

The Influence of: Hip-Hop

Hip-hop culture has had the biggest influence on street culture, informing plenty of the style trends and clothing brands that rose into prominence. In just a few decades, it evolved from fringe subculture to the most dominant force in pop culture.

In '70s New York, hip-hop was born as a reaction to disco culture. Caribbean immigrants and African-American youth in disenfranchised neighborhoods began coming together for impromptu block parties



in boroughs like the Bronx. Early pioneers like DJ Kool Herc, Grand Wizzard Theodore, and Grandmaster Flash started the practice of using

two turntables to extend the dance break in funk and soul records—creating a seamless sound loop ideal for dancing to endlessly. The “breakbeat” formed the backbone of hip-hop music, and later led to the practice of sampling existing music to create something new, adding different tracks and instruments to transform the original piece into a brand new song.

The rhythmic delivery of rapping came from the practice of “capping,” where two men would compete with their words over a microphone to win over an audience. The term emcee came from the traditional acronym MC, short for Master of Ceremonies. Before rappers, the MC’s role was to hype up the audience between a DJ’s songs and encourage them to dance. Early hip-hop culture was comprised of four elements: Rapping, DJing, graffiti writing, and breakdancing, an athletically challenging dance form that developed in the ‘80s, involving acrobatic moves like headspins,



windmills, and flairs as well as popping and locking, which relied more on precise body movements.

In the nascent days of hip-hop, photographers like Jamel Shabazz, Martha Cooper, and Henry Chalfant documented the culture’s rise in New York’s inner cities. B-boys and b-girls wore adidas tracksuits and straight-legged denim over Puma Suede sneakers or adidas Superstars cus-

tomized with fat laces. Kangol bucket hats and Cazal sunglasses were commonplace, and in the winter, it was time to whip out a shearling coat or leather blazer. Jewelry and chains became a prominent flex on your peers, and no other rapper embodied that more than Slick Rick.

Early b-boys and b-girls wore adidas tracksuits and straight-legged denim over Puma Suede sneakers or adidas Superstars customized with fat laces.

Rick the Ruler’s penchant for layered chains and rings, and self-professed love for Bally shoes and Kangol hats, is expressed in his 1985 song with Doug E. Fresh “La Di Da Di.” From the start, this is what separated hip-hop from its rock-and-roll predecessors. Movements like punk were founded on anti-fashion ideals and stood in contrast to consumption and capitalism. Hip-hop fully embraced it from the start, seeing dressing up as its own competition—and every rapper boasted he dressed better than the rest.

Ironically, rappers weren’t the original hip-hop style icons: It was the drug dealers who actually had the money and high-end gear most rappers lyrically bragged

about. A great portion of the hip-hop uniform is informed by what drug dealers wore. In an age before streetwear boutiques, you had sportswear stores and old-school outfitters that peddled sneakers and workwear products like Carhartt chore coats and Timberland boots—rough items that could withstand a New York winter or a day spent hustling on the block. But if you really wanted to get fresh, there was one person you *had* to see: Harlem tailor Dapper Dan.

Born Daniel Day, the man known as Dapper Dan grew up in Harlem on 129th Street and Lexington. He got his name from besting an older man in craps, who went by Dapper Dan. After defeat, he passed his name down and decided to go by “Tenor Man Dan” thereafter, since he played the saxophone. He opened a boutique in 1982 at 43 East 125th Street, taking fabrics from popular luxury brands like Gucci, MCM, Louis Vuitton, and Fendi, and repurposing them into street-ready silhouettes like tracksuits, bomber jackets, and puffy-shouldered coats. The boutique operated 24/7 for 10 years, and served some of hip-hop’s most

