

# SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

## ICE CUBE

Hip Hop music has been shaped by many hands for better and for worse, though which is which is often a matter of perspective. It's difficult sometimes to see positive in some Hip Hop trends, especially when they generate controversy and negative media attention. Gangsta Rap is often noted as one of the uglier areas of Hip Hop culture. At the forefront of the Gangsta Rap movement was Ice Cube, a man who is today celebrated as an artist and as a creator of family entertainment. Is Ice Cube a Hip Hop hero or a villain? Today's SCHOOL'd lesson will look at his career to date and give you the room to decide.

Ice Cube was born O'Shea Jackson (1969) in the South Central area of Los Angeles, California. He had a mother and a father who were constantly looking out for his well being, even sending him to school in the suburbs to get him away from negative influences. O'Shea did well in school and discovered his talent for writing rhymes there when a friend suggested they compete to see who could come up with the best lyrics. It was decided that O'Shea was the winner and, from that point on, he started to take a more serious interest in rapping. It was around this time that O'Shea started going by the name Ice Cube and met Andre Young, better known as Dr. Dre. Dre was a few years older than Cube and was working as a party promoter in the area. Cube formed a rap group with two friends called C.I.A. ("Cru in Action!") and together they would entertain at Dre's parties. In music, Dr. Dre was also working with a group called "World Class Wreckin' Cru" and partnered with Cube and C.I.A. to create the song "Cabbage Patch". Dre and Cube decided to do a project together, separate from their other groups. They formed Stereo Crew and released an album together. This was the beginning of a much bigger partnership that would form when the two combined forces with Eric Wright, aka Eazy-E. It is at this point that the more controversial aspects of Ice Cube's career began.

It is said that Eazy-E was looking to produce a group using money he had obtained through illegal activities. He went to Dre looking for talent and Dre suggested Cube, specifically for his rhyme writing skills. They produced an album together called "NWA and the Posse" and the success with this project led them to form the group NWA. Though neither Cube nor Dre had been directly involved in gangs or crime, NWA became known for its overtly violent, explicit, and graphic lyrical content, most of that content being written by Ice Cube. Many people saw the group as glorifying gang violence, a subversive attitude towards the police and government, criminal activity and intolerance towards other minority groups. The music of NWA was burned, threatened with censorship, investigated by the FBI, denounced in the media and seen by many as a blight on an otherwise golden time in Hip Hop's evolution. Gangsta rap was defended by some as being an artistic reflection of the reality of inner city life in Los Angeles. In the way a journalist would cover a war, a painter would paint a scene of religious persecution or a historian would write about horrible civil atrocities, these rappers were also supported by the rights of free speech and those who believed that they were shining light on an area of society that was not pretty, but important. Ice Cube was clearly not a criminal but he was close enough to the "war zone" of south central Los Angeles to paint a vividly real and unsettling picture of the everyday challenge of living in that area.

Whether anyone agreed with the message or how it was being expressed, with Ice Cube behind the rhymes, NWA was commercially successful. Their album, "Straight Outta Compton" went double platinum. This was especially impressive considering that the album received little to no exposure on the radio. Despite, or perhaps because of, the group's popularity, Ice Cube would soon have issues with their management. Cube did not believe he was being fairly compensated for being the lead writer and therefore left the group in 1989. This proved to be a big move for Cube as it marked the beginning of his solo career, which gained him even greater notoriety. He released his debut solo album in 1989, with a follow-up record in 1991. But it was with his 1992 album, "The Predator" that Cube would find his greatest success. Behind hits like "It Was a Good Day" and "Check Yo Self", the album debuted at number one on the pop and R&B charts, which was a first for a Hip Hop album. The album sold three million copies and remains his biggest seller ever.

In 1994, Ice Cube took a break from music to pursue acting. He had already been in the critically acclaimed John Singleton movie "Boyz n the Hood" and a few others. Singleton encouraged Cube to extend his writing talents to

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film. This led to Ice Cube writing the movie "Friday" which earned \$28 million dollars on a production cost of only \$3.5 million. "Friday" has spawned two sequels and is regarded as a comedy classic in Hip Hop circles. While continuing to move to bigger movies, working with popular actors such as George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, Jennifer Lopez, Jon Voight, Ice-T and Queen Latifah, Ice Cube wrote, produced and directed his first movie "The Player's Club", in 1998. Eventually, Ice Cube starred in other director's movies, such as 2002's "Barbershop" and then again in 2004's "Barbershop 2: Back in Business". Starting to try out different types of roles, Ice Cube got the chance to star as an action hero called Triple X in 2005's "XXX: State of the Union".

Moving farther away from his reputation as a gangsta rapper, Ice Cube produced and starred in the family comedy "Are We There Yet?" (2005) and also the sequel, "Are We Done Yet?" (2007) These movies proved to be so popular that the cable television station TBS picked up a family comedy television series based on them which premiered in 2010. The show has already been cleared for 5-6 seasons of production.

With a record reported to be coming in late 2013, Ice Cube doesn't show any signs of slowing down. He is still very active with acting and producing, as well. This is especially impressive considering how much he has already accomplished. With a career that has spanned 25 years, Ice Cube frequently finds himself on top of many best of all time lists. MTV puts him as #8 on their "10 Greatest MCs of All Time" lineup. The Hip Hop magazine "The Source" listed him as #14 of the "Top 50 Lyricists of All Time". Snoop Dogg personally ranked him as #1 when asked in an interview. VH1 recognized him for his contributions to Hip Hop at their "Hip Hop Honors" show in 2006.

Finally, it is important to be able to consider Hip Hop music, artists and culture within the larger historical and artistic contexts that envelop them. Ice Cube has been married since 1992 and he and his wife have had four children together. Though a promising performance career was looming on the horizon, Ice Cube's parents insisted he continue his education beyond High School which led to him to studying architectural drafting. We are not talking about an uneducated criminal looking to promote anarchy and destroy families. Performers have a public persona as well as a private one. Though someone may play a gangster in a movie, or write a movie about gang life, that does not mean that they support such a lifestyle or engage in it themselves. Art is not about telling people what to do. Art is about shining a light on aspects of everyday life. How an artist presents his or her art may be controversial or not appropriate for all audiences. That doesn't mean the art is wrong. Every person must choose what to take into their mind and what to focus on. Being able to separate the artist from the art is critical when evaluating a piece and its creator. We do not say this to endorse or condone any particular artist, song, or genre of music. We believe that each family and individual must choose what they consume based on their unique perspective and values. What we do support is an open-minded yet careful consideration of all cultures, while holding strong to the core truths that make us who we are.

\*popular for being associated with the actual old school Hip Hop dance move called "The Cabbage Patch"

## HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

In full effect: a phrase which denotes a person, thing, idea or event happening completely and at a high level.

EX: "He was in full effect on the dance floor." "That DANCE was in full effect."

Get mine: to claim something for your own or to aspire to have something completely. As to say, "I'm going to get my piece of the pie."

EX: "I may not have won class president this year but, make no mistake, I'm gonna get mine soon."

Get at me: another way of saying "contact me". A combination of "get in touch with me" and "holla at me".

EX: "I'm gonna go but get at me later, okay?"

**BONUS:** Create a sentence using all words of the week

## EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Does Ice Cube have a clothing line? If so, what is it called?
- 2) Ice Cube was supposed to co-star in the movie "Poetic Justice" with Janet Jackson. What happened?
- 3) Are any of Ice Cube's kids following him into the family business?