

H.I.P. H.O.P. - Healing Inter Personally, Healing Our Planet

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Abstract

Our planet is facing a multitude of environmental crises due to a societal disconnect from our natural world. This disconnect perpetuates the justification of gender, ethnic, racial, and economic oppression in the name of progress and capitalism. Hip Hop Culture was born from a resistance against systemic racism and classism that negatively impacts low income and mostly non-white communities in the United States. It has since captured the world's attention, becoming a multi-billion dollar industry and global influence that includes participation of a multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial audience. Hip Hop is a unique and intriguing vehicle for encouraging change towards environmental sustainability because it simultaneously teaches self-preservation and the principles of sharing, educating, honoring the past, and innovation. Hip Hop is also anchored in the tradition of community building and rising to one's potential, both of which are impossible to achieve without a healthy and viable ecosystem. The stewardship of and connection to our natural environment is an over-arching solution to the systemic poverty, racism, and sexism that are often represented and debated about within Hip Hop Culture today. Therefore, environmental advocacy should be incorporated into Hip Hop Culture as an additional element, being taught and dialogued about as an integral part of the culture itself.

Introduction

Hip Hop culture began as a response to the poverty and violence resulting from structural racism and classism in the United States (Malone & Martinez, 2015). Research shows that minority and low-income communities continue to be exposed to higher levels of pollution and related toxicity, and are consequently subjected to the decrease in economic value of their communities as a result. There is also a direct correlation of environmental racism to increased health problems and poverty among minority and low-income communities yet environmental stewardship has not fully integrated within the Hip Hop social justice ethos. The stewardship and connection to our natural environment is an over-arching solution to the systemic poverty, racism, and sexism that are often represented and debated within Hip Hop Culture today. Therefore, environmental advocacy should be incorporated into Hip Hop Culture as an additional element, being taught and dialogued about as an integral part of the culture itself.

I have been a fan and participant of Hip Hop since 1983, and as a Hip Hop Head it is my belief that Hip Hop emerged as a tool for racial healing to help bring unity to our global community. It is also my belief that because of the global reach and influence Hip Hop has, and to honor the true roots of the culture, it is our responsibility to incorporate teachings of environmental stewardship and environmental justice into Hip Hop culture. We must help motivate all people participating in Hip Hop into action on behalf of each other and our planet in a timely manner and do our part in the global effort needed to combat our current environmental crisis. These beliefs are the inspiration for my title *H.I.P. H.O.P. - Healing Interpersonally, Healing Our Planet.*

The reality of environmental stewardship is that it is a behavior. A behavior that must be taught and practiced to maintain integrity, similar to any other form of self-care and/or

community communication and participation. However, shifting one's behavior is not always easy. Until a behavior is second nature, there needs to be some manner of framework or a protocol in place to container discomfort. This is where the work of this paper lies. I will look at how the subculture of Hip Hop is a vehicle to implement this shift in behavior towards environmental sustainability by exploring the intersection of the culture and environmental justice. I argue and demonstrate how environmental stewardship should be incorporated into Hip Hop Culture and taught and dialogued about as an additional element.

I have organized this paper into chronological sections. The first section *Hip Hop History* highlights the origin of Hip Hop from a historical perspective. This is a synopsis of information I have gathered from over 35 years of personal involvement with the culture as a fan, consumer, student, artistic collaborator, and professional dancer including learning about accurate cultural details and stories directly from both pioneers and current international icons of the culture. For those interested, the book *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* by Jeff Chang (2005), the movie *Wild Style* (1983), and the documentary *Style Wars* (1983) are all excellent sources to begin learning about the history of Hip Hop in greater detail. The next section, and the bulk of this research, *Environmental Justice*, explores the emergence of the Environmental Justice Movement, the impacts of racism and pollution on health and economics and how this relates into Hip Hop philosophy. The two sections *How to Integrate Environmental Advocacy into Hip Hop – The Hip Hop Caucus* and *How to Integrate Environmental Advocacy into Hip Hop – DJ Cavem* provide case studies of Hip Hop and environmental activism from both the organizational and individual perspectives. The fifth section, *Hip Hop Activism*, presents pathways for action via a combination of Hip Hop scholarly contributions, exploration of the

roles of leadership and collaboration within Hip Hop culture, and the advocacy work of current artists. And finally, I present my *Conclusion* as the sixth section of this paper.

Hip Hop History

Hip Hop began in the early 1970s in the Bronx of New York City in the United States. It emerged as a collective response to the systemic racism embedded in our nation and the oppression, poverty, and violence resulting from it. At this time, the Bronx was essentially a war zone - buildings were crumbling to rubble, people were living in extreme poverty, and there were clashes of police brutality. Already wrought with economic disparity, the wealthier residents fled in masse to the suburbs in what became known as the 'great white flight', causing an even greater economic disruption. Infrastructure was crumbling, arson rates doubled, and unemployment skyrocketed. This created an environment that supported the escalation of gang violence, making the neighborhood extremely volatile, dangerous, and limiting in the ways residents could navigate through and access the borough. In summary, the Bronx was imploding.

Stemming from the African diaspora, Hip Hop is a predominantly black culture that merged with the strong Latin influence of the Bronx at that time, with particular influence from the Puerto Rican residents. Puerto Ricans are the descendants of the Taíno indigenous people of the island who were colonized by Spain. Their mixed heritage consists of Taíno and Spanish, as well as African and Caribbean lineages resulting from the forced migration of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Held within the container of NYC, the 'melting pot' of our country and a complex and influential city, it took many people and circumstances developed over a similar time period to create and nurture the culture of Hip Hop. However, it is generally agreed that credit for the birth of Hip Hop lie in the actions of a few specific individuals. Three musicians, collectively referred to as 'The Godfathers of Hip Hop': Afrika Bambaataa, DJ Cool Herc, and Grand Master

Flash, and one budding entrepreneur ‘The Godmother of Hip Hop’ Cindy Campbell, each played an integral role in establishing the foundational elements of Hip Hop culture.

Afrika Bambaataa is a DJ (and later producer and band leader) that at that time was a leader in the prominent gang the Black Spades. He had been studying about the Zulu Nation of Africa, one of the few tribes in Africa that successfully resisted colonization. He realized that the gang on gang violence in the Bronx was keeping people stuck in a negative loop, assisting the oppressive forces of the times. However, if they had a platform to channel aggression into a positive and unifying force, they could lift each other up while improving their community. With this new philosophy, he worked to transform the Black Spades into the Universal Zulu Nation outlining the foundational concepts of Hip Hop as peace, love, unity, and having fun.

Clive Campbell, a Jamaican immigrant who later became known as DJ Cool Herc, is a DJ and inventor of ‘the break’. He was the first DJ to use two turn tables in order to loop the musical breaks within songs, as he noticed that this part of the song was what got people dancing the most, allowing party goers the ability to interact positively while blowing off steam, channeling their aggressions into art, and having a container to settle conflicts safely such as through a dance battle as opposed to a gang fight. This also allowed him the ability to control the vibe of a party and set the conditions for longer and more intense dance sessions that evolved into the popular forms of Hip Hop dance like party rocking and breaking.

The third DJ, Grand Master Flash aka Joseph Saddler, whose family emigrated from Barbados, is also an innovator. He developed a lot of turntable technology, helping to push forward the evolution of electronic music. He influenced the stylistic flavor of Hip Hop music by creating and/or popularizing several DJing techniques such as scratches and cuts (an apprentice of Grand Master Flash, Theodore Livingston aka Grand Wizard Theodore, is credited with

creating the scratch). Scratching consists of moving a record back and forth to create live percussive like sounds within the music set and cuts are when the DJ skips the record back to play a sound, word, or phrase repetitively. This is also used as a percussive element and often within the 'hook' or chorus of a song. Grand Master Flash also created the Hip Hop music group Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, who in 2007 were the first Hip Hop group to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

All three of these men realized that because of music and their ability to DJ at parties and events, providing a vibe that allowed people to get free and de-stress, they were able to move across gang territories with ease and accessibility. This was a pivotal realization. However, it was not until Cool Herc's 16-year-old sister, Cindy Campbell, hired him to DJ a party she was organizing that Hip Hop was "born". Cindy wanted to earn some money before the start of school. With the help of a family member, she rented out a room in a community recreation center at 1520 Sedgewick Ave in the Bronx and advertised an all-are-welcome, all borough dance party, based on the premise that no violence would be tolerated. And on August 11, 1973 Hip Hop was born. It was a huge success and continued to grow through the efforts of Cindy and other event organizers.

It is imperative to note that what they did was not just throw a dance party. They threw the start of a revolution. They created Hip Hop because they wanted to rise above the violence and poverty. Hip Hop was a platform for marginalized people to come together, feel supported, heard, valued, and seen. By sharing knowledge and shifting the collective behavior of the youth in the Bronx at that time, they opened up avenues of personal expression that allowed individuals the opportunity to channel the anger, frustration, heartache, and fear created by their day to day living situation into something that was productive and empowering. Hip Hop became the voice

of the voiceless by uniting individuals into a unified community while still respecting their unique personal contributions. As Cool Herc says, Hip Hop to him means “Come as you are. All are welcome here.”

The culture of Hip Hop was founded on four original artistic elements. Breaking (Bboying/BGirling or breakin’ or breakdancing) a form of athletic and dynamic dance, Graffiti writing, DJing (turntablism), and MCing (rapping). The vibrant colors, new music sounds, new dance styles, and graffiti art were loud with purpose. An example of this is the famous full subway train murals of the early 1970s, known as ‘burners’. ‘Bombing’ trains (painting them) was one method of communication, a way to earn recognition, and a call to change. The early writers painted trains in part because the trains ran through every borough. They knew that they couldn’t afford to go to Manhattan and take on the powers that be that created and maintained their circumstances of poverty and racism, but if they could paint a train, that train would go through, and be seen by, all five boroughs of the city. Through Hip Hop, they could be so loud and proud in their culture that they would no longer be able to be ignored by their city. In essence, Hip Hop gave people of the Bronx back their dignity and provided needed hope for the youth to use their power and create a new way of life. The participants in the Golden Era of Hip Hop (the years 1973-1979 before the first national commercial Hip Hop release, Rapper’s Delight by the Sugar Hill Gang), built a new subculture based on the philosophies of Peace, Love, Unity, and Having Fun. It was inter-generational, inter-racial, and inter-ethnic and became encompassed by the fifth element of Hip Hop, Knowledge.

Sharing knowledge in true Hip Hop culture is imperative. Exchanging knowledge is the only way for the culture to grow and continue. This is personified by the motto Each One Teach One, a fundamental principle woven into the fabric of Hip Hop culture. What this means is that

everyone has something of value and purpose to share with their community and that it is each person's responsibility to stand in their power and share those gifts openly for the benefit of all. Hip Hop requires participation and participation builds confidence, expands understanding, and supports livelihood. And, Each One Teach One worked. Hip Hop has since grown into a multi-billion dollar global industry with presence in almost every country in the world. It has evolved to include 10 elements, including Entrepreneurialism and Health & Wellness, and although not all of these elements are yet acknowledged or practiced by everyone in Hip Hop, it is collectively respected that Hip Hop is a social change movement built on the foundation of the original 5 elements. It continues to be a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-generational culture that is a powerhouse of influence. Hip Hop influences the way we consume art and entertainment, it influences the fashion industry, influences sports, and influences the political arena.

Hip Hop came to be on the heels of the Civil Rights and Environmental Rights movements and it could be argued that Hip Hop itself is a political movement. Why then, if Hip Hop grew as a socially just response to poverty and racism, isn't ecological sustainability a core value of Hip Hop today? I believe this comes down to a combination of miscommunication, misogyny, mainstream music industry manipulation, and the continuation of systemic racism all helping to distort the image and direction of Hip Hop in the media and the mainstream. However, the point of this research is not to justify why it is not part of main stream Hip Hop, but rather, why it should be. And to understand this intersection, we need to understand environmental justice.

Environmental Justice

Racial segregation is a major contributing factor to the creation and maintenance of environmental degradation and social inequality. Government and corporate entities seek a path

of least resistance by targeting poor and underrepresented communities that do not have the resources to fight back. This cycle of environmental inequality is referred to as environmental racism. According to Brulle and Pellow, environmental racism is “racial discrimination in environmental policy making, the enforcements of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the ecology movements” (2006, paragraph 6). Environmental racism refers to “any policy, practice or directive, that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color” (Brulle and Pellow, 2006, paragraph 6).

Conversations regarding the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation and the poor have been happening since the 1960s alongside the Civil Rights movement and the start of the modern ecological rights movement, birthing the public discourse and identity of the “environmentalist” (McGurty, 1997, p.302), and there have been studies documenting cases of environmental racism since the early 1970s. However, it was not until 1978, several years after the birth of Hip Hop, that a group of predominantly black social activists came together in Warren County, North Carolina to resist the building of a toxic waste dump and take a collective stand against racism and environmental degradation as one entity.

In 1978, Ward Transfer Company hired Robert Burns to illegally dump liquid hazardous waste alongside 240 miles of agricultural roadside throughout 13 counties in North Carolina to avoid the impacts of rising costs and regulation for hazardous waste resulting from the Toxic Control Substance Act. The U.S. EPA ordered North Carolina to clean it up, and the state ordered the building of a toxic waste dump within Warren County which was also the poorest

county in the state with the highest black population. With strong opposition by the citizens, activists turned to disruptive collective action focused on environmental racism. Their main argument was that “The community was politically and economically unempowered; that was the reason for the siting [of the toxic waste dump]. They took advantage of poor people and people of color” (McGurty, 1997, p.301-302). Although they lost and the site was built in 1982, the people of Warren County shifted contemporary activism and policy agenda to begin including within the national conversation of environmental sustainability and justice the fact that people of color had not been included in decision-making processes. Activists argued that “inequitable distribution of environmental degradation and systematic exclusion of the poor and people of color from environmental decision making is perpetuated by traditional environmental organizations (mainstream environmentalism) and by regulatory agencies” (McGurty, 1997, p.302). The national spotlight placed on this confrontation exposed environmental racism and highlighted the disparity of exposure to toxic pollution in relation to wealth and race, giving birth to the Environmental Justice movement (McGurty, 1997, p.301).

Environmental Justice is the principle that “all people and communities are entitled to equal protection of environmental and public health laws and regulations” (Brull & Pellow, 2006, p.495). The Environmental Protection Agency further elaborates on this, defining

Environmental Justice as:

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no population due to policy or economic disempowerment, is forced to bear a disproportionate share of negative human health or environmental impacts of pollution or environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies (Brull & Pellow, 2006, paragraph 5).

What environmental justice highlights is that to achieve true social justice within a society, we must also take into account how the society deals with interactions between humans and nature, and how societal constructs surrounding class and race relate to these interactions. Hip Hop culture aimed to end racism and create a public space in which people of color could safely express, be heard, and be seen for their unique gifts. Racism is a social justice issue often discussed within Hip Hop culture, music and media, as well as within the political activism of many artists such as Jay-Z, Killer Mike, and Bgirl Asia One. However, racism remains a systemic problem meaning that it is expressed through social and political institutions that are intrinsically linked to the modern global economy and therefore, linked to environmental degradation and consequently, to environmental racism. This is important because to realize the dream of Hip Hop ending social stigma, oppression, and racial segregation and violence, we have to incorporate environmental justice principles and sustainability into our teachings within this culture of Hip Hop.

Racism is a learned behavior that has many implications and creates many barriers, including barriers to employment, financial wealth, social status, and education. It can create barriers to free choice in terms of where one can live and how they are able to move throughout society. Racism has been mixed into the collective culture of our world, and in particular and for the focus of this paper, the collective culture of the United States. In the book *Difference Matters* by Brenda Allen, she mentions that race, biologically speaking, is an expression of *phenotypes* (such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features) (2011). However, many people conceptualize race as an artificial social construct based off social, political, cultural, economic, historic, and legal factors. (Allen, 2011). How we perceive race matters because it can set up a framework that can either falsely benefit or greatly diminish one's chance for success and fair

treatment in life because it effects how people view themselves, each other, and can manipulate how one is treated within a society. Ultimately, constructs of race as a negative quality manipulates society into a state of unfairness where one can be judged and persecuted because of natural variances in genetic human expressions like skin color. Racism intersects with environmental degradation in the form of environmental classism, which means that poor communities are targeted for environmental hazards (Allen, 2001), subjecting mostly low income, and often non-white communities, to a higher amount of consequences from environmental pollution.

We operate within a capitalist economy and one of the byproducts of capitalism is waste. To create anything, whether it be electricity, clothing, or modes of transportation, there is waste of some form such as air pollution, water pollution, and/or trash. One of the challenges of a consumer society is what to do with the waste. This is where power dynamics of racism and social class come into play. Social class is the ranking of groups in society according to various criteria, with higher positions afforded more value, respect, status, and privilege than lower positions (Allen, 2011). One's social class can be determined through achievement or through ascription based on conditions at birth such as family background, race, sex, or place of birth. For example, in the United States, our economy was founded and built with very strict social class "rules" such as our national policies on slavery (then followed by segregation and Jim Crow laws) and interaction with the indigenous communities of North America including the forced separation of children from their communities into Christian boarding schools run by white Americans. This inequity of power allowed affluent and mostly white people the opportunity to generate wealth further separating the distance between the social classes,

increasing the power of the wealthy to retain their political influence. And, this is all relevant in regards to how ecological degradation and pollution are distributed throughout our world.

For example, in an in-depth review of the historical timeline and connection of economics and waste material distribution in the Philadelphia region, a historically politically and economically impactful city with a large black population, points out several points that support this inequity.

Sicotte says that:

“When community is almost exclusively white and most residents are affluent, it ranks high in both racial/ethnic and social class hierarchies. White privilege, combined with economic privilege, provides such communities with the power to control conditions both within and outside their borders.” (2016, p.140).

This allows rich, and predominantly white, communities the power to ship their waste elsewhere.

Poor communities are areas that have depressed land prices. Allen articulates in his study *Social Class, Race, and Toxic Releases in American Cities* that land is cheaper in poor areas possibly because of existing industry and as a result of pollution. Additionally, wealthy and well-educated individuals want to protect against decreasing their own property value (2001). They put their resources that they disproportionately have into fighting any opposition to moving their waste to other communities. This turns social privilege into environmental privilege. Allen concludes that minorities and the poor are disproportionately affected by environmental harms, especially in the sunbelt (the states in the southern half of the U.S.). These communities are exposed to the highest levels of toxic releases (2001). Additionally, a separate study conducted in the United Kingdom showed that “Some ethnic minority adolescents are more likely than their white peers to reside in deprived neighborhoods which experience higher levels of air pollution as measured by a number of different indicators” (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013).

More research into roles of disparate exposures to environmental pollution show they are a major contributing factor in the production of health inequities (Brulle & Pellow, 2005).

Research also reveals that, in many communities, it is people of color and the poor who tend to live near environmentally hazardous facilities and who bear a larger share of the health burden from exposure to toxins. However, we must note that while there are certainly low income white communities that experience the negative consequences of classism like discrimination and pollution similarly to minority communities, this is related predominantly to issues of lack of financial resources, not lack of resources and racial prejudice combined.

Racism is a form of psychological stress. Studies have shown that repeated exposure to psychological stress may weaken the body's potential to regulate allostasis (the regular "wear and tear" a body goes through), diminish immune function, and increase sensitivity to environmental exposures like air pollution (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013, p.175). This can lead to Stress Exposure Disease (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013, p.175), of which children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable. Stress Exposure Disease is linked with interrupting two immune mediators interleukin (IL)-5 and interferon- γ , causing the body to become more susceptible to other health complications (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013, p.176). There is increasing evidence that air pollution has a harmful impact on the functional development of children, and in particular with lung development (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013). A study on the effect of air pollution and racism on ethnic differences in relation to respiratory health included racism as a marker of psychosocial stress, asking all the participants if they had been personally and negatively affected by racism, and if they felt threatened because of their race. They concluded that while there was no direct correlation between racism and lung function, they did find a positive correlation between racism and asthma (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013). In other words, it means that the risk of having asthma was significantly higher for adolescents exposed to both air pollution and racism in comparison to those who were exposed to just one (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013). Not only are minority and low-

income children already at a disadvantage from developmental struggles due to living in more toxic areas, environmental factors like air pollution may play a role in determining a difference in respiratory health into adulthood and old age (Astell-Burt, et al., 2013) due to the added stress that racism puts on the body.

Environmental classism and racism concerning the Navajo Indians and uranium mining is another example of the implications of dual exposure to racism and high pollution levels. The Navajo Indians were pushed off their own lands and forced onto reservations along with others such as the Ute, Hopi and Zuni peoples in the Four Corners area of the United States in Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona (Charley et al., 2004) because the land was considered barren by the United States government. However, in the 1940s it was discovered that there were large uranium deposits under the reservations occupied by the Navajo. Because the Navajo initially had no vocabulary to understand the nature of uranium and its risks (Charley et al., 2004), the associated businesses and officials used this against them, withholding information about the risks and pollution that could occur, moving the projects through without public scrutiny (Charley et al., 2004).

For almost two decades people worked in the industry, lacking the understanding that radiation exposure could lead to negative consequences such as cancer and emphysema, as well as prolonged radiation seepage from mines that would continue to contaminate water and the surrounding land for many decades into the future.

“Uranium mining and milling has left large areas of the Navajo reservation contaminated with abandoned mines, mine waste, and mill tailings and associated radioactive contaminants. There are well-documented problems with lung cancer and silicosis in former Navajo uranium miners, and there is great concern between uranium millers and other Navajos who reside near contaminated areas about late effects of radiation exposure from these sources” (Charley, 2000, p.1).

Additionally, because of racial and social class restrictions placed on Native Americans, they have the lowest employment rate of any racial or ethnic group in the United States according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Running Strong, 2018) and occupy the poorest communities in the country. Because there were no other jobs available to those on this reservation, the mines continued to operate for another two decades even after the truth of the negative impact had become public knowledge. This example shows how racism affects a person's available choices within a society and how environmental racism effects individuals and communities.

How does Hip Hop fit into this conversation? Hip Hop emerged as a response to structural racism and classism evident throughout American history (Malone & Martinez, 2015, p.44). And the creative drive was to overcome the poverty, violence, and sadness that resulted because of these oppressive forces. However, not uniting the environmental and social justice movements as a society, including and beyond Hip Hop, has resulted in environmental racism becoming a form of modern segregation. It must be remedied to heal a multitude of social injustice and ultimately, to heal the planet ecologically. Because of the popularity and reach that Hip Hop culture has, and it's ties to healing injustice and bringing equity to all people, it has a responsibility to teach the whole truth and inspire conscious action across the globe. As Malone and Martinez state in their book *Organic Globalizer: Hip Hop, Political Development, and Movement Culture* "We cannot simply avoid the more uncomfortable aspects of hip hop. In fact, it is through engaging directly and critically with the complexities and contradictions of hip hop that learning and transformation can take place" (2015, p.45).

Hip Hop as Activism

"Hip Hop activism (in historical context)" is the "modern face of a long line of cultural movements linked to political struggle." (Malone & Martinez, 2005, p.49). Music, theater, and

other forms of art, alongside direct action and organizing, were integral to the Civil Rights Movement. Hip Hop emerged from the minds of the youth who were brought up by the Civil Rights generation, empowered by the voice their elders had given them, and fueled by injustice still remaining. The youth being brought up within Hip Hop today need to understand the complete historical roots of Hip Hop in order to have a deeper understanding of Hip Hop's relationship to systems of power (Malone & Martinez, 2005) including environmental justice.

The roots of Hip Hop are the relationship between individual and communal expression, and the recognition that for one to thrive we all need to thrive. This is exemplified by what is known as the cypher within Hip Hop, and can easily be expanded to include teachings of our connection to the whole planet and our responsibility for it and each other. A cypher is the cyclical exchange that unites the individuals as one culture. It is the BGirl within the circle of other dancers, the beatboxer accompanying the MCs, the exchange between the DJ and the crowd, the sharing of art amongst graffiti writers and their community, and the concept of sharing knowledge to evolve the community known within the culture of Hip Hop as Each One Teach One. Armed with this knowledge and guidance into action, Hip Hop can increase its "resistance capital" (Malone & Martinez, 2005, p. 49) or its ability to push back against power domination.

Hip Hop is a container for being witnessed, seen, and valued for what you bring to the community table. However, the widely disseminated forms of commercial Hip Hop are out of balance from the origin of the culture, exhibiting more emphasis on individual talents and personal wealth and less on civic action and working together for the greater good of all. According to Malone and Martinez, Hip Hop is in need of re-connection and that we must re-imagine the culture in order to create the communities we need (2005). "Balancing Hip Hop

tendencies towards individuality, competition, and boastfulness with more value on community, collaboration, and representing for our highest good” (Malone & Martinez, 2005, p.46) is necessary in order for Hip Hop to achieve its full potential as a vehicle for social change.

However, it must be noted that this source is from 2005 and environmental racism, as a result of the combination of racism and the destruction of nature to our own detriment, are still happening.

Flint, MI still does not have clean water almost five years after the exposure of their water crisis.

Los Angeles, CA has more oil wells and refineries than any other city in the United States and almost all of them are located within low income brown and black neighborhoods. And, North American indigenous communities are still involved in fights with corporations and the government over land and water rights (A. Gore, personal communication, August 28-30, 2018).

And this is just in the United States. There are over 3,400 *documented* cases of major environmental justice conflicts currently happening throughout the world (Temper, et al., 2015), another reason that a global culture such as Hip Hop has potential to generate an impact on global issues and a collective responsibility to do so. Climate change, racism, and economic imbalance are global issues. However, to create this shift, it is crucial that we complete the circle of understanding between human action/inaction and environmental impact. In order to truly re-create our communities, we need to educate and motivate people to join the cypher that is the relationship between planetary health and individual wellness. We need to re-build the cypher with environmental justice as a key player.

Integrating Environmental Advocacy into Hip Hop – The Hip Hop Caucus

Just as Hip Hop is a culture of participation, creating timely change in response to climate change and sustainability will require participation by everyone. We must all play our part and fortunately there are others with these ideas leading the way that we can look to for inspiration

and mentorship. The Hip Hop Caucus is a national non-profit organization utilizing Hip Hop to educate and motivate people on behalf of climate change and environmental racism. Founded in 2004 by the Rev. Lennox Yearwood, the Hip Hop Caucus is an American based non-partisan organization that leverages Hip Hop Culture to encourage young people to participate in the democratic process ([www.Hip Hop Caucus.org](http://www.HipHopCaucus.org)). According to their website their vision is “A just, sustainable, and prosperous world for all.” And their mission is “Empowering communities who are impacted first and worst by injustice.” Founder Yearwood says, “We use Hip Hop to make sure our voices are heard and to strengthen our democracy” (Poteat, 2016, paragraph 7). By linking Hip Hop culture to political policy, the Hip Hop Caucus is able to grow the environmental movement, making it more diverse and therefore more powerful. They exist to hold space for everyone who identifies with Hip Hop Culture to come together for positive change and use our cultural expression to shape the political experience (Hip Hop Caucus, 2018). Or as Yearwood states, “We are facing the next greatest economic and racial injustice of our time... We are fighting for existence” (Hip Hop Caucus, 2015, p.56). And the Hip Hop Caucus is taking this fight directly to the people.

A national organization with chapters in 14 cities such as Los Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, and Baltimore, the Hip Hop Caucus works to bring their mission to as many people as possible by working through various platforms. Representatives speak at conventions, community centers, black universities and more, encouraging the community to get involved. They have also initiated several large-scale projects including helping create the Peoples’ Climate Music, a collective that brings together musicians and activists working towards environmental justice. Yearwood points out that using celebrity voices and influence to raise awareness about climate change is important because they reach large audiences, and can help

bring relevance and urgency to important issues, especially for the younger social media driven audiences (Poteat, 2016). To further their outreach efforts, the Peoples' Climate Music initiated the 'Act on Climate' national bus tour which sponsored concerts and community events aimed at inspiring climate awareness and citizen action. The tour purposefully stopped in a dozen cities where low income communities of color are disproportionately impacted by high levels of pollution and social inequality such as New York City. Their aim is to draw attention to the injustice inherent within the fossil fuel economy while simultaneously calling for a just and rapid transition to a clean energy future (Hip Hop Caucus, 2015, p.56). The Peoples' Climate Music also partners with artists like Taboo of The Black Eyed Peas (Fernández-Llamazares, 2017) and Common and Malik Yusef (Peoples' Climate Music, 2016) creating music videos for the songs *Stand Up/Stand N Rock* and *Trouble in the Water*. These partnerships utilized Hip Hop to articulate the truth and the challenges that faced the Standing Rock Reservation's campaign to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Flint, Michigan water crisis.

The Hip Hop Caucus also initiated the "Respect My Vote!" Campaign, to encourage people to engage in the political process and vote. Building off of similar platforms such as Puff Daddy's Vote or Die Campaign and Jay-Z's Voice Your Choice Campaign, the Hip Hop Caucus highlights voting as a personal responsibility to the community at large, pointing to the common adage often overheard in Hip Hop Culture "Each One Teach One". Hip Hop has always advocated for personal expression, owning your space and right to a dignified life. Voting, as seen through the Hip Hop Caucus, is another form of using your voice and personal expression.

In an interview by Poteat in the *Afro-American*, Yearwood says:

Hip Hop has always been political from its inception, and tells the story of the oppressed, that over time helped shape policy. Hip Hop and politics are critical to each other and it is important for people to understand that their vote is critical and that democracy is not a

spectator sport. You can't say anything if you don't vote (2016, paragraph 2).

Through Hip Hop, we can take this story (Each One Teach One) and share information on climate change, police reform, women's rights, etc. and apply it to the next steps of policy change. Examples of this would be including space on Hip Hop discussion panels for these topics at jams and events as well as hosting voter registration tables at all events, utilizing the entertainment value of Hip Hop to promote these issues on college campuses to help educate and motivate young voters, and holding each other accountable to speak up on these issues and continue to learn as we grow.

Another example of Hip Hop in environmental action where the Hip Hop Caucus furthers their own platform of Each One Teach One is through their podcast *Think 100%*. This weekly show hosted by Hip Hop Caucus founder Rev. Lennox Yearwood, former Director of Environmental Justice of the Environmental Protection Agency Mustafa Santiago Ali, and award-winning singer and activist Antonique Smith focuses on educating and empowering people to work towards a 100% renewable energy future in a manner that is informative, engaging, and uplifting. Through this platform, Yearwood is shedding light on the social implications of unchecked climate change.

We know that pollution is causing an increase in the rates of asthma, cancer, heart and lung disease especially in communities of color... We also know from Hurricane Katrina that it is the poor and people of color who get left behind in extreme weather disasters, which are increasing in strength and frequency because of climate change. This is why climate change can no longer be just a political issue. It is a social justice issue, and one that we can solve in our generation, if we come together to make a change! (Hip Hop Caucus, 2015, paragraph 3).

Integrating Environmental Advocacy into Hip Hop – DJ Cavem

While the Hip Hop Caucus lends to a positive and effective example of what an organization can do in terms of utilizing Hip Hop to motivate action in relation to the

environment and well-being, it by no means takes an entire organization to make effective change. Change can certainly come from the individual. Making a personal change is the ethos of another Hip Hop activist (artist x activist) who has championed earth advocacy and community involvement through the practice and education of personal lifestyle choices. DJ Cavem Motivation (or DJ Cavem - Communicating Awareness Victoriously Educating the Masses) is the moniker of Ietef Vita, an MC, BBoy, Educator, Organic Gardener, midwife, yogi, and founder of Eco Hip Hop who is a Music Educator Award Grammy nominee, and has been featured by Oprah, Rachel Ray, and the Obama's. Cavem grew up in a food desert in Denver, Colorado known as Five Points, which was also near a coal-fired power plant. A food desert is an area that does not have access to fresh food. He saw how this affected the people he loved, including high instances of cancer, heart disease, and Type II diabetes. As an adult, he saw how poor food choices were contributing to the deaths of his Hip Hop idols, such as Phife Dog, one of the founding members of A Tribe Called Quest, who died from complications of Type II diabetes (Cavem & Earth, 2015). He knew that influence had power, and he began to question the influences in our society that lead us to disease and ill health and what can be done to shift the influence towards a healthier life for all.

From Cavem's perspective, social patterns of inequity and the pathways to remedy them are all about marketing. "As the commercialization of hip hop progressed into a multi-billion dollar industry, corporations began partnering with hip hop to use it as a platform to market destructive ideas, imagery and, more importantly, bringing unhealthy food to consumers." (Whitfield, 2016, paragraph 11). He feels that people "suffer from marketing" (Cavem & Earth, 2015). Not only are people marketed things that negatively affect their health, but the foundation of Hip Hop culture, which was a positive movement to promote unity and intelligence, has been

since marketed as a ‘thug culture’ often depicting violence, drugs, and the derogatory treatment of women. Cavem’s creation and focus on Eco Hip Hop stands to eradicate both of these while simultaneously uplifting impoverished black communities. Or as he puts it, he wants to shift the street slogan “Thug Life” to “Kale Life” (Whitfield, 2016, paragraph 23).

Cavem refers to himself as an “OG”, which in the world of Hip Hop is commonly known as standing for an “Original Gangster”. However, in Cavem’s approach, it means an “Organic Gardener”. OGs, in relation to the street culture of Hip Hop, are often Original Gangsters of a particular neighborhood. In other words, they run the street culture of that area. Cavem’s play on the term is his way of saying “You’re down for the Hood? Then put seeds down. Grow health and wealth. Have love for each other, have love for the land.” (Cavem & Earth, 2015). He feels that because many food deserts are in impoverished and largely black and brown communities, teaching about gardening and healthy eating are powerful ways to uplift the community, and a way that people can take power back from the systemic impacts of racism that have placed challenges to food access. But, of course, there are challenges to shifting behaviors.

In the 2015 Tedx talk *Marketing Environmental Hip Hop and Culinary Wellness* presented by Cavem and his wife Alkemia Earth, they speak about the manipulation of marketing and how people, especially the youth, are ill-advised and negatively influenced by marketing. He says that 30% of commercials directed towards children are for cereals, 12% for fast food, 40% for candy and snacks, and the other 18% is a mix of beverages, food, and ‘other’ (Cavem & Earth, 2015). If people are influenced by marketing, why not market health and wellness? Why not educate people about healthy eating and how it improves your overall health?

Cavem and his wife Alkemia’s mission lies in promoting health through the influence of Hip Hop culture in order to make healthy lifestyles ‘cool’. As Alkemia says, “To change the way

you eat, you got to change the way you think.” (Cavem & Earth, 2015). However, to change thinking and behavior patterns more knowledge and education are required, so the pair use the elements of Hip Hop culture to educate others. They created the organization *Going Green, Living Bling*, which focuses on bringing environmental curriculum into schools and communities groups and hosts Eco Hip Hop summer camps to children. And through his music with tracks like “Wheatgrass” and “I Can’t Breathe the Air” and the mini-documentary “From Gangs to Gardens” Cavem uses education to bring ideas of culinary wellness, urban gardening, yoga, permaculture, and holistic health back into the education system and urban communities with a personal focus on improving the lives of African Americans.

It’s gotten to the point that the practice of (environmental) sustainability is associated almost exclusively with white people...Many times in our beautiful black community we don’t stretch ourselves enough – figuratively and literally. That’s why I talk about wellness on a large scale; we’re surrounded by liquor stores and processed foods and, as a result, we have all of these health issues like diabetes, hypertension and issues with our joints...A lot of our original ancestral heritage toward healthy living and eating is lost...I’m trying to get the black community back into those things. I also want us, as a community, to get more involved in the development of green jobs because that’s the future...The time has come where communities of color should look to embrace ideas of sustainable holistic health for the mind and body and not shun it because of cultural differences (Whitfield, 2016, paragraphs 14, 16, 20-21).

Cavem believes that there is a place for Hip Hop to have a role in the positive change that is needed in our communities, especially in communities of color.

Hip Hop is incredibly popular, especially with the youth. And, it [Hip Hop] started as a platform of empowerment for positive change. If we show kids that, teaching them the true values of hip hop, they will want to be a part of it (Cavem & Earth, 2015). This is how we can influence wellness into the future.

Hip Hop Activism

Environmental and social activism may not be front running characteristics of main stream Hip Hop yet, but fortunately, there are many more “underground” examples that we all can look to and learn from in our collective effort to utilize the power and influence of Hip Hop for positive social and environmental change. The Rock Steady Crew, one of the original Breaking crews, throws a “party with a purpose” in Puerto Rico every summer called Puerto Rock Steady Festival that combines a dance and music festival with volunteer opportunities in ecological restoration and community service with on the ground organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and Waves for Water. Internationally famous graffiti artist Banksy uses their art to create commentary on social ills like war, poverty, and environmental degradation. In Denver, Colorado, the Queenz of Hip Hop, an all women Hip Hop crew, teaches throughout the community using Hip Hop culture to speak about personal empowerment, racial equality, and to promote personal responsibility and civic participation on topics such as voting and incarceration inequities. Hip Hop is Green is a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching healthy eating within the Hip Hop community. Native American Hip Hop artists like Artson, Supa Man, and Tribe Called Red are rising in popularity, blending the culture, traditions, and true history of North American Indigenous Peoples with the political messaging of Hip Hop music. And artists such as Killer Mike, Malik Yusef (formerly known as Mos Def), Nipsey Hustle, StickMan (from Dead Presidents), Supa Nova Slom all work(ed) tirelessly to promote political progression, ecological awareness, health, wellness, and social justice as part of their art forms, businesses, and personal missions. And, there are more. This is not a new idea, but it is one worth diving deeper into in order to integrate it into the fabric of our culture for the benefit of all and moving this influence into the mainstream.

Conclusion

Hip Hop is based on unity. It is a coming together of all races and social classes for a unified form of connection and healthy self-expression. It is a form of racial communication and healing that is helping heal the world community. Art and expression has long been a part of the human condition, but it is morphed by every person's contribution. For a young culture such as Hip Hop, it is imperative that we continually evaluate our influence. We need to understand the roots of how the culture came to be, and continue to put effort forth into ensuring that those conditions no longer remain. Shifting towards sustainable industry and clean energy may not solve racism immediately on the individual level, but it could set the change in motion to begin to eradicate racism on the institutional level, which could ultimately lead us to a more just society. And this is where our work lies. We must continue to work towards evolving our culture in the best way possible, for the best future possible. Hip Hop only exists because of individual participation within the collective. The culture thrives when we all thrive. And for us to thrive into infinity, for our culture to reach its potential, we must teach each other and the coming generations accurately and well.

Knowledge of the origins of Hip Hop and of current world affairs in terms of how they relate to the catalysts of Hip Hop's origin are core principles of true Hip Hop Culture. As Williams states in *Historicizing the Break Beat* (2011, p.166), "Knowledge of Hip Hop's origins keeps the field [of Hip Hop culture] defined in an act of both celebration and self-preservation." In other words, Hip Hop's authenticity is found in its origin. To represent Hip Hop authentically and to preserve the culture for the future, we must understand why Hip Hop came to be and continue to work towards the vision it held of peace, unity, and respect for all. Its origin was that it was a unifying of forces in an effort to eliminate racism, poverty, and violence and create a

better world. And, this work is not yet finished. Our elders put in a lot of effort into demanding a seat at the table, and it is our responsibility to sit down at the table and speak up. To speak up for the planet, each other, and ourselves. If Hip Hop is a form of social justice, and social justice requires environmental justice, then Hip Hop is environmental justice. If a person claims to be a part of Hip Hop, then by definition, they must stand up against environmental racism, and stand for environmental justice and our planet. It is our responsibility to incorporate teachings of civic action and environmental stewardship at events, shows, jams, educational presentations, and at times, within the music itself. Tabling with information of ways to get involved at the local and larger levels, voting registration drives, composting and recycling stations at events, round table talks, linking this connection within the cultural teachings offered during Hip Hop related art/dance/music classes, and more are just some concrete examples of how to implement these shifts within the mindset of the participants of Hip Hop.

The reality is that pollution and environmental degradation are effecting all of us, every living thing on this planet, regardless of what you can directly see from your own front yard. This will continue to compound, and continue to impact the most vulnerable, unless we correct course and prioritize environmental integrity. It is up to each of us to adapt to the times and participate for the greater good of all. This will require a behavior shift personally, socially, and systemically, which, in time, could change the collective wisdom of our society. Shifting our collective wisdom towards equality and sustainable living opens up opportunity for everyone's potential to be reached. And, when everyone's potential is able to be fully activated, then the true goal of Hip Hop will be realized.

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