

# UNCHAINED MELODIES



## ON HIPHOP AND LIBERATION

Emerging from Black and Brown communities facing systemic racism, economic neglect, and state violence, hip-hop became more than a musical genre; it became a language of resistance, self-definition, and collective identity. Through MCing, DJing, graffiti, and knowledge-building, hip-hop offered young people a way to speak back to power, reclaim space, and imagine new futures.

The voices collected here reflect hip-hop's roots as a liberatory practice, one that connects personal expression to social transformation. These reflections remind us that hip-hop has always been global, communal, and deeply political, even when its radical origins are ignored or commercialized. To study hip-hop is to study creativity as survival, art as movement, and culture as a site of freedom.

Hip-hop isn't just music, it is also a spiritual movement of the blacks! You can't just call hip-hop a trend!  
-Lauryn Hill

A collective voice can speak for a people or a movement in a way that a solo act might not. And artists around the world know that when a group speaks out against factors and try to start, or stop, movements they tend to get noticed more. No such thing as a one-man movement. And Hip Hop is global. Has been almost since the beginning.

-Chuck D

Hip-hop is the voice of this generation. Even if you didn't grow up in the Bronx in the '70s, hip-hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together.

-Kool Herc

Hip-hop didn't invent anything. Hip-hop reinvented everything. There's nothing new under the sun. We ain't do nothing new. People played music before us, people danced before us, people talked and rapped before us just like we do. Did it way before we did, but this is our generation's reinvention of those elements. And that is what hip-hop is.

-Grandmaster Caz

African American musics are the seeds of our freedom, our liberation of thought... But, literally, hip-hop gave me a voice. Hip-hop made me want to write actually, hip-hop made me want to take a spray paint can and spray my name on a wall, or spray a name on the wall of an identity I was assuming. And so that, you know, is liberating and because of the way that we understand where it comes from, and the history of all that, it has massive social ramifications. So it's not just personal kinds of implications, but it has social ramifications as well.

-Jeff Chang

# A BIT ABOUT THE VOICES, REFERENCES

- Lauryn Hill is a Grammy Award winning artist whose work bridges hip-hop and soul while addressing identity, spirituality, and social commentary. IMDB, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005012/quotes/>
- Jeff Chang is a historian, journalist, and author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of Hip-Hop Generation*, a book documenting the cultural and political history of hip-hop. Interview, <https://www.mashupamericans.com/jeff-chang-cant-stop-and-he-wont-stop/>
- Kool Herc is a Jamaican-American pioneering DJ widely recognized as one of the founding figures of hip-hop culture in the Bronx in the 1970s. Quote, <https://globalnoise.wordpress.com/2012/11/29/hip-hop-is-the/>
- Chuck D is a rapper, writer, and frontman of hip-hop group Public Enemy, known for using hip-hop as a tool for political education and collective resistance. Q&A interview, <https://www.pbs.org/articles/q-a-chuck-d-lorrie-boula-and-yemi-bamiro-on-fight-the-power-and-the-50th-anniversary-of-hip-hop>
- Grandmaster Caz is a pioneering MC and lyricist whose contributions helped shape early hip-hop's lyrical traditions and artistic foundations. Podcast interview, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afnHymG9CYQ>

