

**THE
GRAPHIC
HISTORY
OF
HIP HOP**

WALTER GREASON & TIM FIELDER



WALTER GREASON

WRITER

*Suburban Erasure
Cities Imagined
&
Illmatic Consequences*



TIM FIELDER

ILLUSTRATOR

*Matty's Rocket
&
INFINITUM An Afrofuturist Tale*

Special Title Art by

JAMAR NICHOLAS

LEON The Extraordinary

We travel at magnificent speeds around the universe.

THE GRAPHIC HISTORY OF HIP HOP

The Graphic History of Hip Hop is a unique educational resource that analyzes one of the most important cultural revolutions in the context of urban and world history. Hip Hop provided several ways to reimagine human life and community through graffiti, breakdancing, DJing, emceeing, and beatboxing—what some call the five elements. It is one of the greatest roses to ever grow from concrete. From the minds of youth on the margins of American society, Hip Hop grew to transform every aspect of culture on a global scale.

This graphic history provides a first step in understanding the miracle of countless dreams affirmed.

It's time to step up to the mic and prepare yourself to be transported into the history of... **Hip Hop!**

Note that this comic refers to acts of violence and examples of systemic racism. Please use discretion when incorporating this resource into instruction.



A NOTE ON COMIC CREATION AND CONTENT

by Walter D. Greason

This comic is built on a parallel structure—a social history of New York City and the lyrics that Hip Hop artists themselves produced since 1973. The social history that is the foundation of this script incorporates sixty years of research from hundreds of professional historians and other scholars from the humanities and social sciences. The fundamental skeleton of the writing, however, comes from the poetry written during the Hip Hop revolution. The lyrics are emphasized visually in this comic, but also conceptually provide the emotional context for the entire narrative.

The Graphic History of Hip Hop #1 is designed to inspire students and teachers to listen to the full songs that represented the ways that Hip Hop evolved in relationship with the world around it. The parallel structure of this comic is brought to life by artist Tim Fielder.

Tim Fielder's gifts as an artist and designer are unparalleled—he holistically maximizes the intellectual and emotional impact of the standard design with extensive variations in the presentation of historical and lyrical text.

His hands have defined the connections between Hip Hop and Afrofuturism over the last forty years. Comics blend the narrative and insight provided by a writer with the vision and craft of a visual artist. As readers engage with the pictures and words, a rhythm takes root in their mind. The best comics provide a quick laugh and new insights. *The Graphic History of Hip Hop #1* challenges readers to experience half a century of social change—and then immerse themselves in the sights, sounds, smells, and emotions of New York City.

To develop the comic, Tim immersed himself in the script and began sketching based on suggestions I made. His initial sketches led to a comic book breakdown or visual outline. From the breakdown, Tim built a final product. Throughout the process, Tim collected and referred to HUNDREDS of elements of photo or visual references to embed authenticity into the art on each page. For an illustration of this process, see page 31 of this comic book. This collaborative process between us has produced *The Graphic History of Hip Hop #1*, which you now hold in your hands.

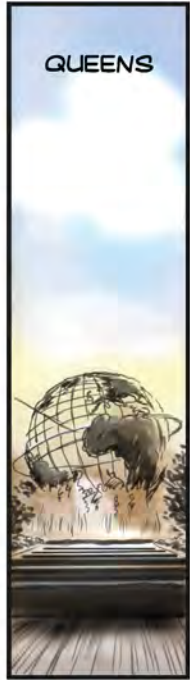
THE EAST

GIL SCOTT-HERON

Music has the power to make me feel good like nothing else does. It gives me some peace for a while. Takes me back to who I really am.
Gil Scott-Heron

THE LAST POETS





JAMES BROWN

THE BIG PAYBACK!
I got to deal with you...!

Hip Hop got some of its heart and style from folks like James Brown and Parliament Funkadelic...

...but at the same time that Brown was performing at the Apollo Theater, members of White Citizens' Councils were becoming influential leaders within the conservative movement.

When Disco was at the top of the charts, political and economic policies were beginning to have devastating effects on cities like New York.



The joy of Disco faded.



The glamour always fades.



The bottom line was clear—the policies of austerity in the 1970s led to lower pay, high unemployment, surging crime rates, and the privatization of many social services.

The people in New York City, as well as other major metropolitan areas, faced...

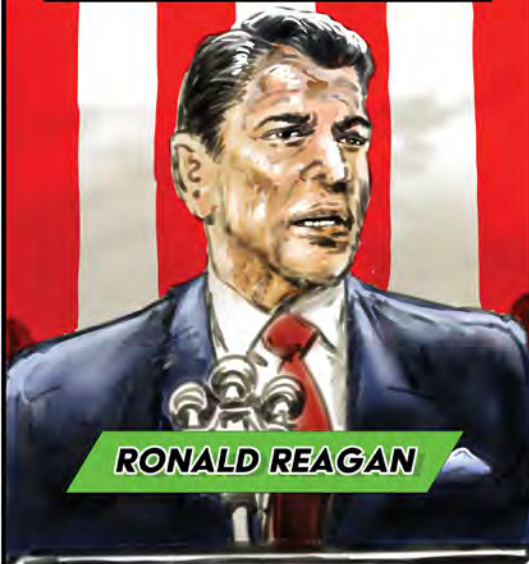


Bankruptcy and Unemployment

Absolute faith in free markets became the latest superstition after 1981.



Deregulation meant slashing social safety nets, increasing crime and homelessness.



For the love of profit, all public goods became expendable.

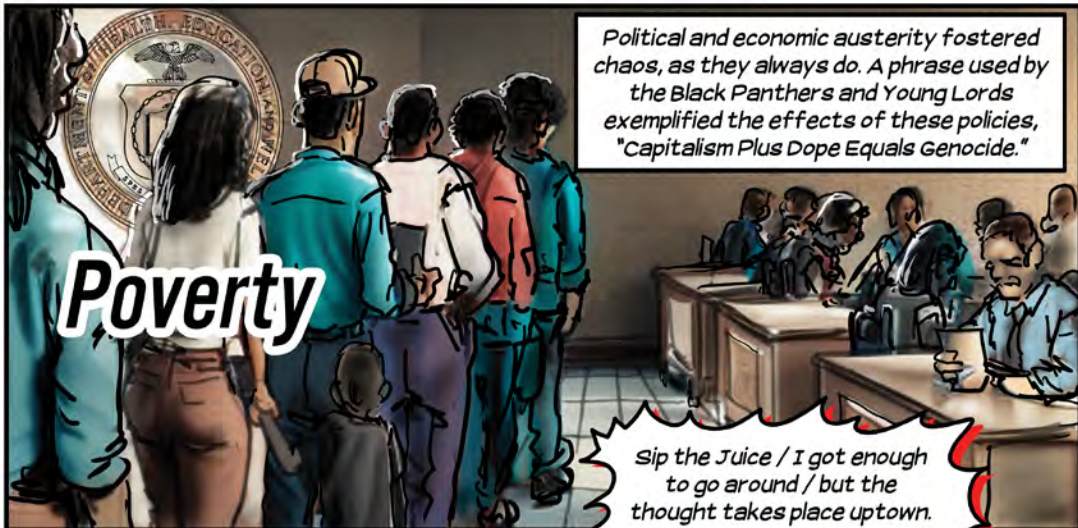


Addiction



As a result, many Black and immigrant neighborhoods collapsed.

Poverty



Political and economic austerity fostered chaos, as they always do. A phrase used by the Black Panthers and Young Lords exemplified the effects of these policies, "Capitalism Plus Dope Equals Genocide."

Sip the Juice / I got enough to go around / but the thought takes place uptown.

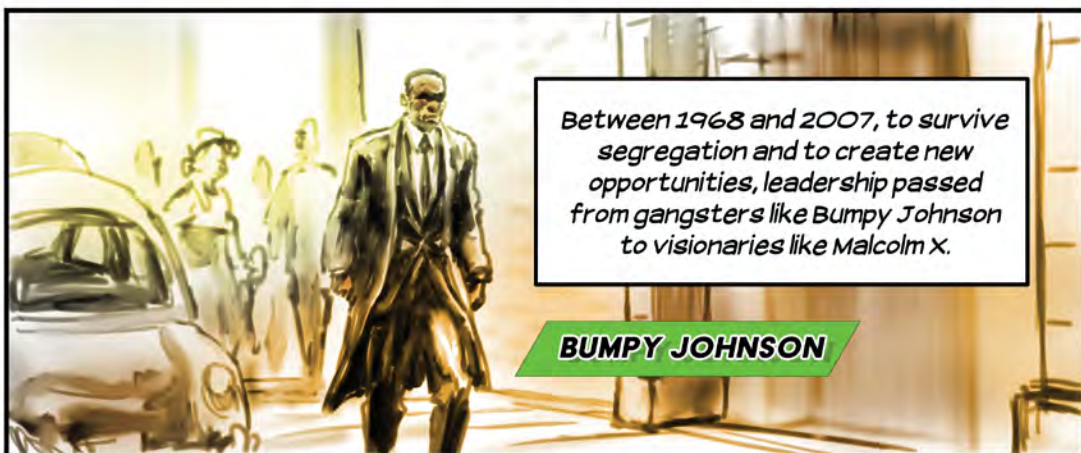
Violence



Hip Hop was defined by the hustle to survive against these forces every day *by any means necessary*



History of Black Godfathers



Between 1968 and 2007, to survive segregation and to create new opportunities, leadership passed from gangsters like Bumpy Johnson to visionaries like Malcolm X.

BUMPY JOHNSON



Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research.

Organized crime filled the streets across America, leveraging the collapse of labor unions with the surge in deregulation and commercial gambling...

MALCOLM X



...but in New York, amidst the upheaval, a new spirit would emerge, a vital new sound and cultural phenomenon... HIP HOP.

BAD BOY RECORDS

In 1973, at 1520 Sedgwick Ave. in The Bronx, a back-to-school party hosted by Cindy Campbell with music from DJ Kool Herc was held. Many consider this the birth of Hip Hop.

DJ KOOL HERC

The original wheels of steel.



Young people energized the streets and nightlife with dance, rhymes, beats, and graffiti.



To the beat, yall / you don't stop.

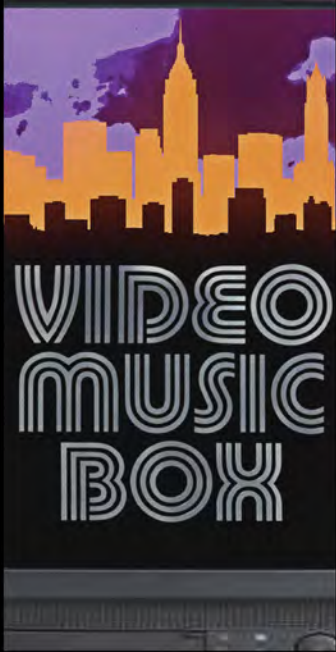
Stealing electricity from street lights, DJs brought parties to life, offering comfort where there was none.

FAB FIVE FREDDY



Reinventing sorrow songs and the blues, MCs gave voice to a new generation on their own terms.

RALPH MCDANIELS



These are the breaks.

KURTIS BLOW



WHODINI

Five Minutes of Funk changed the world.



*A child is born with no state of mind /
blind to the ways of mankind.*

GRAND MASTER FLASH AND THE FURIOUS FIVE



Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five offered a message that was simultaneously analysis about the human condition and specific assessment of the Black experience after the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

Young people suffered through the War on Drugs and policies of the prison-industrial complex.

U.T.F.O. told the story of Roxanne that transformed the structure of opportunities of rappers and other hip-hop artists.

The daily hustle for romance, work, and a few minutes of peace brought people together around the world, making the emergence of record companies like Def Jam possible.

U.T.F.O.



THE REAL ROXANNE

ROXANNE SHANTÉ

MARLEY MARL

She said, "You call yourself a doctor?" / I said, "This is true." / She said, "Explain to me really what doctors must do."





Despite failures, setbacks, and betrayals, the art was unstoppable around the world.

AFRIKA BAMBATAA

Rock rock to the Planet Rock, don't stop



The combination of funk, jazz, and R&B inspired music and lyrics that demanded its own authenticity.

Pan-Africanism originated in the early 20th century and inspired an international peace movement after 1945.

Pan-African liberation.

Many Black leaders embraced pan-Africanism to attempt to rebuild.

KWAME TURE



Problems got me pessimistic.
Arrested Development

FORECLOSURE

FOR SALE



The global struggle against Apartheid in South Africa provided a ray of sunlight, and Hip Hop addressed the deteriorating conditions across the diaspora.

NELSON MANDELA

We rap by what we see, meaning reality / From people busting caps and like Mandela being free / Not every MC be with the negativity



Back in New York City...

RUN-D.M.C.

RUN-D.M.C. emerged as the most popular emcees in the world by 1988.

I'm the king of rock / there is none higher.

RUN-D.M.C. and other Def Jam artists broke through the music industry's barriers and created a space for Hip Hop.

RUSSELL SIMMONS

LL COOL J

RICK RUBIN

In that space, new artists and groups like Boogie Down Productions took the microphone.

SCOTT LA ROCK

KRS-ONE

You seem to be the type that only understand / annihilation and destruction of the next man / that's not poetry, that is insanity / simply fantasy far from reality.

**T H E
STOP THE VIOLENCE
MOVEMENT**

KOOL MOE DEE

Boogie Down Productions captured multiple dimensions of street life, asserting forms of knowledge that defied authority and traditional institutions.





SLICK RICK

The show grew larger every day.

DOUG E. FRESH



Women emcees refused to be silent!

Gotta be you and only you, babe / let me be me



Negotiating relationships, job pressures, paychecks and rent, Hip Hop exposed the hypocrisy of globalization, while creating new streams of revenue outside of international banking.

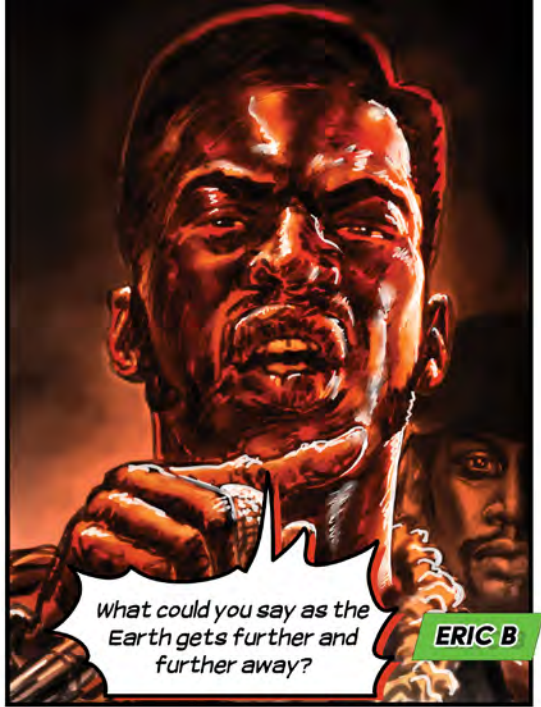
SALT N PEPA

BIG DADDY KANE



Come, get some, you little bum / I take the cake but you can't get a crumb

RAKIM



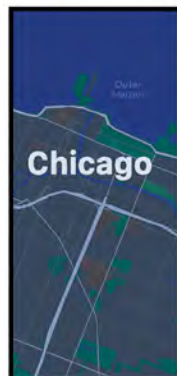
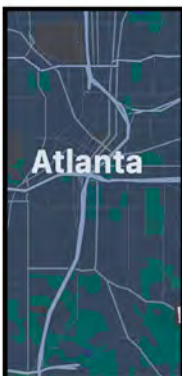
What could you say as the Earth gets further and further away?

ERIC B

Hip Hop was Black imaginative intellect unleashed. It transformed everything it touched.



MC LYTE



A stylized illustration of DJ Red Alert. He is wearing a grey flat cap and a red jacket with a purple shirt underneath. The background features a large black vinyl record with a prominent red circle in the center. The text 'DJ RED ALERT' is written in white on a green banner at the top.

DJ RED ALERT

*DJ Red Alert.
Every Friday night,
he went berserk.*

A stylized illustration of Chuck Chillout. He is bald with a mustache and is wearing a red jacket with a purple shirt underneath. The background features a large black vinyl record with a prominent red circle in the center. The text 'CHUCK CHILLOUT' is written in white on a green banner at the top.

CHUCK CHILLOUT

*Chuck Chillout.
The Juice Crew made Friday
nights a global party on radio
that transformed all aspects
of global media over the
next two decades.*

*They wanted me for their army or whatever /
picture me giving a damn, I said never*



PUBLIC ENEMY



Public Enemy marked the first peak of Hip Hop production and performance. Their combination of poetry, politics, and sonic force made it impossible to ignore Hip Hop as the most important entertainment industry in the world by 1989. The strident rejection of American conservatism marked a new battleground about the nature of segregation, enslavement, colonization, and commodification for the next twenty years.



Summertime lets us celebrate our most beautiful moments of U.N.I.T.Y.

HEAVY D

WILL SMITH



JAZZY JEFF

KID AND PLAY

From the parties, the movement was built. Music, television, movies, and digital media all came to rely on Hip Hop influences.

QUEEN LATIFAH



THE NATIVE TONGUES

Underground hip hop continued to preserve the core of the emergent culture, fueling new forms of commercial industry.



DE LA SOUL



I got brothers in the jungle / Cousins on a quest



A TRIBE CALLED QUEST



MONIE LOVE



BRAND NUBIAN



The new moon rode high in the crown of the metropolis



JUNGLE BROTHERS



BLACK SHEEP



THE FUGEES



Shinin', like who on top of this?



MOS DEF



THE ROOTS



COMMON



"the West"

MC HAMMER

DEATH ROW AND AFTERMATH RECORDS

Westside rap brought gang life into clear focus, showing the horrors of the prison-industrial complex and suburban erasure in communities like Compton.

The power of the culture came from its honest expression of reality. In a world dominated by marketing, gangster rappers told stories that resonated beyond mass media.

DMX

TOO \$HORT

TUPAC SHAKUR

ICET

Take this, for example /
young brothers want rep /
so in the life they living /
you can't half-step

Gang Starr and the
Wu-Tang Clan
influenced artists on
the West Coast and
around the world.

GANGSTARR

J DILLA

WU-TANG CLAN

BUSTA RHYMES



DA SOUTH

The Dirty South

The world can never forget that the South got something to say.

SUN RA

PHARRELL

OUTKAST

TIMBALAND

Ain't nobody dope as me / I'm just so fresh, so clean

MISSY ELLIOTT



GETO BOYS



The southern roots of Black culture rose to the heights of the new empire, opening paths out of poverty that never existed in the twentieth century.

CASH MONEY MILLIONAIRES



LUDACRIS



LUTHER CAMPBELL

Now we sittin' in a drop top soakin' wet / in a silk suit tryin' not to sweat

MASTER P

MYSTIKAL



the WORLD

The message everywhere, to everyone, was unmistakable.

50

NAS

JAY-Z

All I need is one mic.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HIP HOP


by Walter D. Greason

Signifying is one of the core aspects of the African American experience in the United States. It is a subtle performance of personal irony that satirizes the conditions of daily life in a society that claims to be free, while attempting to dominate every moment of a Black person's existence. For Black men in New York City after 1968, the joy of liberation combined with socioeconomic realities—poverty, joblessness, drug abuse, and street violence. Hip Hop was born in this moment of fragile possibility when the rules of anti-Black racism were changing. Rhyming is a key element of signifying. To talk that talk and walk that walk, the language had to be as sharp as the fashion. From foundations with James Brown and Muhammad Ali, the sonic force of Hip Hop transformed emceeing, DJing, breaking, graffiti, and beatboxing into a culture that the world had never seen.

In the outer boroughs of New York City—The Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island—young people who faced harsh realities on the streets came together to form cyphers on the corners to pass the time. Then, in the evenings, they would gather in parks and throw block parties where DJs would spin the most recent records for dancing, socializing, and rapping. Few politicians or public leaders acknowledged these growing trends, but there was an urgency to these youth voices. Growing from the expressions of the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords, rappers were insistent about describing the joys and hardships they shared. Most notably, schools constantly tried to silence and discipline these young voices. As a result, they felt that all they had was each other. With DJ Kool Herc and emcees like Kurtis Blow leading the way, Hip Hop was born. The beats were bold and hard. The stories showed the world that this art form could not be denied. When Run-DMC broke through the segregated barriers of the music industry, it was the first sign that a new form of Black genius was on the rise.

Run-DMC built the stage, but the next generation provided the enduring aesthetic. LL Cool J, Big Daddy Kane, Salt-N-Pepa, and Rakim established a style of dress and public presence that commanded respect. Even the politics of these cities transformed as artists like Public Enemy, NWA, A Tribe Called Quest, and Boogie Down Productions emphasized the power of their rhetoric to re-energize youth involvement in the Black Freedom Struggle. With this cultural power surging, the music industry took notice. Performers like Nas, the Notorious B.I.G., Busta Rhymes, Tupac Shakur, Snoop Dogg, JAY-Z, and the Wu-Tang Clan became the headliners at the peak of the commercial breakthrough,



The background of the page features a stylized, high-angle photograph of several breakdancers in motion. The image is rendered in a monochromatic orange or sepia tone, creating a warm and energetic atmosphere. The dancers are captured in various dynamic poses, with limbs extended and bodies arched, suggesting a sense of rhythm and movement. The lighting is bright, casting soft shadows and highlighting the contours of the dancers' clothing and bodies.

generating thousands of imitators. Meanwhile, the art form continued to refine itself with groups like Outkast, the Fugees (featuring Lauryn Hill), the Roots, and the assorted talents of Rawkus Records (Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Pharoahe Monch). This commercial turn generated remarkable profits, and ultimately led to the dilution of the art in favor of straight profits.

As an industry, Hip Hop lost its connection to graffiti and breakdancing. Fashion spun off into its own sub-genres. Lyricism became a supplement, not a requirement. The ascendance of Kanye West and Eminem marked a transition that the street cyphers no longer determined the credibility and authenticity of the artform. Hip Hop went global and served as a force for liberation in countless communities. However, the cost at its roots was profound. Gentrification and displacement expanded rapidly, even in communities like Harlem and Brooklyn. The success of the movement followed the model that had been established with Jackie Robinson and Negro League Baseball. The on-field talent could cross over into white-owned, industrial networks and achieve massive financial success. The staffing and foundations, like the Negro League owners, vendors, and ushers, would be left behind—not invited to the table that they helped to build.

In this way, Hip Hop is the most successful platform to bring Black people, marginalized and oppressed, into global leadership in the last five centuries. At the same time, it has failed in a core mission to increase the social and economic opportunities for the masses of Black people in the United States and around the world. As nearly every artist and contributor would readily admit, the struggle continues.

This essay originally appeared in Passport to Social Studies, Grade 11, Unit 7 (New York City: New York City Department of Education, 2022).

NOTES

Books

The following books were referred to by the creators during the production of this comic. Please use them to continue to investigate the history of Hip Hop and the social, political, and economic contexts that gave rise to it.

Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Streets: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (1999).

Reynaldo Anderson, *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* (2017).

Dawud Anyabwile, Jason Sims, and Guy Sims, *Brotherman Dictator of Discipline* (1990).

Houston A. Baker, *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy* (1987).

Kyle Baker and KRS-One, *Break the Chain* (1994).

Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1992).

Pedro Bell, Overton Loyd, *Atomic Slop*, album art, Funkadelic (1973).

Herb Boyd, *Autobiography of a People: Three Centuries of African American History Told by Those Who Lived It* (2000).

Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005).

Marcia Chatelain, *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America* (2020).

Dalton Conley, *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth, and Social Policy in America* (1999).

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990).

Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (New York: NYU Press, 2020).

Tim Fielder, "Dr Dre: Man With A Cold Cold Heart" (1995).

Murray Foreman and Mark Anthony Neal, eds., *That's the Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (2011).

Walter Greason and Danian Jerry, eds., *Illmatic Consequences: The Clapback to Opponents of 'Critical Race Theory'* (2023).

Walter Greason, *Suburban Erasure: How the Suburbs Ended the Civil Rights Movement in New Jersey* (2013).

Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (2021).

Floyd Hughes, *Snoop Dogg* (1995).

Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (1994).

Kenneth Kusmer, *Down and Out, On the Road: The Homeless in American History* (2001).

Eric Orr, *Rappin Max Robot* (1986).

Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (2010).

Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (2004).

Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society* (1984).

Robyn Rodriguez, *In Lady Liberty's Shadow: The Politics of Race and Immigration in New Jersey* (2017).

Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994).

Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (2019).



Lyrics and Quotes

The lyrics or quotes found in the pages of the comic are noted below in the order they appear. Page numbers are provided next to the artist, song title, and publication date.

Page 3: Gil Scott-Heron, "[Interview](#)" *The Guardian*, 2010.

Page 4: James Brown, "The Payback," 1973.

Page 6: Stevie Wonder, "Superstition," 1972.

Page 7: Eric B. & Rakim, "Know The Ledge," 1991.

Page 8: Malcolm X, "[Message to the Grassroots](#)," 1963.

Page 9: Lady B, "To The Beat Y'all," 1979.

Page 10: Kurtis Blow, "The Breaks," 1980.

Page 11: Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, "The Message," 1982; UTFO, "Roxanne, Roxanne," 1983.

Page 12: DJ Red Alert, Mix, "Planet Rock" and "Looking for the Perfect Beat."

Page 13: Arrested Development, "Tennessee," 1992; A Tribe Called Quest, "We Can Get Down," 1993.

Page 14: Run-DMC, "King of Rock," 1985.

Page 15: Boogie Down Productions, "Poetry," 1987.

Page 16: Salt-N-Pepa, "Expression," 1989.

Page 17: Big Daddy Kane, "Warm it Up, Kane," 1989; Eric B & Rakim, "Follow the Leader," 1988.

Page 19: Public Enemy, "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos," 1988.

Page 21: Black Sheep, "The Choice is Yours," 1991; Black Star, "Respiration," 1998.

Page 23: Gang Starr, "Code of the Streets," 1994.

Page 24: Outkast, "So Fresh, So Clean," 2000.

Page 25: Outkast, "B.O.B.," 2000.



The QR code links to a [playlist of these tracks](#).

Please use discretion when incorporating these songs and lyrics into instruction.

COMIC PROCESS

This page illustrates Tim Fielder and Walter Greason's creation process for page two of *The Graphic History of Hip Hop*—starting with the script, then layout, inks, and the final published page.

Page TWO: Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Harlem (1970)

Panel 1.

Cityscape, Bronx, at night. (vertical, top 3rd)

Narration: "The Bronx"

Panel 2.

Cityscape, Brooklyn, day. (vertical, top 3rd)

Narration: "Brooklyn"

Panel 3.

Cityscape, Queens, night. (vertical, top 3rd)

Narration: "Queens"

Panel 4.

Cityscape, Staten Island, day. (vertical, top 3rd)

Narration: "Staten Island"

Panel 5.

Cityscape, Harlem, night. (vertical, top 3rd)

Narration: "Harlem, Manhattan"

Panel 6.

James Brown, singing. (horizontal, middle third)

Name plate: *James Brown*

Lyric/Quote: "The Big Payback!"

I got to deal with you...!"

Narration: Hip Hop got some of its heart and style from folks like James Brown and Parliament Funkadelic...

Panel 7.

In two halves. a) Ku Klux Klan marching;

b) White businessmen/politicians meeting.

(horizontal, bottom third)

Narration: ...but at the same time that Brown was performing at the Apollo Theater, members of White Citizens' Councils were becoming influential leaders within the conservative movement.



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THE
GRAPHIC
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OF
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