

Subculture of hip hop: a sociological analysis



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It all started with the birth of a nation. The shameful crimes that build this country rest on the backs of an enslaved people, yesterday in chains and with laws and today behind bars and within socialization. The tale is as old as our time. The first slaves were brought to the Virginia Colony in the early 1600s.

they were simply indentured servant whom would be released after working an agreed number of years. They came to America on a voluntary basis. Soon after, that model of slavery was replaced with the race-based slavery used in the Caribbean. Slavery was officially legalized in 1641 and gradually progressed to the brutal form that we know today. The undermining and oppression of those African people were sealed in 1712 when William Lynch, a plantation owner from the British West Indies, was asked to come to the Virginia Colony to give basically a seminar on how to manage slaves. His method, in my opinion was the catalyst that started the psychological oppression that still plagues the African American psyche today.

In his speech he compared Blacks directly to horses saying, " Both horse and niggers is no good to the economy in the wilder or natural state. Both must be broken and tied together for orderly production. " (Lynch 1712). he thought that the most important factor to managing a slave was breaking his mind, or their will to resist. In the speech he gave he laid out three major points that were mandatory.

1. breaking the mother
2. emasculating the man in front of the woman and offspring
3. removing men from family after offspring were born

The breaking of the woman was the most important as it lead to perpetuation of

the slave mentality through offspring which ensured survival of the mentality with no more work done on the part of the slave owner. After breaking the dependency of the woman from the man it caused her to do for the master and not for herself. In emasculating and removing the male from the household, which also reinforced the independency of the mother and fear in the woman, it caused the mother to in turn teach those roles to her children.

She taught the female child to be independent and to live for the master and in fear for her male offspring's life taught him the "rules" which made him psychologically dependent, but continued to keep them physically strong. He even took into consideration that the slaves might eventually correct this way of thinking. His solution was to crossbreed Whites with the slave women. By mixing and creating different shades of people this created different levels of labor. Each level of labor had different values which created separation and caused tension among them. Lynch promised that his method would keep Blacks enslaved for at least 300 years.

2011 is the 299th year mark from the day of his speech and his theory is still going strong. His ideas are constantly reconstructed and perpetuated by the ones whom it affects the most. To be stripped of your humanity and turned into property. How does one cope when they come into the "freedom" we have today? It is through creation of your own world, one where you can escape to, where you are in control. That is how the Hip-Hop subculture was born.

The definition of subculture that I will use for my research is: a subdivision of a natural culture, composed of a combination of factorable social situations

such as class status, ethnic background, regional and rural or urban residence, and religious affiliation, but forming in their combination a functional unity which as an intergrated impact on the participating individual (Gordon, 1947: 40)The subculture that I will be analyzing is the Hip-Hop subculture. Hip-Hop emerged in the 1970s in the Bronx area of New York. Keith Wiggins a member of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five has been credited with coining the term “ Hip Hop” in the late 70’s but it is more recognized to have been started by DJ Afrika Bambaataa. Bambaataa is credited with really starting the movement and establishing it has a legit music genre.

He outlined four main pillars of hip hop culture and they include MCing, DJing, break dancing and graffiti writing. Beatboxing is also included as a sub element of DJing. Hip-Hop as a subculture was established by Black Americans, the youth in particular because of their marginalization. Mainstream music was made mostly by White Americans for White Americans on topics they could relate to. Even though Hip-Hop started off as just a beat it transformed into something so much more.

Jamaica born DJ Clive “ Kool Herc” Campbell, one of the most influential in pioneering the art of hip hop music, brought over many Jamaican traditions including their tradition of toasting, which laid the blueprint for the actual rapping on instrumentals. Toasting is impromptu, boastful poetry and speech over music. Hip Hop music became one of the primary constructive outlets for Black Americans to release their thoughts, pain, and anguish about the injustices and mistreatments of Black people. Even though most of the

pioneers in Hip-Hop either were not born in America or are 2nd generation immigrants that proves that common oppression can lead to unity.

The fact that that these individuals were impoverished and felt marginalized is what brought them together and lead to the culture today. Deep rooted racism in the United States kept the genre of music suppressed for a while before it was allowed to even be played on the airwaves. Now, in 2011, the main consumers of byproducts of hip hop are White Americans. Durkheimian Analysis The continuous marginalization of African Americans has left them in a state of anomie, not being able to totally meet the social goals and norms of white America has caused strain and dysfunctionality which eventually lead to a feeling of alienation. The members of this anomic class, having similar reasons for alienation, have been brought together and cohesion has formed which strikingly resembles mechanical solidarity.

Mechanical solidarity is a social bond based on resemblance. It is the common oppression that creates the collective consciousness that maintains this bond. "Blackness" is the token that is deified. Characteristics of that "Blackness" are marginalization, poverty, and oppression.

These are the most prevailing themes in the "society" that is created. Not surprisingly, these are also the main themes in Hip-Hop music. The collective conscious of this group is translated through symbolic communication such as slang and beat making and translates to the collective behavior which is the Hip-Hop culture. A subculture such as this one is a response to the gap that has been created between the involuntary or mainstream ideology and

the group that one has chosen. These subcultures are a necessity to restore control back to the main society.

We see evidence of this in the adoption of Hip-Hop into the mainstream culture which has lessened its marginality and brought African Americans into the control of White America once again. This shows very much in the content of the music that is made today versus when Hip-Hop was still underground. Weberian Critique The Hip-Hop subculture is not a response to an oppressive authority but a communal relationship created by a subjective feeling that as a common people they belong together. Ethnicity, a shared language, or symbols is not themselves sufficient enough to cause a bond so strong as to create a sub group. This type of bond is less of a relationship and more of a membership that is based on surface characteristics, such as clothing, bad attitudes, and taste in music, in this case.

Individuals apart of this culture have not been forced into a group but opted into this group as a consequence of conformity or to feel cool. This subculture can be seen as a response to charismatic authority. Emcees and DJs, because of their skill, high esteem in the community, and superficial wealth, are seen as figures to idolize. These individuals were therefore followed into the creation of this subculture. These two analyses of the Hip-Hop culture has lead us me to insights as to why the subculture was created, has been maintained, and is so readily adopted by the mainstream today. Something that started off just as something fun to keep young African Americans out of trouble evolved into its own society.

This society even though it started as a counterculture has found its way into the mainstream. The music that has resulted, once banned from airwaves, now is used more than not in all facets of advertisement, at sporting events, and tops billboards continuously. This shows that the oppression placed on this group and the positivity that resulted from it changed the world as we know it.