stepin' Fetch, etc. The minstrel show, which featured the negative



stereotypes of shuffling, irresponsible, wide-grinning, loud-laughing Negroes, became one of the most popular entertainments in nineteenth-century United States.

**Oppression-** An unjust or excessive exercise of power: as an unlawful, wrongful, or corrupt exercise of authority by a public official acting under color of authority that causes person harm.

**Pioneers-** The leaders and innovators of the Hip Hop movement: Kool DJ Herc, Grandmaster Flash & Afrika Bambaata are coined the Pioneers of the Hip Hop culture.

**Ring Shout-** The union of dance and song, the Ring Shout is an African American religious tradition done in a circular formation incorporating call and response songs, dance and lively percussion. The shout songs were used to convey the slaves' ideas, beliefs and experiences. It is believed that the circle tradition of the Ring Shout and the shuffling, percussive dance movements influenced other circle or "walk-around" dances.

**Sampling-** The act of taking a portion of one sound recording and reusing it as an instrument in a new recording.

**The Last Poets-** Created after the death of Martin Luther King, The Last Poets were wordsmith from the civil rights era. They used obstreperous verse to chide a nation whose inclination was to maintain the colonial yoke around the neck of the disenfranchised. Originally comprised of three poets and a drummer, they combined revolutionary politics, street language, and percussion in an artistic form that would inspire countless Black Americans. The New York Times called The Last Poets "the village elders of rap and a living bridge to the new poetry," hence, they were the prototype rappers pre-dating the Hip Hop movement.

**Thomas D. Rice-** a.k.a. T.D. “Daddy” Rice was a popular white entertainer who donned black face to create the caricature “Jim Crow.”

**Toasting-** The Jamaican art form of DJ’s talking over music to incite the crowd to dance. Jamaican Hip Hop Pioneer Kool DJ Herc contributed this form to Hip Hop music.

## **Review of Literature**

The first half of my thesis research examines how specific slave cultures within America developed new dance and musical forms. The modes of inquiry I am using for my research are historically and ethnographically based. In The Vibe History of Hip Hop (1999), Rapper Chuck D eloquently describes the purpose of Hip Hop in the midst of oppression:

Chuck D described rap as ‘black America’s CNN,’... it’s the news you’d never catch on the real CNN- including the slang, the jokes, the style and attitudes-presented in the voices of the people who are living it. If you live outside that community and want to hear that news, you have to tune it up. And if you are part of that community, rap provides a reflection and an expression of your daily life, suggests that you can be part of the cultural conversation that helps shape this country, and infuses your experience with all the dignity and seriousness artistic representation imparts. (Light, 1999, p.92)

Blacks throughout the Diaspora forged a new identity through slave culture. Professor Sterling Stuckey, a leading cultural historian and authority on slavery documented the necessary unification of enslaved Africans in America through Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (1988). Stuckey (1987) states enslaved Africans were able to hold on to traditional beliefs by preserving and hiding their ceremonies from their captors: “such secretiveness was dictated by the

realities of oppression and worked against whites acquiring knowledge of slave culture that might have been used to attempt to eradicate that culture” (Stuckey, 1988, p.24). Stuckey extensively documents the religious traditions that survived, specifically ring-shouts, and how important and inseparable the black dancing body was and still is to black culture. Ring-shout served as a connection to ancestry and religious traditions: it was the breeding ground for new dance forms in the United States. Stuckey’s strongest assertion is “the ring shout was the main context in which Africans recognized values common to them—the values of ancestor worship and contact, communication and teaching through storytelling and trickster expressions, and of various other symbolic devices. Those values were remarkable because, while of ancient African provenance, they were fertile seed for the bloom of new forms” (Stuckey, 1988, p.16).

Documenting the oldest known African American dance called the Ring shout was done by Art Rosenbaum, Margo Newmark Rosenbaum, and Johann S. Buis in Shout Because You're Free: The African-American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia. Shout Because You're Free (1998) documents the praise-song traditions of the sea-islanders of South Carolina and Georgia known as the Gullah peoples. The Gullahs’ are the descendents of West African slaves who managed to preserve their folkways due to the isolated nature of the island plantations on which they lived and worked. This makes them of special interest to social scientists and ethno-musicologists, as their isolation promotes the notion of a more pure art form. The writers intended this book to be a study of folk tradition in its community and historical context (1998, p. xiv). The Ring Shout is an African fusion of call and response, polyrhythmic percussion and formalized dance movements. A strong characteristic of the Ring-Shout is the circle. The dancers move in

a counterclockwise direction, shuffling in time with the beat of the stick against the floor in keeping the rhythm. Both Sterling Stuckey and Rosenbaum documentation of slave culture and the Ring-Shouts lay the foundation for black dance in the United States. The shuffling, gliding, stomping feet patterns of the “shout” would later influence the choreographic steps within minstrel shows and tap dance.

In Signifyin(G), Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture Caponi (1999) wrote an article entitled Ring-shout! Literary Studies, Historic Studies and Black Music Inquiry. Caponi examines the relationship music has to dance. Caponi asserts that all black musical eras modeled after the dance of that time, starting first with ring-shouts. The movement quality of the Ring-Shouts in creating *buck* dance, which informed the slow drag of the foot on the ground during the late nineteenth century, through the Charleston and the lindy hop dance mirrored the rhythms of all of the black-music genres (Caponi, 1999, p. 138). Caponi states “It was in the ring that these terpsichorean and sonic confluents had their origin and early development and from the ring that they emerged and took many different forms” (Caponi, 1999, p. 139). Within an African context music and dance informs one another.

The Ring-Shout may have been the first documented religious African American dance form to develop and survive through slave culture, however it was the minstrel shows that were the first African American stage performance. Minstrel shows could not have flourished without the contributions of black dance, dialect and music, and blacks who actually became a part of this experience. According to African American Arts-Dance, (1997) by Michael and Angela Medearis: “Black dancers and musicians knew that whites enjoyed their performances and began to use this appeal to their advantage.

In order to make a living, however, they had to continue to portray the image of a happy-go-lucky, lazy, ignorant, and totally dependent people in their presentations to white audiences ...whites enjoyed the 'exotic' rhythms in black music and the expressive movements in black dance, although most considered it low-class entertainment" (Medearis & Medearis, 1997, p.23).

Another book that looks at the history of minstrel shows but goes further to relate the specific dance movements of that era to the popular moves of hip hop singers and dancers such as Michael Jackson and M.C. Hammer is Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop (1998) by W. T., Jr. Lhamon. Lhamon takes a deeper look at the signature movements of the Jim Crow era, making note that minstrelsy did not die with black face entertainers, (making it a distant memory); but the residue of Jim Crow can still be seen today in hip hop's dance moves and gestures and comedy shows:

Blackface not only stepped in, it primarily brought in and broadcasted blackness...sure, we have erased the scatological humor of the minstrel show, scrubbed away Zuni coprophagy, and knocked Amos 'n' Andy off the air. To what avail? In their stead we have Lenny Bruce and George Carlin, Red Foxx and Eddie Murphy. (Lhamon 1998 p.149)

Embracing and understanding the various degrees of contempt and acceptance blacks endured while carving a place in the United States dance history, I was empowered through Brenda Dixon Gottschild recent published work The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool (2003). This book takes the reader on a journey through race and the black dancing body. The negative and accepted stereotypes

stemming from hair, butt, and feet along with the significant contributions black dancers have made by overcoming the pitfalls of what is and is not black. In the chapter entitled *Feet* Gottschild gives a historical account of the black dancing feet contributions to minstrelsy, tap dance and hip hop, while taking note of certain dance pioneers, in their own right, William Henry Lane, James Brown and Savion Glover. Both Gottschilds' The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool (2003) and Jacqui Malone's' Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance (Folklore and Society) (1996), looks at certain characteristics that make the black dancing body distinctively different from its white counterpart. In a chapter entitled Keep to The Rhythm & You'll Keep to Life, Malone focuses on the meaning & style in African American vernacular dance while outlining six of its definitive traits, (rhythm, improvisation, control, angularity, asymmetry, and dynamism), which are contributed by the African use of torso, spine, hips and arms. In other chapters Malone looks at: Mocking & celebrating: freedom of expression in dance during slavery -- Black dance on the road: minstrelsy & traveling shows -- Dancing singers & singing dancers: black vernacular dance on stage, 1890-1940. Her final chapter looks at Stepping: regeneration through dance in African American fraternities & sororities. Malone asserts that dance in African culture is a way of life, which also became a means of survival and resistance under enslavement.

The contributions of Latin and Jamaican culture in the shaping of Hip Hop are highly overlooked because Hip Hop is considered a "black" phenomenon. However, the universal thread shared between African American, Latino and Jamaican people was the forging of a new cultural identity throughout the Americas shaped by the whips on our

backs and the chains on our feet. Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/O America (1997) by Celeste Fraser Delgado and Jose Esteban Munoz examines how the dancing body makes socio/political statements against enslavement: “The dancing body not only writes counter history, but the dance resists and reconfigures the subjugating history written on the enslaved or laboring body” (Delgado & Munoz, 1997, p.18). The history of Bomba is given in a Daily News article Bomba! A Puerto Rican Transplant with African Roots Struggles in NYC (2003) by journalist Aurora Flores. Flores defines Bomba as resistance music and dance that breaks the chains of slavery. Both Barbara Browning in SAMBA Resistance in Motion (1995) and Nestor Capoeira in Capoeira Roots of the Dance-Fight-Game (2002) documents the historical significance of resistance Capoeira made within Brazil. Capoeira has its roots in Bantu tradition and was used by the enslaved Africans of Brazil as a form of revolution. In keeping with African war strategies, Capoeiristas masked the art's effectiveness from plantation overseers. Then and today, to uninformed onlookers, Capoeira appeared to be a harmless demonstration of dance, acrobatics, play and music. Capoeira was and is composed of cat like movements where participants collapse to the ground, use cartwheels, flips, handstands and many other deceptive movements to avoid strikes and injury by opponents. Practitioners use kicks, sweeps, head butts, gouges and punches in order to strike their opponent. All of these actions are combined to compose a devastating form of martial art, which protected its participants from enslavers. Break-dancing borrowed from the martial arts community incorporating cartwheels, handstands, floor swipes, and kicks into their dance routines. To be able to “break” to the floor performing these stunts gave rise to break-dancing which is one of the four elements of Hip Hop.

There is no Hip Hop without Latin culture. Many write about Hip Hop as a black expressive movement that merely had Latin followers. However, historically speaking, Puerto Rican culture was very influential in the development and preservation of Hip Hop. “*Word Up* magazine did an article where they mentioned me and it was called ‘The Latinos in Hip Hop.’ What’s whack about that is they have to separate us [Latinos] from [Blacks]. And I hated that...you never hear an article called ‘The Blacks in Hip Hop’” (Rivera, 2001, p.235). Raquel Z. Rivera (2001) wrote an article in Mambo Montage: the Latinization of New York entitled Hip Hop, Puerto Ricans and Ethnoracial Identities in New York. In this work along with her own book New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone (2003) Rivera outlines the contributions that Puerto Ricans have made to the Hip Hop movement. Often frustrated by being considered non-black or non-Puerto Rican by embracing Hip Hop culture, Rivera shows that Hip Hop culture and legacy is not merely a black experience solely, but oppression affected both groups during the time of its rise and both groups helped in its development. Rivera also completed her thesis on *Rap Music In Puerto Rico*. Another book which examines the role Latin culture had in the early stages of Hip Hop and beyond is From Bomba to Hip-Hop (2000) by Juan Flores. The book explains in its prelude and subsequent chapters that Puerto Rican and other Caribbean practices and traditions are woven into this movement called Hip Hop. Hence, Hip Hop is not solely a black phenomenon.

The second half of my paper documents the early development of Hip Hop. I used books, articles, magazines, The Hip Hop Archive at the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University, and dance videos to inform my research. In researching Hip Hop I noticed that there has been a sudden wave of movies, books and



articles trying to capture and break-down this thing called Hip Hop. I believe the death of legendary wordsmith Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur made the world stop and try to analyze urban youth. However, Hip Hop is no longer “urban” only. This phenomenon has spread overseas to Cuba, Europe, and Africa making Hip Hop a global movement; a weapon for social change in the hands of any and every oppressed culture. Prolific Hip Hop writers such as Tricia Rose, Chuck D, Bakari Kitwana, Todd Boyd and Nelson George have documented the power of Hip Hop music and the influence it has had on American culture. I used the following three books, Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (Music/Culture) (1994) by Tricia Rose, Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality (1998) by Chuck D and Am I Black Enough for You: Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond (1997) by Todd Boyd to help give insight to the positive and negative power of images Hip Hop has within the black community. The contradictions blacks had to endure in whites defining black culture coupled with the negative stereotypes of Zip Coon, Mammy, Step n’ Fetch of the Jim Crow era did not die, it still exists. All three authors take the reader back in history to show the relationship between what is seen then and now.

In understanding the role and responsibility of the Hip Hop generation today in carrying the tradition of being a voice of resistance in the midst of oppression, marginalization, and institutional racism, Hip Hop America (1999) by Nelson Georges looks at the historical roots of rap music and shows the cultural, political and economical force of rap music. The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture, (2002) by Bakari Kitwana looks at the hip hop generation which he places between the years of 1965 to 1984. He appeals to an older audience in helping to

clarify the distinction and connections between those who came out of the Civil Rights era and the movement which ushered in a new cultural phenomenon, the Hip Hop generation. Bakari also looks at the political level Hip Hop must move towards in order to maintain its existence. Although Hip Hop has had a political and social message, its leaders, rappers and dancers need to establish a united universal political movement and agenda so black peoples concerns and voices can be taken seriously had heard on from a political platform.

“Young blacks have used this access, both in pop film and music, far too much to strengthen associations between Blackness and poverty, while celebrating anti-intellectualism, ignorance, irresponsible parenthood, and criminal lifestyles. This is the paradox: given hip-hop’s growing influence, these *Birth of a Nation*-styled representations...void of open and consistent criticism, such widely distributed incendiary ideas (what cultural critic Stanley Crouch calls ‘the new minstrelsy’) reinforce the myth of black inferiority” (p. xxi). Nelson George and Bakari Kitwana both assert that the struggles of the Civil Right era did not end. Hip Hop is a continuation of where that movement left off. Guthrie P., Jr. takes an ethnographical look into African American music traditions in his book Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop (2003). Guthrie examines how musical meaning emerges in the private and communal realms of lived experience and how African American music has shaped and reflected identities in the black community.

Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture (Critical Perspectives on the Past) (1995) by William Eric Perkins and The Vibe History of Hip Hop (1999) edited by Alan Light documents the early start of Hip Hop in New York City,

the evolution of its many forms and frequent controversies, including violence and misogyny and the Jamaican influence on its musical style of “toasting.” The Vibe History of Hip Hop (1999) specifically looks at the Pioneers and the four elements of Hip Hop, the earliest rap artists, both men and women, and those who laid the foundation for Hip Hop culture and how “sampling,” (another strong component in Tricia Rose’s book) became the very heart of rap music.

Two informative dissertations I have found to further inform my knowledge on Hip Hop are: Joanna Teresa Demers Sampling As Lineage in Hip-Hop and Aime Jero Ellis The “Bad Nigger” in Contemporary Black Popular Culture: 1940 To The Present. Demers’s dissertation focuses on the effects “sampling” has had on rap music. Rap music is inclusive, meaning it takes from other genres of music, i.e. country, rock-n-roll, Latin, etc and uses its beats or part of the lyrics to fuse with rap music. The author asserts that the hip hop community has exerted greater influence on racial relations than any other musical genre since rock-n-roll. Ellis’s dissertation looks at how literature and music, written or performed by black males represents cultural opposition to social oppression. The bad nigger refers to the urban black youth and the negative depictions of them being angry, violent and self destructive on one hand and how they express violent revolt and protest on the other. The author further looks at the “bad nigger” showing resistance and empowerment through literary writers as Richard Wright, Eldridge Cleaver and Nathan McCall and rap music as well. Finally, the author seeks to understand the political and cultural identity of “bad niggers” as an evolving form of creativity that is continuously shifting.

Lastly, I will use various venues such as the Nuyorican Poet Café in New York City, The Hip Hop Archive at the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The Salsa Museum of East Harlem, NY, and video documentation from MTV and BET on Hip Hop as well as the PBS special on the Last Poets which aired February 16, 2003. Rap artist such as Chuck D and Dana Dane attributed the rise of Hip Hop to this organization of the 60's. Chuck D. makes reference to the groups members being wordsmiths carrying on the African tradition of storytelling in their poetry. The ability to use words to tell a story with the oratorical flow of a Baptist minister was the true catalyst for rap music. Several other video footage which shows the stylistic nature of Hip Hop dance stemming from the mid 80's are *Beat Street* (1984) *Breaking'* (1984) and *Wildstyle* (1983). The new millennium has produced several new movies on Hip Hop culture such as *Save the Last Dance* (2001) and *Brown Sugar* (2002). *Brown Sugar* is very important to the understanding of the evolution of Hip Hop because the beginning of the film starts out with a question which is posed to some of Hip Hops pioneers and leaders: *When did you first fall in love with Hip Hop?* It was amazing to see and hear old and new school rappers explain what turned them on to the culture and why was it important their lives. Two additional recent break dancing films are *Honey* (2003) and *You Got Served* (2004). Both movies are important to my research because it showed the evolution and liberation the oppressed dancing body has made in re-inventing and re-defining movement.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Culture: From Ring Shout to Minstrelsy

#### **Jubilee**

*Jubilee, Jubilee/Oh my Lord/  
Jubilee, Jubilee/My Lord Jubilee/  
Jubilee in the morning/Oh My Lord/  
Jubilee in the evening/My Lord Jubilee/  
Walkin', members, walkin'/ Oh My Lord/  
Walkin' on yo Jesus/ My Lord Jubilee/  
Shout, my children, 'cause you are free/ Oh my Lord/  
My God brought you liberty/ My Lord Jubilee/*

-Sung by Lawrence McGiver and  
Group, Folkways Record, 1983

#### **The Beginning**

All researchers have an “aha” moment; that initial discovery of a missing link or common thread which impacts one’s research. My “aha” moment came spring 2003 when I began my research on hip hop. Hip Hop’s music, dance and culture, was all I needed to study, or so I thought. Growing up in the midst of hip hop culture, I thought I knew and understood what made Hip Hop what it was, and to me Bronx, New York in the 1970’s was Hip Hop’s beginning. However, that was incomplete. Hip Hop was not the beginning of my research but its consequence. I had to ask several questions. Why do we (meaning African Americans and those influenced by the Hip Hop phenomenon) move and rhyme the way we do? Where did this artistic vehicle of protest against social and political injustice stem from? How could Hip Hop possibly be linked back to Africa, or was it? As I delved deeper into these questions I discovered two books that changed the scope of my research: Slave Culture: Nationalist theory and the Foundations of Black America (1988) by Professor Sterling Stuckey and the second book, Shout Because You’re Free: The African American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia (1998) by

Art Rosenbaum, Margo Newmark Rosenbaum, and Johann S. Buis. These two books gave me my “beginning.” Hip Hop is the result of a cultural evolutionary process rooted in African musical and dance traditions. To understand how African dance traditions and Hip Hop are related, we have to first examine slave culture in the United States, the characteristics of passive artistic protest through music and dance and the lasting effects of minstrelsy on American entertainment.

## **Culture**

What is culture? Culture includes “The beliefs, customs, arts, and institutions of a society at a given time” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 1996). When I studied the anthropological perception of culture I came across two very distinctive schools of thought on the migration of culture from one society to another: they are diffusion and acculturation. Diffusion may be simply defined as the spread of a cultural item from its place of origin to other places (Titiev, 1959, p. 446). A more expanded definition depicts diffusion as the process by which discrete cultural traits are transferred from one society to another, through migration, trade, war, or other contact (Winthrop, 1991, p. 82). The “other contact” through which African culture was transferred throughout the Diaspora was slavery. Although African traditions were modified to adapt to changes in environment, customs, beliefs and religious ideals of their white slave masters, there was still a transference of certain African aesthetics that found its way to the new world. Boas (1938) viewed culture as consisting of countless loose threads, most of foreign origin, but which were woven together to fit into their new cultural context. Acculturation, then, is the process of systematic cultural change of a particular society carried out by an alien, dominant society (Winthrop, 1991, p. 82-83). Individuals of a

foreign or minority culture learn the language, habits, and values of a standard or dominant culture by the process of acculturation (Winthrop, 1991, p. 3). These changes may be reciprocal, results in the two cultures becoming similar or one-way, resulting in the extinction of one culture, when it is absorbed by the other (Kroeber, 1948, p. 425). The process by which individuals enter the social, political, economic, and educational arena of the dominant culture is called assimilation. Through the process of assimilation individuals become integrated into the standard culture (Thompson, 1996, p. 112). Diffusion, acculturation, and assimilation can all be found in the character of black face performer Master Juba; however, I am jumping ahead of myself. Limiting my research to the impact slavery had on the transference of African culture through dance and music, I discovered Professor Sterling Stuckey's research on *slave culture*.

### **Stuckey & Slave Culture**

Africa has the biggest impact on music, dance, the arts, literature, speech forms, and religious practices throughout the Diaspora. From the definitions above we see that *diffusion* brings a particular trait of a foreign culture into a new society; *acculturation* changes that cultural trait to fit and adapt to the standards of the dominant culture. Foreigners may decide to assimilate into the given society and/or foster a creolization of certain cultural traditions, forming something new. Creolization happens when a foreign group abandons and/or modifies some aspect of their culture to create new forms. The number of Africans brought to the new world and the length of time spent in any one place was crucial to the development of an African-American culture (Mintz 1992, p. 44).

In the United States, the basic tenet of slave culture was the quick development of a brotherhood among men and women of various regions throughout Africa, being bound together to endure the brutal system of slavery and oppression (Stuckey 1988, p. ix). This brotherhood started in Africa with the capture and forced condition of slavery and continued throughout the Middle Passage. When Africans arrived in the Americas the purpose of slave culture was expanded. Slave culture became the mixture of linguistic, musical, religious, and other cultural traditions from many regions of Africa with those of Native American, English, and other European groups.

During the Middle Passage ethnically distinct Africans began the cooperative efforts that would form new communities, through the bonding of shipmate ties, or through the enforced shipboard drumming, dancing, and singing...in the erasing of intra-African barriers, African American culture was born.” (Caponi, 1999, p. 14)

This mixture or sharing between African and non-African cultures would influence the early development of tap, blues, gospel and later Hip Hop. However, slave culture was not homogeneous within the United States; it varied from plantation to plantation. Regardless of where they ended up in the United States, enslaved Africans dealt with adversity by developing a new sense of cultural identity, which served as a means of survival within their communities. Music and dance was one of the most powerful connection Africans had to their homeland and each other. One dance that made its way to the United States and helped in the development of an African American culture was the “shout.” The Ring Shout would later change the face of spiritual and secular dance in the United States.



## **The Ring Shout**

Black dance in America had its start with the oldest African dance and musical tradition called the Ring Shout. The Ring Shout is a circular dance with origins in the African regions we now call the Congo: “The majority of Africans brought to North America to be enslaved were from the central and western areas of Africa—from Congo-Angola, Nigeria, Dahomey, Togo, the Gold Coast, and Sierra Leone. In these areas, an integral part of religion and culture was movement in a ring during ceremonies honoring the ancestors” (Stuckey 1988, p. 11). Ring Shout dance rituals consisted of Africans moving counterclockwise in a circle to the syncopated beat of the drum, moving their heads, arms and legs in a rhythmic fashion. When drums were outlawed on Southern plantations in fear of slave revolts, the dancers stomped their feet with rhythmic complexity, clapped their hands giving musical texture like that of drums and used broom handles to help carry the beat of the Ring Shout song. In its original context, this ritual often took place during burials and during ceremonies honoring the ancestors. Stuckey (1988) shows how Ring Shouting spread throughout West Africa and became an integral religious rite.

The circle is linked to the most important of all African ceremonies, the burial ceremony... In that ceremony, the men keep their eyes to the ground and the songs they sing are said to be ‘so old that their meaning has long since been forgotten,’ which suggests the ancient quality of dance within the circle, the immemorial regard for the ancestral spirits in a country in which dance exists mainly as a form of worship and appears to have developed as a means of achieving union with God. (Stuckey, 1988, p. 11)

Enslaved Africans brought circle dances with them, but once they arrived in North America it was called the Ring Shout, with dancing and singing directed to the ancestors and God, with the tempo and revolution of the circle quickening during the course of movement (Stuckey, 1988, p. 12). Even after many were converted to Christianity they still sang their hymns and spirituals while dancing counterclockwise in a circle. There is a certain aesthetic value that is interwoven throughout black worship which is far different from their white counterparts. Whites found Ring Shout rituals incomprehensible and even blasphemous. Religious ceremonies among whites did not include dancing, especially rhythmic dancing syncopated to a drumbeat. In white churches hymns were sung in a calm uptight quiet manner: "Religion was for many slaves, by the mid-nineteenth century in Virginia, an African version of Christianity marked by an awareness of the limits of the religion of whites" (Stuckey, 1988, p. 33). The songs slaves sang during the Ring Shout protested their enslavement in clever and masked ways and also provided a psychological escape from the horrors of slavery. Many of these songs drew parallels between Biblical accounts of Hebrew enslavement and the American enslavement of Africans. Their movements showed how comfortable and uninhibited they were with their bodies. This frightened white observers who considered Ring Shouts obscene. Yet enslaved Africans continuously resisted attempts to suppress ring shouts in their religious ceremonies:

In the ceremony before and at the pond, as in most 'Christian' ceremonies on slave plantations, Christianity provided a protective exterior beneath which more complex, less familiar (to outsiders) religious principles and practices were operative. The very features of Christianity peculiar to slaves were often outward

manifestations of deeper African religious concerns, products of a religious outlook toward which the master class might otherwise be hostile. By operating under the cover of Christianity, vital aspects of Africanity, which some consider eccentric in movement, sound, and symbolism, could more easily be practiced openly. (Stuckey 1988, p. 35)

The Rings Shout brought the African traditions of call and response and improvisation. The whole body was engaged in the shout, not just one part. The relationship that once existed between a drummer and dancer was now seen between the “stickers” and “shouters.” With improvisation came the focus of individual style and movement. The embodiment of God in all forms of life was brought over to the new world as well as the deep connection to the earth, the ancestors and God. For many whites this was unheard of and boarded on heathenism. The counterclockwise circle showed the cycle of birth, death and re-birth, which made it a very distinctive form of worship and dance.

### **The Aesthetics of the Ring Shout**

Rosenbaum, Rosenbaum, and Buis (1998) documented their encounter with the McIntosh County Shouters in Coastal Georgia in their book Shout Because You're Free: The African American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia. This community of “shouters” is one of the few that still take part in the shout and allows outsiders to view their gatherings. The three main components of the “shout” are the stickers, baser, and shouters. Since drums were outlawed in fear of insurrections, the Sticker or Stick Man provided the rhythm for the shout by beating a broomstick on a wooden floor (Rosenbaum, Rosenbaum, & Buis 1998, pg. 2). The shout was performed after a church service when the chairs were pushed out of the way for its preparation. The Baser were

singers who answered to a call and response during the songs and set up counter rhythms to the stick beat with clapping of hands and stomping of the feet (pg. 2). Lastly, the Shouters were women dressed in long dresses with head coverings moving in a counterclockwise circle with shuffling, dipping and swaying movements of the hips. Another important characteristic of the shout was that the shouters could not cross their feet. During slavery white slave owners viewed dancing as "movement where the feet crossed. Many converted black Christians and their white counterparts, saw African dance as heathenistic and lewd. The Ring Shout survived, in part, through the church because it was not seen as "dancing." Rosenbaum et al (1998) further state that the word "shout" was the name given more to the dance than the vocal.

Although similar, the shout differed from hymns, and Negro spirituals in that it could be secular at times, coded to express the hardship of slavery, and had a more positive outlook than Negro spirituals. African in nature, the shout used call and response, polyrhythm of the feet, stick and hands. The counterclockwise circle aids in summoning and communicating with God and the ancestors (Rosenbaum, Rosenbaum, & Buis 1998, pg 20). Sterling Stuckey (1988) asserts that the moving in a circle "'drawing or signing a point' on the ground summons the power of God and the ancestors...when combined with singing, marking the point causes the power of God to descend upon that exact spot" (Stuckey, 1988, p 20). Although the McIntosh Shouters cannot attest for the Ring Shout being performed before or during funerals, they do shout as a way to communicate with God and remembrance of their ancestors, hence keeping in part, with the tradition of the shout performed in West Africa. "The ring shout was the main context in which Africans recognized values common to them" (Stuckey, 1988, p.16).

Because fusions happened when enslaved Africans became Christianized it is hard to say what the first Africans looked like when doing the “shout.”

Growing up in a Pentecostal Christian church I remember my mother getting the “Holy Ghost” and began leaping, clapping her hands and stomping her feet in a distinctive manner called “shouting.” This form of praise and worship commonly found within the black church was my first introduction to dance. Shouting up North is done during a pray service whereas in the South, the Ring Shout is performed after a church service and usually in slave quarters. Shouting in the Baptist/Pentecostal church was a medium used to be “anointed by the spirit” (Caponi, 1999, p. 16). As impressionable as the shouting experience was for me growing up and the connection it fostered between me and God, this information later impacted the way I moved in secular settings. Although you had the swaying of the hips from side to side, polyrhythmic foot work and call and response between the preacher and church goers, the shout stayed in the context of religion. It was spiritual even though the songs could be secular at times. Slave culture and the Ring Shout would serve as a precursor to black dance in America.

African and African American dance encompasses various emotions such as joy, happiness, sorrow and pain. Malone (1996) states there is a distinctive style that’s manifested in the expression of black dancers. Malone refers to Katherine Dunham and how Dunham understood rhythm to be essential to the culture and if the rhythm is broken the individual or society is disintegrated. Originality, individuality and creativity are important to the Ring Shout and vernacular dance. The ring shout laid the foundation and Minstrelsy in the United States would serve as the first building block to American theatre and black dance.

## **From the Plantation to the Stage: The Minstrel Show & T. “Daddy” Rice**

Turn about an’ wheel about  
An’ do jes so,  
An’ ebery time I turn about  
I jump Jim Crow  
- T. “Daddy” Rice

The minstrel show, or minstrelsy, is an indigenous form of American entertainment consisting of comic skits, variety acts, dancing, and music, usually performed by white people in blackface. This form of entertainment may have gotten its start in the winter of 1843 at the Chatham Theatre with Dan Emmett’s Virginia Minstrels (Lhamon, 1998, p. 57). However others argue that E.P. Christy performed the minstrel show six months prior to Emmett in provincial Buffalo (Lhamon, 1998, p. 57). Unlike the shout, the minstrel show did not have a set format at first.

Whites became attracted to African-influenced movements and rhythms that they saw and heard in the slave quarters. They darkened their faces with burnt cork, to look more authentic, and imitated black music and dance, thus giving rise to Minstrel shows (Medearis & Medearis 1997, p. 20). Minstrel shows were the most popular form of dehumanizing entertainment of blacks in American culture and helped perpetuate negative stereotypes from the 1830’s to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Film documentary Ethnic Notions (1986), aired the historical reality of the minstrel show and its negative caricatures such as Mammy, Sambo, Zip Coon and ‘Stepin’ Fetchin,’ all of which displayed blacks as savages, ignorant, loving their masters, darkies, dim witted, lazy and unattractive. Contrary to popular belief however, minstrelsy could not have flourished without first the contributions of black dance, dialect, and music, and secondly blacks who actually became a part of this experience:

Black dancers and musicians knew that whites enjoyed their performances and began to use this appeal to their advantage. In order to make a living, however, they had to continue to portray the image of a happy-go-lucky, lazy, ignorant, and totally dependent people in their presentations to white audiences ... whites enjoyed the 'exotic' rhythms in black music and the expressive movements in black dance, although most considered it low-class entertainment. (Medearis & Medearis 1997, p.23)

The minstrel show is broken into three parts: The Opening which is comprised of song/dance dance skits. Part two was the Olio or the "Coon" dance where the most boisterous black entertainer performed upbeat songs and spoke in broken dialect or "stump speech," with elaborate fancy polyrhythmic foot work. The third and last section was the Cake Walk. The Cake Walk origin comes from the West Indies but was incorporated into minstrel shows in the United States. White audiences did not see the Cake Walk as having any significant cultural value. Whether performed by actual slaves or by men in blackface, the Cake Walk was simply a form of entertainment that reinforced the stereotype whites truly wanted to believe; Blacks were a happy-go-lucky, ignorant and lazy people that were content with their conditions. Writer Eric Sundquist (1993) describes the Cake Walk by saying:

It derived in its stage form from the 'walk-around' that concluded many minstrel shows, a grand promenade in which couples dancing in a circle competed with fancy improvised steps and struts...[By the end of the 19th century] the cakewalk would become the most popular element of the minstrel and early black theatrical

stage, usually a grand finale with elaborate choreography and costumes. It could be easily made to correspond to the stereotype of black buffoonery.” (p. 277)

The minstrel show afforded blacks elitist status. As a black face entertainer you traveled. Some performed with whites and made a living exploiting the negative images fostered by whites. The minstrel show developed its form from the Virginia Minstrels, with the implementation of the banjo and other African instruments, clothing, dialect, and the re-creating of plantation life, whites began to study black life on the plantations in order to add more appeal to their acts (Shaw, 1986, p. 20). Although the minstrel show was in existence before the emergence of Thomas Dartmouth Rice, it was his song and act titled “Jump Jim Crow” that brought international acclaim and success as a black face entertainer. T. “Daddy” Rice is one of the most influential and ground breaking black face performers.

T. “Daddy” Rice’s dance and song, “Jump Jim Crow,” was based on his imitation of a crippled male slave he saw working and singing on a plantation. The words Jim Crow are from Rice’s song, “Jim Crow.” It went on to become an international hit landing him performances from city to city as well as in England (Shaw, 1986, pg. 19). In New York City, the act of “Tambo and Bones” was one of Manhattan stage’s biggest draws. These shows introduced some of Africa’s musical instruments to white audiences for the first time. The minstrel show was one of the first native forms of American entertainment, and Rice was rightly regarded as the “Father of American minstrelsy” (p. 19). Rice’s manipulation of black culture in the United States is extremely important because he not only shaped the depiction of black dance and movement style, but blacks’



social and political life would further be harmed by Jim Crow. The word Jim Crow would later be associated with the segregation laws of the South.

Slave culture would shift from a sense of brotherhood, to cultural mixtures and move on to black face delineators, as in the case of William Henry Lane who symbolized one of the many contradictions found in black entertainment in the United States. He represents the paradox black entertainers find themselves in today; accountability versus assimilation. When does entertainment stop being entertaining? Should blacks who participated in minstrel shows be held accountable for the continual perpetuation of the negative stereotypes placed on us? How did William Henry Lane re-define black dance in America?

### **Master Juba: A Minstrels Legacy**

William Henry Lane was labeled the best dancer of his time. Given the name "Juba," as most black musicians and dancers were called, he died at age 27. His contributions to black dance in general and tap dance specifically were instrumental in popularizing African American vernacular dance. Brenda Ghottschild (2003) pins him as the link between black and white dancers and black and white minstrelsy (p. 110). He was the only black permitted to perform in an all white minstrel show. Lane's technique was a combination of Irish jig dancing and African rhythm. Lane combined elusive elements of "swing" with African rhythmic patterns which helped to distinguish his style from other dancers. According to Gottschild (2003), "...Lane's contribution was in forging an original, innovative merger of Africanist-based torso articulations, foot-work, and rhythmic syncopation with Europeanist steps characteristic of the Irish Jig..." (p. 110). Lane used his own style, coupled with European influence; he exemplified

diffusion, acculturation and assimilation all within his pseudonym, Master Juba. His shuffling syncopated moves were closely related to those of the Ring Shout. Lane was a challenge to those white entertainers wanting to walk, dance and look authentically black; Lane was the real thing. His contribution was seen in the usage of his feet as percussive instruments, introducing speed, and sophisticated complexity of African rhythms to the dominated white field of minstrelsy (Gottschild, 2003, p. 110). His rhythmic timing and energy was un-matched and he became an international star. “Lane’s innovations were carried over into early vaudeville, which is how and why his legacy was transmitted down through the ages and can be tasted even today in the work of Savion Glover” (Gottschild, 2003, p. 111).

Whereas the Europeanist dance aesthetic is centered with a vertical torso and little to no movement of the pelvis, the African dance aesthetic engages the whole body with particular emphasis on the pelvis and a bent torso, which lends itself to an angular and asymmetrical movement quality (Malone, 1996, p. 231). Just as the pelvis is seen as the cradle of life, West Africans believed flexed joints embodied energy and life whereas straightened knees, hips and elbows epitomized death (Wood, 1988, p7-8). Lane was the life force through which the early traditions of buck dance and tap would emerge. Lane helped catapult blacks from the plantation to the stage. A walking contradiction, is how I have identified him, he is still undeniably the most influential black entertainer of all times. Not merely borrowing from the Irish Jig tradition, Lane infused early minstrelsy with an Africanist vitality and style.

## **Dance: A Passive Form of Resistance**

Master Juba was also a part of the artistic movement of passive resistance through dance and music. The United States tends to remember the ways in which whites mocked African-Americans through minstrelsy, but often forgets the original functions of such acts as the cakewalk. Medearis et al (1997) in African-American Arts- Dance states:

The cake walk originated among slaves in the West Indies during harvest time. It was once called the chalk line walk because it was a dance done by couples in a straight path while balancing a bucket or glass of water on their head, hence, dances like this are directly linked to African customs of carrying baskets, bundles, and jugs on the head... the cakewalk was changed into a dance by African American slaves to poke fun at the elegance and stiffness of the ballroom dances of white plantation owners. (p.24)

Not only did such traditions as the cakewalk allow blacks to keep their cultural values and mock whites, but it allowed blacks to achieve these goals, which kept whites clueless. Black dance was viewed as a mindless slave sport. Franz Fanon (1993), in "The Negro and Recognition" noted the colonial master's "belief in the slave's incapacity for *cognition*—slaves work; slaves dance; slaves do not think" (p.19). However, Hazzard-Gordon (1990) documents the dualities within black dance during the period of enslavement. It may have appeared as a mindless sport to whites yet whites began to view slave dances as potentially dangerous, serving "as a kind of prelude to or rehearsal for revolt" (p. 34). It is important to view dance as a complex social practice, one that has the potential to tell a variety of stories about culture and to enact a type of resistance to hegemonic power; dance should be seen as both playful and political.

Historians outside the field of dance usually can not identify politics inherent within the body mind connection in dance. Because dance is an extension of the historical body, it is often seen as “natural” rather than a deliberate social practice. Resistance in dance remains difficult for some to see because the dancing body speaks its own language; it is not confined to words. Dance may not look like a traditional form of resistance, in which the oppressed outwardly and actively revolts against their oppressor to change social conditions, but the dancing body uses the medium of performance to convey its hidden meanings against oppression. History is “written on the body through gesture” (Delgado & Muñoz, 1993, p. 9). Looking at other cultures that use dance as a form of passive resistance, specifically Afro-Caribbean/Latin dances, such as the Rumba and Mambo, we see that their dance traditions were rooted in cultural resistance (p.11). The rumba is traditionally danced with “much movement of the hips and little movement of the feet;” this originated with “slaves who first danced this [that] were usually chained up at night by the ankle” (p. 11). In contrast, the mambo came along in the 1940’s: “as a dance it’s like the rumba, but with much more movement of the feet, as if the chains had been removed” (p. 11). Mambo just like the North American version of the cakewalk and the minstrel show sought to resist and re-shape the suppression history had written on the body of the enslaved (p. 17-18).

Passive resistance as personally defined involves the use of creative expression to depict societal ills to the oppressed without the knowledge of the dominant culture. “Through cultural expressions such as dance, religion, music, and play, societies articulate and transmit the ideas, values, and beliefs that bind people together” (Caponi, 1999, p 7). Dance, through passive resistance, appears to be light, entertaining and fun

while an underlying theme of protest and mockery belies the façade of dance as entertainment. For example, the Ring Shout survived longer than intended because whites truly did not understand its function or history. Stuckey documents the “secretiveness” of the shout in the following:

But the possibility that whites might discover the guiding principles of African culture kept blacks on guard and led them...to keep the essentials of their culture from view...such secretiveness was dictated by the realities of oppression and worked against whites acquiring knowledge of slave culture that might have been used to attempt to eradicate that culture (p. 24).

This secretive nature is evident within the Ring Shout, the Cake Walk, jazz, gospel, the Afro-Brazilian form of martial arts called Capoeira, and Bomba which can be found in Puerto Rico.

### **Two Real Coons: Bert Williams Legacy**

Of all the main characteristics of minstrelsy, such as the grotesque caricatures, fancy foot work and rhythm, and the imitation of black gestures, body stance and style, the “grinning black mask” was the most pivotal exploitive factor adopted into the African American performance style. The “grinning black mask” was essential in keeping the appearance of a happy-go-lucky black entertainer in front of white audiences. This was a means of survival for blacks who did not fit into the American dream, but were still a part of the American entertainment circuit. The ability to grin and bear the pain oppression imposed could be seen in the characters of Master Juba and Bert Williams, which gave rise to the aesthetic notion of “cool.”

Egbert Austin "Bert" Williams was once described by comedian W. C. Fields as the funniest man he had ever seen and the saddest he had ever known (Shaw, 1986, p. 68). William's contribution to African American dance and theatre was his ability to "tone down the wilder minstrel-derived antics into a 'cooler [style that] more realistically mirrored actual black behavior' " (Caponi, 1999, p. 243).

Egbert Austin Williams was born in the West Indies on November 12, 1874. His career began in the summer of 1893 when he met George "Bon Bon" Walker and the two paired in a duet with Bert strumming the banjo and George singing. Their act was not only rooted in blackface and coon songs, but they were the first introduction to musical comedies American theatre goers would experience. Bert was noted as the most famous African American comic and entertainer whose signature song, "Nobody," would be demanded every time he performed (Shaw, 1986, p. 70). Williams' most memorable character was Mr. Nobody, an unemployed, illiterate black man who made observations on life. He even composed a song "Nobody" to accompany his act. Bert used "Nobody" to "express the existential desire to be treated as a person" in society (Caponi, 1999, p. 243). The two men became the famous team of Williams and Walker, billing themselves as "The Two Real Coons," a means of distinguishing themselves from the large number of blackface acts performed by white actors in burnt cork (Shaw, 1986, p. 69). With the production of *In Dahomey* Bert Williams was established as one of the leading comedians in the country, and he and Walker became the first internationally famous team of black stars in American entertainment. This was also the first full-length production which was written and performed by blacks on Broadway (69). It ran from

1902 until 1905, including cross-country tours and a seven-month tour of England, where it popularized the Cake Walk to European audiences.

Jazz also contributed to the aesthetic of cool with beginnings closely tied to the Ring Shout. Jazz flourished in New Orleans and was incorporated into funeral processions (Stuckey, 1988, p. 95). Jazz continued the African tradition of syncopation, individual style and improvisation and introduced another key element rooted in the African tradition, “coolness.” Malone (1996) describes cool as dealing with control, balance and “directing one’s energy with a clear purpose in mind” (p. 18). The grinning black mask served to keep the white audience engaged with the smiles and coolness of black entertainers such as Bert Williams and Louis Armstrong. Armstrong’s success “was probably dependent upon allowing whites to hold on to their ideas of white supremacy while enjoying his music as purely entertainment (Caponi, 1999, p. 244). Were the performance disposition of Juba and Williams really a walking contradiction or a brilliant example of keeping cool in the midst of oppression? I think they were a little of both. “...the West African ‘mask of coolness’ is admired in the midst of pleasures as well as stress, and has the connotation of healing” (Caponi 1999, p. 254). The contradiction and coolness helped advance black entertainment in America and helped reshape African American cultural identity.

### **Minstrelsy: Hip Hop’s Ancestor**

The effects minstrel shows had on comedic acts can be seen in the satire of Bert Williams, Mantan Moreland, Moms Mabley, Dick Gregory, Flip Wilson, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy and Martin Lawrence. The notion of “blackening up” may have died down with blacks re-defining dance and entertainment in America, however, the residue

of minstrelsy still has a hold on American pop culture. Bert and others set in motion a need for black entertainers to carve their place in society outside of minstrelsy. The aesthetics of the cool would be that defining moment separating and evolving black music and dance from “cooning” to “cool.”

Hip Hop borrowed from everything that was passive and made a blatant protest against the American hegemonic culture. Although the following chapters will go deeper into the beginnings of Hip Hop music, which is rooted in jazz and gospel, Hip Hop has become, in many ways, a revival of the minstrel show. Minstrelsy is still seen in present day movies such as *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2002), starring Jamie Kennedy and *Bringing Down the House* (2003), starring Queen Latifah. Although neither actor is donned in black face, both movies featured comedic satire at the expense of African American culture. Spike Lee's prolific 2000 film *Bamboozled*, bridged the gap between Master Juba, Bert Williams, and Savion Glover. Lee's message is clear in the film as he “admonishes all of us, black and white, to beware the minstrelization and exploitation of blackness that we have come to know and accept, if not love” (Gottschild, 2003, pg. 128).

Because minstrelsy is synonymous with buffoonery and un-educated ideals of black life, our youth have now taken on those negative characteristics without knowing it, hence, making entertainment a detrimental medium to the Hip Hop generation because the educational component is missing. African American youth do not know or see themselves in history, so when approached with such derogatory films, music, and videos, they are not familiar of the cultural and political roots of what they are watching.

The transference of the grinning black mask as a means of survival has impacted American and African American entertainment both then and now. West African music



and dance traditions, the ring-shout, minstrelsy, jazz, and gospel served as the building blocks for Hip Hop. The civil rights movement was the catalyst of a new shift in cultural identity for the disenfranchised, especially in New York City. This phenomenon would change the scope of entertainment and the way whites would view black culture forever. The Last Poets was the signifying change for urban youth; Hip Hop was now born.

Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning  
have been giving to this nation in blood-brotherhood.  
Are not these gifts worth giving?  
Is not this work and striving?  
Would America have been America without her  
Negro people?

-W.E.B. DuBois  
The Souls of Black Folk

## CHAPTER THREE:

### Hip Hop is Born

#### **The Pioneers**

#### **DJ Herc**

What is Hip Hop? The term 'Hip Hop' is used to describe a cultural movement, which includes four major elements; *Break-dancing, Graffiti, DJing, and Rap music* (Light, 1999, p.14-15). Hip Hop has its roots within the heart of the 'urban' community, specifically the Bronx, beginning in the late 1960's to the early 1970's, an era now fondly remembered as the 'old school' (Light, 1999, p.14). However, 3 young men were instrumental to the early development of Hip Hop and are fondly known as the *Pioneers*.

Kool DJ Herc (b. Clive Campbell), was born in Jamaica in 1955. His family moved to the Bronx in 1967 when Clive was 12 years old (Light, 1999, p.16). With his unique mixture of R&B, soul, funk, and disco, Herc quickly became the catalyst of the hip-hop way of life. The kids from the Bronx and Harlem loved his style, which gave birth to the concept of the B-Boy (Break boy or Bronx boy). Herc was the first DJ to buy two copies of the same record for just a 15-second break (rhythmic instrumental segment) in the middle. By mixing back and forth between the two copies he was able to double, triple, or indefinitely extend the break (Light, 1999, p.15). Herc used the turntable as a musical instrument. Because these breaks were relatively short, he learned to extend them indefinitely by using an audio mixer and two identical records in which he continuously replaced the desired segment. The 'breaks' in the music was what b-boys used to dance; hence, giving birth to the "break-dancing" phenomenon. Extending the percussion for people to dance to at parties was Herc's primary contribution to Hip Hop.

Modern day rap music finds its immediate roots in the toasting of reggae music. Herc brought this element of “toasting” from Jamaica to the world of Hip Hop. Kool Herc personalized his DJing style by chanting over the instrumental or percussion sections of the day's popular songs. The African tradition of “call and response,” was infused into the evolution of Hip Hop culture. There was a relationship between the DJ and his audience that when he made a slogan on the mike this would usually evoke a response from the crowd, who began to call out their own names and slogans. As this phenomenon evolved, the party shouts became more elaborate as DJs, in an effort to be different, began to incorporate little rhymes into their act.

Herc first used reggae records and was toasting to the music of Jamaican artists U-Roy and I-Roy. But he started using funk records due to popular demand. The relationship between hip hop and reggae became more important again with reggae artists and rappers collaborating with each other, from Yellowman and Afrika Bambaataa to KRS One and Shabba Ranks. Hip hop and reggae still influence each other in both directions (Toop, 1991, p.85).

### **Bambaataa**

The second pioneer, Afrika Bambaataa (b. Kevin Donovan) was born in the Bronx on April 10, 1960. Afrika Bambaataa Aasim took his name from a 19th century Zulu chief. Beginning in 1977, Bambaataa began organizing block parties and break dancing competitions around the Bronx. Bambaataa was the leader of one of NYC worst gangs called the Spades (Light, 1999, p.15). Although he was a part of this gang, he tried to encourage African American and those of Latin decent to learn more about their greatness in history. Leaving the gang life for Hip Hop, he initiated an international hip

hop movement known as the Universal Zulu Nation, “that upholds such principles as knowledge, wisdom, understanding, freedom...peace, unity, love and respect” (ibid 15). The Zulu Nation, a group of like-minded Afro centric musicians gained fame in the late '80s but had influenced the rise of hip-hop crews throughout the decade. Bambaataa's conscious rhymes were one of his biggest contributions to Hip Hop music and culture.

### **Grandmaster Flash**

Finally, Grandmaster Flash (b. Joseph Saddler) was born in Barbados, but raised in the Bronx, had regularly attended Kool Herc's performances. He believed that he could improve on Herc's turntable technique of re-cuing, which was mostly done by feel. From his Bronx bedroom he developed a more precise way of cuing, monitoring the process with the use of headphones. This enabled him to seamlessly join the “break-beats” together, the process became known as “segue” (commonly pronounced, *segway*) (Light, 1999, p19). Receiving the nickname 'Flash' when audiences first saw his rapid hand speed while employing this new turntable technique, he played his turntables cuing records with his elbow, his feet, and from behind his back. Flash would perfect Grand Wizard Theodore's turntable technique of 'scratching, (spinning a record back and forth to create a scratchy rhythmical sound), which was employed to emphasize the beat of the music (ibid 19).

These 3 men created a new form of music while building on traditional art forms of: “call and response,” the rhythmic way an MC rhymed and told his story resembled that of the African Griot, and the incorporation of the Afro-Brazilian form of martial arts known as Capoeira into break-dancing. These men helped shape a culture where disenfranchised youth could use their own voice and develop a new expression of their

cultural identity. The Pioneers along with the 4 Elements are the core foundation of Hip Hop culture, music and dance.

### **The 4 Elements**

#### **Break-dancing**

Dance as resistance from the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, Brazil along with the United States help to serve as a prelude to the “pop” culture, specifically Hip Hop. Enslaved Africans used dance as playful and political to exercise a type of resistance to the hegemonic power. Dance may not look like the textbook definition of resistance, in which the oppressed actively revolt against their oppressors to change social conditions; but dancing can nonetheless enact resistance through unity, purpose, performance quality and the use of polyrhythmic drum and syncopated body movements of the oppressed. One of the most influential composers of ragtime has to be Scott Joplin. Scott Joplin composed ‘Stop-time Rag’ which “included the device of suddenly stopping the music while the dancers would fill in the silence with the sounds of their feet on the floor: tapping out the rhythm or sliding over the boards for a bar or two” (Thorpe, 1990, p.60). This marriage between dancers and the manipulation of musical ‘breaks’ was very important to the creation of jazz, ‘break’-dancing and rap music.

Juke joints, Ballrooms, Dancehalls, and ‘the streets,’ are all important mediums for the creation of popular African American dance. The word juke or ‘jook’ means “wicked” coming originally from dzugu, the Gullah dialect of the Bambera tribe in Africa (Thorpe, 1990, p64). Juke joints were places black people came together to drink, dance and gamble. The spirit of juke joints in the South was seen in Harlem’s Ballrooms where the lindy hops, jitterbug, shag, Suzi-Q, camel walk and truckin’ were its popular dances

(Medearis & Medearis, 1997, p.29). From the South to Harlem, New Orleans surfaced as the birth place of jazz, although Thorpe states no one knows where and when jazz began (62). Thorpe (1990) also concludes:

The jazz style of playing, with the opportunities it gave to virtuoso instrumentalists to improve their 'breaks' or cadenzas made an immediate and obvious appeal to those who found their entertainment in dance halls; it appealed to both the professional dancer and amateur who took the musician's 'break' or 'riff' as an opportunity to invent and display his own steps and prowess. (p.64)

Breaks, within jazz and rap music, gave rise to the experimentation or improvisation of dance moves during those musical breaks. There is a deep link between African dance form, African based dances created in juke joints, ballroom dances, jazz and tap. This link is what Jacqui Malone called propulsive rhythm (Malone, 1998, p33). This rhythm, which incorporated 'breaks' started a new trend in the late 1970's, break-dancing.

The emergence of gang activity in the 1970's became wide spread in NYC. Break-dancing made it possible for opposing gang members to take their anger out on the dance floor than on the streets. When there was a "break" in the music where the instrumentation was only played, b-boys or "break-boys and girls," would go on the dance floor and compete amongst their peer for the group who had the most creative dance moves (Light, 1999, p.54). Break dancing includes moving the feet sideways and onto the toes, spinning on the knees, head, hands and elbows, mock fighting moves, and pantomime, an element introduced in California in the 1980's (ibid 55). Movies in the 80's made these moves famous, like Beat Street, Spinnin' and Breakin' (ibid 56-57). The nature of the break-dancing lies in improvisation and individual style. Similar to many

traditional African and African American dances like the shout or that of the Afro-Brazilian form of martial arts called Capoeira, breakers performed in and enter through the circle that was created by spectators. Break-dancing brought new ideas onto the world of social dance. I noticed three major factors of break dancing: 1) Improvisation and experimentation are essential elements to the early development of this art form; 2) the integration of martial arts with other acrobatic moves into break dancing were possible through careful manipulation of the body and 3) Break dancing made the concept of full body contact with the floor an acceptable and freer way of dance expression. These three factors helped keep break dancing “fresh” and innovative, less controlled and defiant in the face of Western culture and dance.

### **Rap & DJing**

The name rap came from a term used in the 1960's meaning “talk.” Hip Hop was another coined term after Lovebug Starsky used the lyric ‘To the hip, hop hippety hop’ in the song Rapper’s Delight sung by the Sugarhill Gang (Light, 1999, p13). However, while rap refers to the music, the term Hip Hop encompassed the new culture of graffiti writing, a looser way of dressing and break-dancing (ibid 15).

Rap, is spoken word put to a musical rhythm. Along with DJing, “break-beats” gave rise not only to break-dancing but rap music as well. Kool Herc began to DJ in 1973 once he had amassed a great sound system (Light, 1999, p15). Herc realized that in order for large crowds to dance to his music they needed to hear the beat. Kool Herc seldom played an entire song. As a DJ, he knew which part of the record sent his audience into a frenzy. Light (1999) states that “Herc noticed that when he played, for example, James Brown’s ‘Give It Up or Turnit A Loose,’ people went especially wild



during the 'break' segment of the song, when just the drums or percussion took over" (p.15). It was usually a 30 second "break" section in which the drums, bass, and rhythm guitar stripped the beat to its barest essence (ibid 15). Herc would buy two copies of the same record and play it over and over emphasizing the break section. This technique became known as "beats" or "break-beats." As in graffiti, style was important and to be imitated if it was good. As with the onset of Jamaican 'toasting', Kool Herc also used simple phrases to encourage his dancers.

At first Jamaican toasting began when DJs would 'toast' over the music they played with simple slogans to encourage the dancers. As 'toasting' became more popular so did the lengths of the toasts. One of the first big "toasting" stars was a Jamaican named U Roy (his real name was Ewart Beckford) (Light, 1999, p357). Another technique, which developed along side 'toasting' was called 'dubs'. 'Dubbing' was when the record engineers would cut back and forth between the vocal and instrumental tracks while adjusting the bass and the treble. This technique highlighted the Jamaican 'toasting' even more (ibid 357).

There are four areas which Jamaican 'toasting' and American rap music have in common. First, both types of music relied on pre-recorded sounds. Second, both types of music relied on a strong beat by which they either rapped or toasted. American rap music relied on the strong beat of hard funk and Jamaican "toasting" relied on the beat from the Jamaican rhythms. Third, in both styles the rapper or toaster spoke their lines in time with the rhythm taken from the records. Lastly, the content of the raps and toasts were similar in nature. For example, as there were boast raps, insult raps, news raps, message raps, nonsense raps, and party raps, there also existed "toasts" that were similar in nature

(Light, 1999, p92). In understanding the impact rap music have on the Hip Hop culture

Light (1999) further states:

When Chuck D described rap as 'black America's CNN,' that's what he had in mind. It's the news you'd never catch on the real CNN- including the slang, the jokes, the style and attitudes-presented in the voices of the people who are living it. If you live outside that community and want to hear that news, you have to tune it up. And if you are part of that community, rap provides a reflection and an expression of your daily life, suggests that you can be part of the cultural conversation that helps shape this country, and infuses your experience with all the dignity and seriousness artistic representation imparts. (92)

### **Graffiti**

The last element within the Hip Hop culture is Graffiti. "How many people can walk through a city and prove they were there? It's a sign I was here. My hand made this mark. I'm fucking alive! OMAR, NEW YORK" (Walsh, 1996, p60). The word "graffiti" derives from the Greek word *graphein* meaning: to write. Although many would argue Graffiti art had its beginnings in New York City, The City of Brotherly love (Philadelphia), has been credited with the earliest emergence of this cultural aesthetical form in the late 1960's (Light, 1999, p35). The origins of graffiti go back to the beginnings of human, societal living. Graffiti has been found on uncovered, ancient, Egyptian monuments, and graffiti even was preserved on walls in Pompeii. Graffiti is the plural form of the Italian word *grafficar*. In plural, *grafficar* signifies drawings, markings, patterns, scribbles, or messages that are painted, written, or carved on a wall or surface (Cooper and Chalfant, 1984, p. 50). I had the pleasure of seeing, first hand, what the Greeks called Hieroglyphics when I studied abroad in Egypt in 1997. The correct

name, Medu Netcher (the words of God) were visible on almost every temple we visited. The same concept evolved into modern day writings during the 1960's and had a powerful as well as negative effect on New York City. For many, graffiti was not art, it was vandalism. The mayor of that time set out to eradicate graffiti from the City, especially New York's subway system. Cooper and Chalfant (1984) states:

If one's name was on a train in a colorful and unique style, it was guaranteed to be seen by many people; most importantly by the other writers, because the subway trains in New York City travel in circuits throughout different boroughs. To be a "King" or "Queen" one could not just get-up or simply paint his or her name in a thousand different places. On the contrary, style and artistic talent were and continue to be extremely important. The goal was and is to create burners which are pieces that stand out because of creativity, color, vibrancy, crisp outlines, i.e. no drips, and overall artistic appeal. It is the recognizable artistic talent of the graffiti artist that established his or her reign on the subway line and not just the appearance of s name in a thousand different places. (52-53)

To the Hip Hop world, Graffiti was the voice of the people. It made those who were invisible, visible. Vibe Magazine attributes rebellion and self determination as the main core of this art form; "A raw emotion" (Light, 1999, p37). Graffiti is political protest, rebellion, art, and cultural expression. Hip Hop culture during its early development was mainly misunderstood. Graffiti was not just for 'inner city youth,' everyone had a hand in this aesthetic. From rich to poor graffiti has traveled world -wide and continues to be the vital part of the Hip Hop culture.

**EACH GENERATION OUT OF RELATIVE  
OBSCURITY MUST DISCOVER THEIR MISSION,  
FULFILL IT OR BETRAY IT.**

-Frantz Fanon  
*The Wretched of the Earth*

# IT'S YOU....

By Danisha Nicole Bailey

10/9/02

What is Hip Hop  
Is it ghetto music or what you see on  
MTV?  
Is it shooting my brotha or  
disrespecting my sistas  
What is Hip Hop?  
Is it Tupac Shakur or Biggie Smalls?  
R.I.P.  
Is it Afrika Bambaataa and DJ Herc  
Grandmaster Flash,  
Public Enemy,  
Salt-n-Pepper or  
Queen Latifah  
Is it "Hip Hop the hippy, the hippy/  
To the hip hip hop/uh, you don't stop,  
The rockin' / To the bang, bang boogie/  
Say up jump the boogie/To the  
Rhythm of the boogity beat"  
Is Hip Hop consciousness?  
Is it alive?  
Do you feel Hip Hop?  
Can you live it?  
Does it have a pulse?  
Mos Def says "I am Hip Hop"  
I am Hip Hop?!  
I am that rhythm that keeps the  
Music going  
The bodies swaying, locking and  
popping  
I say Hip Hop is the people  
Hip Hop is Malcolm X  
Hip Hop is Amiri Baraka  
Hip Hop are the Brothas on the  
Corner trying to make a dollar out of  
15 cents  
Hip Hop is your grandmother singing  
"Swing low, sweet chariot, coming  
forth to carry me home"

Hip Hop is the Bronx, Brooklyn, and  
Queens  
Hip Hop was me leaving my 'tag' "D-  
Money" on the A train, letting  
You know I was there-  
Hip hop reflects the condition of the  
people  
Hip Hop is what brought you home  
3 o'clock in the morning cause the DJ  
wouldn't stop playing your 'shit'  
Hip Hop music makes you stop  
and reflect about them good ol' days  
like chik-o-stick and Now or Later  
cracking sunflower seeds on the  
way home from school-  
Kool Aid with  
Mad sugar and you'd save enough  
To make cherry your next hair color  
Hip Hop is my Adidas  
Or my Kangoo tilted to one side  
Hip Hop is the Last Poets, The Ghetto,  
The Suburbs, The Sugar Hill Gang,  
Vanilla Ice,  
The Roots, Mos Def,  
Erkyah Badu, Eminem,  
Run DMC, Common,  
Talib Kweli, Queen Latifah  
LL Cool J,  
Black, White, Latino, Asian, Jamaican,  
East Coast  
West Coast

Hip Hop is you--  
It's all of You

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The *ROOTS*: From My Mind to Hartwell Stage

#### **The Classes: Fraleigh**

When I first started within the graduate dance program at SUNY Brockport, I considered researching the life and legacy Ms. Katherine Dunham because of her contribution to the field of black dance in the United States. Dunham's unparalleled mixture of cultural anthropology with the genre of dance in the early 1930s, produced innovative forms of movement, which helped to established black dance as an art form in the United States. Her professional troupe, which was formed in the early 1940's, was a first for African Americans, and paved the way for future African American companies such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and Arthur Mitchell's Dance Theatre of Harlem. I brought the desire of opening my own Cultural Center in New York City with me when I started at Brockport and considered an apprenticeship at The Katherine Dunham Centers for Arts and Humanities in East St. Louis, Illinois. African Americans have contributed a considerable amount of "body" vocabulary to the field of dance that I wanted to build upon what Ms. Dunham created in St. Louis and transfer that knowledge to New York City in my center.

Sondra Fraleigh, Professor Emeritus at SUNY Brockport, through her class *History, Aesthetic and Culture*, gave me the courage to embrace and not abandon my own cultural voice. It is not often within the field of dance that you will see scholarly work written on this phenomenon called *Hip Hop*. Although I respect the wealth of knowledge and experience Katherine Dunham contributed to the field of dance, I

realized I had my own experience and love that I wanted to explore through Hip Hop. Fraleigh told me regarding my research, “You do not have to validate Hip Hop...pick something that you love because your topic will be with you throughout your tenure here at Brockport and well after.” Her words changed my focus and gave me the needed push to start me on my journey into the roots of Hip Hop dance and culture.

When you're in a culture it's surprising how much you already know because you are living it as well as how much you still need to learn because there is a deeper history that goes beyond the commercialized Hip Hop we have now in the United States. Fall 2002 I chose Hip Hop as my topic of research and then the flood gates of information began. My final project for the class was a web site I created and designed that included my bio, a 20 page paper on the History and Aesthetics of Hip Hop culture, a bibliography of books and videos on Hip Hop for readers and a time line, which unfortunately, started with 1970 as the beginning of Hip Hop culture. Movies such as *Brown Sugar* and *You Got Served* came out in 2002/2003. In fall 2002 I also saw what I considered to be a modern day minstrel show in the movies of *Bringin' Down the House* (2003) featuring Queen Latifah and *Malibus Most Wanted* (2003) featuring Jamie Kennedy. All movies starred Hip Hop entertainers and brought various dimensions of the root of Hip Hop to the screen. It was not until spring 2003 that I would be able to start connecting the dots with Juanita Suarez and finally, in Dean Vasquez's class.

### **Suarez**

Each professor, in their own right, contributed a piece to my research puzzle. Dr. Juanita Suarez contributed my journey through minstrelsy. Having the basic

understanding of Hip Hop was not enough. There was a reason why this culture is able to be a viable life force within the black community. In my History & Development of Dance class, spring 2003, I was paired with Alycia Bright- Holland and Christopher Walker to develop a creative presentation on the history of minstrelsy in America.

The first time we met to devise our creative project I showed the movie *Ethnic Notions* (1986) and part of Spike Lee's movie *Bamboozled* (2000). While I was continuing my research on my thesis two things happened; first, I found Professor Sterling Stuckey's research on slave culture in the University library and secondly, Suarez told me to look into an African dance known as the shout or the ring-shout. Stuckey's book exposed me to the role religious and cultural behaviors, which migrated from Africa to the United States, played into the development of slave culture on Southern plantations. Funny enough in his book dance, specifically the ring-shout, was instrumental to creating a new cultural identity for enslaved Africans connecting them with their ancestors while re-defining and exemplifying the early development of black dance in America. The movements of the shout would later contribute to the early stages of minstrelsy. With this information in hand, my team mates and I were able to create a multi-media presentation on the history of minstrelsy, incorporating characters such as Master Juba, Tim "Daddy" Rice, and Willie Lynch. This was also the first time both Chris and I performed in black face for our class and others that came to view our presentation. We were able to create an aesthetically, uncomfortable at times, artistic performance on the speech by Willie



Lynch entitled "*How to Make a Slave*," while comically introducing "playing the dozens," and "coon songs and dances," into the vocabulary of our audience.

My thesis research was starting to take shape. With each book or new concept sending me in so many new directions, I started to journal my experience. However, spring 2003 was a difficult semester. Not only did I have Dance History with Dr. Suarez, I was also taking Dance Research with Dean Vasquez. Dance Research helped me pull my thoughts together.

### **Dean Vasquez**

Spring 2003 I took Dance Research with Dean Vasquez. Through this class I was able to visually put on paper where my research was taking me. I created the Genogram which ended up being the outline for my written thesis and would later serve to guide my choreography for the Dance Hartwell performance. It was important for me to show the progression and transitions taken within African American culture and dance and how these progressions help influence one genre of dance and music to another. Hip Hop was not an independent source free of cultural influences outside of the African American experience. Hip Hop is a cultural collage which initially came out of the inner city but was infused with African, Caribbean and Latin culture.

I later turned the genogram into a PowerPoint presentation which I used to present to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dance and Introduction to Dance classes at Brockport. Sarah Morell, who would later be one of my dancers, was the physical component added to my presentations in order to teach a basic introduction to Capoeira for my

students. For the next 2 semesters leading up to my thesis performance I was able to fine tune and change around the research.

### **Experimentation and Discovery**

By spring 2004, I invited 12 women to be dancers in my piece for the Dance Hartwell Thesis Concert for fall 2004. Later on in the semester, one male was eventually added to the ensemble, along with Professor Khalid Saleem as the Master Drummer and me, which totaled 14 performers. Prior to picking the dancers, it seemed like I knew the direction that I wanted to take and I started to experiment with my choreography, borrowing from ideas and themes that sprung out of Suarez's class. I focused on two pieces of work believing this would have given me a head start. Through trial and error at the end of the semester I knew that I did want neither the movement nor the content of the two pieces, which are listed below, in my Thesis performance.

#### **“Show Time”**

Alycia, Chris and I started to perform “*Show Time*” for a broader audience. The feedback we received was positive and we even talked about marketing the multimedia performance as a teaching tool for Middle School and High School students. The piece started with African dance performed by the 3 of us and ended with us being captured and enslaved. We were then displayed on the auction block and used movements to exaggerate us being examined by those wanting to purchase slaves. From there we followed with a plantation scene which introduced the character of Willie Lynch and his speech on *How to Make a Slave*, played by Chris. Chris also had the task of transforming into Master Juba by applying make-up on

stage with the end product being Chris in black face. Caricatures such as Mammy, Stepin' Fetchit and the Tragic Malotto were integrated into the skits along with various movie clips from Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000) and *Malcolm X* (1992). We danced to Nina Simone's song *Strange Fruit* and made the correlation between slave dances, tap and jazz. The final section was based on the concept that the negative caricatures of minstrelsy was still present in today's entertainment, the only difference was people no longer were painted in black face. Chris and I, still in black face, invited the audience on stage while we concluded with playing the dozen. Once the performance was over the students were stunned and uncomfortable talking to us because we were out of character but still in black face. We used the Q&A session to talk about movies such as Queen Latifah's *Bringing Down the House* (2003) and Jamie Kennedy's movie *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2003) to show that the residue of minstrelsy was still found in today's entertainment.

What was most interesting about the performance was the number of students that had no idea as to the history of minstrelsy, playing the "dozens," or the fact that traces of minstrelsy still existed today. I was taught and read that enslaved Africans that were not considered of prime quality, i.e., they were too fat, or dark, ugly, short hair, or nappy hair, was sold by the dozen. It was used as a divisive tool among African Americans during slavery and beyond. Growing up in the inner city I heard derogatory jokes said by kids about one's mother or being too fat or too dark, and did not realize the actual history of "playing the dozen" and its effects on keeping the division among blacks. Talking in black face to the students helped foster honest

dialogue even though many were uncomfortable; we were able to move past the face and dig deeper into the history of race and entertainment in America.

Certain components of “*Show Time*” could have been used for my thesis performance. I wanted to experiment with dancers in black face and draw on parallels between minstrelsy then and now. I also wanted to study the movement vocabulary between minstrelsy, jazz and Hip Hop and draw upon those commonalities as well. For my composition class I had the idea of starting this process to see what I could create with a cast of 5 dancers. This compositional piece would be the wake up call I needed to eventually discard the literal for a more comprehensive body of choreography for my thesis. This was truly my biggest learning experience.

### **Out of One Many**

“Out of One Many,” was a Composition piece comprised of 5 dancers. The concept was to juxtapose the movements of minstrelsy against that of Hip Hop and to show the past being represented in the future. I used activist Amiri Baraka’s poem “Something in the Way of Things,” which was set to music by a Hip Hop group called *The Roots*. Amy McDonald and DuEwa Vallier trusted my artistic voice and agreed to perform in black face. Amy represented T. “Daddy” Rice and DuEwa represented Master Juba. The other 3 ladies, Alexis, Monique and Theresa, represented the present time. Both groups mirrored each other displaying specific derivatives of hand gestures, posture, and quick feet movement practiced within their perspective time.

The piece was both positive and negative. The choreography was simple yet under developed and did not move beyond a certain point in displaying the scope of my research. It was also loud, but not in terms of music; the artistic decision to have both a black woman and a white woman in black face drew you into their reality and from the outside looking in you lost the other dancers. A positive point in the choreography was being able to see contrast in the final group section. Towards the end the movements of the 3 women were more angular, quick paced, off balance and free flowing. Amy and DuEwa, however, were placed in the middle with the other three on the outside. Their movements were slower in pace, comical, and complimentary of the history and the relationship between the historical symbol of Rice and Juba. There were times where Amy and DuEwa would go beside or behind the other dancers doing their same movement but at a slower tempo and with more of an emphasis more on hands and lower body gestures.

The piece was well received and ideas were given on how to improve the dance to emphasize the time difference and tighter relationship between the two times. However, at the end of the Spring semester I went back to New York City for the summer not sure exactly what my thesis was going to look like, but I knew what I created was not going to be explored for a twenty minute piece in the Fall.

### **Making Sense of It All**

At the end of spring semester I discovered I did not like my composition piece. Even though I used the musical collaboration between such powerful artists as *The Roots* and poet laureate Amiri Baraka, it limited my scope and my message. I did not want my dancers in blackface, even though that worked in "Show Time." I did

not want that one part of history dominating my whole thesis experience. How do you creatively show your thesis research in a 20 minute piece on stage? What elements were essential in relaying the whole experience of blacks in dance as it relates to the foundation of Hip Hop? I was very confused, frustrated with myself, and overwhelmed. My library at this point was very extensive and I felt I had more capabilities writing my thesis then choreographing the research. I went home to Brooklyn that summer to try to mentally work out the direction I needed to take for the choreography.

In trying to make sense of it all I put the research to the side and enjoyed my summer. I decided not to over think the process but to go back to the root of why I fell in love with Hip Hop culture. I stopped reading books on my topic and went back to the music and took some Hip Hop dance classes. As I began to enjoy the culture once again I understood what I wanted people to get out of my work; it was not just one part of history that impacted Hip Hop, it was a collage of events, music, and cultures that help construct Hip Hop. Professor Stuckey's work on slave culture and the ring shout became an element I wanted on stage. I contacted the University of Georgia to get a video copy of an actual ring-shout performance documentation featuring the McIntosh community ring shouters from Georgia. I also took a Capoeira class to experience firsthand the similarities between break dancing and Capoeira movements. I came back in August more refreshed with new ideas and experiences for my dancers. The first step was formal intensive "boot-camp" training in Capoeira and break dancing. Sarah Morell was the instructor for process. My dancers trained for a month and a half in Capoeira while learning knee drops, spins,

and head stands for the piece. This was one of the hardest but most rewarding times in my thesis rehearsal. I am truly grateful to all my dancers for their hard work and dedication, while allowing me to experiment, alter, add and challenge their mind and body to a new way of dancing, moving and shaking.

When my dancers did a private performance of *TheROOTS* in March 2005 for the students of the Performing Arts High School in Rochester, NY, one of the questions asked during our Q &A session was “How did you come up with the process? How did you know what you wanted and did not want to include in those 20 minutes?” My answer was simple:

I didn't know. I just trusted my dancers to help guide the process. As I got information and put it on their bodies, their bodies showed me what needed to happen next. They helped me paint the picture. Wherever it was too jagged or didn't make sense I had to step back and see what was missing. I also had to go back and rely on to that Genogram I created and trust that I could tell that story (Q & A Spring 2005).

This was the main reason why I added myself to the piece so late in the process. I needed to function as a historian, choreographer, painter, and critic. It was not about me performing on stage but that the audience got the message behind the performance and understood the root of Hip Hop through a historical lens. It was one of the most selfless acts I had to undergo as a performer of not including myself as the central figure in my own thesis performance. I believe that approach was the best decision for both my dancers and I.

## Boot-Camp/Fall 2004

### Phase 1: Training

In August when my dancers returned from their summer break we took off with intense training in Capoeira and break-dancing, earning bruises along the way and a new found appreciation for the art and skill it takes to learn and practice Capoeira. Like with any part of my process, it was important for my dancers to know the history of that which they were demonstrating on stage. Capoeira Angola has its roots in Bantu tradition and was used by the enslaved Africans of Brazil as a form of revolution (Lewis, 1992, p25-26).



In keeping with African war

**TheROOTS/Capoeira 11.18.04**

strategies, Capoeiristas masked the art's effectiveness from plantation overseers. Then and today, to uninformed onlookers the art appeared to be a harmless demonstration of dance, acrobatics, play and music. Authorities eventually learned of its power in 1890, and outlawed the practice, with death being the penalty for involvement during the period of slavery (ibid 50). For years Capoeira was practiced in secrecy and was not lawful to practice and teach until after the 1930s; about forty years after the abolition of slavery (ibid 60).

Capoeira was and is composed of cat like movements where participants collapse to the ground, use cartwheels, flips, handstands and many other deceptive



movements to avoid strikes and injury by opponents (Lewis, 1992, p99). Practitioners use kicks, sweeps, head butts, gouges and punches in order to strike their opponent. All of these actions are combined to compose a devastating form of martial art which protected its participants from enslavers and at times each other. Practitioners of Capoeira gather in a circle, called a roda, and those who surround the contestants sing, clap and play musical instruments such as the berimbau (string instrument) and drums (ibid 138). Then the contestants perform a movement called the Ginga (jinga), where they move around each other, almost like a dance, in order to disorient their opponent (ibid 97). After this point it is open season on both opponents, as contestants leap into an array of deceptive offensive and defensive movements against each other. As one contestant leaves the circle another immediately takes his place. This interaction between the groups continues until the group decides to disband.

My dancers were trained in Capoeira and certain key movements found in break-dancing that resembled that of Capoeira. During the process I had my dancers write down when they first fell in love with Hip Hop, as an exercise I saw performed in the movie *Brown Sugar* (2002). Overall this was a rewarding experience and I am very proud of the varying levels of experimentation played in choreographing

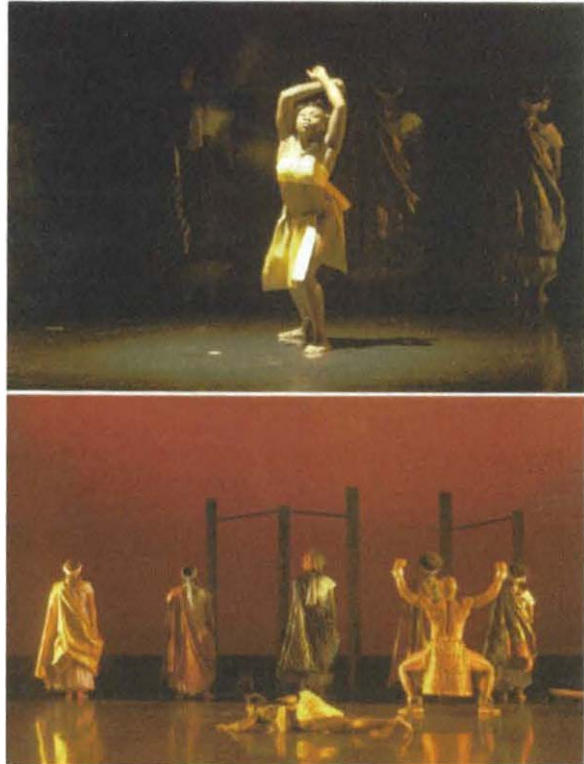
### **TheROOTS.**

#### **Phase 2:11.18-20.04/ TheROOTS on Stage**

**TheROOTS** was a choreographic work, which paid tribute to Professor Sterling Stuckey's research on "slave culture," and the African based tradition of the "Ring-shout," which is performed in the Southern United States, as well as the

contributions that African-American, Jamaican, Afro-Brazilian and Puerto Rican culture, dance, and music had on the early development of Hip Hop. The musical traditions as well as the various dance forms explored in this work all link back to the common *ROOT*, which is Africa. The performance was broken down into 5 sections. The entire piece was 23 minutes.

Section I the “MAAFA” was performed by Ma Abena Aduonum and Julian Reynolds with drumming by Khalid Saleem. The music was from the soundtrack, *Beloved*, and was entitled “*Sierra Leone, 1839.*” MAAFA, a term used in the book, Let the Circle Be Unbroken (1997), by Dr. Marimba Ani, is a Kiswahili term for "Disaster" or "Terrible Occurrence" (p11). This word best describes the more than 500



**TheROOTS/MAAFA 11.18.04**

hundred years of suffering of people of African descent through Slavery, Imperialism, Colonialism, Invasions and Exploitation. Dr. Marimba Ani introduced it into contemporary African-American scholarship as a preferred reference to the period in world history, identified as the Middle Passage or Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The piece started Professor Khalid Saleem drumming as MaAbena performed, which symbolized the strength and importance of African dance prior to the Maafic experience. Julian joins MaAbena in telling the story of captivity and enslavement

during the Trans Atlantic slave. It was important for me to show the transition from Africa to America and the transformation of African dance to the “Ring-Shout” performed on the plantations.

Section II was the “Shout”& Jump Jim Crow,” which featured a “Ring-Shout” demonstration with the dancers singing a famous shout song entitled “Jubilee.” During slavery drumming was banned from being played on the plantation in fear that it would insight a rebellion. Dancing was also considered lewd and sacrilegious; dancing was defined as the “crossing of the feet.” It was important that when the shout was performed the dancers made sure their feet did not cross; they also maintained the African tradition of the “circle” as the shout was performed after church services. The songs within the shout usually depicted scripture versus or the struggles that men and women faced during the period of enslavement. The broken movements, dips



**TheROOTS/ Shout”& Jump Jim Crow 11.18.04**

in the pelvis, grounded connection to the earth, and shuffling along the floor was the catalyst for early minstrel shows and tap dance. Experimenting earlier in the process helped shape the vision I had for this section. I no longer depended on using black face as a means for showing the connection, but incorporated the similarities and

growing thread of traditional African movement with what was evolving on the plantation. It is believed that the circle tradition of the Ring shout and the shuffling, percussive dance movements influenced other circle or “walk-around” dances and tap. My dancers were instrumental making the transition from Africa to the shout and tap in America seamless.

Section II: ended with the tapers, Melinda Phillips and Amy McDonald entering the ring-shout and imitating the shuffling movements of the shouters with that of the tapers. The scene ended with a call and response demonstration between Khalid and Melinda. It was important for the audience to see the musical connection between the tap and the sticks used by Khalid because it showed how important rhythm and improvisation was to both the “shout” and tap and how the relationship between music and dance is very much a part of the African tradition now found in America. There was a cultural exchange that inspired a new genre of dance; as the shout was mainly a religious dance, tap and minstrelsy was the secular counterpart to the new cultural identity being developed in the South during the late 1800’s. Section III **Umoja** (Unity) performed by Khalid Saleem, demonstrated the musical connection and retention between Africa and what was occurring throughout the Diaspora; he showed the African derivative found within Caribbean and Latin music, specifically the samba.

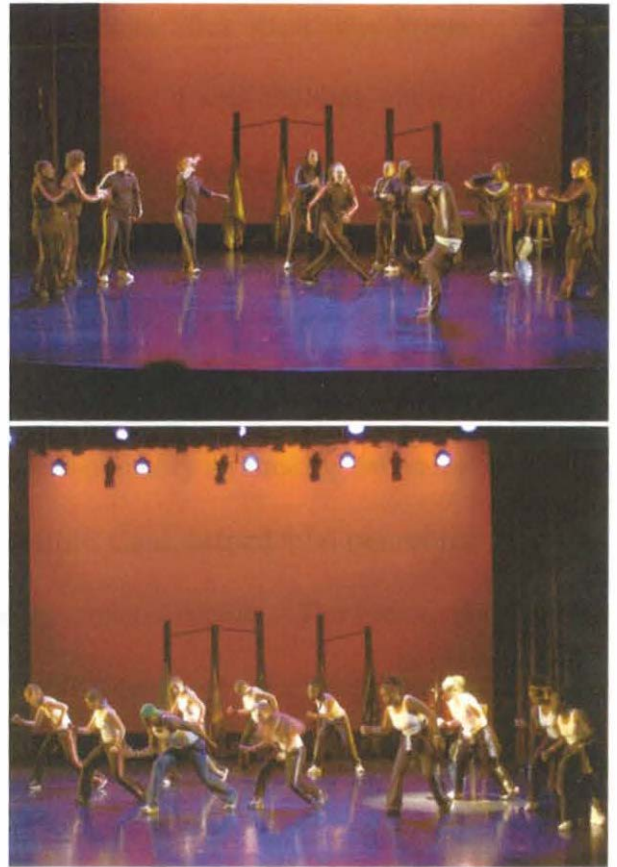
Section IV was entitled Brasil and was a tribute to the influence the Afro-Brazilian form of martial arts, called Capoeira, had on Hip Hop, specifically break dancing. Although in the choreography Capoeira and Samba are done in reverse, traditionally the Samba would be performed after Capoeira.

The final piece, Section V “Rapper’s Delight” brought it all together. The Last Poets revolutionized the vehicle in which urban youth would use to articulate their frustrations, hopes, and dreams; hence Hip Hop and rap music was born. The Jamaican dancehall phenomenon as well as the Latino(a) community continues to be an integral part of Hip Hop culture. This section showed the collaboration and integration of cultures within Hip Hop; it also served to appreciate not only the Jamaican influence but the Latin contributions found within Hip Hop culture.

### **Freedom**

Dance as resistance throughout the Diaspora, specifically in the United States, helped to lay the foundation and shape the formation of Hip Hop. No one can deny the power of body and the drums that the Africans brought with him or her to the New World and its influence on re-creating a cultural identity. Dance is tied into a person’s cultural identity. Despite the restrictions white masters placed on the education and religious activity of slaves, dance became a vehicle for individual and collective resistance, both to brutal treatment and to enslavement itself.

The movie *Brown Sugar*, featuring Taye Diggs and Sanaa Lathan is a love story and a tribute to Hip Hop culture. The first two minutes of the movie showed the



**The***ROOTS*/Rapper’s Delight 11.18.04

pioneers of the Hip Hop culture such as Afrika Bambaataa, Slick Rick, The Roots, Russell Simons, and many others. The question throughout the movie was, “When did you first fall in love with Hip Hop?” For me, Hip Hop always was; I knew nothing else. This movement, beginning in the late 1970’s, took America by storm. The group, *Sugarhill Gang*, rose to prominence with their #1 hit “Rappers Delight.” Although this was not the first rap song ever made, it was the first to gain national and international attention. “Rapper’s Delight” made rap history by ranking #4 on the Billboard R&B charts (Light, 1999, p13). The Sugarhill Gang helped take rap music from the local neighborhood block parties into mainstream America. The lyrics, “I said a hip, hop, the hippie, the hipidipit, hip, hip, hopit, you don’t stop,” (a phrase in the song), gave birth to the word Hip Hop which came to encompass a whole culture of dressing, talking, rapping and dancing. The four major elements of Hip Hop, DJing, Rap, Break-dancing and Graffiti, communicated the hopes, dreams, fears and joys of the African-American community. However, the Hip Hop phenomenon has transcended race and social-economical status. From the inner city to white suburbia, everyone is affected by Hip Hop whether you want to be or not.

So where is Hip Hop? It is in the hearts and minds of everyone who is willing to embrace this movement. Hip Hop is the mouth piece of the other wise voiceless. The evolution of Black Dance in America from Minstrel shows to Break-dancing has left a deep rhythm within the American culture. From the article *Keep to the Rhythm and You’ll Keep to Life*, by Jacqui Malone (1998), one understands that the rhythm in vernacular dance is a pulse, a life force. As Katherine Dunham stated in the same article, if the rhythm is broken the individual or society is disintegrated (p.231). The



rhythm is in the Preachers sermon, the singing, hand-clapping and dancing; this has always been a vital force of survival within the Black experience. Before you can talk about Hip Hop as a form of resistance one must first understand the development of Blacks in Dance in America. One has to understand the significance of Professor Stuckey's work on slave culture, coupled with the tradition of circle dance from Africa to America which is found in the ring shout, and then the outward and sometimes passive resistance found in the dancing body of Juba in black face, in order to really appreciate the evolution of black cultural identity and dance in America. Hip Hop is deeply embedded within the American psyche because it is a collage of all that came before it and continues to grow and transcend race and economic status. I asked a close friend of mine what Hip Hop meant to her. Vicki and I are both from New York City; she's from the Bronx and I am from Brooklyn. Vicki said, "Hip Hop is to me as Shakespeare is to many people. It is how we express ourselves and one day Hip Hop is going to be a classic" (Vicki T. Sapp). Hip Hop, for me, is ***FREEDOM***.

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