

Tawanda Shannon  
Catch the Beat: The Transformation from African Drumbeats  
to Hip-hop Synthesized Basslines-Research Paper

## **Catch the Beat: The Transformation from African Drumbeats to Hip-hop Synthesized Basslines.**



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## **I. PERSEPECTIVES OF HIP-HOP BASSLINES**

### **What Are Hip-Hop Basslines?**

Hip-hop basslines are rich with rhythms deeply rooted in African history. **Traditional African drumming** is the ancestral source that created these rhythms. The complex, polyrhythms of traditional African drumming are embellished in Negro **spirituals, blues, jazz, rhythm & blues, reggae,** and **afrobeat** and transform into synthesized basslines that are essential in rap and hip-hop music. The social ideology of the rhythms relates to the oral and aural traditions prevalent in African-American music. The griot, DJs and MCs keep the history of African-Americans alive as the beat evolves.

The historical aspects of Negro spirituals, blues, jazz, rhythm & blues, reggae, afrobeat and hip-hop are highlighted in my research. I briefly discuss musicology, ethnomusicology, and its connection to the rhythms and beats. It is important for African-Americans (especially young adults) to acknowledge where Hip-hop and its rhythm originate. If young African-Americans realize the connection, they will take on different appreciation for Hip-hop music, its rhythm and recognize the importance of the story and the storyteller.

### **Hip-Hop Basslines: Major Subject Area of My Thesis Project**

My aim is to trace the evolution of African Drumbeats to Hip-hop, which uses synthesized basslines rooted in traditional African-American music. African American, young adults (ages 18-29) are unaware of the roots and origins of Hip-hop basslines. I will create an experiential video that will help young African-Americans understand and appreciate both the lineage and the music using images, quotations, video and audio.

My visual and musical narrative will show the parallel of the African griot to the MCs and DJs of today. My focus is on aural history of beats and basslines. In the opening of my experiential video, I want the audience to hear similar rhythms and beats from African drumming and Hip-hop. After comparing the two, we will journey through segments of all the music that connect African traditional drumming and Hip-hop.

I plan to take a historical and sociological perspective and present a short, entertaining, and informative experiential video. My conceptual approach to the comparison of traditional African rhythms and Hip-hop basslines will be the focus of my audio treatment. My sound design will consist of alternating, comparisons of traditional and Hip-hop rhythms. My aesthetic approach will be created using repeated images and powerful quotes. There will be portions of the interviews with my griot and dj shown within my experiential video. If I am successful, my audience will be able to recognize aurally, similar beats in traditional African drumming and Hip-Hop basslines.

## II. HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF HIP-HOP BASSLINES

### Historical Perspective

#### Hip-hop MCs and DJs

Rap and hip-hop are about freedom, revenge, heritage, identity and the future. Hip-hop includes rapping (MC-ing), DJ-ing, break-dancing, and graffiti art. Hip-hop is considered a recent cultural development, but its roots stretch back through time. It encompassed various genres of music and dance.

Tap dancers talk with their feet. In tap, feet are the drumsticks and the ground is the drum. West African “juba” step dances coordinated with European clog dances to create tap. “They almost are like drummers and you



*Savion Glover  
professional tapdancer*

can learn a lot just listening to the rhythms they get from their taps”, Miles Davis recalls. “Savion Glover put a spring in tap’s step in the 1990s. His griot-like musical, “Bring in ‘Da Noize, Bring in Da Funk”, was a dramatic tap journey through the history of African America”. (Corio, 15) The composer, conductor and unprompted inventor, Bobby McFerrin, made his entire body and voice the instruments and

percussion for his hit song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” Tap along with other forms of verbal and physical percussive expression could be seen everywhere, especially the major

cities.

Urban Hip-hop was born in New York City in the early 1970s. African-American youth documented what was going on around them and what they thought about it. Rap is a major part of African American music. Chuck D, rapper and producing member of the group Public Enemy, calls rap “Black American CNN” and the “Black American folktale”. Rap serves as a commentary, or an opinion about the events of our time.

Hip-hop and rap are also educational resources. Through the language of music, they are teaching listeners about modern culture. The extreme synthesized basslines draw you into the message. “The infectious beat of rap music, with an aid of both technology and imagination, drives a cut-and mix formula of composing.” (Ayazi-Hashjin, 7)

The grandfathers of hip-hop are poets and musicians such as Langston Hughes, The Last Poets, and Gill Scott-Heron. Revolutionary blues, jazz and funk musicians are found on the turntables of today’s greatest DJs. Hip-hop’s cousins are reggae and dancehall music, born to the distant musical uncles and aunts in Jamaica and the West Indies.

Most modern pop, rock, jazz, blues, soul, and reggae traces back to the merging black and white forms of music. On the surface you may just hear the light carefree music, but underneath the harmonies lies a rhythm that expresses the angry threatening voices of the slaves and their descendants. These voices represent the rebel sound of people who seek freedom and revenge.

In the 1970s, Hip-hop pioneers recreated the drum. Instead of carved wood and covered in animal skins, it took the form of turntables and synthesizers. Today’s DJ is an urban drummer, recreating the drum heartbeat by mixing and scratching sounds and voices from old records and mixing beats electronically on drum machines. Hip-hop is its own culture; rap is its oratory. It is a modern expression of an ancient tradition helping to keep a rich cultural history alive.

### **The Drum**

Africa is the second-largest continent in the world, and three times the size of the United States. Africa is home to many different ethnic groups and cultures, all with their own language, traditions and religions. African musicians strive to create music that expresses life. The early forms of African-American music came from Nigeria, Senegal, and the Congo. In order to understand the roots of hip-hop music, we must break down the two most important elements of its heritage: the drum and the griot. "The drum symbolizes the heartbeat. The griot is a storyteller who builds a story against the back drop of the drum." (Ayazi-Hashjin, pg.10)

In Africa, the drum has been an essential tool of communication for centuries. The sound of the drum can be replaced by hand clapping, stomping, or rhythmic beating of objects. Instruments and bodies can be one in the same. Music's basics are the voice and human percussion, using the body itself as a drum. African natives compare the sounds of instruments in Africa to voices. The natural pygmy percussion of playing nature-hitting a tree with two sticks or rhythmically slapping water as it rushes over rocks is a simplified solo percussive sound. These sounds are an extension of the drummer and not as a separate tool or object. "Both past and modern-day Africans consider the drum as sacred. Some believe that God speaks through the sound of the drum. Drums are the heartbeat of the song and the spirit". (Blades, 57) That heartbeat is where the subliminal message comes from.

"The drum became indispensable in primitive life. It remains so. The drum plays a part in ALL human musical history. Even children respond naturally to its rhythm. The importance of the drum and its influence on humankind through the age is universally recognized. It is a vital instrument and the most compelling and significant of the instruments of percussion. Its use and development, is a story in itself. From its inception, the drum had numerous ritual functions. It was credited with magical powers and was held more sacred than other instrument." (Blades, 49)

Drumming served as an essential instrument. During slavery, music was a way in which slaves expressed their anger and frustration. By preserving the African drum traditions and remembering African rhythms, the slaves could keep a part of themselves free from European influence. The slaves adapted European forms of music by adding their African rhythms to it.



*Jali Nyama Suso, The Gambia, 1974 Griot singer Suso is playing the kora (note his name on the instrument).*

### **The Griot**

The griot is the name given to those individuals in West African society who tell stories, both historical and imaginary, to their communities. Griot stories reveal lessons through music, song, memory, and ancestral wisdom. In America, hip-hop artists maintain many of these same roles in the eyes of their fans. Through this storytelling, came the emotions of the people. The griot played a significant role in traditional Africa music and the DJs and the MCs take on that role in Hip-hop music.

### **Traditional African Drumming**

African music differs greatly in both style and content across various countries on the continent, to a whole host of languages, which creates this rich genre. In West Africa, the voice was the instrument needed by griots-the guardians of verbal culture-to convey their ancestral epics. "Telling two hundred years of history takes a long time. Some of our songs last two days. They speak of kings and how they fought for power, and they tried to make their kingdoms strong," wrote Foday Musa Susa, a Gambian griot and **kora** master in his book *Jali Hunda: Griots of West Africa and Beyond*. "In songs about slavery, we sing about which kings fought each other and who was captured," he wrote. (Corio, 16)

A complicated social decorum governs the griots. Making music to accompany the griot is reserved for their caste. The musicians are respected and needed; yet they have low social status. Many griot epics were committed to describe the feats of the Manding emperor and warrior, Sundiata Keita. His descendants, Salif Keita, update the style on the contemporary album, Soro. Married with synthesizers, Keita's outrageous sharp vibrato gives the machine soul.

Rooted in the praise song tradition, Nigeria's many musical rhythms like **fuju** and **juju** invigorate with fascinating ranks of massed percussion came out of the Yoruba talking drum. The lively urban center Sophiatown,

where Zulu and Sotho artists were collaborating and breaking limits, was overtaken. The government used tribalism to try to shatter the vivacious Black culture. They effectively moved Sophiatown residents to new townships like Soweto that were separated according to tribe. With one blow, the South African big-band jazz scene was devastated. The scene revived itself in the 1960s with a unique sound of small electric bands playing the Zulu backbeat of **mbaqanga** music.

### **Negro Spirituals, Work Songs, and Gospels**

Spirituals are an African-American religious, folk song. Spirituals were born during slavery, and grew up in the years after emancipation. African-Americans sang Christian hymns but added their own style and often their own words. "Slaves could identify with the teachings of the Bible many saw the connection with the tribulations in their own lives". (Ayazi-Hashjin, 24) The tradition of spirituals compares to rappers talking about overcoming hardship and finding freedom.

### **Blues**

Freedom presented itself with the blues. It was born in the beginning of the twentieth century after the Civil War. Blues was the first music of free African Americans marking the end of slavery. The blues was a mixture of different traditions: African song types including call-and-response and holler, spirituals, and ballads about daring heroes and notorious outlaws. The subject matter was new, concerning loss, loneliness, drinking, and gambling. The combination of emotions and ideas changed the overall structure of the blues and genres that followed. The musical structure of blues greatly influenced hip-hop. "Blues players use riffs similar to the bassline of many hip-hop tracks". (Ayazi-Hashjin, 25) **Riffs** are single rhythmic phrases repeated as background to (or part of) the melody.

## **Jazz**

Jazz is originally a spin-off of blues music and evolved from African-American artists and musicians. Jazz is often referred to as America's classical music: one of the first, native musical styles born out of American culture. This improvisational music wins favor with its audience as it uses techniques that enhances its impromptu sound.

In the very beginning jazz was created as dance music in order to entertain audiences, but soon the dance aspect of jazz music evolved and was split into many sub-genres. Jazz styles vary from the fast, hard-hitting rhythms of Bebop and the nonchalant, mellow harmonies of cool jazz, to the restless free jazz and the natural grooves of soul jazz.

One constant remains through jazz and its different sub-genres: its foundation in blues music, boasting reliance on group interaction and unpredictable improvisation. Dizzy Gillespie was pioneering Cu-bop and blending



*Quincy Jones*  
*producer*

Afro-Cuba and bebop jazz. He embraced the opportunity to work with Hugh Masekela. "The African had a good sense of going back to the beginning of the music, says Quincy Jones. Dizzy took American music and fused with African drums, and Hugh did it the other way around." (Corio, 98)

To Chicago, New Orleans, Kansas City and Harlem, African-Americans brought along their musical roots. The musical roots they planted bore seeds of music called jazz. Small ensembles of brass and winds would play extemporaneous music with offbeat interwoven rhythms. Starting in places like New Orleans, Jazz took root in cities such as Chicago and New York. Jazz swept the country with its big band and swing style.

In the 1940s, another style of Jazz called "bebop" emerged. A couple of musicians joined to create unpredictable melodies, complex rhythms, and new tones. Later, there were other styles drawn from African roots called free jazz and fusion. During the same time, a hip-hop awareness began to emerge.



*Gil Scott-Heron  
jazz fusion singer and  
musician*

In the 1970s, jazz fusion singer and musician Gil Scott-Heron performed powerful rap poems such as “Small Talk on 125<sup>th</sup> and Lennox,” “No Knock,” and “H2 Ogate Blues.”

### *Harlem Renaissance*

Jazz music was the center of the Harlem Renaissance, one of the great intellectual movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based in the New York City neighborhood of Harlem, the Harlem Renaissance presented itself in literature, art, and music that portrayed African-American experiences. During this time, New York nightclubs like the "Cotton Club" and "Connie's Inn" were popular jazz spots. The Harlem Renaissance left a permanent mark on American culture, opening doors so that new forms of expression could develop. Fifty years later, hip-hop culture emerged, north of Harlem in the South Bronx, addressing many of the same concerns as the Harlem Renaissance.

### **Rhythm & Blues**

Over the years, social and sexual mores have shifted radically, and with this, shift the way music talks about love. In music like blues, musicians would make songs where notions were indirect or assumed. However romantic love is not the only type of love, African-Americans musicians uttered vocally. African-Americans have always sung songs concerning love for friends, freedom, African-American people, etc. Even African griots chanted the praises and various types of human love: love of community and country, love of family, adoration of material things, and a longing for a Supreme Being.

There has always been an appreciation for romantic music sung by a melodious lead voice. Soul music was a romantic music that drives from blues through urbanization, commercialization and growing popularity of rhythm and blues music style. Soul described a number of important rhythm and blues styles from the 60s. Memorable acts such as Motown were definitely in the forefront of soul. This demonstrates the immense diversity

that can be found within soul and r&b music. Although soul originated in part from America, soon evolved to encompass local styles of musicians and their own interpretations. In urban cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, the music concentrated on vocal relations and even productions. However, in cities such as Detroit, Motown concentrated on creating a commercial sound that was influenced evenly by Gospel and Rock and Roll.

### **Reggae/Afrobeat**

The first time Jamaicans encountered African-America music was during the Second World War. Many Black American sailors were stationed on the island. They brought their musical tastes and record collections to Jamaica. R & B produced in New Orleans and other southern states became interesting to those in W. Kingston who could afford radios. The looping style of southern r & b was reminiscent of West Indians unhurried rhythms.

Jamaican musicians listened to radio broadcasts from North America, which played upbeat variations of New Orleans rhythm and blues, known as ska. Jamaican music was originally an interpretation of this style of ska and proved quite popular in the beginning. Modern jazz and American r&b influenced the early ska musicians. Eventually the style of this music evolved through Jamaicans musicians, who slowed the tempo slightly. This



*Coxsone Dodd*  
*Jamaican producer*

evolved form became known as reggae.

Reggae has since proven itself as a flexible approach to music with many crossovers from blues to melodic rock. The Jamaican producer, Coxsone Dodd, recalls a parallel moment when the urgency of the 1960s ska music –the sound of Jamaican’s heady slowed into rock steady. "They people just go tired of dancing so

fast. It was time to slow down the beat," Dodd said. (Corio, 78)

By 1961, the Jamaican rhythms could be easily distinguished from the r & b sound. Jamaicans took r & b flattened the sound, increase the bass and beat, and lengthen the instrumental parts of ska music. The transition from

r & b to the original sound of ska came about through the influence of Rasta and Burru drumming. This new sound manifested in underground Jamaican music.

Before roots reggae became popular, underground Jamaican music was present. The language of the music was in broken English or patois. "Signifying" and "toasting" were the names given to this modern form of storytelling. This style included rhyming, simple tale telling, boasting, and inventing humorous insults. "The "Dee-jay"-was the Jamaican predecessor and the American MC-was the performer. This form of rap was called "chanting on the mike." (Ayazi-Hashjin, 29)

The Deejays would play "dub" tracks, instrumentals, or B-sides of a song. The sound system used to play this music included a turntable, an amplifier, and enormous speakers. A "selector" was responsible for playing the records and a Deejay would announce the tracks. Jamaican Deejays would toast over what they described as "riddims", using phrases like "Live the life you love and love the life you live", "Wake the town and tell the people," and scats like "chick-a-bow-wow-wow". DJs would take instrumental r & b and would scat or use improvised lyrics while the record played. Talk over and dub DJs would use slang and slogan like "Work it!" "Work it!" "Move it up!" to encourage the dancers. Jamaicans would set up these sound systems, which played loud bass, at halls and slum yards and have a disco. Dances occurred nightly during the 50s, 60s, and 70s.



*Fela Anikulapo Kuti  
Nigerian Singer and  
musician*

The digital sound of dance hall shifted Jamaican pop from slow dance style and natural reggae drum and bass, to ruthless strokes of synthesized drums in the years following Bob Marley's death. This change in style brought about a new breed of reggae artists like Shaba Ranks, Buju Banton, and Beenie Man. Unlike Ranks and Banton, Beenie Man sings tunefully and developed the "sing-jay" style that mixes singing with DJing. His solid voice and high-speed technique flow effortlessly through R&B, rap, and reggae.

The solid sound of Afrobeat similarly stood out for its unique rhythms and technique, but from a more traditional drumming and live band stand point. Afrobeat is a term coined by the late Nigerian Superstar Fela Anikulapo Kuti. His unique musical mixture created combining elements of Yoruba music with jazz, funk and big band. His larger than life personality and enormous talent dominated this genre practically shadowing all other Afrobeat musicians. After Fela's passing the region of Afrobeat opened refocusing its spotlights on seasoned veterans like Orlando Julius as well as the next gifted generation with Femi Kuti and, innovator Lagbaja, and many others. Artists such as Super Cat, Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton, Beenie Man, and Fela follow the Jamaican deejay tradition or the traditional drumming techniques. Their sounds can merge easily with hip-hop beats.

### **Rap & Hip-hop**

Different times find different messengers. The griot role was portrayed in the 1990s by rapper-group Public Enemy. This group influenced attitudes and events with titles such as, "It takes A Nation of A Millions to Hold Us Back." The volume of the message was amplified by dramatic lyrics, cutting through the club scene like a screaming siren.

To understand Rap and Hip-hop, it is important to understand all the styles of African American music that precedes it. Just as hip-hop began underground, so did many other kinds of music. As these early styles became more popular, they paved the way for the hip-hop culture.

As KRS One says, " Rap is something you do, Hip-hop is something you live". (Ayazi-Hashjin, 43)

Both reggae and rap grew out of city slum environments. Rap started in the South Bronx of New York, which mainly consist of Black and Hispanic ghettos.



*Graffiti*

Hip-hop music refers to the culture, which promotes graffiti spraying, breakdancing, beatboxing, scratching/DJ-ing/**turntablism** in addition to rapping (MC-

ing) itself. At the core, Hip-hop is a postmodern musical style that deconstructs familiar sounds and songs, transforming them as entirely new original songs. Hip-hop was really the medium for modern day rap music, however with the growing population of rap music, original Hip-hop artists are now evolving this music and returning to the basics of Hip-hop and its cultural implications through old school.

Old school rap is a terminology that refers to a style of early rap through rappers of the 70s and early 80s. Primarily old school is recognizable through its heavy orientation of beats coupled with sporadic versatile lyrics, always falling on the beat. DJs scratching records and playing drum loops, with MCs rapping over the resulting rhythms usually made old school records. Old school passed away in 1984 with the introduction of more complex rhymes and rhythms, which began to dominate both the street Hip-hop and commercial rap movements.

In accordance to the laws of Hip-hop, where **beatboxing** was originally implemented a great level of coordination and rhythm is required from the individual in order to effectively master this style of music. A human beatbox is a person who produces beat sounds from his mouth. The vibrations of the lips clicking with the tongue on



*Doug E. Fresh  
Rapper and Beatboxer*

the roof of the mouth along with breathing techniques creates the beatbox sound. An amazing range of sounds and music can be created through these techniques, and though it may only take minutes to learn how to beatbox, it can take a lifetime to master. Beatbox music is usually produced live to show the skill to a crowd. The microphone amplifies the overall sound.

In the 1980s, Doug E. Fresh brought a new meaning to going solo and was influenced by his Harlem hip-hop background. Like Darren Robinson (Fresh) of the rap group, the Fat Boys, billed himself as “The Human Beatbox.” His bleeps, clicks, and boings were so distinctive that an actual beatbox-the Oberheim Emulator synthesizer- installed a Doug E. Fresh sound chip in 1986. Other artists in this genre include, Bobby McFerrin, Biz Markie, and Rahzel Questlove (Questlove), the godfather of Noyze.

Rap is considered DJ and MC music and reggae relies on pre-recorded sound. The rap beat comes from hard funk as opposed to Jamaican rhythms. DJ reggae and rap are similar in that the both include speaking and singing from rhythm from records. Just as reggae discusses the idea of roots and culture, rap is rooted in the experience of lower class blacks in America's major northern cities.

The rap arena is highly competitive. Rappers must work hard at their skills to gain respect and recognition. People have discarded rap as insubstantial music. Some people feel that it does not use traditional instruments or singing styles. Some even argue that rap is violent and negative to the ear.

Throughout the years, rap has been dismissed by all kinds of people for various reasons. However, if you listen closely, there lies a virtuous message therein. As more and more people open their minds and ears, there have been more records sold.

**Gansta rap** originated from the late 80s, evolving from early hardcore rap adding a tense noisy sound to the style. Lyrically gansta rap is extremely harsh, as rappers speak profanities with verses concerning coarse tales of urban crime and despair. Gansta rap during its prime was most successful from hip-hop during the late 80s and 90s. Therefore, this caused considerable controversy, as conservative organizations tried to get explicit albums banned in fear of its messages and strong lyrics.

Although gansta rap was a truthful representation of some aspects of ghetto reality, its hardnosed attitude could not define Hip-hop. In reaction, a new musical and lyrical balance was struck by a generation for whom sampling was as natural as playing a guitar. Once again, the idea of validity became a standard of truth, and in the 1990s that meant "old school." Within Hip-hop the term referred to rap's 1979's originators, like Doug E. Fresh, Afrikka Bambataa, and Run D.M.C. Broadly, old school identified the most affecting fundamentals of soul excited gospel vocalizing, a tight rhythm section, full-blown horn section, and emotional sincerity.

Socially direct rap neutralized gangster style, but rap still illustrated certain conflicts that were not necessarily deadly ones. "Snapping," a game of trading insults as entertainment, was experienced during slavery and has African roots. Both reggae and rap feature competitor "dissing" or disrespecting on record. The widespread commercial success of hip-hop artists proves what a powerful art form it is. Rap's presence for mainstream culture is a victory of African Americans.

Rappers and DJs who stay true to the art form are keeping the beat alive. Not only rhymes and beats will change, but also the new technology and techniques will emerge. There will be new collaborations with other kinds of musician's new ways of creating hip-hop tracks and new attitudes about them as well.

Hip-hop represents a form of underground entertainment, while rap tells the raw, expressive, and controversial story. This art form emerged because youth needed to express themselves and they had something important to say. Like the griots of African tradition, MCs will continue to offer us lessons to comprehend.

Hip-hop is a form of expression created by youth. Its root traces back to Africa, but it is an art form focussed on the future and change. It teaches use to strive for originality through sound, learning, creativity, and in



*DJ Kay Slay  
DJ for Hot 97 Radio  
Station*

the way we live our lives. The culture that grew up around rap is called "hip-hop".

Hip-hop culture involves dance, dress, language, graffiti, and attitude.

Turntablism is the art of mixing and scratching, which is and involves part of

Hip-hop music, but also a genre in itself due to its precise and skilled sound.

Turntablism began over dub tracks where rappers would rap daily concerns and implement them on live sets at sound system dances. The skills surrounding turntabalism through beat scratching developed in rap music. With these intense collages of samples at their clearance, rappers such as Public Enemy furthered sampled and helped introduce a social and political conscience of rap music.

A DJ called Theodore eventually invented “scratching”. Scratching occurs when a DJ spins a record back and forth while the needle is in the groove. While scratching, the record acts as the percussion instrument. This technique pushed the beat even further.



*Max Roach  
Jazz Musician*

Hip-hop and rap was about the vital mix of voice and rhythm. Although the rhythm comes out of a drum machine at times, there is an appreciation for the essence of the beat. Rap, Hip-hop, and old school might sound all the same to the inexperienced, however each style of music has different reputations. Rap has evolved from both the old school sound of Hip-hop culture through hard rock guitars and hard hitting beats which were introduced by Run D.M.C. one of the first hardcore rap groups. “The living that frightened people about hip hop was that they heard people enjoying the rhythm for rhythm’s sake. Hip-hop lives in the world-not the world of music-that’s why it is so revolutionary.” - Max Roach

## **Sociological Perspective**

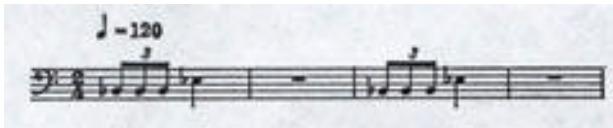
### **Musicology and Ethnomusicology**

Ethnomusicology is relatively young, but a growing discipline that is important to educators, students, and performers of African music and its history. There are not any better textbooks than our work songs, spirituals, hollers, blues, jazz and gospels. From them we learn about the history of our existence in this country and about our relationship to continental Africa. We can also learn about whom resided in the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and elsewhere in North America.

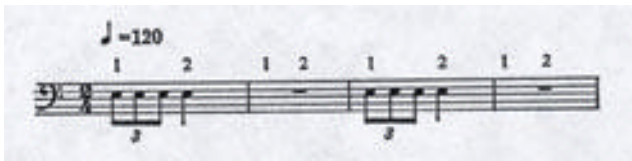
Concepts concerning fundamentals of the tradition such as rhythm, melody, and polyphony were customary, and formal elements were highly distinct. Importantly, music was not separate from the everyday existence of the people; music was in fact, a celebration of life.

African-Americans came with melodies and rhythms, which helped us to survive that arduous journey of the Middle Passage. On American shores, music and song has been a healing source. Techniques like the African call and response when dominant in spirituals. We use those most important of African percussion instruments, the hands and the feet, to create the proper rhythms for shouting and holy dance, which allowed us to maintain our tradition of movement in connection with, worship.

Rhythm appears in every song. Rhythm is the soul of a song. Without the rhythm, the song is nothing. Rhythm is the pulse, the speed, the pitch, the composition, and the texture of the song. By analyzing the rhythm only, we will be able to find the effect of the song.



*The kettledrums tuned into an interval of a fourth, with the notes sounding B flat E flat to suit the pitch of the chimes.*



*The drum rhythm of four strokes timed to occupy four seconds- the first strokes occupying one second, the fourth stroke one second, with two seconds silence between recurring patterns*

When we analyze a song we cannot look through it from bar to bar, we should analyze the song as it is in general. When we analyze the song from bar to bar, it will confuse us, since none of the bars give the same effect. They have their own characteristics. But when we analyze it as it is in general, we will find what the rhythm in that song.

Daily musicians and beat makers draw from centuries of traditional African rhythm. These complex drum rhythms have been simplified and dubbed for duplication. Capturing a beat so rich in sound is really impossible, but emulating it has been the thing to do. Making the connection to a deeply rhythmic history is essential to understanding rhythm in any music, especially Hip-hop.

Traditional and modern African-American instruments talk by following the rhythm of speech, and in fact, can serve as speech substitutes. While English is not a tonal language, the concepts of using musical instruments as speech alternatives remain an important part of African-American music making.

As important as the international acceptance of African-American music is, nothing has been more important than the role that the music has played in our own communities. Music has had a vital relationship to other aspects of African American culture. African American visual artists adopted melodic colors and rhythmic flow of African American music for the musical element of their work. Musicians influence the way that we talk the way that we walk and the way that we dress. For decades, African American writers have been influenced by the sounds of black music. African American music has influenced the work of African American poets, and through their poetry, those poets have helped us to understand. Our best poets are not storytellers in the European sense, but griots in the African sense.

Musicians like Elvin Jones challenged himself to create dense and complex polyrhythms by using African drum tones obtained from the hands. We play the string bass **pizzicato** rather than **arco** because our instruments have to be melodic, rhythmic and harmonic. When Erroll Garner played one meter in his left hand on the piano and another in his right hand, his frame of reference was Africa. When Oliver Sain makes the voice of his saxophone hoarse like James Brown's voice, he demonstrates one more way in which to capture African American tradition.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

We reach back in history and we impart. We inform our brothers and sisters of African decent of what we have created in this land called America. Often they have heard, absorbed, and created their interpretations of African American music, and it has made us proud. This mutual feeling has been going on for sometime now.

African-Americans must hold on to these songs because in them, we tell our story. We must preserve our

music because our ancestors would want us to. We must honor those who continue the musical struggle-Stevie Wonder, Randy Weston, Shirley Caesar, Makanda McIntyre, Melba Liston and many others. The preservation of African American music is important to the heritage of our children and of our children's children. How can we expect them to know if we do not teach them?

Our institutions and we must be repositories of African-American music. We must record the words, conserve the scores, and write the histories. In the end, the protection of this music and the course that African-American music takes in the future will be determined by what we do as a people now.



*Duke Ellington  
Jazz Musician*

We could not produce Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles, and many others like them, and be mediocre to anyone. There is not a more challenging intellectual, physical, or emotional responsibility than to tackle the legacy of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and Miles Davis as our musical ancestors.

What a marvelous thing it was that our ancestors created the spirituals while living under one of the most brutal forms of oppression. What a marvelous achievement it was that our ancestors developed the very reflective music of jazz, while living as less than first class citizens in the land of the free. The very least that we can do is to honor, preserve, document, and bring about those things which they have given us to guide our way. By honoring them, we honor ourselves, revitalize our spirit, and sustain our humanity. If they could do it, we should not have any problem overcoming the obstacles of keeping African American musical tradition alive.

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## **GLOSSARY**

**African Americans**-Any one of African decent. Africans in the

Diaspora.

**African-American music**-Traditional African Drumming, Negro Spirituals, Works, Songs, and Gospels, Blues, Jazz, R & B, Reggae/Afrobeat, Rap and Hip-hop.

**Afrobeat**-the improvisational character of jazz, combined with the raunchiness of funk, and the mixture of African tradition and politics. Term used by Fela Anikulapo Kuti to describe his fusion of West African with black American music.

**Arco**- with the bow -- usually used as a direction in music for players of stringed instruments Bass - a low-pitched sound or tone. The tones in the lowest register of an instrument.

**Beat** -a steady succession of units of rhythm. The measured and rhythmical sound of verse.

**Beatboxing**- the vibrations of the lips clicking with the tongue on the roof of the mouth along with breathing techniques create the beat box sound.

**Blues**-a style of music evolved from southern African-American secular songs and usually distinguished by a syncopated 4/4 rhythm, flatted thirds and sevenths, a 12-bar structure, and lyrics in a three-line stanza in which the second line repeats the first: The blues is an expression of anger against shame and humiliation (B.B. King).

**Consciousness**- a sense of one's personal or collective identity, including the attitudes, beliefs, and sensitivities held by or considered characteristic of an individual or group.

**Djembe** -the traditional West African drum often referred to as the healing drum.

**Drum** -a percussion instrument consisting of a hollow cylinder or hemisphere with a membrane stretched tightly over one or both ends, played by beating with the hands or sticks. A sound produced by this instrument.

**Drum machines** -a sample playback unit (or sound module with synthesized sounds) with drum sounds that can be sequenced by an internal sequencer to play drum patterns.

**Emotions** -a mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes; a feeling: the emotions of joy, sorrow, reverence, hate, and love. The part

of the consciousness that involves feeling; sensibility.

**Fuji (fuju)**-Nigerian Yoruba voice and percussion style using original African percussion instruments popularized by Kollington, Barrister, and Adewale Ayuba. A percussion conversation.

**Gansta rap**- originated from the late 80s, evolving from early hardcore rap adding a tense noisy sound to the style. Lyrically gansta rap is extremely harsh, as rappers speak profanities with verses concerning coarse tales of urban crime and despair.

**Griot (djeli)** -generic term for a West African oral historian-cum-minstrel; a storyteller.

**Hip-hop** -a popular urban youth culture, closely associated with rap music and with the style and fashions of African-American inner-city residents. Rap music.

**Jazz** - music that originated in New Orleans around 1900 and developed through increasingly complex styles. A style of music, native to America, characterized by a strong but flexible rhythmic understructure with solo and ensemble improvisations on basic tunes and chord patterns and, more recently, a highly sophisticated harmonic idiom..

**Juju**-I.K. Dairo was credited with being the first modern Juju star. This popular style from Nigeria relies on the traditional Yoruba rhythms, but instead of being played on all percussive instruments as tradition demands the instruments in Juju are more Western in origin. Drum kit, guitars, keyboards, often pedal steel guitar and some times accordion (squeeze box) are used along with the traditional dun-dun (talking drum, or squeeze drum). King Sunny Ade is the most well known of all Juju performers.

**Kora (Cora)**- is a unique instrument with a harp-like appearance and a notched bridge similar to that of a lute or guitar. It sounds somewhat like a harp, but its intricate playing style can be closer to flamenco guitar.

**Mbaqanga** -Also sometimes called "Township Jive", this South African township music was first popularized in the 60's. Johnny Clegg and the Mahatolla Queens are good examples of this sound.

**Music** -the art of arranging sounds in time so as to produce a continuous, unified, and evocative composition, as through melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre. Vocal or instrumental sounds possessing a degree of melody, harmony, or rhythm.

**Musicology** - The historical and scientific study of music.

**Pizzicato**- a note or passage played by plucking strings

**Pseudo-consciousness** -The false state or condition of being conscious.

**Rap** -a form of popular music developed especially in African-American urban communities and characterized by spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics with a syncopated, repetitive rhythmic accompaniment. A composition or performance of such music.

**Rhythm** -the pattern of musical movement through time. The pattern or flow of sound created by the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in accentual verse or of long and short syllables in quantitative verse.

**Rhythm and Blues** -a style of music developed by African Americans that combines blues and jazz, characterized by a strong backbeat and repeated variations on syncopated instrumental phrases.

**Reggae** -popular music of Jamaican origin having elements of calypso and rhythm and blues, characterized by a strongly accentuated offbeat.

**Riffs**-an ostinato phrase (as in jazz) typically supporting a solo improvisation;  
*also* : a piece based on such a phrase.

**Ska** -popular music originating in Jamaica in the 1960s, having elements of rhythm and blues, jazz, and calypso and marked by a fast tempo and a strongly accented offbeat.

**Spirituals** - a religious folk song of African-American origin.

**Tama** - (talking drum) a small hour shaped drum, held under the armpit and played with a wood curved stick and the hand.

**Traditional drumming** - to beat with the fingers, as with drumsticks; to beat with a rapid succession of strokes; to make a noise like that of a beaten drum.

**Turntablism** - the art of mixing and scratching, which is and involved part of Hip-hop music but also a genre in itself due to its precise and skilled sound.

## APPENDIX

### SCRIPT

**Opening Title Sequence:** Catch the Beat: The Transformation from African Drumbeats to Hip-Hop Synthesized Basslines. (10-15 min. experimental video script)

Stylized. Rhythmic Motion of Typography. Tight.

*Still Images (in order):* black background and white type- 15 sec.

*Audio:* Top Drum Djembe (fade)- 15 sec.

*Fade In*

Introductory Scene: **Comparison I (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

The scratching hands of a DJ interchanges with silhouette of drumming hands. Images on screen split for comparison.

*Still Movies (in order):* Erykah scratching video (fades)-18sec.

*Griot Voice Over:*

What makes up that soulful beat that we hear when we listen to Hip-hop music? Hip-hop basslines can send an unexplainable feeling across you that makes you just want to bob your head, tap your feet, and simply dance. That's what Hip-hop culture is about, expression; Expression not only physically, but verbally as well.

*Still Movies (in order):* Reggie drumming 24sec. fade)

*Griot Voice Over:*

There is connection between Hip-hop rhythms and African drum rhythms that is deeply rooted.

*Still Images (in order):* boydrummer.jpg (fades into) soundboy.jpg. (fade out)

Today, young African Americans are unaware of where their music and rhythms originate. In traditional African days, the drum was accompanied by a griot. The griot, like myself, told the people's story, their history, and their struggle. The drumbeat served as the rhythmic pulse that kept the communication and story alive. The rhythms spoke to us in a way in which we couldn't verbalize. So instead, we allowed the beats to manifest themselves in us through dancing, singing, and other emotional responses.

*Audio:* scratched beat of Run DMC "Here We Go" (fade)

*Fade Into*

**Scene 1: Traditional African Drumming—1860's (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

Starts with a movie of traditional African style. The quotes and music happen in this order succinctly. Two stills may be faded in and out between the movie.

*Still Images (in order):* b/wdrumimage1.jpg-4sec. (fade)

*Voice Over Quote:*

I'm convinced that we are only an extension of African civilization, and all this music is really African music.  
-Randy Weston  
Pianist

*Still Images (in order):* togetherAfrdrumming.jpg-4sec.(fades into) Reggie drumming session movie-16sec. (fade out)

*Griot Voice Over:*

At the very root of all music is the African drum. Its beats have influenced African American music today. The baselines of hip-hop and rap reflect the soulful rhythms from the mother continent. African American music is the tree deeply rooted in the soil of African drum rhythms.

*Audio:* D'Afrique Drumming -24 sec. (fade)

*Fade Into*

**Scene 2: Negro Spirituals, Work, Songs, and Gospels—1890's (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

These stills may be faded into one another. The quotes and music happen in this order succinctly.

*Still Images (in order):* prayersession.jpg (fade)

*Voice Over Quote:*

Give me that old-time religion/It's good enough for me.

-Anonymous  
Traditional

Were the chants of our ancestors as they work in the field.

*Griot Voice Over:*

Tears of joy and broken dialects were some ways to express the pain of oppressed people enslaved.

*Still Images (in order):* slavecryforhelpbw.jpg (fade)

Daily slaves used the drum to communicate with other slaves. The music and rhythm served as the universal language of the plantation. Drum rhythms were prevalent in work songs and spirituals sung by the slaves. Their faith and feelings were poured out through their music, their movement, and their rhythm.

*Still Images (in order):* plantationtunesbw.jpg (fade into) Reggie drumming 24sec.

Slaves believed they spoke a language through music in which the oppressor could not comprehend.

*Audio:* “Nobody knows the Trouble I see” (fades into) Pearson, Carlton. “In the Morning” (fade)

*Fade Into*

Scene 3: **Blues—1900’s (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

These stills may be faded into one another. The quotes and music happen in this order succinctly.

*Still Images (in order):* raycharles.jpg (fade)

*Voice Over Quote:*

The blues is where we came from and what we experience. The blues came from nothingness, from want, from desire.

-W.C. Handy  
Blues Musician

*Still Images (in order):* johnleehooker.jpg(fade)

*Griot Voice Over:*

Sorrow manifested itself into a genre of music called blues, base on the melancholy feelings of African American people.

African Americans were at such a low point in life that the music, tempo, and rhythm reflected it.

*Still Images (in order):* fatsdomino.jpg (fade into) Reggie drumming 24sec.

The drum would now present a slow count of desire and sadness. It was the voice of a people so hurt that they had become loss for cheerful words.

*Audio:* Junior Wells “ Take off your shoes” (fade)

*Fade Into*

Scene 4: **Jazz—1920’s (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

These stills may be faded into one another. The quotes and music happen in this order succinctly.

*Griot Voice Over:*

Jazz had a domino affects on people, places, and things. It was a highpoint in African American art and music.

*Still Images (in order):* harlemmoonbw.jpg (fade)

Harlem Renaissance was the time, and the Cotton Club was the place that rang loud with the sound of soloist, jazz horns, and complex drum rhythms.

*Still Images (in order):* dukeellingtonbw.jpg (fade)

The spicy tempos were not complete without the count of the snare and bass drums. Much of the attention was placed on the horn instruments during this era, but the drum was the glue that held jazz together.

*Still Images (in order):* milesdavis.jpg (fade into) collective drum 24sec.

*Voice Over Quote:*

You could remove the white elements-the French quadrilles, the Mexican military rhythms, the Italian melodies- and the music would still recognizably be jazz. But if you remove the black elements- the emphasis on improvisation, the polyphony, the complex rhythms, not to mention the all-important attitude that music was apart of daily life- the remainder would not be jazz.

-Lawrence Bergreen  
writer

*Audio:* Marsalis, Wynton. “Black Codes” (fades into) Marsalis, Wynton. “Jig's Jig” (fade)

*Fade Into*

**Scene 5: R & B—1960's (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

These stills may be faded into one another. The quotes and music happen in this order succinctly.

*Still Images (in order):* steviewonder.jpg (fades into) temptations.jpg (fade)

*DJ Voice Over:*

Music had evolved into so many genres it was hard to keep up. Eventually, the tempo was slowed down into what we called rhythm and blues. The interest in African American music kept increasing. This caused a major change in the types of rhythms we were accustomed to hearing. The rhythms were no longer the rhythms from traditional drummers. Replication of rhythms took on the form of synthesized beats.

*Still Images (in order):* womenrb.jpg (fades into) menrb.jpg (fade into) scratched record 24sec.

This gave music a different sound, but in a world that was searching for change, it was accepted as a norm. The rhythms would still serve the same functions as it always had but lose some of its traditional finesse.

**\*\*All of the music in the following scenes will be scratched and mixed into one another\*\***

*Audio:* Gaye, Marvin. "Mercy, Mercy, Me" (fades into) Gaye, Marvin. "Inner City Blues (Makes Me Wanna Holler)" (fade)

*Fade Into*

**Scene 6: Reggae/Afrobeat—1970's (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

Images of Fela and Bob Marley singing and dancing will fade into the stills.

*Voice Over Quote:*

Reggae is the spontaneous sound of a local revolutionary impulse.  
-Michael Manley  
Jamaican statesman

*Still Images/Movies (in order):* Bob Marley singing movie (fades into) bobmarley.jpg (fade)

*DJ Voice Over:*

Everyone had a message, so more people turned to music as a means of speaking out. When Africans and West Indians began to hit the scene with Reggae and Afrobeat the message of the time was all about revolution.

*Still Images/Movies (in order):* Fela singing and dancing movie (fades into) felafists.jpg

The beats could be heard as synthesized or traditional drumbeats. Whether synthesized or not, the drum roles were intensified. The drum was responsible for powerful and heavy basslines to increase the significance of the song.

*Still Images (in order):* haitiandrums.jpg (fade into) scratched record 24sec.

The intense rhythms would speak to your inner self, which prompted you dance to the music. Initially the beat would grab the listeners' attention and draw you into the lyrics.

*Audio:* Banton, Buju. "Untold Stories", Banton, Buju. (fades into) "'Til I'm laid to Rest", Anikulapo-Kuti, Fela (fade)

*Fade Into*

Scene 7: **Rap and Hip-hop—1980's (type overlay at bottom of screen)-24sec.**

You see freestyling from rappers and breakdancing. There are stills of popular rappers. These stills may be faded into one another. The quotes and music happen in this order succinctly.

*Voice Over Quote:*

Black rap music recovers and revises elements of black rhetorical style, some from black preaching and black rhythmic drumming.

-Cornel West

Philosopher and Activist

*Still Movies (in order):* Nappy Roots freestyle commercial-10sec. (fade)

*DJ Voice Over:*

Hip-hop is the culture, and rap is the musical message. A generation looking for new means of communication brought about another change in African American music, culture, and art.

*Still Movies (in order):* Eryka breaking video (fade)

The art was graffiti, the dance was breaking, and the story was spoken through the skills of DJs and MCs. Hip-hop is fresh, naive, yet mischief. It took on an expression like no other music had done before. It set new trends like battling, beat boxing, and freestyling.

*Still Images (in order):* arresteddevelopment.jpg (fades into) icetpublicenemy.jpg (fades into) biggie.jpg (fade into) scratched record 24sec.

DJing and MCing embraced the art of scratching with two turntables and a mic. These DJs and MCs acted as the modern form of the griot, telling their story in a new style. The rhythms remain essential to presenting the message. The traditional drum rhythms became that of the mixed and scratched basslines of Hip-hop music.

*Audio:* Nas. "One Mic", Kwaleib (fades into) Rhymes, Busta. "Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Can See" (fade)

*Fade Into*

Closing Scene: **Comparison II (type overlay at bottom of screen)**

African and hip-hop movie and images reflect dance, drumming, and rapping. These stills may be faded into one another. The quotes and music happen in this order succinctly.

*Voice Over Quote:*

You see we colored people have our own music that is part of us. It's a product of our souls. It's been created by the suffering and series of our race. Some of the melodies made up by slaves of the old days and others were handed down down from the days before we left Africa.

-Louis Armstrong  
Jazz Musician

*Still Images (in order):* optional: musiciancollage1.jpg-7sec. (fades into) rakim.jpg (fades into)  
Africandrummers.jpg (fade out)

*DJ Voice Over:*

Listen closely to the aural history of the origins of Hip-hop rhythms.

African/hip-hop MTV2 commercial (fade)

It may not seem as though the hard beats we listen to on the crowded dance floor of today's club have a history, but they do.

*Still Movies (in order):* Fela dancers movie (fade)

The next time you are out dancing, chilling at home meditating, and letting the rhythm sink into your mind, body, and soul; think of all the years, history, and ancestry that connects you to the beats you listen to today. Why does the rhythm sound good? Why does it make you want to dance? It can be very hard to put into words! The rhythm has always been something that was hard to explain. The drum can speak your feelings, say what you wish you could put into words, and tell the history you dare to remember. African drum rhythm will always be the heartbeat of African American music from past to present. Catch the Beat!

*Still Movies (in order):* optional: **Interview with QuestLove**

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*Audio:* Talib and Hi-Tek. "Africa Song" (fades into) African Hip-hop drumming commercial (fade)

Fade Out

**Credits:**

*Info:*

*Still Images (in order):* black background and white type

*Audio:* D'Angelo. Africa (fade out)