

Name _____

Date _____



50 Years of Hip-Hop (1973-2023)

Part I: Origins

Let's take it back to the 1970s

In Bronx, NY, the year was '73.

August 11th, party goers traveled to
1520 Sedgwick Avenue.

DJ Kool Herc was on the 1s and 2s

With a new technique that made people move.

Herc used two copies of the same record to

Loop instrumental breaks, so breakers could groove.

See, all the break boys and all the break girls

Had more time to dance and take on the world.

It also gave rhythm to speak on the mic,

With a call and response or a wicked rhyme.

A style that would soon open doors

To a new genre—hip-hop was born.

These techniques spread to parties indoors and out,

Where Black and Latinx people rocked the house.

Across the five boroughs the news would spread

And the shaping of five hip-hop pillars began.

Learn these pillars and you'll understand

Why hip-hop is shared all across the land.

There's DJing and MCing,

Breakdancing and graffiti,

And you can't forget knowledge

Of self and one's surroundings

And how this movement started,

Because knowledge is power.

Kool Herc's style would influence more
DJs like Grand Wizzard Theodore,
The inventor of the scratch technique.
And Grandmaster Flash cut furiously.
MCs like Coke La Rock
And groups like Furious Five and Cold Crush rocked the spot
And the mic at parties and battles in parks.
If today was the flame, this era was the spark.
These breakbeats were dubbed onto cassettes,
And these tapes would travel and help hip-hop spread,
Allowing breakdancers to show their skills
And MCs too, rhyming all at will.
They'd battle in school yards and neighborhood streets.
Hip-hop had grown by the late '70s,
But at the time,
In-person was the only way to hear MCs rhyme.
That would soon change by 1979
When The Sugarhill Gang released "Rappers' Delight."
A commercial success it was,
The rise of hip-hop had begun.

Part II: On Wax

Once Sugarhill Gang dropped "Rapper's Delight,"
It pushed hip-hop into the spotlight
By landing in the billboard charts—that's huge.
This made a lot of rappers wanna make songs, too.
So they hit the studio to record the flow
And capture the magic they'd make at shows
In hopes that they'd get a record deal
And drop classic songs that we play still,
Like "The Breaks" by a rapper named Kurtis Blow,
A disco rap that was eight minutes long,

Or a song called “The Message” which was very
Striking with vivid social commentary.
And since music and film go hand in hand,
It was a matter of time before rap was featured in movies,
Like Style Wars and Wild Style,
Two documentaries that are worthwhile,
And scripted films too, like Beat Street,
Another classic that you’ve got to see.
The audience was growing and so was the genre,
And technology helped keep the sound evolving.
Synthesizers and drum machines
Started replacing sampled breakbeats
’Cause hip-hop don’t stop, it kept spreading
To the downtown Manhattan dance club scene.
And all these things helped open the door for
The next generation to come and do more.
And that generation that was coming through
In the mid-’80s was called the New School,
Like Run DMC, who mixed rock and rap,
And LL Cool J, now he acts,
But back then he was the first rapper to be
Considered as hip-hop’s romantic lead.
And Public Enemy kept the message alive,
While the Beastie Boys brought the party vibe.
They captured the ears of a White audience,
But were loved all over for being authentic.
Rick Rubin built the blueprint for a lot of this,
His label Def Jam really flipped the script—
A visionary who signed these acts
And many more that elevated rap,
Including the Bomb Squad.
Their production style was like a sound collage.

Hip-hop was huge, but it had room to grow.

It's about to expand, so here we go!

Part III: Expansion

OK, by the late '80s, hip-hop had spread globally,

And women MCs were on the rise, notably

Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, and Salt-N-Pepa.

And they paved the way for more women to step up.

Plus acts outside of New York were getting down,

From the Fresh Prince & Jazzy Jeff to Digital Underground.

But the West Coast really started to hold sway

With the emergence of N.W.A

And gangsta rap that was aggressive and hardcore.

Dr. Dre and Ice Cube opened the door

For artists like Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dogg.

Meanwhile, back East lyricists had evolved:

Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, and KRS-One

All pushed the boundaries of what could be done.

And you know we've got to talk about the beats.

The early '90s brought new production techniques,

Like in NYC they got grimy and gritty

With Wu-Tang, Nas, and can't forget Biggie,

While A Tribe Called Quest and De La Soul

Brought a playful and Afrocentric approach.

And by the mid-'90s, groups like the Fugees

Melded socially conscious hip-hop with R&B.

And mainstream rappers became celebrities,

Like Dr. Dre, Diddy, and Jay-Z.

Plus music video budgets had grown fast see;

It was all about showing cash and being flashy.

Now, beef between East and West was on the rise,

Which led to 2Pac and Biggie's demise.

Part IV: Commercial Success

By the late '90s, hip-hop was the bestselling genre in the US—
Influenced the culture with its commercial success.
The genre's musical and visual style caught the attention
Of increasingly White and suburban audiences.
It was everywhere, playing from house to house.
Once the '90s ended, a new region rose: the South.
It added bounce and new cadences to the genre,
From artists like OutKast, Master P, Three 6 Mafia,
Lil Wayne, T.I., and also Ludacris
Dominated the hip-hop scene with booming hits.
The era of the super producer occurred in the early to mid-2000s.
Dr. Dre signed Eminem and 50 Cent;
Timbaland worked with Missy Elliot and Jay-Z;
Swizz Beats with the Ruff Ryders, the Lox, and Jay-Z;
Kanye West with himself and, well, Jay-Z;
The Neptunes with Clipse, Snoop Dogg, and of course Jay-Z.
Hip-hop was a fully commercial product by the mid-2000s.
Its growth was incredibly astounding.
LL Cool J, Ice Cube, and Queen Latifah
Became movie stars in major motion pictures.
Jay-Z was as much a business mogul as he was an MC,
Gained his wealth from investments and songs he released.
Underground and alternative hip-hop acts like MF DOOM,
Mos Def, J Dilla, and The Roots
Garnered acclaim, but hip-hop was already big business.
Hip-hop was consistently shifting
And continuing to push whatever limits.
It seemed money made by hip-hop would never finish.

Part V: The Internet

Once upon a time, you had to turn on the TV
To hear and see who was the latest and greatest in the music industry.
But in the mid-2000s, commercial hip-hop sales
Were slowing down on a massive scale.
But then there was a shift; things were starting to change.
Internet sensations were becoming household names.
Internet technology rivaled professional studios
Because now anyone was allowed to release music or videos.
Artists 'round the world caught wind of this and boom—up and away!
You could use the internet to build an online fan base,
Like M.I.A. from the UK,
Who released music independently creating worldwide fame.
Social media and file sharing further evolved,
Which brought artists like Drake, Kid Cudi, Kendrick Lamar,
Nicki Minaj, Lupe Fiasco, and J. Cole.
Emerged through the late 2000s, as we watched it unfold.
Throughout the 2010s, commercial hip-hop regained its strength.
In the streaming era, it regained its prominence.
Migos and Future modernized the southern sound.
Women MCs, like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion,
Were doing their thing and rose to fame,
While rappers like Lil Uzi Vert took the moodier lane.
Hip-hop's global appeal became clearer for sure,
With huge acts like Bad Bunny
And rap verses on K-pop songs.
50 years in, hip-hop has changed the world.
Started in a Bronx basement with DJ Kool Herc
To Jay-Z selling out the Garden,
Kendrick winning a Pulitzer Prize,
And we're just getting started. 'Cause
50 years sounds like a lot—and yes, it's been an honor—
But hip-hop is still a relatively young genre.

As hip-hop continues to evolve and change,
Older rap songs are sampled in new ones today.
But who knows how the flow of hip-hop will grow,
We'll keep a close eye online and around the globe.
Whether you go the commercial route or you create your start,
Hip-hop is raw and from the heart—never forget that part.