

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

AFRIKA BAMBAATAA - "GODFATHER OF HIP HOP"

The three names that come up most commonly when historians talk about the pioneers of Hip Hop music and culture are DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and the subject of today's lesson, Afrika Bambaataa.

As with nearly all of the important names in early Hip Hop, Afrika Bambaataa came from the Bronx area of New York. He fell in love with music at a very early age, mainly through the influence of his mother who he has said had an awesome record collection. Another thing he was exposed to as a young person was political activism. Both music and activism would go on to play major roles in his life. As a teen, Bambaataa (aka Bam) became involved in a street gang called the Black Spades. He was in charge of expanding the territory of the gang. This often led to violence between rival gang members. However, this affiliation was changed when Bam won an essay contest which rewarded him with a free trip to Africa. While there, he realized that the violence of gangs was only negative for his community and African Americans. He made a commitment to himself to be a source of positive change for other people back in New York. He changed his name from Kevin Donovan to Afrika Bambaataa, after a famous African chieftan, and began to create a new life for himself. Hip Hop music became his outlet for channeling his new ideas and lifestyle.

Bambaataa started to play block parties and drawing large crowds. They were particularly attracted to his creative mixes which combined all kinds of music from TV show theme songs to obscure funk records to electronic music from Europe and Asia. Like Herc and Flash, he also did amazing things with the break sections of funk songs. He cut together breaks and extended them in the style of the developing street music scene of the 1970s. Like Herc, Bambaataa also realized that the music he played and the way he played it attracted a lot of urban youth. He used this realization to reach out to those he saw in gangs to help them turn away from that life. He formed a group he named the Zulu Nation (after an African warrior tribe). It was a collection of other DJs, MCs, Graffiti Artists, B-boys and others helping to promote the new culture. Within the Zulu Nation, Bam had a special group of five b-boys called Zulu Kings which have the distinction of being recognized as the very first b-boy crew. Since the 70s, the Zulu Nation has grown from a local group of Hip Hop's earliest followers to a worldwide army of the culture's biggest contributors and supporters.

Another of Bam's major contributions to Hip Hop culture was the actual naming of the culture itself. Though he was not the one to create the term "Hip Hop", he was the person who singled out the different artistic elements coming up in street culture (DJing, MCing, B-boying, Graffiti) and identified them collectively as Hip Hop. As Bam set the official birthdate of the Zulu Nation to be November 12th, 1973, he also started a movement to make November 12th, 1974 the official birthdate of Hip Hop itself. This has led a large group of Hip Hop's followers to make November Hip Hop history month.

As Hip Hop music started to make its way into the mainstream, Bam naturally became a part of the scene. In 1980, he formed the Soulsonic Force, which pioneered the "electrofunk" sound. As mentioned earlier, Bam had always been influenced by electronic music from around the world and, of course, as he was largely a funk DJ, he had a strong liking for the heavy beats of that style. By combining these two styles, Bam created a sound like no one had ever heard. Their best known and most successful song was "Planet Rock" which, according to the Zulu Nation website, sold enough copies to be certified gold. Bam released many other songs that are less well known to mainstream audiences but equally as important to Hip Hop lovers like "Looking For The Perfect Beat" and "Renegades of Funk"

Afrika Bambaataa still continues to be one of the greatest leaders of Hip Hop culture today. He was recognized by Life Magazine as being one of the most important people of the 20th century. In 2007, he was nominated for admission to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. And, as he is now recognized worldwide as one of Hip Hop's founding fathers, Bam makes appearances all over the globe to help set the record straight about Hip Hop's true history and spread the culture to the next generation.

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HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Fly: Super cool.

EX: "Them's some of the flyest kicks I've ever seen! Where'd you cop those?"

Janky/Bootsy/Wack: Lame, uncool, broken, put together poorly or unfashionable.

EX: "That's the jankiest whip in the history of whips. The doors are hangin' on with duct tape!"

Bougie (pronounced boo-zhie): Trying to be of a higher class but without the money, stature or style to do it right.

EX: "That girl over there is rockin a face Louis Vitton purse, tryin' to act all bougie."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name some members of the Zulu Nation
- 2) Name some members of the Soulsonic Force.
- 3) Name one of the songs that "Planet Rock" sampled.