

SCHOOL' D BY FUNKMODE

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

HIP HOP FASHION

Hip Hop fashion goes back as far as Hip Hop itself. In the early days, B-boys and club goers set the trends. In later years, the styles were set almost exclusively by rappers. In today's lesson, we are going to take a brief look at the styles that have come and gone in Hip Hop culture and reflect on how those fashions affect our choices today.

Early B-boys and club dancers were two sides of the same coin back in the 1970s. The B-boys represented what was being done in the streets and at night, the dance clubs showed off the more upscale version of the emerging culture. B-boys wore whatever allowed them to stand out at parties or in a battle. However, they also dressed in such a way as to allow them to dance without having to worry about what they were wearing. Common among breakers were styles borrowed from punk culture like studded bracelets, chains, earrings, cut-off sleeve t-shirts, bandannas, and shredded jeans. As many of them didn't have a lot of money, they often were very creative with their style. They found inexpensive ways to personalize their clothes, putting their or their crew's name on shirts or shoes or they would cut or tear clothing in a way to make it unique. This way of putting a personal slant on clothes while making them fit the function of what they needed to be able to do on the dance floor really established the essence of what Hip Hop style was and is all about. Club dancers represented a different side of street fashion (many B-boys by day were club goers at night). They also dressed to be seen, but as opposed to the B-boys, getting noticed was the primary concern. Disco strongly affected club dress in the late 1970s. Shiny shirts, sequins, tight pants, gold chains, floral prints, bell bottoms, heeled shoes for men and women, tight leather jackets, fedoras and Kangol brand caddy hats were all popular fashion trends in night clubs. Disco culture and, to a lesser extent, B-boying started to die down in the 1980s. This is when the increase in the popularity of commercial rap artists started to change the landscape of Hip Hop fashion.

There are few better examples of Hip Hop fashion in the 1980s than Run DMC. Not only did they reflect then change in trend towards Hip Hoppers dressing like their favorite rap artists but they had a complete style all their own. They were known for their Adidas tracks suits, large, thick gold rope chains, black fedoras and Adidas shoes with no laces. As opposed to the flashier style of the 70s, Run DMC's fashion represented a powerful yet minimalist street style. They rarely wore anything other than black and they didn't stray much from their basic costume components listed above. Other rappers of the 80s, like Slick Rick, went opposite Run DMC's style and introduced more ostentatious fashion elements like bomber jackets, gold teeth, and a massive amount of diamond and gold jewelry. This trend of wearing expensive items like four finger rings and diamond accessories was a result of the enormous riches that many of these formerly poor artists had come into. The style served as a means to demonstrate and boast about how far they have risen above poverty. This trend continued throughout the the next two decades and is still very present in Hip Hop culture today.

The 90s brought in many new styles as Hip Hop music enjoyed its most popular decade yet. MC Hammer made popular big ballooning pants (often referred to as "Hammer Pants") and expensive glasses like Cazals. He had a style that was much more like the very flashy disco fashions of the 70s. Two other styles popular in the 90s were bright, bold colors and the African pride look. The first style was represented by groups like TLC and The Fresh Prince and clothing lines like Cross Colours. The African style was worn by artists like KRS-One, Rakim, Queen Latifah and many others. It featured the red, green and yellow colors of Africa and many of the native African pieces of clothing, even including some ceremonial or royal pieces. Almost as a counter response to these styles, the gangsta rap scene donned a very simple style reflecting gang and prison culture of Los Angeles. This style included reds and blues (popular gang colors), bandannas, Dickies brand shirts and pants, button up shirts and heavy boots. This is also where we get the "sagging" style so commonly associated with Hip Hop today. Unfortunately, few realize that this style is a direct copy of the way the prison population wore their prison clothes, as these were often the wrong size and prison did not provide belts because they are often used in suicides. Normally, we don't get into such heavy topics in these lessons. However, FUNKMODE feels it is very important to give accurate information to our readers, especially when it is clear that many people are following trends without any understanding of their origin.

In the mid to late 90s we saw a rise in clothing companies that made clothes specifically for the Hip Hop culture. Previous to this time, Hip Hoppers were borrowing and matching things from a variety of sources that were never intended for those for those who were wearing them. But when companies like Phat Farm, Karl Kani and FUBU came onto the scene, suddenly we saw designers who really knew and understood urban culture designing clothes that really reflected the styles so greatly desired by lovers of Hip Hop. As these companies experience a degree of success, individual rappers started to see the value in starting their own clothing lines. After all, people had been copying the styles of rappers for at least a decade. Why not build their own fashions instead of using others clothes and letting them get all of the money and credit? Today, many, many rappers have clothing lines. To name just a few ... No Limit & P. Miller by Master P, Apple Bottom & Vokal by Nellyvokal, BBC Ice Cream by Pharrell, Wu-wear by Wu-tang Clan, Sean Jean by P. Diddy, Akoo by TI, Rocawear by Jay-Z, G-Unit Clothing by 50 Cent and Shady Limited by Eminem.

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In the late 90s, many rappers, possibly in response to the strong gangsta rap trends, began wearing very dressy clothes. Things like suits, expensive shoes, jackets, hats and accessories were very common. This is different than what was happening in the 80s when rappers wore a lot of expensive jewelry. This newer style didn't feature tons of gold or diamonds but perhaps just a single expensive piece, like a million dollar bracelet or hundred thousand dollar ring. Producers like Sean Combs (Diddy) and rappers like Jay-Z were known for this style.

Fast forwarding to our current time, we see many more new trends. The gangsta rap style has given way to a more upscale mafioso inspired dress. Suits, expensive rings, alligator shoes and bowler hats (a common style amongst 1920-1940s mafia bosses) are commonly worn. 1970-1980s skateboard and punk culture fashion has also made a comeback in the Hip Hop community. You see artists like the New Boyz and LMFAO wearing skinny jeans, neon colors, studded bracelets, chain wallets, and beanie hats. It is very common for styles to come back around in this way. Andre 3000, from the hugely popular group Outkast, often dons styles ranging from 1970s funk fashion to Golf fashion to Bohemian culture. As of this writing (early 2012), even the once thought forever forgotten Hammer pants have come back into style with some.

A quick note ... Hip Hop (especially rap) has always been heavily male dominated. Hip Hop fashion reflects this male focused cultural reality. In most of the cases of each of the trends listed here, women wore them just like men, but with perhaps just slight changes to make them more feminine. It wasn't until the late 1990s that artists like Lil Kim and Foxy Brown started to change trends for women towards a completely female created style. Kimora Lee Simmons (former wife of Hip Hop producer and business legend Russell Simmons) started Baby Phat, a clothing line for women that didn't follow the trends of men's Hip Hop fashion, but instead focused on what women wanted to wear. Today, women in Hip Hop have a completely distinct style from that of their male counterparts. Even though women are still not prominent in the rap or DJ scene, their fashion is now completely their own.

We want to end this lesson on what we feel is a very important truth in the discussion of Hip Hop fashion. Hip Hop, not in dancing, rapping, fashion or any other aspect of the culture, has ever been about following what other people are doing. At its essence, Hip Hop is about improvisation, creativity and expressing oneself through art. Hip Hop fashion is whatever those who are truly a part of the culture say it is. You don't have to follow some rapper, athlete, DJ, artist or anyone else to be a part of Hip Hop. If you are a Hip Hop lover, if Hip Hop is an everyday part of your life, if you can't imagine a world without Hip Hop, then YOU are the one who decides what the culture is about. This includes how we dress. New styles and trends are popping up all of the time. There is no reason why you should not be the trendsetter. In fact, if you are really about what Hip Hop is about, then you're always looking for new and cool ways to express yourself; that includes what you wear. So get out there and start a new trend today. Wear something unique that expresses who you are. Maybe people will follow and maybe they will laugh. It doesn't matter. Be yourself. Represent yourself. Do what you love. That is what Hip Hop is all about.

Check out this page for great pictures of the styles discussed in this lesson:

<http://www.FUNKMODE.com/AHistoryOfHipHopFashions.html>

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Threads: clothes

EX: "I got some new threads for the dance tonight. I'm gonna look flyer than a jet plane!"

Ice/Bling: Diamonds. (note: As "bling" has moved into mainstream usage, its usage in Hip Hop circles has lessened.

Saying "bling" is now seen as a joke or a sign of a Hip hop outsider. Ice is still used commonly in Hip Hop culture.)

EX: "I'm rockin more ice than a frozen polar bear."

Throwback: a throwback sports jersey, i.e. a jersey from a team no longer in existence or an older design.

EX: "I own so many jerseys, I'm a throwback mess. I hit the cleaners and tell 'em I want a full court press."

- Ludacris, from the song "Hip Hop Quotables"

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) What is a fashion trend that you might start based on your own personal style?
- 2) Who is the creator of the Phat Farm clothing line?