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Analysis of Fresh, Fly, and Fabulous 50 years of Hip-Hop Style



Figure 1

Throughout these past several decades hip-hop has taken over the world and stood at the forefront of popular culture. The roots of hip-hop are marked by the legendary DJ Kool Herc and his iconic school party which was held in the recreation room of his apartment building in the Bronx on August 11th, 1973. Ever since then the culture of hip-hop has evolved and spread its influence worldwide. Fashion and style is certainly one of the most visible manifestations of its

unique culture. Anyone from mainstream brands to luxury labels certainly has to pay homage to hip-hop and its influence. The genre's artists and fans have cultivated streetwear, athleisure, and the prevalence of big logos within fashion. Hip-hop style embodies individuality, inventiveness, creativity, and much like all other forms of style a reflection of the world around us. One of the most prevalent aspects of hip-hop culture is personalization. Key looks such as Kangol hats, shearling jackets, and Adidas tracksuits worn by b-boys and b-girls at parties and clubs. Graffiti artists had applied their art to hip-hop fashion and MCs and DJs had popularized those looks throughout the 80s and 90s. The inevitable love and fascination for these hip hop artists and influencers have led to eventual separate love affairs with American labels such as Tommy Hilfiger, and Ralph Lauren as well as luxury high fashion European brands like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Versace. One monumental moment that stood out in fashion history particularly in hip hop was in 2004 when Sean "Puffy" Combs won the menswear designer of the year from the Council of Fashion Designers of America. This made him the first black designer to ever win this award and cemented Hip Hop as a culture to not be ignored within the fashion industry. In 2023 Hip Hop's influence is enthralled within every aspect of mainstream culture including luxury fashion houses. Designers such as Pharrell Williams, the late Virgil Abloh, and Rihanna are all well respected within the fashion industry.

As shown in figure one we can see the various styles of outerwear that were very prevalent within hip-hop fashion in the 1990s. Some of these brands included Avirex, Pelle Pelle, Triple Fat Goose, and 8 ball. Outerwear has been an important category for hip-hop style because luxe leather jackets and puffers provided warmth on the street while showcasing some of the most expensive items in a wardrobe. "Color is the biggest motivation for shopping before size, fit, or price. Color signage says more than words. Some of these terms to describe color are

Daring, intrusive, sophisticated, and demanding” (Sternquist, 2004). Marc Buchanan launched Pelle Pelle in 1978 to create high-fashion leather jackets. His bright colors and unique designs drew a hip-hop audience, and Buchanan purposely focused his distribution on specialty neighborhood stores in New York and Philadelphia to reach his consumer base. It is evident here that Buchanan utilized color and texture to attract his customer base while having an understanding of hip-hop culture. The value of these outerwear pieces is very dark and defined which was purposefully done to reflect the rugged essence of the culture of hip-hop in the 80s and 90s. Another major element in this instance is a line. “Line is a direction- a major part of the composition - the way they are arranged determines the effectiveness of the presentation” (Sternquist, 2004). In this instance, a line is certainly being utilized by all of these designs by portraying a direct upright structure for the leather jackets and the prominent horizontal stitches on the puffer jackets that give it its signature look. Dominance and repetition are certainly other terms that perfectly describe some of the main aspects of fashion within the hip-hop realm of style. With repetitive styles such as the puffer jacket and the leather bomber that are constantly re-releasing and evolving, it is evident that hip hop’s reign within the fashion industry is certainly going to retain its dominance for the foreseeable future.

In conclusion, the culture of hip hop and its influence over the fashion industry and moreover the world around us is not only a testament to the innate resilience, pride, creativity, and essence of the black and brown working-class youth that cultivated the movement of hip hop which today is at the forefront of popular culture. Hip-hop style has been criticized, stereotyped, and oversimplified in ways that the prevalence of institutionalized racism has affected hip-hop’s outlook on the world around us. This magnificent culture encompasses individualization,

innovation, realism, and modernity. Many naysayers have outed this particular style as being “too much” or “outside the realm of good taste” yet the culture is constantly pushing the envelope in terms of shaping the standard of modern dress and it deserves to be respected. Ultimately the formula that hip hop has created, mainstream culture has adapted, appropriated, and adopted. Hip-hop will forever be cemented within the history of dress and it isn't hard to predict that it is here to stay.



Figure 2