

From Black Power Toward Rap's Power: The Influence of Garveyism on the Hip-Hop Nation.

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It has been said that hip-hop is one of the most powerful mediums on the face of the planet. The music, the performers and the culture are highly visible in popular culture throughout the world. Hip-Hop has gone through many transitions and has adapted to the various forces that have influenced it over the course of its thirty year history. With hip-hop's commercialization and commodification, the culture has grown estranged from its roots of creativity and cultural unification in exchange for the significant revenues generated by more detrimental themes; for example, themes like violence and misogyny.

The music that once claimed a significant portion of the airwaves with groups like Public Enemy, X-CLAN, Boogie Down Productions (KRS-ONE), among others, has long since been replaced with the presence of 50 Cent, The Dip Set and Young Jeezy. The latter, with assistance and guidance from the record industry and its cohorts, use the power of the art form to collect as much money for their individualistic goals as possible, while leaving hip-hop culture and many of its participants decimated in their wake. As a result, hip-hop music that promotes community empowerment and unity finds no room in the marketplace. In similar fashion, the ideologies and philosophies that inform community based hip-hop, are rejected by white supremacist power structures.

African Ancestors like Marcus Garvey, served as a beacon of leadership for Black people in the struggle for liberation. Though it may not seem clear in a contemporary context, the ideas proclaimed by leaders like Garvey had a profound impact on the hip-hop nation through those who adopted his legacy. At one time, his Black-nationalist and Pan-African ideologies were a very prevalent part of hip-hop music and culture. Moreover, Garvey was strong advocate for the use of art in propagating his ideas and unifying his people.

His work begat a stream of black leadership that included the Moorish Science Temple, The Nation of Islam (NOI), the Black Power Movement and Five Percent Nation, in addition to a principled art aesthetic that informed the Black Arts Movement (BAM). With roots in Garveyism, all of the subsequent branches lead to a dynamic influence on hip-hop culture. As is evidenced and documented among many of the aforementioned entities, much of their progress was undermined by the threat they posed to the dominant, capitalist white power structure. Some have intimated that hip-hop music created in the same vein has been undermined for the very same reasons. A valid exploration of these issues is necessary to draw a valid conclusion.

Garveyism

Marcus Garvey inherited, enhanced and imparted the legacy of the Black Nationalist and Pan-African movements in ways that influence various contemporary cultures of the African Diaspora. A very strong lineage that substantiates these connections can be traced through the most notable stages of these movements in the Twentieth Century. Absorbing the “Back to Africa” philosophies of Martin R. Delaney and the self-reliant beliefs of Booker T. Washington, among others, Garvey became a very powerful force in the resurrection of the cultural capital and integrity of Africans across the globe in the early part of the Twentieth Century. He was very passionate about the need for African descendants everywhere to embody Black Nationalist ideals, build institutions of self-reliance, and eventually repatriate to their African homeland.

As Theodore Vincent describes in his Black Power and the Garvey Movement, “Garveyite politics was complex and diverse...the ultimate goal was the liberation of black nationals in every country in the world. The difference between the United Negro

Improvement Association (UNIA) and other movements of this country,” wrote Garvey, “...is that the UNIA seeks independence of government, the other organizations seek to make the Negro secondary part of existing governments (104).” Garvey’s primary opponents, which came in the form of W.E.B. Dubois and the NAACP, were not only funded by white interests, but also proposed that the Black people should struggle to be properly integrated into white society. According to Garvey, Black liberation had to be focused within the Black race. In Race First, a comprehensive work on Garvey’s ideologies, Tony Martin expounds upon this conflict and philosophy:

Marcus Garvey, unlike his major rivals in the United States, built a mass organization that went beyond mere civil-rights agitation and protest and based itself upon a definite, well-thought out program that he believed would lead to the total emancipation of the race from white domination. Central to the ideological basis underpinning Garvey’s program was the question of race. For Garvey, the black man was universally oppressed on racial grounds, and any program of emancipation would have to be built around the question of race first. The race became a “political entity” which would have to be redeemed. (23)

Garvey was successful at promoting his ideas to African people all over the world and ignited a movement that seemed headed toward the end he proclaimed; however, his opponents along with the forces of American and European interests moved to undermine the Garveyism movement in exchange for a more integrationist, white power-structure friendly, social evolution. Though his ultimate vision has yet to be fully realized and his movement was stifled by various opposing forces, Garvey’s efforts toward mass organization and mobilization remain unmatched by those with similar motives. Some scholars argue that his use of art as propaganda was an ingenious strategy that aided his achievement of that distinction.

Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) reached into every part of the world where Black people lived, propelling this movement in dynamic fashion. Garvey, a strong advocate of nationhood and cultural propaganda, employed several means of disseminating his message to his followers. In Race First, Tony Martin delves into this critical aspect of Garvey's movement:

“We are not afraid of propaganda,” he declared, for we use the term in the sense of disseminating our ideas among Negroes all the world over. “We have nothing stealthy in this meaning.” As far as Garvey was concerned, everything—education, religion, history, the news media—was enlisted by the dominant race in the furtherance of propaganda designed to perpetuate its continuance of power. The time had come, therefore, for the black man...to make his own propaganda available (90).

One of the most influential means was his use of potent art forms to capture the imagination of his people and ignite the discourse toward social and political action. An expansive body of knowledge exists which speaks to the historical significance of art among African cultures, especially in the case of poetry, music and cultural maintenance. Understanding functional art as core component of African cultures, Garvey utilized the arts as a valuable tool to reach his people. Martin asserts:

Garvey's race-first doctrine found excellent expression in his acute awareness of the role of culture as a tool for liberation. He himself was a prolific poet of liberation. Indeed, his poems are as good a source of his ideology as any. They were replete with such themes as the beauty of the black woman, the need for self-reliance, the glories of African history, the necessity for an end to black participation in white wars, and protests of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (24).

Moreover, it was no secret to those of Garvey's time that he did not consider himself a “poet laureate” by any stretch of the imagination. Many of his followers loved his pieces and committed favorites to memory. Put simply, he harnessed a powerful tool and used its reach to successfully propagate his

philosophies. In a lesser-known collection of Garvey's poetry, The Poetical Works of Marcus Garvey, Tony Martin brings light to this. He writes:

To say that Garvey's poetry was without significant literary merit is not to say anything of which Garvey himself was unaware. From a purely literary standpoint, he inspired better poetry than he himself produced. He even expressed doubt as to whether his poetry efforts actually measured up to real poetry. Even so, however, he could still justify the attempt, for he saw his verse as an important supplementary vehicle for propagating his ideas. And these are the ideas upon which the world's greatest Pan-African movement was built (vii).

Garvey was very clear about the role that art was to play in this movement.

Though he was a prolific writer, he sought first to define an aesthetic that defined the terms of expression for African people (this aesthetic would reemerge during the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's and will be fully addressed later in this discussion). For Garvey, the international political climate and conditions of his people clearly dictated the use of art.

In Literary Garveyism, an intense look at the use of literature to catalyze mass movement, Tony Martin explicitly discusses this issue. He writes, "However great his interest in art, Garvey was still a political figure. And art, for him, had to serve the cause of freedom, justice and equality. His view of the place of art in his people's struggle was a succinct statement of what, in the 1960's, came to be known as the 'Black aesthetic.'" His understanding and subsequent organization of these ideas onto an internationally circulated publication, *The Negro World*, was arguably the source of his greatest impact; one that has yet to be rivaled. In Literary Garveyism, Martin eludes to this fact:

There exists no greater demonstration of the massive interest in poetry of which Black Communities are capable, than that to be found within the pages of the *Negro World*. The Black Arts Movement of the 1960's certainly rivals the poetic interest of the Garvey heyday. But in one crucial area at least, the Garvey era clearly outdistanced the 1960s. For the

poetical outpourings of the Negro World were thoroughly international, to a degree unmatched by the Black Arts Movement (43).

Even with decline of the UNIA and his subsequent deportation, Garvey achieved immortality in the annals of revolutionary thought and action. His use of “art propaganda”, among other means, as a galvanizing force to foster Black liberation allowed him to achieve an influence that birthed many ideological offspring that would continue to forge a path toward the hip-hop nation.

Garvey’s Legacy

A litany of Garvey’s philosophical progeny grew into the void left by his incomplete mission. Countless African descendants in the United States and abroad had adopted Garvey’s red, black and green banner of nationhood. In his absence, his followers yearned for the continuation of the struggle that consumed many of their lives. It was not long before groups steeped in similar ideologies emerged to attempt to quench the thirst of this population. Some scholars contend that among the first groups to assume this role were the Moorish Science Temple under the leadership of the Noble Drew Ali and the Nation of Islam. Though similar in creed and tenets, the Moorish Science temple is given credit as Garvey’s most direct descendant. In Five Percenter Rap, a well developed analysis of the Five Percent Nation’s impact on the hip-hop culture, Felica M. Miyakawa supports this historical view. She writes:

“... the creeds of the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam do have tenets in common, but these are better explained by reference to an exchange of ideas and the common roots of in the black nationalist tradition, specifically the legacy of Marcus Garvey. Indeed many of Noble Drew Ali “converts” had been followers of Marcus Garvey, the charismatic black nationalist leader of the early 1920’s who preached a back to Africa message and purchased a shipping line to transport African Americans to their “homeland.” Marcus Garvey’s followers found in Noble Drew Ali’s teachings a common core of black-nationalism. Images

of a glorious past and future for blacks, racial solidarity, and separatism infused the rhetoric of both leaders. Noble Drew Ali himself was highly influenced by Garvey and in fact refers to Garvey as his forerunner...: *In the modern days there came a forerunner, who was divinely prepared by great God-Allah and his name is Marcus Garvey, who did teach and warn the nations of the earth to prepare to meet the coming Prophet.* Noble Drew Ali considered himself the heir to Garvey's black-nationalist mantle (11)."

In attempting to carry on where Garvey left off, Noble Drew Ali failed miserably and his "movement" was not only short-lived, but it quickly spawned the rise of organizations teaming to fill the hefty void left by Garvey and the UNIA. Following the death of Noble Drew Ali, a new organization surfaced that would become the powerhouse of Black-nationalist thought and action: the Nation of Islam. Miyakawa writes, "Noble Drew Ali died under rather mysterious circumstances...[His congregation] quickly divided into multiple factions, including one led by Sheik Timothy Givens El and another led by Wali D. Farad. The latter became the Temple of Islam, soon to be known as the Nation of Islam (12)." It is here in the Nation of Islam that the true spirit of Garveyism operates to a degree. There are very definite links that help carry us forward in our discussion. In [The Nation of Islam](#), a basic, critical analysis of the history and impact of the Nation, Martha F. Lee gives a very clear view of this relationship. She offers:

The Universal Negro Improvement Association originated in 1916 and was perhaps the most popular "back to Africa" movement in American history. The Garveyites, as they were known, invested their money and energy into amassing a large commercial empire, the goal of which was to see Africa become the homeland of all Blacks. Like the Nation of Islam (which later developed from it), the UNIA stressed Black independence through self-sufficiency. Indeed Marcus Garvey himself originated the phrase "Up you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will," a rallying cry frequently used by the Muslim's Messenger Elijah

Muhammad. The movement progressed...but began to lose momentum...when Marcus Garvey was exiled in 1927. The waning of [this group] left a void in black religious and political life at precisely the time such a channel was needed most. The void was filled by the Nation of Islam (29-30).

The condition of Blacks in America in the late twenties and early thirties were very ripe for another regime. The seemingly flimsy leadership of Noble Drew could not fill the immense footprint of Marcus Garvey. The level of pride in community and culture left in Garvey's wake, coupled with the worsening socio-economic and political position of Blacks called for a more robust approach. Though he did not live to see its fruition, Wallace D. Fard's vision kept the fire burning. C. Eric Lincoln provides a valuable analysis in The Black

Muslims in America:

The failure of the... Garveyite movement left in the lower class and constrained silence, a vacuum of extremist protest against racial indignities that were soon to be aggravated by the tensions of the Depression. Either America had to come up to its senses quickly and live up to its democratic ideals or a new Black nationalist movement would move in to fill that vacuum. It was just at this time, in the summer of 1930, that Wallace D. Fard appeared in Detroit. Many of those who first came under his spell had been followers of Garvey or Noble Drew Ali. Fard was not alone, of course, in seeking to win the masses already to black nationalism, especially those who had flocked to the black, green and crimson banner of the UNIA (62).

It is true Fard was not alone in seeking the favor of the masses, but his efforts were the most successful of the period. Interestingly enough, he shared the fate of his mentor Noble Drew Ali and vanished under very mysterious circumstances; however, prior to his disappearance, he passed his blessing of leadership to Elijah Muhammad, the man who would steer the direction of the Nation for the next forty years: "The Nation of Islam teaches that Fard summoned his followers shortly before his mysterious

disappearance in 1934 to tell them, “you don’t need me anymore, hear Elijah,” thus anointing (the honorable) Elijah Muhammad as his successor (Miyakawa,14).

Echoes of Garvey were consistently heard in the rhetoric of Elijah Muhammad. With a cursory glance at speeches and writings it would seem that Muhammad had Garvey’s blessing to continue the Black-nationalist legacy. The similarities were akin to proselytizing, or Muhammad channeling various elements of Garvey’s leadership in his methods. Lincoln offers:

Above all, self-reliance and a sense of mutual responsibility are the hallmarks of Muslim morality. Muhammad urges his people to: Put your brains to thinking for self; your feet to walking in the direction of self; your hands to working for self and your children...Stop begging for what others have and help yourself to some of this good earth...We must go for our selves...This calls for unity of us all to accomplish it! (79).

Lee further substantiates these very strong links in two pertinent passages in her work. In a discussion about Muhammad’s view and the overarching belief system of the Nation,

Lee reports:

...Blacks had to come to a knowledge of self. That is, they had to become aware of their history and destiny. Elijah Muhammad referred to this process as the “Resurrection” of Black Americans. His mission would bring about a new life for his people. Once Blacks were aware that originally they had the most civilized and perfect society in the world, the possibility of its recurrence would not seem unreasonable. This new version of history filled a large void in the history the Black race, and gave individuals a sense of pride where before there only existed dishonor (42).

For all intents and purposes, this could be a page directly out of the book of Garveyism. She continues with this discussion marking the correlations, while simultaneously denoting inherent differences in the folds of her comments:

Closely tied to the Muslims’ emphasis on knowledge of self and separation of the races was Elijah Muhammad’s encouragement of Black self-sufficiency in the

economic sphere...Elijah Muhammad offered the following “blueprint”:
“(1)Recognize the necessity for unity and group operation (activities). (2) Pool your resources, physically as well as financially...” While not specifically part of their religious doctrine, economic self-sufficiency was implicitly tied to Muslims’ religious faith (44).

The most obvious difference in ideology and philosophy between Elijah Muhammad and Garvey came in the form of religious doctrine. The Nation used an unorthodox, customized strain of Islam for the ritual and practice of its followers. For the Nation, religion as well as race formed the launch pad of the movement. For Garvey, race and cultural pride comprised the end all be all. Lincoln gives us more insight into the correlations and inherent differences. He asserts, “For Garvey was convinced, as is Elijah Muhammad, that blacks can hope for neither peace nor dignity while they live in and are dependant on white society. Like Muhammad, he saw only one solution: the establishment of a separate nation “so strong as to strike fear” into the hearts of the oppressor white race (56-7).” The separate nation Garvey envisioned was to be formed by the repatriation of African descendants to their proverbial homeland. In addition as aforementioned, the Garvey movement had a strong international focus. This can probably be attributed to his Jamaican roots and global encounters with African people. To the contrary, Muhammad remained focused on the plight of African descendants in America and pushed for a separate nation-state within the borders of the United States. It was not until the rise and infamous split of the Nation’s shining star, Malcolm X that black-nationalist movement in the US would move beyond domestic borders.

By the middle of the Twentieth Century, The Nation of Islam was beginning to reach great national prominence. Elijah Muhammad turned to his growing membership for ministers to lead installations in major cities across the country. Malcolm X was

among his appointees. Miyakawa writes, “[Elijah Muhammad’s] congregation grew rapidly throughout the 1950’s prompting the construction of more temples and the appointment of ministers—such as Minister Malcolm X—to run them under Elijah Muhammad’s guidance (14).” Brother Malcolm, as he is endearingly called, became a powerful, supreme force in building the Nation to its strongest point. He became its mouthpiece and the voice that influenced the Black-nationalist and Black power movements throughout the 1960’s. His presence, power and influence have not been matched by any proponents of Black-nationalist or Pan-African thought to date. Moreover, aside from his allegiance to the Nation of Islam, Malcolm had his own very direct links to the Garvey.

The Black Arts Movement, Garvey and The Nation of Islam

The Civil Rights Movement that was firmly in place at the time of Malcolm’s ascent prided itself in the integrationist philosophies Frederick Douglass and W.E. B. Dubois. As is commonly known, Martin Luther King and Roy Wilkins were among the movement’s leadership and are seen as the ideological opponents of Black-nationalism. The inevitable dichotomy created by the proponents of civil rights is described by a term coined by W.E. B. Dubois: “double-consciousness.” This term refers to, as DuBois reflected in Souls of Black Folk, “this sense of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” and fighting for liberation with the limits set by the oppressor. It was the anti-thesis of Garvey and Malcolm. Malcolm embraced Garvey’s mantle and led the charge for a separate Black nation. In Visions of a Liberated Future, Larry Neale, a prominent scholar on the Black Arts Movement, assists in placing Malcolm in context:

Malcolm X whose father had been a Garveyite, was destined to confront the double-consciousness of black America. But his confrontation would

be a modern one, rooted in the teachings of the Nation of Islam and the realities of contemporary politics. That is to say, his ideas would be a synthesis of black nationalism's essential truths as derived from Martin Delaney, ... Garvey, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Fanon and Richard Wright... He was the conscious of black America, setting out, like a warrior, to destroy the double consciousness (13).

For Malcolm the struggle had to be about self-definition, self-determination and self-reliance on terms set by black people. Black Power is the term coined to describe this proactive struggle. He heavily informed the political positions of the Black Panthers and other prominent Black-nationalist leaders of the time ushering in the dawn of calls for Black Power. Of course, this stance was not reserved for political leadership and became a potent force in the black artist's community, hence giving rise to the Black Arts Movement (BAM). Just as Garvey's political mantle came to adorn Brother Malcolm, so too did his philosophy of a black art aesthetic come to shape that of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's. This was yet another cultural evolution that served to sculpt significant aspects of the hip hop-nation.

The 1920's marked a period of great transitions for large segments of African descendents in America. Blacks journeyed north in record numbers to escape the ghosts of southern plantations and take advantage of the booming job opportunities in northern industries. Simultaneously, in Harlem, a renaissance bloomed of black intellectuals and artists of all genres. It occurred at a time when black people were still enduring the wrath of Jim Crow and countless denials of human rights (some scholars would posit that it has never ended). Interestingly enough, the Harlem Renaissance reached its height during Garvey's rise as a primary leader of the Pan-African world, but did not receive his endorsement. This is quite ironic given Garvey's strong affinity for the use of art as a tool for African liberation. It was certainly a result of the alliances of many of the

associated artists and their intended audience. As Martin illuminates in Literary Garveyism, “For it was widely believed, and not without justification, that the Harlem Renaissance was more an elite and less grassroots affair. Furthermore, the leading lights of the 1920’s had often relied overwhelmingly on white patronage and largely on a white audience (1).

Neal writes, “The so-called Harlem Renaissance was for the most part, a fantasy-era for most black writers and their white friends. For the people of the community, it never even existed. It was a thing a part (15).” This reality is parallel to the opposing views of civil rights leaders and proponents of Black Power. It was not until the period of the BAM that Black-nationalist sentiments took center stage among many leading personalities of the Black arts community. In continuing his discussion about the Harlem Renaissance in context of Garvey, Martin offers, “The major figures of the Black Arts Movement, however, were inclined to espouse Black-nationalism and tried harder to mobilize the resources of their own community. It was during the period of the Black Arts Movement that the Black world rediscovered Marcus Garvey in a big way (1).” As much as Garvey’s political ideals were rediscovered, so too was his understanding of the importance of developing, maintaining and using a Black arts aesthetic to raise the consciousness of Black people toward changing their condition. Martin proposes all of these connections:

He had never really been forgotten, but during the 1960’s and 70’s he again became an object of mass interest which threatened to rival with intensity his heyday of the 1920’s. Such was inevitable, for in Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the generation of the 1960’s found a fitting precursor to its own actions. Garvey, too, had tried to mobilize the Black World’s resources in its own behalf. Garvey, too, had preached race pride, community control, self-reliance and in a word, Black nationalism. And Garvey had done so with unparalleled success.

The Black Arts Movement, therefore, looked to Garvey for political inspiration. What it mostly did not know, was that Garvey could have also provided literary inspiration. For Garvey, too, half a century earlier, had demonstrated the fact which so surprised the commentators of the 1960's- the fact that the black masses can be moved to an appreciation for literature and the arts on a scale not often equaled in other communities (2).

The rebirth of the Garvey art aesthetic during the BAM was very matter of fact and explicit in its implementation. It was the perfect apparatus of expression for the Black Power Movement of the 1960's. Larry Neale has long been the leading scholar on this period and its many dimensions. In Visions for a Liberated Future he draws clear associations between the aesthetics and gives a great deal of insight into their practical functions. As Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and various other activist organizations were thrusting the banner of Black Power, a segment of the Black artist community began to find its purpose in complimenting these tenets artistically. Neal writes:

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to the concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. This movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept... The Black Arts and the Black Power concepts both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics... the political values inherent in the Black Power concept are now finding concrete expression in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians and novelists. A main tenet of the Black power movement is the necessity for black people to define the world in their own terms. The black artist has made the same point in terms of aesthetics (62).

These ideas became the basis of creativity for artists like Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Gil Scot-Heron and The Last Poets to name a few. These artists used their pens and their voices to fight the tyranny and oppression under which the white power structure held African descendents in America. Malcolm X's death in 1965 accelerated this process. Neale reports,

“After Malcolm’s death, thousands of heretofore unorganized black students and activists became more radically politicized. The Black Arts Movement started in Harlem...Never before had black artists entered into a conscious spiritual union of goal and purpose (129).

They wanted to capture the imagination of their people in ways that would not only raise community consciousness, but move the people to action. Just as Garvey postulated forty years before, art uses powerful media to relate to the people and helps create a participatory culture around the tenets of Black-nationalism. Neale is precise in his discussion of these issues and narrows the discourse even closer to hip-hop, by advocating the importance of music. Writing at the time of the BAM he contends, “Our literature, our art, and our music are moving closer to the forces motivating black America. You can hear it everywhere especially in the music, a surging new sound...We must take this sound, and make this energy meaningful to our people. Otherwise, it will have meant nothing, will have affected nothing. The force of what we have to say can only be realized in action (20).”

A few popular musicians of the time like James Brown (*I’m Black and I’m Proud*) gave energy to these theories in their work while it was seemingly acceptable. Other musician/poets dedicated their entire life’s work to Neale’s premise. Here the discussion turns to the legendary work of the Last Poets and Gil Scot-Heron, who are consistently credited as the direct fore-parents of “message” rap.

Footsteps to Hip Hop

“Conscious” is the name given to the strain of hip-hop that best reflects the BAM and hence reflects the Black-nationalist philosophies espoused by Marcus Garvey. In African Classical Music and the Griot Tradition, Tunde Jegede explicitly traces the lineage between this brand of hip-hop and the BAM ideology carried by the Last Poets. He writes, “The Last Poets functioned as initiators stirring public awareness and they were a symbol of the thriving culture of inner cities. At the street corner, with a small drum and the spoken word, they caught the heartbeat of the people and were heralded as the ‘Godfather’s of Rap’ (21).” Eric Perkins adds a great deal of credibility to this assertion in his well-crafted Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture. He draws parallels in ways that are rather undeniable. Perkins relates:

The message oriented poetry of the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron laid the groundwork for political rappers. The Last Poets set lyrics to the beat of the conga drum...to create a distinctive rap performance style that would have an almost infectious appeal for the masters of the old school and their successors...What makes The Last Poets’ style so important to the emergence of rap music is its orality. The poetry’s effectiveness comes through only when it is spoken, just like rap (4).

These are the roots from which hip-hop groups like Public Enemy and X-CLAN blossomed into prominence. Just as the Last Poets became an extension of Black-nationalist traditions during the BAM by way of Malcolm X’s influences, these groups exploded and had an impact on hip-hop culture that made Garveyism contemporary. Perkins posits, “Public Enemy’s lyrical style is the standard by which all political rap should be judged. The group has redefined the political terrain of rap music, helping to refuel the Malcolm X revival and political fashion

while speaking out against the moral and economic decay of the inner city (21).”

Perkins reflects further on the X-CLAN in stating that:

X-CLAN...led by Professor X (Lumumba Carson, son of the well-known Brooklyn activist and black nationalist Sonny Carson) represent the epitome of the African-centered genre of political rap...XCLAN’s freedom or death, unite-or-perish philosophy, along with their African garb, invokes a nostalgia for the cultural nationalism of the 1960s, while hip-hop props launch the group into the visual overdrive of the media hyped 1990s (23-4).

Even more recently, came the dawn of Black Star, a group created by Most Def and Talib Kweli. They actually used the same moniker as the UNIA’s ship fleet that had the intended use of repatriating African descendents in America back to their homeland. The connections that trace this ancestry are very sound; however, while the Last Poets and the BAM were instrumental in the family tree that produced these bearers of “Garveyesque” politically charged hip-hop, these were not the only contributing factors in creating of hip-hop of the “conscious” sort. As Perkins states, “Political or message rap falls into three categories: African centered, neo-nationalist, and Islamic (dominated by the eclectic Five Percent faction of Muslim blacks) (20).” To more holistically understand all the factors that shaped Black-nationalist forms of hip-hop, we must return to the turmoil that plagued the Nation of Islam during the early 1960’s and the dissent that ensued.

Challenges: the Nation of Islam in the 1960’s

During the time of Malcolm X’s rise to an ever-powerful status above the general body of the Nation of Islam (NOI), there were factions of dissent brewing in the rank and file under Elijah Muhammad’s leadership. It is very important to

note that the opposition was not based on the aspects of the NOI related to the traditions of Garveyism. Various source provide differing accounts.

Some claim the issues centered on the religious doctrine propagated by Muhammad in addition to accusations raised about him secretly fathering several illegitimate children during his tenure. Miyakawa delves further into this interesting history. She writes that in 1963, rumors surfaced, “of Elijah Muhammad’s affairs with several of his secretaries and the “love children” these affairs produced...(15).” In this same discussion she continues, “[S]oon thereafter, a young philosopher from Malcolm X’s temple, Clarence 13X (ne’ Clarence Smith Jowers), left the Nation of Islam and founded the Five Percent Nation, later also known as the Nation of God’s and Earths.” She goes further: “Some scholars maintain that Clarence 13X left for theological reasons, disagreeing with Elijah Muhammad that Fard was Allah incarnate (15).” Whatever the reason, the Five Percent Nation was born and proposed its own take on the black-nationalist philosophies that informed its predecessors. Miyakawa reflects on this as well:

...[Much] of Five Percenter rhetoric falls squarely within black-nationalist traditions. Like many black nationalists, Five Percenters seek to establish both cultural and historical ties to Africa and the African [D]iaspora in order form a sense of identity. A frequent corollary to black-nationalism is Pan-Africanism, the belief that the fate and future of all African people are somehow linked (67).

After spending six years building a firm foundation for his Five Percent Nation, Clarence 13X was slain under mysterious circumstances in 1969, a fate that had befallen many of his predecessors in the history of the NOI.

Within five years of his death, hip-hop culture was burgeoning in New York City. The evolution of the Five Percent Nation would eventually include the use hip-hop to expand the reach of its message. The nature and compositions of both movements created a harmonious union. Myakawa adds:

Within five years of [Clarence 13X's] death, hip-hop was forming in New York City's African-American and Latino neighborhoods; Five Percenters quickly became a part of the new cultural movement. The pairing of rap and the Five Percent Nation was perhaps inevitable. The Five Percent Nation, essentially a youth movement, found resonance in hip-hop, another youth oriented culture (21).

Garvey used the arts to proliferate his black-nationalist messages because of his critical understanding of the functional uses of art to rouse his people. Being cut from the same cloth, "Five Percenter and Nation of Islam rappers are clearly aware that the quickest way to the souls of their intended audience-black American youth-is through African-America's cultural soul: black music (Mayakawa, 138)." They have been so affective in promulgating their messages in the music that, aside from the lineage of the Last Poets and some NOI rappers, the Five Percent Nation is seen as one of the most consistent forces of Garveyism in hip-hop:

As one of the most popular forms of American youth music, rap music is perhaps the most effective tool to reach the souls of young blacks and lead them to redemption and "knowledge of self". Within its layers, rap music carries both oral and musical traditions...[Fiver Percenter Rap] lyrics not only bring Five Percenter doctrine to the public, but also extend a number of black intellectual traditions: [Five Percenter Rap] lyrics draw on centuries of black nationalist and Pan-Africanist rhetoric and celebrate self-sufficiency, the family, and cultural unity (Miyakawa,139).

Similar to Garvey's use of the arts to spread his philosophies, the Five Percent Nation has not only been successful in disseminating its message to black youth in the US, but to

international audiences as well. A plethora of Five Percent artists have used their platform to spread the doctrine on a global scale. Mayakawa addressed this in depth:

Originally a movement confined to the boroughs of New York City, today the Five Percent Nation is a national and increasingly international phenomenon...Rap music has played an important role in spreading this doctrine...Five Percenter MC'S and DJ's include such major figures as Rakim Allah, the Wu-Tang Clan, Poor Righteous Teachers, Brand Nubian, Capone and Noreaga, Queen Latifah (a former member), Guru (of Gangstarr), DJ Pete Rock, Mobb Deep, Doodlebug...of Digable Planets, Leaders of the New School (featuring Busta Rhymes), and Black Thought of the Roots. Many of these artists perform regularly on world tours, thus influencing hip-hop music and culture in other nations...Rap is the perfect medium for spreading the Nation's doctrine (37).

With the birth of such a powerful art form, the prominence of these artists and their use of hip-hop to spread a Black-nationalist, Pan-African agenda, the body politic of the United States has taken measures to combat and dilute the potency of these messages. This is nothing different than what has been done to undermine the Black Power struggle since the height and decline of Garveyism.

Under Attack: COINTELPRO to The Hip Hop Police

The Last Poets, and other prominent artists during the Black Power and Black Arts Movements, experienced the U.S. government's malicious efforts to dismantle the movement for Black solidarity and self-determination. The FBI, and later its Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), was heavily involved in Garvey's deportation, Malcolm X's assassination, the deaths of countless Black Panthers and the death of Clarence 13X according to some sources. In fact, Myakawa describes the FBI's surveillance of the Five Percent Nation and other organizations:

As Gardell effectively documents in his study of the Nation of Islam, throughout the 1960s the FBI and other law enforcement agencies infiltrated black religious and nationalist organizations, including the Nation of Islam and the Five Percent Nation, under J. Edgar Hoover's

direction and the auspices of COINTELPRO (the counterintelligence program)...Subsequent reports yield inflammatory “data”. One FBI file, for example characterized the Five Percenters as “a ‘mysterious armed group of youth’ who were ‘prepared to die fighting white supremacy (17).

A body of information exists that suggests that hip-hop is a victim of the same attack due to its lineage and power. In general, hip-hop culture has had a great deal of influence domestically and internationally on the world’s youth. It has affected fashion and language trends in addition to youth habit and behavior. Perkins writes:

Rap music has been the subject of lawsuits and arguments before the Supreme Court, the target of hellfire-and-brimstone sermons by preachers, and even political ammunition for presidents and presidential candidates. Rap has transformed American fashion with its sneakers, boots, loose fitting clothes, and “whacked” colors and designs (1).

In his critically acclaimed Hip-Hop America, Nelson George speaks to the international effects. He writes, “Because hip-hop has so many elements-music clothing, dance, attitude—its essential mutability makes it adaptable worldwide (203).” George goes on to say, “From Vancouver and Toronto in Canada, to Dakar in Senegal, to Holland, to Cuba’s Havana, to every place satellites beam music videos and CD’s are sold (or bootlegged or counterfeited), hip hop has made an impression (206).”

Early in its history, hip-hop culture was used as a powerful tool of unification. Its birthplace, the South Bronx, was a tumultuous environment that fostered a great deal of conflict between Black and Brown people. In the Vibe History of Hip-Hop, John F. Szwed gives more incite into what characterized the South Bronx in the mid to late 1970’s. He writes: “The South Bronx was tuff turf, characterized by burned out buildings, brutal street gangs, and the scourge of drugs and poverty (15).” Nelson George echoes this sentiment in claiming that, “In the mid 70’s ...no place in America was held up more

consistently as a symbol of pitiful urban priorities than the Bronx, particularly its southernmost section (10).”

In the midst of this seemingly ‘incorrigible chaos’ hip-hop was born and in many ways facilitated pockets of unity throughout this impoverished community: “As a leader of the city’s biggest and baddest street gang, the Black Spade, [Afrika Bambaataa, one of hip-hop’s founders] commanded the respect of his peers with intelligence, a sharp tongue and a bold vision of what his Black and Hispanic brothers and sisters could accomplish if they worked toward a common cause (Szwed, 15).” In Black Noise, an in depth analysis of rap music and Black culture in contemporary America, Tricia Rose adds dimension to the cause of hip-hop’s creation, while alluding to its power to politicize and mobilize youth:

Hip-Hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its built environment...Identity in hip-hop is deeply rooted in the specific, the local experience, and one’s attachment to and status in a local group or alternative family. These crews are new kinds of families forged with intercultural bonds that, like the social of gangs, provide insulation and support in a complex and unyielding environment and may serve as the basis for new social movements (34).

As the culture evolved, many artists adopted the banner of political commentary and socially consciousness. In fact, in many nations around the world hip-hop’s power has been used as a means to political ends. George also includes this in his discussion:

The legacy of rap’s socially conscious period when Public Enemy used the music to raise political issues is still visible around the world. In Italy, a place where extremes of political thought mesh with a passionate nature, there are many groups that have gravitated toward the culture and its ability to articulate anger...In France, the culture’s political aspect has been a vehicle of protest for music and filmmakers (205).

Ironically, this same fervor to use hip-hop in this fashion and the African-centered understanding of its potential political, social, psychological and spiritual impact seems to be lost among artists in the United States, at least on the surface.

In The Healing Drum, African Wisdom and Teaching, Yayo Diallo asserts that western [hip hop] musicians have grown dangerously unaware of their power due to an increased focus to make a hit record. He writes:

When you are playing music, you need to be conscious of how you are affecting people. I have met many musicians in North America who want only to make a hit record, regardless of the value of the music on deeper levels. They are not aware of the subtle effects of music on human well being, but musicians should be aware of their role. They can build or destroy (97).

Though many hip-hop artists are unaware of their true capacity, the intoxicating power of the music has not gone unnoticed. Much like the banning of the drum and other musical and oral traditions during the centuries of chattel slavery, the potential energy of hip-hop culture had to be neutralized to preserve the status quo.

Several artists intended to use the art to facilitate changes in their ailing communities. Artists like Public Enemy, X-CLAN, KRS-ONE and many others were using their understanding of their gift and its legacy to mobilize the minds of Black youth across the country. Their message was not only political, but it was formulated to carry an uplifting and empowering value system echoing Garvey and his progeny. In his underground gem Culture Bandits, Del Jones explores the purpose, power, and source of Black music in general and engages an interesting perspective on the threat in the power of Hip Hop music and culture. Serving as the mouthpiece of African youth in America, hip-hop was initially dismissed in mainstream media as a short-lived trend. However, as

it developed a sweeping influence, the maintainers of the status quo found themselves in a dilemma.

While they did not want the culture to pose a formidable political threat, they deemed the art form potentially lucrative. The solution came in the form of colonization and control. Jones explains that the music had to be exploited for profit and controlled for political stability. He writes, “This insulated their system (white supremacy) from the natural attack of our music as we responded to an environment that holds our dreams and aspirations hostage (44).” He goes on to state, “...[They] destroy/control/define our music for us, they isolate the songs/dance poems that threaten their control and destroy them. How? By making the creation of such work unprofitable, because they control the other mediums of communication (44).” Furthermore, any perspectives of using the art form for the collective wellbeing had to be destroyed and replaced with a very strict code of individualism. This is the hallmark of “American Dream” ideology. Diallo is very frank in expressing how this dynamic is created:

The star system I see in Western popular music goes very much against the standards of conduct for the village musician with which I was raised. The star does not give time to the community but to himself or herself. The star usually seeks to amaze people, not to care for them; to be admired and praised by the anonymous throngs, not to honor distinct individuals whose lives depend on one another in community. It is forgotten that the reason for playing is to bring wellbeing to people. This is different from driving fans into ecstasies of overexcitement. Music should not be a means to build a personal cult. That is idolatry. My village teaches that music is a calling greater than the individual. I can give my life to it if I love it. In serving this music, I can share with other people and contribute to their joy and health (196).

In turn, this individualist ethic is supported by the chaotic conditions many African descendants in America find themselves in. It is not complex to understand that a person’s depravity may lead that individual to survive by any

means necessary, legitimate or otherwise. As the American music industry is considered a legitimate workforce, executives have been known to prey on young Black artists who just want a way out of a life of constant struggle and hardship. Jones relates how this is detrimental to the collective: “ And as they use the carrot on the stick technique on poor rural and inner-city kids, [these Black youth] unconsciously churn out all the musical products they use against [Black people’s] struggle to create healthy families, progressive communities...and true freedom (45).”

Jones also discusses why many contemporary Black artists are oblivious to the cultural significance of African music and why the staunch outlines of the Garvey and BAM aesthetic have become secondary:

Most Black artists dream of million sellers, fast cars, and quicker women, and the development of their work has nothing to do with the struggle or cultural maintenance. Many only want to try and find out what’s happening and plug into it for profit. Consequently, the development of our musical culture is stagnated by profit motive (44).

Many of the artists that have chosen to carry the Black-nationalist banner are subject to the same surveillance and scrutiny of the people or organizations that originally inspired them. With this in mind, fewer artists have chosen to explore this avenue of expression. More recently, with the advent of the Hip-Hop police, a law enforcement task force that keeps tabs on the movements of the most prominent hip-hop artists, it is obvious that the power structure intends on preventing hip-hop from inciting an international movement that would revive the tenets of Garveyism and serve to expand them to exponential levels.

Conclusion:

Guided by this intense analysis, the assertion of Garvey's impact on the hip-hop nation is indeed more comfortable. What may have first seemed nebulous given the current state of hip-hop, is more lucid and tangible through a historical analysis. From his clear-cut ideas on achieving international Black liberation to his keen understanding of the power of the arts in carrying his messages, the correlations are solid. Furthermore, Garvey's effect on the Nation of Islam, the Black Power Movement, the aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement and the Five Percent Nation frame the connections well. In addition, the concerted effort to undermine all of the aforementioned Black-nationalist entities clearly illustrates the contemporary state of hip-hop. Marcus Garvey intended to remove the yoke of the white power structure from the neck of the Black masses around the world. His movement was destabilized because of its potential power. Hip-Hop has the same potential power and is consistently being diluted to prevent a movement from materializing. As artists become wiser and the masses grow tired of the state of the world, the prospect of a resurgence of Garvey's influence remains.

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