

THE INVASION OF FASHION IN HIP-HOP

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Giselle Leon

New York College of Technology

Professor Dr. Ines Corujo-Martin

## INTRODUCTION

In 1990, Hip-Hop became dominant not only in mainstream popular music but in the world of high fashion as well. The relationship between hip-hop and fashion was so impactful to our communities in the 1980s especially in New York that it became the chapter of a new era, new genre, and new style as everyone learned to become unique in their styles. Hip-hop fashion arose from the streets of New York City as an outsider status that gave birth to a distinctive style and aesthetic. Every brand had its own story that led them to the spotlight. The documentary 'Fresh Dressed' directed by Sacha Jenkins, discusses a look into the development of hip-hop and urban fashion. Those who wanted to change the image of fashion, black culture, and society learned to take advantage of their musical creativity through time.

Urban fashion began in the late 1970s and early 1980s as New York b-boy culture largely dominated fashion in hip-hop. B-boys were breakdancers who helped organize and give birth to hip-hop culture in the early days. This style included baggy pants, a pair of Adidas sneakers, oversized t-shirts and jackets, gazelle glasses, tracksuits, chains, and Kangol hats. The culture became obsessed with a more lavish, designer style. It opened the doors for artists like Notorious B.I.G. to begin rapping about luxury brands such as Versace, Prada, and DKNY. This new approach in music began hip hop's lasting obsession with high-end designer brands. During this time, department stores were highly traded in white suburbs and were very traditional. They did not include urban designer brands until their popularity of them proved profitable.

**BREAK THE RULES**

The documentary discusses the obstacles that came along the way for many designers in the 1990s, especially Carl Jones, the owner of Cross Colours. Carl Jones was a designer that brought bright colors, large pants, and headwear to the mainstream. These elements inspired



most of the styles of dressing in the early 1990s. Jones began seeing the evolution of urban fashion and wanted to bring it to the spotlight to engage more consumers. Carl Jones is a black fashion executive who began his brand in California. As Jones partnered with the store, Merry-Go-Round Enterprises,

he used his network to speak to the brand owners about who their customers are and their primary interests. It came to his attention that the majority of the consumers were “urban customers” best known as the stereotypical “scary” black or Latino individuals who wanted to spend money. During his trips to New York City, Jones noticed that young men were wearing their jeans four to five sizes larger with a belt on the waistline holding it in place. Jones began designing baggy silhouettes that fit the style that was popular. For example, his size medium clothing was more of a size large meaning that 32 inches in the waist increased to a 36-inch silhouette. Jones saw his invasion as an opportunity for his brand to be seen in the mainstream. He reached out to the producers of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-air* to see if they were interested in having the protagonist of each show, Will Smith, wearing his clothes. Throughout time, his style became so popular with the show that he was able to partner with other producers to style the

cast for the *Martin Lawrence Show*, and the show, *In Living Colour*. Jones also had artists such as Snoop Dogg, TLC, Tupac Shakur, Aaliyah, and Will Smith promoting his brands.

All the producers were impressed and were eager for more of the styles that Jones brought to the mainstream. Jones became an icon in the fashion industry with his invasive designs and details on each sketch. As his designs continue to stream all over television, Jones influenced other entrepreneurs - Jones' game changed the fashion industry by being the first black designer to ask celebrities to wear his clothing. Jones's brand united young people in thought and through culture. His clothes made many of the African American population proud of their identity.

The documentary also highlighted FUBU, another urban fashion brand founded by Daymond John. John began his brand in 1992, with no funds or space for creation. He did not have enough money to exhibit his brand to be exhibited at the fashion trade shows that occur where the street designers have models walk a runway with their designs in a selected association of people that is held every year. He tried to get a loan but it was denied by 25 banks around New York City. He decided to mortgage his home for \$100,000 and sold all the furniture that he could. With that seed money, John rebuilt half of his home into a factory while the other half remained living space. He moved into industrial sewing machines and hired a staff to help begin producing more merchandise since his consumer demand began increasing. John even had employees sleeping in sleeping bags next to the machines for a year until his brand began to populate department stores. FUBU was able to do what Cross Colors did not in terms of volume.



The commercial became a controversy in fashion as it was at its max, and at its peak made \$100 million in 1990. Less than seven years later, FUBU became a brand that proved itself at \$350 million. The brand's authentic approach to the industry allowed it to expand beyond just the local young kids in the hood. John made his brand a natural lifestyle and used television media as an advantage. For example, putting a FUBU hat on the artist LL Cool J, in the Gap commercial in 1997 changed everything. LL Cool J had a huge platform in the hip-hop industry at the time. He felt as if Gap was not respecting the genre's culture, so he decided to add a FUBU hat to his style. The \$30 million Gap commercial, automatically became a FUBU commercial. The commercial created massive sales for both companies Gap and FUBU, calling it history's biggest advertising coup. Unfortunately, in 2003 FUBU's decline occurred due to over-saturating the market, since the brand was buying more inventory than it needed.

### CONCLUSION

Fashion isn't just described as the way that we dress, it encompasses the attitude, energy, and confidence that we have put on without an outfit every day. Fashion exemplifies the emotion of acceptance, and boldness, and illuminates every room with your 'freshness.' When you can discover the creative side of yourself through art or culture, you tend to find peace within yourself because you are learning to be you. For centuries, fashion was inspired by world life events but most importantly through culture. Culture allowed fashion to create a common variation of one language with the expansion of technology and different marketing platforms. Hip-Hop created a platform for many designers that couldn't be seen by the public because of their rough upbringings. They began gravitating their creativity into art just like graffiti was implemented in the street styles that were being created. It became more than just a genre in

music, it was the primary platform that was used to express, identify, and project the new transition into urban fashion. Fashion has given freedom, creativity, and a free format or rhymes as language music continues to always be down with the movement in hip-hop. While fashion has changed throughout the year with different influences, oversized white t-shirts, sportswear, and sneakers continue to serve as the baseline for the hip-hop wardrobe, with puffy jackets, Timberland work boots, flannel shorts, denim jackets, jeans, and overalls. Many believed that the invasion was only going to be a fad but quickly realized that this trend has transcended decades. Fashion has become more than just a style or design, it more now becoming a language.