

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Before You Speak Know Your History

Adrian Starr · Sunday, April 20th, 2025

Part I

The West Coast hip-hop scene is a rich tapestry of sound that stands as one of the most influential movements in music history. From there we have to start from the beginning. A man I credit as “The Blueprint,” James Brown, often hailed as the “Godfather of Soul,” played a monumental role in the birth of rap production. His influence on the development of rap can be traced back to his work in the 1960s and 1970s, where his rhythm-heavy tracks laid the groundwork for what would eventually evolve into hip-hop.

Brown’s signature, particularly his use of basslines, sharp drum breaks and horn sections, became the backbone of many early productions. DJs began to use his music as a foundation for their sets, extending the instrumental breaks in his songs to create a new form of dance music. This technique, known as “breakdancing,” became an integral part of the early scene, and rappers would later step in to add their lyrical flow over these beats. Songs like “Funky Drummer” became iconic samples, providing the rhythm for the art form.

George Clinton, Sly and the Family Stone, Parliament Funkadelic and The Gap Band were major influences on the production on the west coast. They weren’t just making music they were creating anthems, resonating deeply with the triumphs of our communities. LA and the Bay Area became massive hubs for the movement, with locals and DJs pushing these sounds heavily at block parties, skating rinks, and nightclubs. Basslines, and call-and-response lyrics became a way for communities to express and connect, laying the groundwork for the rhythms that would later define the West’s identity.



The rise of DJs in the 1970s was another critical factor in the West Coast's rising hip-hop culture. Inspired more by funk and disco, DJs began using turntables to extend breakbeats, creating continuous dance production for partygoers. West Coast DJs like Lonzo Williams (later of The World Class Wreckin' Cru) and others were spinning records at parties all across LA, introducing new sounds and techniques that would eventually evolve into hip-hop. In the Bay Area, DJ culture was growing, with a focus on community gatherings and innovative techniques. These events, often centered around the youth, were a precursor to the rap battles and freestyle sessions that would define the genre in the coming decades.

The 70s was a decade of significant social change in California, in urban centers like Los Angeles, Oakland, Compton and Watts. The Civil Rights Movement of the previous decade had brought progress, but systemic racism, police brutality, and economic inequality continued to plague our communities. The Revolutionary Black Panther Party, founded in Oakland in the late 1960s, had a profound influence on the cultural and political consciousness of the West. Their message of community action and resistance to oppression resonated in youth of the 70s, shaping the narratives that would later emerge in the West Coast.

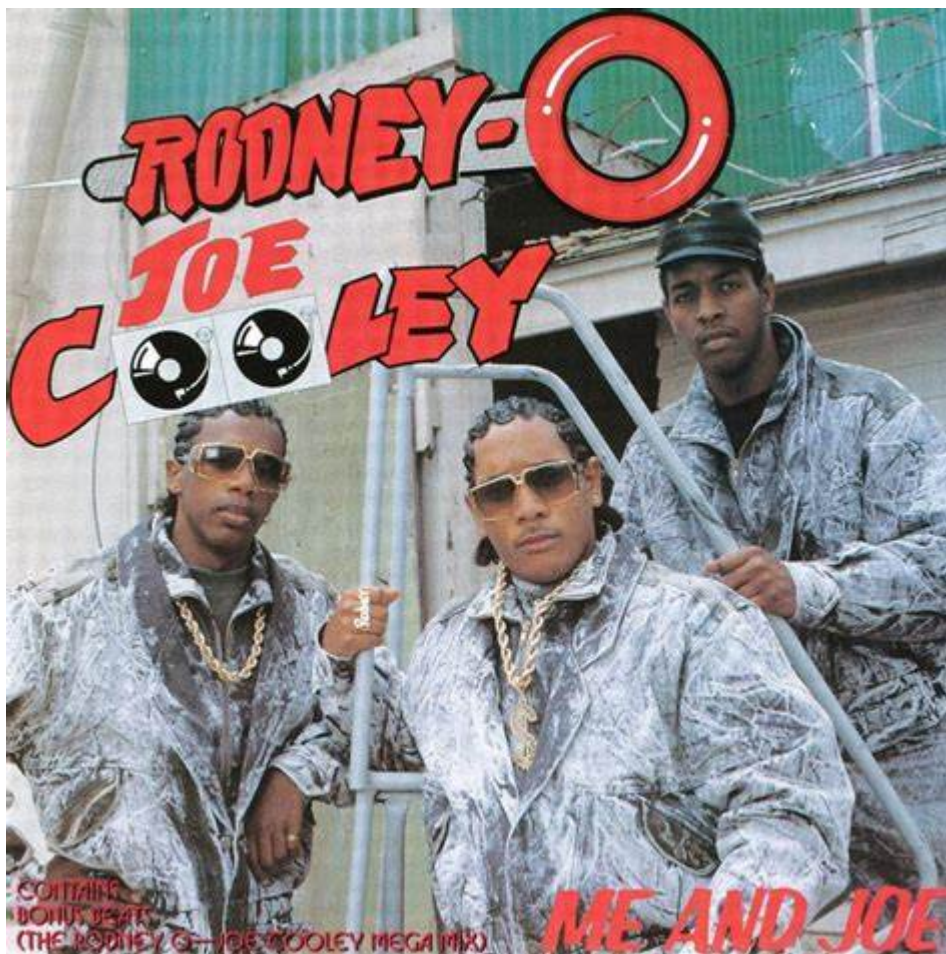
Though the term "hip-hop" had not yet been coined, the "building blocks" of the genre were already present on the West Coast. Spoken word and rhythm-based storytelling were thriving as a

form of cultural expression. Artists like The Watts Prophets and Gil Scott-Heron, while not traditional rappers in sense, were using spoken word to deliver powerful messages over rhythmic backdrops. Their work laid the intellectual groundwork for the storytelling and social commentary that would become hallmarks of West Coast Rap.

Curls for the Girls

In the early 1980s, LA became the epicenter of the West Coast's initial push into this genre as stamped. The electro-funk sound, influenced by pioneers like Kurtis Blow and Afrika Bambaataa, also found its way in the West and was embraced by early DJs and producers. The World Class Wreckin' Cru, led by Lonzo Williams and featuring a young Dr. Dre, were national showcases for this sound. Tracks like "Surgery" combined futuristic beats with funk-inspired chords, building the basis for the sonic identity.

During this era, Uncle Jamm's Army, a collective of DJs and party promoters, became a significant force in Los Angeles. Known for hosting massive parties at venues like the Los Angeles Sports Arena, they played tracks that mixed funk with early hip-hop beats. DJs like Egyptian Lover, part of the collective, created music that resonated deeply with locals and introduced sounds that would influence the next wave of hip-hop.



Another influential act during this time was Rodney O and Joe Cooley, who brought a street-oriented edge to the electro-driven sound. Rodney O's aggressive delivery and Joe Cooley's exceptional skills as a DJ created anthems like "Everlasting Bass" and "This Is for the Homies," which became staples of party culture on the west coast. Their music bridged the gap between the

electro-funk origins of west coast hip hop and the harder, more street-conscious styles that would define the genre in the coming years. They gained a reputation for representing the working-class neighborhoods of Southern California, solidifying their status as foundational figures in the region's early hip-hop scene.

Gangsta Gangsta

While electro dominated the early part of the decade, the mid-1980s saw a shift toward a grittier, street-oriented style of hip-hop. Ice-T(fed) emerged as one of the first artists to bring gangsta rap to the forefront, vivid street narratives on wax. His early singles like "6 in the Mornin'" and "Colors" were offering raw depictions of life of people in poverty in South Central Los Angeles. Inspired by Schoolly D from Philadelphia, Ice-T adapted the gangsta aesthetic to reflect the injustices put in place in Los Angeles, creating a template for what would later become the dominant style of Gangsta Rap.

Spaceships On Rosecrans



The late 1980s saw the rise of N.W.A. (N****z Wit Attitudes), the group that would redefine West Coast hip-hop and gangsta rap. Composed of Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, MC Ren, and DJ Yella, N.W.A. released their landmark album *Straight Outta Compton* in 1988. The album's raw portrayal of life in Compton, combined with its unapologetic critique of police brutality, resonated across the nation. Tracks like "Fuck tha Police" and "Straight Outta Compton" became anthems of resistance and empowerment, despite being highly controversial.

Ruthless Records, founded by Eazy-E, became a major force in hip-hop, not only as the home of N.W.A. but also as a platform for other influential acts like The D.O.C. and Above the Law. This period cemented Compton as a central hub for West Coast hip-hop and introduced a sound that was deeply rooted in funk samples and aggressive lyrics.

Origin of the Izzle



TOO \$ HORT



B O R N T O M A C K

While Los Angeles dominated much of the spotlight in the 1980s, the Bay Area was also developing its own unique hip-hop identity. Artists like Too \$hort emerged as pioneers of Bay Area rap, with a style that emphasized storytelling, humor, and funk inspired instrumentals. Too \$hort's early albums, including *Born to Mack*, established him as a voice for Oakland, with lyrics

that express the region's street culture and Hustler spirit.

Additionally, the Bay Area was home to an emerging independent rap scene that emphasized self-reliance and community support. This ethos would later become a defining characteristic of Bay Area rap, influencing artists like E-40 and Mac Dre in the following decade.

“Sets in Stone”

By the end of the 1980s, the West Coast had firmly established itself as a major player in hip-hop, with its own distinct sound and cultural identity. From the funk iteration of the early years to the gritty realism of gangsta rap, the West had carved out a space that was undeniably its own. The foundation laid by pioneers like Rodney O and Joe Cooley, Ice-T, and N.W.A. set the stage for the explosion on the West Coast in the 1990s, when it would reach unprecedented levels of mainstream success and cultural influence.

This will be the first installment of this lesson and be continued.

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