

HOWARD

MAGAZINE

FALL 2023



HIP-HOP+
HOWARD

50 Years of
Lyrics, Lessons,
and Legacy



■ **SEVENTEEN GOING ON EIGHTEEN**
The new president of Howard, Ben Vinson III, PhD, shares a laugh with his predecessor, Wayne A. I. Frederick, MD, MBA, as the University transitioned its leadership in September. *Photo by Justin D. Knight*



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FEATURES

HIP-HOP+HOWARD

24 1973: The Birth of a Phenomenon

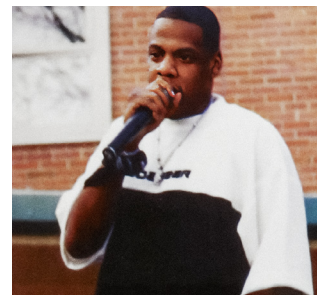
As immigrants settled in New York, a new era of Black music started.

26 1980s: Breaking All the Rules

As hip-hop culture entered the mainstream, it carved out an identity that would make it impossible to ignore.

32 1990s: Tha Golden Era

In the '90's, hip-hop spread its wings – geographically, culturally, academically, and politically.



40 2000s: Political Power and the World Wide Web

As hip-hop entered the digital age, it found a whole new way to empower the music industry—and the nation.

44 2010s: Freedom of Expression

In the digital age, women determined their roles with their own words. But the courts did the same with other lyrics.

48 2020s: Still Roaring

Howard reflects on the genre's current presence and its future potential.



Brittany Bailer, Amber D. Dodd, Rin-rin Yu, and Larry Sanders in Nashville.

Hip-Hop+Howard

■ **HIP-HOP IS THE ONLY MUSIC GENRE WITH A SPECIFIC** birthdate and birth address. And it's more than just a genre: As it aged, hip-hop took on its own meaning, constantly evolving, refining, and maturing. Now 50, it's not showing any signs of slowing down. May we all be so lucky.

Our editorial team was a flurry of ideas over how to cover Howard's role in hip-hop over the years. There was so much history and so many people to interview that we didn't know where to begin. Our team flew to the National Museum of African American Music in Nashville to take a hard look at hip-hop from an academic perspective and to meet with the museum's curator, and our inspiration grew from there. I thank Amber D. Dodd, our dedicated associate editor, for guest-editing the magazine's features with such endless enthusiasm.

■■■

Rin-rin Yu, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

LOVE+HIP-HOP

■ The iconic question goes:

"When did you fall in love with hip-hop?" What's special about love is that, if unconditional, you will fall deeper into its allure on multiple occasions. My love for hip-hop is high school summer night mixes, 30 albums and 244 songs as DJAyee, begging for classic Adidas after legend Missy Elliot's "On&On," or listening to 93.9 WKYS in the back of my parents' gold Dodge Caravan with DJ Angie Ange (BA '06). However, there is no better way to honor my love than editing and curating Howard Magazine's hip-hop edition for the genre's 50th birthday.

I wanted to create a project filled with Bison fellowship, the symbiotic relationship between

hip-hop and Howard from a scholastic lens, all while evoking the fondest moments on the Yard.

This was made from the pride of the Howard University community. It was a commitment to telling our side of every story; an undying love for hip-hop that contextualizes how Black talent, innovation, and domination in pop culture are commonly used to paint the worldwide canvas.

Hip-hop gave us something that we could never pay back nor forward: agency. Telling our stories from our perspectives and memories connects us back to the original messaging of hip-hop. Despite our systemic dilemmas, there is value and significance in the dances we do, the songs we sing, the beats we break. H-U!

■■■

Amber D. Dodd, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

HOWARD

MAGAZINE

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by Michelle Moore

BACK COVER

by Justin D. Knight

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Crepe myrtle
blooms in early
Fall by Louis
Stokes Health
Sciences Library.

PHOTO BY RIN-RIN YU

From the President

Dear Howard University
Community,

■ IT IS AN HONOR AND PRIVILEGE TO DELIVER greetings inside the pages of the prestigious Howard Magazine! This award-winning publication has been crucial to furthering our historic institution, spotlighting the everyday brilliance that constantly radiates from all of you. I truly admire those dedicated to ensuring that this periodical is among the best in higher education, and I am excited to witness your continued growth in both prestige and readership over the coming years. Thank you for allowing me to play a small part in your creative process; I look forward to offering more reflections in the editions to come.

For my first letter as the University’s president, it is fitting that we are paying tribute to hip-hop. I grew up listening to hip-hop as it developed in the early days. My memories of D.C. remain just as fresh in my mind today as they were in real time. Once considered an iconoclastic artform, hip-hop has now become synonymous with mainstream American society, wholly inextricable from our perception of what it means to be “cool” in this country. From our esteemed faculty to our students and alumni, Howard University’s impact on hip-hop culture continues to resonate in ways, big and small. We would be remiss if we failed to commemorate the myriad contributions of our community to the art form on such a meaningful anniversary.

As a scholar of the African diaspora, it is especially important for me to note hip-hop’s worldwide impact over the past 50 years: how the genre and the culture have captured the imaginations of millions across the globe. According to media research firm Nielsen, international artists have created more than 100 subgenres of hip-hop since its inception. While that number is certainly mind-blowing, it makes sense considering hip-hop’s reputation for self-expression and artistic freedom. From the countries of Latin America to the continent of Africa to the shores of Asia, hip-hop has become a conduit for liberation for the masses, a transformative crusade for the creation of a more just and equitable world. It is exhilarating to consider how much hip-hop culture has changed us over the past half-century, and it will be even more exciting to watch how its universal language will continually break barriers and build bridges in the next half-century ahead.



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I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the hip-hop community and all who have contributed to its growth and evolution. Thanks to each of you for being a part of the Howard University community, where the celebration of diversity and the pursuit of excellence are at the core of our mission. Together, let us honor the enduring legacy of hip-hop and its profound impact on our world.

Committed to Truth and Service,

Ben Vinson III, PhD
PRESIDENT

President
Vinson heads
towards Opening
Convocation.

INCLUSION

Where I Belong

My Howard sisterhood supported me after I transitioned to male. Our country needs to do the same.

by NEEKA GREENE (BA '20)

■ DURING MY FRESHMAN YEAR AT Howard University, I joined the Ladies of the Quad Social Club (LOQSC). I started transitioning from female to male the next year.

I didn't want to leave the club; I was a welcomed part of the sisterhood. Because of its emphasis on self-love and care, I felt enabled to become the person I was meant to be.

With the aid of an older sister and the chairwomen at the time, we could protect my membership by making an amendment to our constitution. We switched the use of "sex" to "gender expression" so that someone like me, who gender-expressed as a woman at the time of entry, would still retain membership even after transitioning. Likewise, someone whose sex might be different but who gender-expressed as a woman would not be discriminated against in the entry process. This amendment was not only was the first unanimous decision made by our board in history, but also made LOQSC the first and only social club on campus to be based on gender expression, not sex.

In 2019 I received the Lavender Fund Scholarship for advocacy work for the LGBTQ+ community within my social club. The recognition was monumental, not just for me as a young activist, but also for Howard and



its commitment to moving forward.

Currently the atmosphere for transgender youth in the United States is bleak. Data indicates that 82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have attempted suicide. Thirty percent of respondents reported being homeless at one point, and 27% responded that they had been fired, not hired, or not promoted in 2016 or 2017 because of their gender identity. Twenty-nine percent of transgender youth have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, compared to 7% of cisgender youth.

And 43% of transgender youth have been bullied on school property, compared to 18% of cisgender youth.

Despite all this, more anti-transgender bills have been introduced—and passed—across the country. According to the Washington Post, more than 400 anti-trans bills have been introduced since January. That's more than the total number of bills in the past four years. These range from outlawing gender affirming care to banning participation in sports leagues. This type of legislation is an attempt to erase and exclude trans people from participation in all aspects of public life.

Our generation has the privilege that many other generations didn't have. We can change our birth certificate from female to male. We have modern medicine guaranteeing safe and successful gender affirming care and surgeries. Yet this still doesn't address the body politics and reality of a trans community being systematically erased in public and archival spaces. Body politics doesn't allow us to live our truth; nor honor that truth by documenting, understanding, or appreciating it. It forces us into gender roles arbitrarily because of someone else's whim or vision.

It is our responsibility to treat every citizen in our community with the same respect, for we've been walking among you this entire time. We are not responsible for the repression we face. Our existence is non-negotiable. If one caters their politics to the least among us, all will benefit, no matter what.

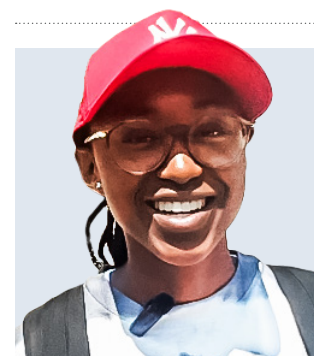
➡ Neeka Greene (*he, him, his*) is a library technician at Howard University and a transgender activist.

PHOTO BY TONY RICHARDS

IN THEIR SHOES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE HIP-HOP SONG?

by AMBER D. DODD



Alana I. Smith
SACRAMENTO, CALIF.
SENIOR, TV/FILM
MAJOR, SOC COUNCIL
PRESIDENT

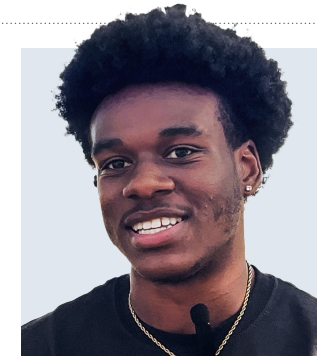
'Otis' by Jay-Z and Kanye West.

"I remember being in the fifth grade and this dropped. I watched the music video on 106 & Park and I'm like 'Hold on ... this actually goes!' It's a mix of classic music, R&B and hip-hop, and rap and when you mesh that together, it's golden ... which is the cover of the album."



Elise Miller
WASHINGTON, D.C.
JUNIOR, ACTING MAJOR
'Popping' by Rico Nasty.

"It gets you hyped for the day. It gets you ready. It's an affirming song. You're a popping person, and you want to hear like that when you wake up or when you need to get motivated to do something."



Zuri Franklin
WASHINGTON, D.C., JUNIOR, HONORS PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR
'Black Friday' by Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole.

"Though it's not an official release, they swapped beats and absolutely destroyed it. The flows were ridiculous. The bars were ridiculous. I feel like it's one of the best rap and hip-hop songs of all time. I enjoyed listening to two of my favorite artists and people I consider the greatest of all time go back and forth and trade bars."



Jenelle Howard
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
MULTICULTURAL
AFFAIRS AND
THE LGBTQ+
RESOURCE CENTER
'Where My Girls At' by 702.

"That song was like a riot for me and my cousins! When we were younger, we'd do these performances for our family and that was our song. It was three women, so it was three of us. We had the matching outfits, we all picked a part of the song and sang it for our families."

Anthony Bierria-Anderson
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
UNDERGRADUATE
ADMISSIONS
'Black Jesus' by Ghostface Killah, Raekwon, and U-God.

"Although it's a great song, the intro to it, the convo alludes to everything in life is because of you and what you have done and the work that you have put in to achieve those goals."



TECHNOLOGY

CHATGPT: A DIGITAL DJEMBE OR A VIRTUAL TROJAN HORSE?

We should critically engage and evaluate the expansion of artificial intelligence models and other content-generating technologies. Here's why.

by AMY YEBOAH QUARKUME

■ OpenAI's ChatGPT has been hailed as the revolutionary generative tool with the potential to break down barriers and promote cross-cultural understanding. With approximately 13 million unique visitors using ChatGPT each day in January 2023, the platform and similar technologies has reshaped our communication, healthcare, government, schooling, and business systems. With just a click, generative artificial intelligence (AI) platforms can schedule focus time, construct a draft budget, predict travel plans, or compose images from text.

As a professor with dyslexia, I've harnessed the power of ChatGPT and other AI technologies to assist in editing course notes, automatically generate

text from audio, and craft an extensive test bank filled with questions tailored to my instructional materials. However, despite these advancements, I remain mindful that I am the instructor and AI is just one of many tools helping me communicate.

The reason is because artificial intelligence models and other content-generating tools fail to grasp the historical diverse nuances of human opinion, thought, language, and experience. Many lack the historical knowledge that grounds the foundations of science and technology in the African world: The computational data collection power of the ishango bone, the fractal patterns in kente weaving, and the binary logic embedded in the Ifá system. ChatGPT and



other content-generating tools engage in the unauthorized collection of data, commonly referred to as "scraping," from many undisclosed sources to generate content or develop products. Frequently, AI technologies echo dominant viewpoints

of certain groups, spread misinformation, or simply generate inaccurate and unknown information as facts, especially within the African diaspora.

For example, a system named DALL-E 2, which can create realistic images and art from a description in natural language, failed to depict Founders Library, kente cloth, or the faces of future Howard University students.

AI tools are integrated into many common social media platforms (Twitter, IG, Snapchat), professional office tools (Microsoft 365, Google Docs), and general applications (resume builders, mortgage applications), under the guise of efficiency and productivity. Without guidance, guardrails, and authentic engagement, our communities face what Safiya Noble, PhD, author of "Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism," refers to as technological redlining and algorithmic oppression.

The broad and extensive ramifications of AI technologies on marginalized communities are noteworthy. If these technologies were developed to support us, they can be deployed to imagine a world without food insecurity, toxic drinking water, mass incarceration, infant mortality, or elementary school dropouts. Yet, there is not enough data on our communities to model such a reality. The data world has yet to substantially invest in such projects.

A collaborative team of Howard faculty and staff members are formulating preliminary guidelines on the use of generative AI tools. Everyone should develop an expansive set of AI literacies in order to take responsibility for telling our stories, to protect our data, and to promote an ethic of transparency as the world uses these tools.

➔ Amy Yeboah Quarkume is associate professor of Africana studies and director of graduate studies for the master's program in applied data science at Howard University.



■■■ These images were generated by OpenAI's image-generation software, Dall-E 2. The prompt was: "Create a photograph depicting Howard University Afro American studies doctoral students wearing kente graduation regalia while standing outside Founders Library, on the main quadrangle of Howard University's campus in Washington, D.C. Set this scene in the year 2071, where the air quality index is above 500."



EDUCATION

Erasing Affirmative Action and Opportunity

Education has long been considered a pathway to social mobility. Removing these opportunities can alter transformational life experiences and hinder the ability to break the cycle of poverty.

by DAWN WILLIAMS

■ ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 29, 2023, I was in Henderson, Nevada, preparing to deliver opening remarks to over two dozen Black school superintendents. Breaking news on TV shared that the Supreme Court ruled that the admissions practices used by Harvard University and the University of North Carolina violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause. In other words, by a 6-3 vote, the Court eroded 45 years of precedent, deciding that race-conscious admissions practices in higher education was unconstitutional.

The pursuit of equality and justice requires ongoing efforts to level the playing field and provide opportunities to those that have been historically marginalized and disadvantaged. This ruling hit hard and felt uncomfortably personal, knowing and acknowledging how I and other students like me benefited from affirmative action. My prepared remarks

shifted to underscore the premise that, from PreK-12 to postsecondary educators, we are all in this together.

Affirmative action has long been a contentious legal issue in the U.S., aiming to address and remedy historical inequalities by promoting diversity and inclusion in education. This is due to the exclusivity of American postsecondary institutions. Harvard University, founded in 1636, is the nation's oldest higher education institution, but did not admit its first Black student until 1847. Public protests from students and faculty followed; that student died prior to the start of the academic year. It would be 23 years until Harvard accepted another Black student. Despite being founded in 1789, the University of North Carolina did not admit its first Black student until 1951.

Hence, affirmative action has been seen as a response to the centuries of exclusion of Black students by predominantly white institutions

(PWI), enabling these universities to create diverse learning environments. Data has shown that since the onset of affirmative action policies, there has been an increase in college student diversity. Without this proactive approach, we are likely to see a reduction in student diversity on campuses, particularly at selective PWIs.

I credit affirmative action programs for exposing me to graduate education that ultimately led to pursuing and earning a PhD. As a first-generation college student, I had the talent and intelligence, but lacked the opportunity and exposure. Participating in a gateway program to increase the number of underrepresented students in graduate study and research careers prepared me for graduate study at a research-intensive university. This opportunity directly combatted a history of unfair systemic barriers to education that my family and I had experienced due to racial discrimination and segregation. Education has long been considered a pathway to social mobility. Removing these opportunities for students can alter transformational life experiences and hinder the ability to break the cycle of poverty.

I expect that we will see declines in racial diversity among many PWIs, which means that some of the most talented students of color will be seeking a college degree elsewhere. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) should be among their options. HBCUs have upheld the mission of educating talented diverse students, many of whom are first generation and graduated from Title I schools—like me. HBCUs are known for fostering talent that often goes unrecognized at other institutions and are examples of simultaneously promoting diversity and academic excellence. As we embark on a new admissions cycle, we will begin to see the consequences that this decision has for all institutions.

➔ Dawn Williams is the dean of the School of Education at Howard University.

DAWN WILLIAMS PHOTO BY TONY RICHARDS

CAMPUS NEWS

ON HILLTOP HIGH
President Vinson
sings the Alma
Mater during Open-
ing Convocation.



LEADERSHIP

Howard Welcomes 18th President, Ben Vinson III, PhD

■ BEN VINSON III, PHD, STARTED HIS presidency with a keynote speech to the Howard community at this year's opening convocation on September 15, 2023.

Donning the Howard blue-and-white regalia, Vinson recounted the first time he visited Howard's campus when he was about 12 years old and saw a Howard student dressed in a starched white shirt and carrying a briefcase.

"It seemed he had places to be, people to see, something to accomplish. Nothing stood in his way, although he paused long enough to smile my way. That image of accomplishment, drive,

and determination has never left me. It has always defined what Howard University is, in thought and in action. I knew then, as I do now, that there is rich treasure right here on these grounds.

"The treasure is the people, the mission, the building of character and mind that—person by person—happens here like nowhere else. Howard fortifies each member of our community with an internal strength and instills in each of us a confidence, a pride, a knowledge, and an uncompromising pursuit of excellence in truth and service. I couldn't be more honored to

stand before you today, in this regalia, as an official member of our community; and as I do, I carry that image of that determined Howard student in my mind. I remain as captivated by Howard University as I was when I first entered its gates those many years ago."

The community is excited about his tenure. "He [seems] very happy to be here. It seems like he wants to do a lot for the campus and school. I'm excited to see what he does," said sophomore Eseosa Eregia, an international business major from Dallas.

James T. Jackson, PhD, associate professor in the School of Education, agreed. "I'm excited that we have a new type of energy. I'm hopeful that he will bring with him an ethos of shared governance," he said. "[Vinson's scholarship] adds to the historical context of Howard University and something we've been able to achieve since our inception."

Vinson's first few months in office included kicking off the Bison engagement tour; a visit from the president of Guyana, Irfaan Ali; and leading his first Howard Homecoming.

As he acknowledged that he came on board to lead Howard at the University's high point, he said people should never become too comfortable where they are.

"Is the strongest we've ever been the strongest we can absolutely be?" he asked the crowd at opening convocation. "I believe our collective mission is to aim even greater, and I will do everything in my power to steward us there."



DEDICATION

Undergraduate Library Renamed Wayne A. I. Frederick Undergraduate Library

■ THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED the re-naming of the Undergraduate Library in honor of 17th Howard University President Wayne A. I. Frederick, M.D., MBA.

Board Chairman Laurence Morse, PhD, announced the building's new name to a room full of Howard University trustees, alumni, staff and supporters of the University during the president's farewell dinner held at the Ritz Carlton in Washington, D.C. on June 8. During the celebration, Morse also announced that Mayor Muriel Bowser has officially declared June 8 Dr. Wayne Frederick Day in D.C.

"There is, perhaps, no place on the Hilltop more revered than the Upper Quadrangle-Main Yard, known affectionately as 'The Yard,' said Morse. "The buildings bear names of those whose legacies loom large in the history of Howard University: The Founders, Rankin, Carnegie, Douglass, Childers, Blackburn, Locke. Now, the name Frederick will be added to this pantheon."

Dr. Frederick handed the reins to Ben Vinson III, PhD, in September, after 10 years of service as president of the University and more than 30 years as a dedicated member of the Howard community.

CAMPUS LIFE

Homecoming 2023



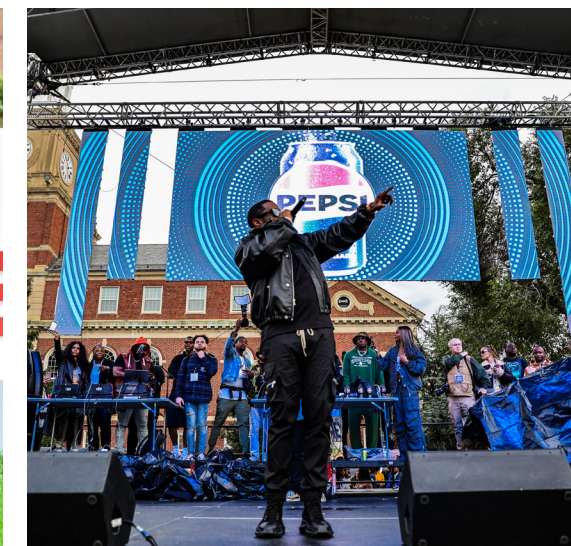
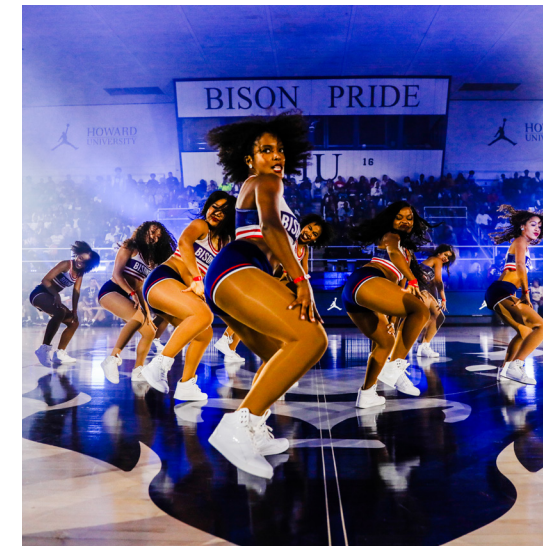
■ **HOMECOMING WAS IN FULL** swing as Bison made their way back to the Mecca during October 15-22 for a week of traditions, culminating in a victorious game against Norfolk State.

“The energy is still here. We still have the Yardfest, we still have the activities going. The only difference is the time and music,” said Jay “DJ Parlay” Perry (BA ’95), who came down from New York. “We are the greatest homecoming of all time... the GOAHT!”

This year, the Office of Student Affairs held a grand opening of the new student food pantry in Blackburn. The fashion show featured a tribute to 50 years of hip-hop with a performance by Howard alumna Lady London. Yardfest featured rapper Kaliiii and R&B artist Victoria Monét. Hip-hop icon and former Howard student Sean Combs also gifted \$1 million to the University and performed some of his most popular hits.

Alumni were equally excited to come home. “It’s really cool to see how I’ve grown in those 20 years, reflecting on how Howard’s grown in those 20 years,” said Brandon McCalla (BA ’03).

“I didn’t come back to Homecoming until last year,” said Deitre Epps (BA ’87), who attended the 1982 Freshman Class of Howard University event. “I was so anxious after all this time to come back....I went through that door and [my friends] come to me like a bee-line and say, “Deeeitrrraaaaaa! Where have you been?!” Imagine how it felt after 40 years to be welcomed like that!”



■ **REVIVAL!** In keeping with this year’s Homecoming theme, traditions old and new were present all week. Top row, L-R: The royal coronation, game day, Lavender reception; Middle, L-R: Ribbon cutting of the new food pantry, Bison Madness, fashion show; Bottom, L-R: Quad step team at the step show, alum shows HU Love, Sean “Diddy” Combs performs at Yardfest.

HONORS

HU's Office of University Communications Wins Several Awards

■ **BEST MAGAZINE, BEST website, and best video** are some of the awards won by the Howard's Office of University Communications in recent months. The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) Circle of Excellence awarded Howard Magazine gold for its 2022 issues; silver for Howard Magazine's story, "Making Waves," about the University swim and dive team by Sholnn Freeman; bronze for The Dig news and information website; bronze for Best Cover ("Making Waves"); and bronze for the "Enter the Meccaverse" homecoming video. Howard Magazine also took home four wins and 10 honorable mentions at the 2023 Folio: Eddie & Ozzie Awards in New York City, including Best Full Issue for "The 17th Presidency."



HISTORY

HATTIE MCDANIEL'S ACADEMY AWARD COMES HOME

■ **THE ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURES ARTS AND Sciences** replaced the plaque awarded to Hattie McDaniel for Best Supporting Actress, after it went missing from Howard University more than 50 years ago. McDaniel was the first Black person to win the prestigious award for her role as Mammy in "Gone with the Wind" in 1940. She bequeathed the award to Howard, and it arrived after her death in 1952. However, it disappeared sometime in the 1960's, and the reasons why or its whereabouts were never found. For decades, the family petitioned the Academy for a replacement, but was consistently denied. Finally, on October 3, 2023, Howard received one during a ceremony titled "Hattie Comes Home." It now resides in the Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts.

LITERARY

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center Revives Black Writers Festival

■ **Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (MSRC)**, in partnership with the Center for Journalism and Democracy, hosted the International Black Writers Festival from September 27-29, a new iteration on the National Writers Conference. The event was themed around the idea, "Why We Gather," and drew writers, readers, critics, academics, and more to discuss the role of literature and the arts, political issues, the concept of inclusion, and more. "This is a repository about Black people around the world, controlled by Black people from around the world and we decide what is important. We decide what is significant, we decide the collections that we hold, we control the space. That distinction is worth homing in on and meditating on," said Benjamin Talton, PhD, director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. Talton gathered Black academics and thinkers from around the world to join in conversation about banned books and other salient topics. Prolific writers Nikole Hannah-Jones, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Mikki Kendall, and more appeared on panels during the festival.



PHOTO BY KEITH STOKES

SCHOLARSHIP

JAMAICA HOWARD UNIVERSITY AFFINITY NETWORK CELEBRATES JAMAICAN HOWARD STUDENTS



■ **THE JAMAICA HOWARD University Affinity Network** recently held its fifth annual scholarship fundraiser at the residence of Jamaican ambassador Audrey P. Marks in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Themed "Hues of Blue," the event took place at the poolside of the ambassador and guests were invited to wear blue. Ambassador Marks delivered remarks, and former Howard First Lady Simone Frederick was present. Since the first fundraiser in 2018, \$254,000 has been raised and 64 scholarships have been awarded to students across undergraduate and graduate levels. Scholarships benefit Jamaican students studying at Howard. To contribute to the fund, please visit jhuan.org/become-a-donor.

CULTURE

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

■ **Dancers demonstrate the bachata, salsa, and merengue** at the Diaspora Block Party during Hispanic Heritage Month. ¡Changó!, Howard's Afro-Latine and Hispanic Cultural Society, celebrated with a Multicultural Festival, Lotería and Dominos game night, and more. (Photo by Chase Lincoln)





POLITICS

Unpacking the Supreme Court’s Power

Just Julian scholar Carlos Aguilera examines whether the nation’s highest justices align with America’s needs.

by TAMARA E. HOLMES (BA ’94)

■ RECENT SUPREME COURT DECISIONS such as the end of affirmative action in higher education and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* will have life-changing implications for many Americans. But do they reflect the will of the people who are most impacted?

That’s a question posed by Carlos Aguilera, a doctoral student in political science and government, in his current research on how public opinion lines up with Supreme Court decisions.

of the three branches of government in which its members weren’t voted for directly by the American people.

“You have your executive branch, your legislative branch, and then the judicial branch,” he says. “You vote for the president, you vote for your congressional member, your senator, even representatives at the local level. But when it comes to the judicial system, these people impact our choices and our freedoms,

“WE’RE THE COLLECTIVE THAT NEEDS TO COME TOGETHER AND MAKE SURE WE HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE.”

AKALA PHOTO BY JUSTIN D. KNIGHT

and yet they’re not elected by us.”

There are some rulings where it’s evident that the decision doesn’t match public opinion. For example, Pew Research found that 62% of Americans say abortion should be legal throughout the country despite the fact that the Court ruled that states have the right to ban it. But that’s just one decision, Aguilera says. He wants to know if the Supreme Court has always ruled differently than what the majority wants. “I need to research other poll data to see if historically this has been the case.”

One thing Aguilera has found: “A lot of underrepresented communities are being hurt by these decisions,” he says. At the same time, there aren’t many people of color in some of the groups that raise money for the congressional and presidential candidates who vote for Supreme Court justices.

Research such as his may be able to help sway public opinion about efforts to restructure the Supreme Court, which have been widely discussed in recent years. For example, some members of Congress have suggested increasing the number of justices on the Supreme Court while others have called for setting term limits.

At the very least, his research could provide a better understanding of the importance of voting for legislators and presidents who are more likely to vote for justices whose opinions are more mainstream.

“We need to be aware of what’s going on with the Supreme Court,” Aguilera says. “We must continue to mount pressure if [its] decisions aren’t reflecting public opinion. We are the ones with the say, we’re the collective that needs to come together and make sure we hold them accountable.”

PHARMACEUTICALS

Using Nanotechnology to Find a Cure for HIV—and Save Black Lives

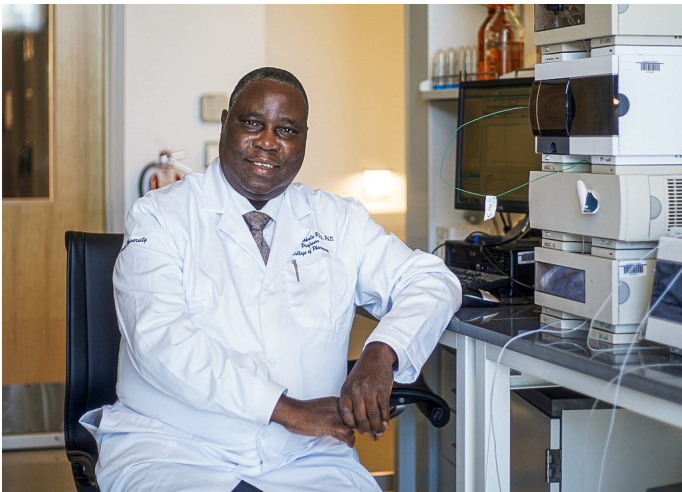
African Americans continue to be diagnosed with HIV at a higher rate than other races. Conducting research at Howard will represent them best.

by OTESA MIDDLETON MILES (BA ’94)

■ A possible cure for HIV may lie in nanoparticles about 500 times smaller than human hair. Howard University scientist Emmanuel O. Akala, RPh, PhD, won a nearly \$800,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to attack the virus via nanotechnology. The goal is to see if the tiny nanoparticles can guide medication to wipe out the virus that causes AIDS.

If successful, this research will greatly impact the Black community. African Americans, who account for approximately 13% of the U.S. population, make up more than 40% of new HIV diagnoses and deaths. That the research takes place at Howard is significant, considering clinical studies often struggle to enroll enough Black participants. Howard University researchers will not have the same challenges ensuring Black people are represented in trials. “Howard already has the required population,” Akala says.

Current treatments successfully reduce the amount of virus in the body so that the patient can live normally. The drawback is these medications must be taken for life or the hidden virus returns, says Akala. As director of the College of Pharmacy’s Laboratory for Nanomedicine, Drug Delivery, and Pharmaceutical and Biopharmaceutical Drug Products Design and Development, he and his team hope their research can find a way to completely eliminate HIV from the body so no further treatment is needed. “That would be a cure,” Akala says. His team experienced some success in



studying nanotechnology to treat HER2 positive and triple negative breast cancers.

The researchers’ work targets specific cells. These cells are the molecular addresses in the lymph nodes and the spleen. The nanoparticles will contain targeting ligands, which Akala describes as zip codes to ensure the medication gets delivered to the right location.

Each portion of the lymphatic system, part of the body’s immune system, contains its own unique address. “When you write a letter, the address and zip code determine where the letter goes,” Akala says. Similarly, on the surface of diseased cells there are receptors—they are the molecular address, he says. Targeted drug delivery will use nanoparticles containing medicine with appropriate zip codes, the ligands. The targeted drug will go directly to hidden HIV cells. “The medication won’t go everywhere in the body,” he says. “We encapsulate the drug in the nanoparticle and it will be released only after it reaches its target.”

The NIH grant will fund the research into 2024. By then, the team plans to have identified the exact target, ligands, and drugs to be used. It also plans to have created a material that will deliver the medication that dissolves after reaching the target. Once that is complete, the researchers will begin small animal testing. If successful, the research will move to human studies.

Akala, who has taught at Howard for 25 years and has won almost \$12 million in research grants, stresses that more funding is needed to continue the research after the grant funds run out.

“With a cure, HIV/AIDS will no longer be a chronic disease that requires a lifetime of costly medications with their side effects,” Akala says. “Because we are diagnosed more often and die from it more than any other race, a cure for HIV will have a monumental, positive impact on the Black community.”



CYBERSECURITY

Strengthening America's Vulnerable Electrical Grid

Doctoral candidate Odunayo Oluokun researches tools to enhance grid security

BY KIMBERLY HOLMES-IVERSON

■ **America's electrical grid** has problems, but Odunayo Oluokun, a PhD candidate in electrical engineering, may have the power to fix it.

The Howard University graduate student asserts the nation's biggest grid concerns lie within two areas: its ability to withstand unprecedented climate change and cybersecurity—or lack thereof.

"We need to do something now," says Oluokun. "The issues we're having are not going away."

Most electricity in the United States is produced from sources such as natural gas, oil, coal, and nuclear. The U.S. power grid is made up of more than 7,300 power plants that fuel nearly

160,000 miles of high-voltage power lines and connect 145 million customers nationwide. Experts agree the power grid is essential to life as most know it, but it's vulnerable.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the most disruptive events affecting the power grid are outages caused by weather. On top of that, extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, heat waves, and droughts, are occurring more often and with increased severity. These events can damage power lines and substations, leading to power outages. In 2021, extreme weather events caused power outages in Texas, California, and the Northeast, affecting millions of people and causing billions of dollars in damage.

As for cybersecurity concerns, Oluokun says most researchers are now focused on cyber physical systems. Hackers from around the world can attack the U.S. power grid and shut off power to millions. In 2022, the Government Accountability Office warned the Department of Energy to immediately focus on addressing cybersecurity risks, adding enough hasn't been done to prevent threats to the grid.

"Those systems were designed for use on the internet," Oluokun says. "They were not designed for cloud AI (artificial intelligence). That's why resiliency in terms of cyberattack is a big part of the smart grid right now."

Oluokun says the answers to both issues are connected to improving communication

and coordination. She says a smart grid can automatically reroute power around damaged areas, minimizing the impact of outages. Oluokun's research is focused on the multifaceted challenges presented by smart grid security and resilience. She's studying how cutting-edge simulation tools and optimization techniques can help produce a power grid that is secured against cyberattacks, safeguarding economic prosperity and societal well-being.

"The grid can take information from you with the help of artificial intel and use it to predict how serious the event will be," Oluokun says. "It's then able to avoid taking power from the affected substation and prevent blackouts because power is redistributed through the network before the event even takes place."

Another solution? Encourage more students to pursue a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) degree—especially those who are intrigued by hacking.

"We need more people interested and thinking like the attacker," Oluokun says. "That way you'll be able to predict what the attacker will want to do next."

Oluokun also says students should try out different areas within STEM. Growing up in Nigeria, she wanted to be a mathematician, but her interest shifted once she dug into her course load.

"I did not like regular calculus," Oluokun says. "I connected more with engineering and the fact it helps millions, if not billions, of people, you know, live better on the planet. That's exciting."



COMMUNITY

RACING TO FIGHT SICKLE CELL DISEASE

Through its annual run, the Sickle Cell Center of Excellence fosters community bonds to raise awareness and battle the disease.

by AMBER D. DODD

■ **THE FIRST SICKLE CELL RUN** SPONSORED by Howard University transpired on a small stretch down Connecticut Avenue. Barbara Harrison, genetic counselor at the University's Sickle Cell Center of Excellence, remembers those early events well. As popularity rose around both the center's ongoing efforts around sickle cell and the annual 5k run itself, the event expanded to the National Mall, where diverse partnerships began to bloom around the University.

"It was interesting because we heard from the community, 'This is really nice to be [at the Mall], but we should be back at Howard,'" Harrison recalls. "We've really just tried to listen to the folks that participate."

Now 27 years in, the event still sparks necessary conversations around sickle cell and how the Sickle Cell Center of Excellence combats the disease throughout the nation's capital.

Despite its longstanding reputation as the country's oldest center dedicated to the disease, the team has still sought innovative ways to raise awareness and create community partnerships. Events like the sickle cell run help the center join forces with diverse organizations within the Black community and beyond, including fraternities, sororities, Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc., 100 Black Men of America, Inc., and others.

As the run's audience expanded, so did the event's purpose: accessibility became a priority when planning out the day's activities. The center realized how much pain sickle cell may cause certain participants, so they created options for yoga, Zumba, strength training, and kid-friendly events.

In 2019, Howard's president Wayne A. I. Frederick, M.D., MBA, ran a monthly 5k to raise awareness around sickle cell. His participation married his presidential responsibilities of highlighting Howard's center and his personal sickle cell diagnosis.

That September, which is annually Sickle Cell Awareness Month, Frederick's personal 5k coincided with the University's "Stomp Out Sickle Cell 5k." With Dr. Frederick's

“**JUST SIGNING UP, THEY'VE BROUGHT AWARENESS TO AN IMPORTANT DISEASE.**”

participation and star power, the 2019 event was the biggest run to date. The women's tennis team, track team, volleyball team, and many undergraduates were all in attendance as well.

This year's event leaned on its community-based traditions. Undergraduate students served as walk monitors to ensure the well-being of participants and keep them on track, participants began the walk at the Howard University Hospital Plaza and continued throughout the University, and volunteers distributed free t-shirts and pins to members of the public.

However, a new tradition was introduced to this year's run. The Center of Excellence partnered with Nike for its Nike Run Club app, which logged participants' running metrics from September 1 to September 30. But, with the help of DC's sickle cell community, the run will reflect the traditions of the University's sickle cell center for the 17th year and running.

"We have not charged any money for the quite the last few years now and that's really been driven by sponsors," says center director James Taylor, PhD. "Just signing up, they've brought awareness to an important disease."





■■■ THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS: Jasmine Young (BA '94) is the director of the Warner Music/ Blavatnik Center for Music Business Education.

BLAVATNIK BEYOND BOOKS

Howard Enters a New Chapter of Music Education

BY
Autumn Coleman

■ DESPITE HAVING ONLY EXISTED for two years, the Warner Music/ Blavatnik Center for Music Business Education program has a history at Howard University that long predates the program. The fellowship program allows future executives and creatives to learn the ropes of the entertainment industry and gain important connections for their careers.

Housed in the School of Business, the idea for the Blavatnik Center came out of a need to create a space for students with dreams of being a part of the

music business industry—one that still lacks significant diversity across race and gender barriers, explains Jasmine Young (BA '94), director of the center. In recognizing this disparity, the Blavatnik center welcomes students to its program from multiple different schools on campus, such as the College of Fine Arts, School of Communication, and College of Arts and Sciences.

The Blavatnik Center was made possible in March 2021 with a \$4.9 million gift from the Warner Music Group/ Blavatnik Family Foundation Social

Justice Fund. This fund was established in June 2020 as a timely response to the murders of Black people at the hands of police that sparked protests nationwide. Young has played a part in the center since its inception. In designing the program, Young emphasizes her passion for pushing Howard students forward in a space that she believes is extremely special. “This center is one of the most magical places, not only on Howard University’s campus, but in the world. There’s no other place in the world that can say they’re doing what we’re doing,” Young says.

Within the curriculum, students take classes such as Black Entrepreneurs in the Music Business and HR 101 as well as workshops that focus on personal branding and resume preparation. Outside of their classes, students must spend up to five hours weekly helping out in the center and 10 hours monthly with an assigned mentor.

Young is adamant about the program’s dedication to a combination of practical knowledge and applied knowledge. Desmond Braxton, a finance major, recounts a weekend trip to New York where students

went to Billboard’s and Warner Music/Atlantic Records’ offices.

There, students were able to learn firsthand about what entails a career in the music business. “We walked in, and I felt like ‘oh, this is what it feels like to be a part of the industry,’” Braxton recalls. He credits this experience, along with many others facilitated by the program, as having shown him what was possible for his career in music business.

An important facet of the program is the plethora of big names from all parts of the industry that come to speak to students. Artists such as DJ Drama, Jonathan McReynolds, Pink Sweat\$, and Killumantii have visited. And executives like Tarik Brooks and

“THERE’S NO OTHER PLACE IN THE WORLD THAT CAN SAY THEY’RE DOING WHAT WE’RE DOING.”

Julian Petty (BBA '99), who Young calls the “visionary of the center,” have spoken to and mentored students.

“Petty had this vision, and it was kind of like a global vision of what him and I were doing,” Young says. This vision was “giving back to our school community and giving back to students who wish to be in the music industry,” a point Young repeatedly emphasizes. As part of the program, students receive scholarships of \$25,000 each that allow them to focus on achieving instead of on financial burdens.

Howard graduates who have been through the program can be found in lots of different industries and companies. Students have gone on to jobs at law firms, Mattel, the NBA, CNBC, Creative Artists Agency, Warner Records, and Pinterest.

The program prepares students for all industries as they seek to cultivate advocates of change, leaders, and glass-ceiling breakers. Young says, “the biggest thing is teaching these students how to be the advocates of change, to be in the music business so they can really go in, continue to kick in the doors, continue to break these glass ceilings.”



JASMINE YOUNG PHOTO BY TONY RICHARDS



HIP-HOP+ HOWARD

EVEN BEFORE THE INCEPTION OF BLACK AMERICA TO NOW, MUSIC HAS SENT A CULTURAL MESSAGE to the masses to reflect the times onto itself. 📌 It is said that Harriet Tubman masked the Black spiritual hymn “Wade in the Water” as directions for the enslaved to escape and find freedom. James Brown’s “Say it Loud: I’m Black & I’m Proud” unified Black Americans reeling from the Civil Rights Movement in 1968. Queen Latifah’s 1993 Grammy-winning song “U.N.I.T.Y.” dished the female perspective of misogynoir in the Black community. Lil Baby’s 2020 hit “The Bigger Picture” adds onto the legacy of Southern rappers portraying the battle between Black male survival and white supremacy in America’s societal and systemic structures. 📌 From ragtime blues to trap music, music preserves Blackness in ways the world tries to restrict. Hip-hop’s 50-year run is a testament to the diversity of Black communities and the genre’s global impact to hold a mirror to the world’s joys and pains. 📌 There aren’t enough words to thank hip-hop. Here is Howard University’s grand attempt.

1973

The Birth
of a
Phenomenon

In the 1970s, the South Bronx was one of the most neglected areas of the United States. My mother, who grew up in nearby Brooklyn, would talk about how parts of the city resembled a warzone:

there was rampant heroin addiction, landlords burning down apartment buildings for insurance money, trash littering the streets. “[The Bronx] was the poorest congressional district in the country and instead of taking accountability and correcting what was happening, the government ... ignored it,” she says.

This was the backdrop for the birth of hip-hop. While the marquee element of today’s hip-hop is rap music, the culture originated with four elements: deejaying, emceeing, breakdancing, and graffiti writing. The focus of the 1970s were the deejays and break dancers (“b-boys” or “b-girls”).

On August 11, 1973, recent Jamaican immigrant Cindy Campbell hired her brother, Clive Campbell, also known as Kool Herc, to deejay her back-to-school party to raise money for new school clothes and supplies. At 1520 Sedgewick Avenue, the siblings introduced elements of Jamaican culture to the New York City party scene, notably the sound system culture. The sound system was a collection of deejays, sound engineers, emcees, and stacks of massive speakers.

Each sound employed a selector, who selected the records, and an emcee who shouted and rhymed over a record’s instrumental, a practice known as “toasting.” Coke La Rock was Cindy’s party emcee. While similar practices had existed for decades in America, the Campbell siblings combined all the elements, creating the foundation of hip-hop. Herc pioneered a method of deejaying he coined the “merry-go-round.” Noticing the b-boys would wait for the instrumental portions in songs, Herc would play two copies of the same record in succession to extend the break and give dancers an opportunity to battle and show-

off. Other deejays soon expanded on the technique.

Grandmaster Flash (née Joseph Saddler), who immigrated from Barbados, made his own turntables and invented the Quik Mix Theory, which built upon Herc’s merry-go-round technique and using cutting and scratching. In doing this, Flash discovered a mathematical way to cut and extend even the smallest section of a song. At his family’s house parties, Flash noticed that the crowd would get excited when there was a drum break in the songs and created a way to make a 10-second break last 10 minutes. He manipulated records and turntables to do so. He told the Washington Post, “I had to find the proper needle that would stay inside the groove when it’s under pressure of the vinyl being moved counterclockwise. The second step was figuring out what to do with the rubber matting that comes with the turntable.”

Afrika Bambaataa, née Lance Taylor, brought all the elements together. The former gang warlord was inspired on a trip to Africa to create the Universal Zulu Nation. He came home and used his influence to direct angry kids off the streets and toward more positive, creative endeavors, though allegations later arose that he had sexually abused some of them. The group introduced a disco-inspired, electric sound to the culture with its debut album, “Planet Rock.”

In 1979, hip-hop entered the world of mainstream music. “Rapper’s Delight” by Sugarhill Gang debuted on WBLS-FM in New York City. The 15-minute song sent a shockwave through the city. “When I first heard it, I immediately picked up my phone and called my friends, who were also losing their minds. It was like someone put a party tape on the radio,” my mother recalls. “Every single kid came into school the next day having sat up all night writing every single word. There’s nothing I can think of that happened since then that engaged the youth and changed the world so quickly.” ■



“There’s nothing I can think of that happened since then that engaged the youth and changed the world so quickly.”

Black Music Hits FM Broadcasting

HOWARD HAD THE APPROPRIATE ENTITIES in place as hip-hop blossomed nationally in the '80s, but it starts in 1971, when WHUR became one of the nation’s first Black-specific stations on the FM dial under founding general manager Phil Watson. Watson named Jim Watkins III as his successor before officially leaving in 1973.

Michael “Duhon” Nixon (BBA '72, MA '74), a Harlem native, worked with the WHUR’s student radio station WHBC in the '70s, helping WHUR’s Cathy Hughes in the sales department as an account executive. WHBC began as a learning lab for students to gain broadcast and production skills at a functioning radio station. (Nixon later created the Gavin Rap Chart in 1990 and was inducted into the National Museum of African American Music in 2020.)

Nixon calls Watson the brain-child of Howard’s historic radio contributions. He believes he witnessed the University’s hand in helping hip-hop take its rightful place, a process which he calls “brewing the perfect storm.”

“[Watson] met with his contacts at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and secured the licensing for WHUR to become the first Black FM radio station,” Nixon says. “On December 3, 1971, when Jim Watkins pulled the switch, that was the official entrance of Black music onto the FM dial.” ■ AMBER D. DODD



1980s

Breaking All
the Rules

*I wanna live good, so sh*t I sell dope
For a four-finger ring, one of them gold ropes
Nana told me if I passed, I'd get a sheepskin coat
If I can move a few packs, I'd get the hat—
now that'd be dope.*

That's how Curtis Jackson, more famously known as 50 Cent, wistfully reminisces on the style of burgeoning hip-hop culture from his vantage point in 1980s Queens, New York, on the 2005 classic record "Hate It or Love It." Four-finger rings. Chunky gold chains for the fellas and door-knocker nameplate earrings for the ladies. Adidas shell-toe sneakers. Between LL Cool J and Run-DMC, Def Jam Recordings may have singlehandedly been keeping the Kangol brand in business. To be certain, the fashion was gaudy, but when you want to establish yourself as a cultural institution, one doesn't have much time for subtlety.

As hip-hop bulldozed its way into the mainstream in the 1980s, it did so with flair and panache, carving out an early identity around individual liberty and artistic expression that would make it impossible to ignore.

The fashion in other cultures generally trended more conservative during the Ronald Reagan era, but hip-hop icons were showing and proving that business suits, power ties, and the King's English were not elemental to American success.

“We were always taught in school ‘dress for success’ meant something else, and here they were breaking all the rules and winning,” reflected fashion designer April Walker in “Fresh Dressed,” a 2015 documentary on the evolution of streetwear. “I just remember that changing my life in the sense of, everything I’d been taught was a farce for me from that point.”

FAKE IT ’TIL YOU MAKE IT

Nevertheless, the grandiose fashion belied the solemnity that often undergirded the music specifically and the culture more broadly, much in the tradition of their predecessors. Just as the flamboyant popular disco and rhythm and blues entertainers of the 1960s and ’70s—acts like Little Richard; Earth, Wind & Fire; and the Isley Brothers—hip-hop’s pioneers embraced their fashion choices as an additional means of connecting with their audiences.

“If you go through the history of African American culture—particularly in the 20th century—style, fashion, clothes were always a very prominent part of people’s identity,” said Todd Boyd, PhD, in “Fresh Dressed.” He is a hip-hop expert and professor of cinema and media studies at the University of Southern California fittingly nicknamed “Notorious PhD.” “Even for people who maybe didn’t have money, their own unique way of wearing something came to be a way for people to be distinct, to be identified in a crowd, to stand out.”

Fashion also became a way for folks to affect a greater socioeconomic status in the face of their actual circumstances. In other words, fake it ’til they make it. In “Fresh Dressed,” hip-hop duo Kid ’n Play laughed about wearing high-quality apparel despite having no money between them, while Roc-A-Fella Records founder Damon Dash described fashion as “a status symbol based on

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... Their own unique way of wearing something came to be a way for people to be distinct, to be identified in a crowd, to stand out.”

insecurity.” Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five ironically donned some of their finest threads while documenting the struggles of inner-city living in their video for 1982’s “The Message.”

Author and former Howard adjunct professor Adrian Loving (BFA ’93) discussed this phenomenon with photographer Janette Beckman in his book “Fade to Grey: Androgyny, Style & Art in 80s Dance Music.” In 1982, Beckman began shooting images of hip-hop culture, and counts names such as Run-DMC, Salt-N-Pepa, and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five among her portfolio. Beckman hails from the United Kingdom, but she quickly understood the significance behind these Black American artists choosing to showcase their earnings. “It was definitely about, ‘I can afford to have gold chains and gold teeth to show you that I’m doing well,’” Beckman said in his book. “All the flashy gold and cars showed affluence and wealth for those artists.”

Loving elaborated on Beckman’s observation. “I think in the Black community it’s like the concept of Sunday best. Even if you’re poor, you will wear your best suit or threads to important things on Sunday,” he said. “For these rap guys to take a toothbrush to their sneakers and keep their gold flashy, and jeans and suits pressed, it’s the same inherent quality as the Sunday best types. They would be looking great on stage and you know momma would be proud of them.”

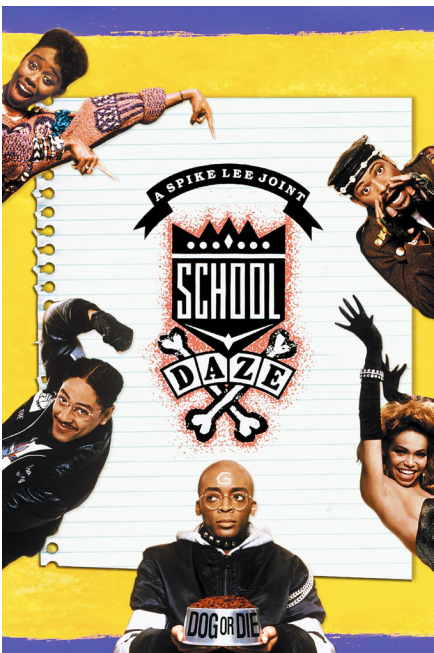
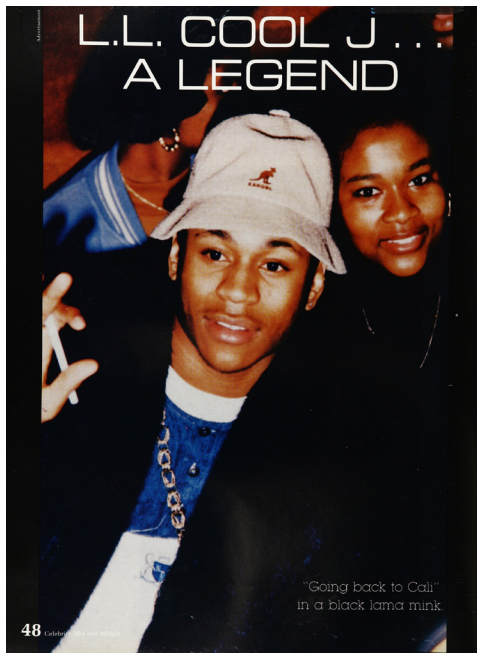
HIP-HOP IN ’80S TELEVISION AND FILM

But the style of the era wasn’t limited to opulence, nor was the culture’s distribution limited to the music business. It even began permeating the television and movie industries through filmmakers like Spike Lee. His second film, 1988’s “School Daze,” was a cinematic exploration into student life at historically Black colleges and universities based on Lee’s own experiences at Morehouse College. Although the movie’s soundtrack wasn’t rap-heavy, it did prominently feature the D.C.-based go-go band E.U. and its song “Da Butt,” which would reach number-one on the Billboard Hot Black Singles chart and the top-40 on the Billboard Hot 100.

“You can’t have this conversation without starting with Spike Lee’s ‘School Daze,’” says Tia C. M. Tyree (PHD ’07), professor in Howard University’s Cathy Hughes School of Communications. “I think for most people, this was the moment where they understood that HBCUs were different spaces, that HBCUs had a culture in and of themselves, and that they were



LOOKIN’ FLY Run D.M.C. made Adidas, gold chains, and Kangol hats a 1980’s hip-hop fashion staple. Below, L.L. Cool J showed up in the 1989 Bison Yearbook; Spike Lee’s “School Daze” introduced HBCUs to the mainstream; and Howard’s own Phylicia Rashad portrayed a successful Black lawyer and mother on primetime television.



spaces where you not only learned in the classroom, but you learned outside of those educational spaces.”

Meanwhile on the smaller screen, the Huxtables out of Brooklyn, New York, were being coronated as America’s first family of the decade. Helmed by matriarch Clair Huxtable, portrayed by Howard alumna and dean of the Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts Phylicia Rashad (BFA ’70), the family’s five children were coming of age just a couple boroughs over from hip-hop’s birthplace. Malcolm-Jamal Warner’s Theo was the sibling most obviously influenced by the culture, but in the show’s spin-off, “A Different World,” Lisa Bonet’s Denise enrolls in the fictional HBCU Hillman College, which would become the avatar for the Black college experience for millions of households nationwide. (“School Daze” released during the first season of “A Different World,” with both projects featuring Kadeem Hardison, Jasmine Guy, and Darryl M. Bell.)

By the end of the decade, Black disenfranchisement had become the main narrative, and new, socially conscious artists such as Public Enemy and

KRS-One were addressing it directly and unapologetically by weaving themes of Afrocentrism into their music. These sentiments of empowerment and self-determination proved popular inside the culture, especially by those embittered by the era’s politics.

These tensions ultimately came to a head on Howard’s campus.

“THE REVOLUTION HAS BEEN IN EFFECT”

During the 1989 spring semester, Howard University students led by the student organization Black Nia F.O.R.C.E.—an acronym for “Freedom Organization for Racial and Cultural Enlightenment”—protested the school’s appointment of Republican strategist Lee Atwater to its Board of Trustees, culminating in a three-day occupation of the University’s main administration building. Atwater had been the mastermind behind a number of racist campaign tactics for years, most recently employing those tactics as campaign manager in the 1988 presidential election. Students attached Atwater’s association with Howard with a dereliction of the University’s Afrocentric

HIP HOP+
HOWARD



...

GITTIN’ FUNKY
Kid ’n Play made hip-hop fun with the hi-top fade, the “House Party” films, the Kickstep, and their playful lyrics.



founding and mission.

“You have the sense that, if a university has enough of an impetus to select Lee Atwater, then it also is redolent of a university that doesn’t necessarily see African American studies as a discipline that should be supported with more faculty and a center for the study of Africana, a graduate program, these kinds of things,” said Joshua M. Myers, PhD (BBA ’09), associate professor of Africana studies at Howard University, in a 2020 interview on “the Kojo Nnamdi Show.” Myers is the author of “We Are Worth Fighting For: A History of the Howard University Student Protest of 1989.”

Black Nia F.O.R.C.E. was headed by alums April R. Silver (BA ’91) and Ras J. Baraka (BA ’91). Silver is now a communications and marketing executive, and Baraka is the 40th and current mayor of Newark, New Jersey. “[We] knew that we were clearing a path for future generations of student activists, but we didn’t have a clear sense of just how deeply we had impacted the culture,” Silver says.

Myers attributed hip-hop as the stimulus for Black Nia F.O.R.C.E.’s dynamism. “It is the hip-hop generation’s answer to Black Nationalist tradition,” he said. “They took the energy of hip-hop and they translated it into political organization. And everything that

“

[We] knew that we were clearing a path for future generations of student activists, but we didn’t have a clear sense of just how deeply we had impacted the culture.”

you would expect from hip-hop and everything that you would expect from the tradition of Black nationalism was crystallized into this one organization.”

Silver confirms this. “Hip-hop was a critical tool for us. We used the culture to start conversations and debates, and to help us do social justice and community-building programs on campus and in the surrounding neighborhoods of Howard,” she says. One “letter to the editor” in the March 17, 1989, edition of “The Hilltop” references the words of Public Enemy directly. “To those critics who feel that this ‘revolutionary thinking’ among students is just a fad that will soon pass,” wrote Stewart Calloway of student organization Black United Youth, “to paraphrase Public Enemy, ‘The Revolution has been in effect—go get a late pass!’”

Howard’s immediate past president Wayne A. I. Frederick (BA ’92, MD ’94, MBA ’11) was then a first-year undergraduate at the University at the time. “Regardless of where you aligned on the political spectrum, I think it was an informative moment for our student body about the power of getting involved and how our voices could be agents of change, even as teenagers and young adults,” he says. “Many of our classmates were literal children of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, so for many of us, this was our moment to walk directly in their legacy. When I implore today’s students to make their voices heard, it is because I have seen and felt the impact firsthand, as both a student and an administrator. Howard University attracts passionate students for a reason, and my cohort was no different. And many of us were certainly emboldened by some of the music and messages of the era.”

In just a decade’s time, hip-hop was established as a dominant cultural force: aspirational enough to explain its mainstream appeal, yet conscious enough to activate social movements across the globe. The grandeur that defined the early ’80s gave way to a more austere side of the culture by the decade’s end, but never fret, dear reader—it only gets shinier from here. Another Howard alum is on the way to make sure of it.

...

FIGHT THE POWER
The Hilltop featured the 1989 student protest against Lee Atwater joining the Howard Board of Trustees.

1990s

Tha
Golden
Era

If you checked the rhymes booming from speakers whizzing by the Yard during the golden age of hip-hop, the eclectic mix included political rap, party anthems, New Jack Swing, Native Tongues vibes, Miami bass, Southern rap, and West Coast G-funk—flavor in your ear that was also represented by Howard’s diverse student population. This period of unparalleled creativity stretched from the mid-to-late ’80s to the mid ’90s, and was punctuated by boom bap beats, masterful emcees, dope dance moves, fresh fashion, and Afrocentric flair (“Black medallions, no gold”). On TV, hip-hop and Black culture wove its way into the mainstream and must-see TV. People watched Denise Huxtable’s matriculation at the fictional HBCU Hillman College on “A Different World,” rap acts made their primetime debut on the “The Arsenio Hall Show” and the sketch variety show “In Living Color,” Will Smith flexed his acting chops on “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,” and Martin Lawrence made audiences laugh out loud with his sitcom “Martin.” Even Nickelodeon catered to younger hip-hop fans via “All That” and its spinoff, “Keenan & Kel,” with the latter’s theme song courtesy of Coolio. Simultaneously, America saw video footage of Los Angeles policemen brutally beat Rodney King and the “City of Angels” burning after the officers were acquitted; Anita Hill testify against Supreme Court justice nominee Clarence Thomas; and the Million Man March take place on the National Mall. Hip-hop’s messages and soundscapes evolved with the times to reflect the nuances of the new decade.



...
**HOWARD IN
THE HOUSE**
In the 1990s, hip-
hop and Howard
became highly
intertwined.



April Silver (BA '91) was a student activist, former president of the Howard University Student Association (HUSA) and co-founder of the Cultural Initiative, which in 1991 launched the first national hip-hop conference held at a college or university. Decades later, the Brooklyn native is still inspired by “the spirit and the essence of hip-hop that taps into a people’s will to survive on their own terms, using their innate style.

“To be so bold and unstoppable is what inspires me 100% of the time,” says Silver.

HOWARD IS WHERE HIP-HOP LIVES

During the '90s, Howard’s campus and Homecoming was at the center of where hip-hop culture was cultivated, celebrated, and captivated an audience. Alumni trustee Chris Washington (BA '92) honed his deejay skills at the student-run radio station, WHBC, and worked his way up from on-air host to general manager. At the time, Howard’s commercial radio station WHUR primarily played R&B music, and the format didn’t change to include classic hip-hop until 2008.

The Bronx, New York native, whose deejay moniker is “The Legendary Chris Washington,” asserts

■■■

A GIRL DJ
Salt-N-Pepa, who stopped by WHBC, changed hip-hop as one of the first all-female groups.



that since rap wasn’t in heavy rotation on D.C. radio, WHBC was a hot promo tour stop for artists like Salt-N-Pepa, MC Lyte, Kwame, Special Ed, and Third Base.

“We cultivated a space where people could come and their music was played,” says Washington, who fostered relationships with music artists and record labels. He notes that when Sony Music started an intern program, their first interns had worked at WHBC.

Rapper and entertainment lawyer Tracey Lee (BA '92) agrees that Howard was a great litmus test.

“I don’t think Howard gets enough credit for its

“

[In the '90s] Howard as an incubator for people who were trying to make it in entertainment and hip-hop music.”

contribution to the culture. [In the '90s] Howard was an incubator for people who were trying to make it in entertainment and hip-hop music,” says the Philadelphia native.

“People came from Texas, Chicago, Las Vegas, and all over. So what better place to test, market your material, your product? And it wasn’t just music, it was fashion, art, dance, and it was everything intelligentsia.”

WHERE I’M FROM

New Yorker Lance Williams attended Howard in the '90s, and he got a culture shock when he arrived at Drew Hall and saw a foot locker with a Compton address. But despite their different area codes, the Staten Islander said he and his roommate became fast friends.

“We put each other on to music from our hoods, and I became a DJ Quik fan because of him,” he says.

For some students, however, being from the West coast was a barrier to fitting in. Toni Blackman (BA '90, MA '94) is from the San Francisco Bay area and was drawn to the Mecca to be immersed in Black excellence. Back home, Blackman was part of a respected female rap crew, but she didn’t receive the soul-clap welcome she expected at a talent show her freshman year.

“As soon as they said I was from California, they started booing. And to make it worse, I was wearing white cowboy boots, white jeans, and a pink jacket. It was the antithesis of the New York style. So I got booed twice,” she says.

“At that time, hip-hop was awkward because of regionalism. One, I’m a girl, and two, I’m from the West coast. So anything I wanted to do with hip-hop was met with resistance by New Yorkers.”

Eventually Blackman found her tribe and became a fixture in the D.C. creative scene. In 1992, she formed a hip-hop theater ensemble called the Hip-Hop Arts Movement (HHAM) and recruited Howard students who would later blow up in their respective fields, including scholar John Lester Jackson (BA '93), Step Afrika founder Brian Williams (BBA '90), and former BET and MTV personality Ananda Lewis (BA '95). Lewis, a fellow Californian, fondly remembers working with Blackman.

“That [time] was about music and art. And what art has always done is move the culture forward and allow it to be seen and heard. [Toni] was so creative and so inspiring for all of us,” she says.

The Los Angeles native adds, “Howard was everything. It was about finding myself in an environment where people looked like me and were about the same thing.”



The Hip-Hop Conference

IN 1991, A GROUNDBREAKING EVENT WAS held at Howard University: the first annual Hip-Hop Conference, launched by the Cultural Initiative (CI). Until it wrapped in 1996, the conference attracted rap royalty including Tupac, Chuck D, Mos Def, Queen Latifah, and Busta Rhymes, who performed and spoke on panels at the Blackburn University Center. Hopeful hip-hop artists attended to gain industry insight.

“[Our] mission was to educate, enlighten, and create a platform for continuous discussions and dialogue amongst students, artists, scholars, industry executives, corporate partners and the community for the preservation of hip-hop culture,” explains co-founder Alberta Coker (BBA '92).

The conference was not a place for artists to hand out demos, but to help them successfully navigate the business of the industry, says co-founder Ceeon Smith (BA '92). It also examined the cultural and activism that hip-hop addressed. “Imagine trying to position what we see now, then when people

were still trying to wrap their minds around what this ‘hip-hop’ thing was ... Our conference was also going to raise the cultural issues that [hip-hop] challenged because you couldn’t separate the two.”

In August 2023, Howard hosted “Hip-Hop 50: Past, Present, and Future Conference” which coincided with the creation of a hip-hop minor in the interdisciplinary studies department. This year’s conference included panels about the original hip-hop conference; the role of women in the industry; and artificial intelligence (AI), including a rap battle with an AI system called “Semantic Kernel.”

Conference founders see the impact their event had on hip-hop. “At that time, hip-hop [was] in the midst of some exponential growth. There was a strong sense of activism, community, and legacy,” says co-founder Timothy D. Jones (BA '91). “Now... it has touched the entire planet, and that’s where I think the impact of what we did went further than we could ever imagine.”

FOR THE CULTURE

In 1991, the Hip-Hop Conference was introduced at Howard and brought stars, execs, and more to Howard's campus to discuss the music and the industry. A highlight of the conference was the Hip-Hop Fashion Show. Proudly representing Queens, New York, Jennifer Gumbs (BA '96) was the show's fashion coordinator for a few years. She recruited Howard students and D.C. locals to model fresh gear from streetwear brands like Karl Kani, ENYCE, FUBU, Baby Phat, and Cross Colours.

In contrast to models casted in the Howard Homecoming fashion shows, Gumbs says, "Our models were definitely more edgy, and [their] styles ranged from the runways in Paris to block party vibes. We made sure that we didn't have just one look."

Each year, the fashion show had a theme, and in 1996, the perhaps prophetic final theme was "Live or Die." Student model and singer Kia Bennett (BA '98) rocked the runway to the opening song, "Ready or Not" by The Fugees.

"It was the style to wear baggy clothes and crop tops and still be feminine and sexy. I was already walking around like I was Aaliyah and a member of TLC. So I came in ready," she says.

The Richmond, Virginia native adds, "All fashion came from what we wore in the streets. It was a reflection of how we lived and the music we listened to."

CAN'T STOP, WON'T STOP: THE RISE OF PUFF DADDY

Best-selling novelist Omar Tyree (BA '92) has penned over 20 books with an African American culture backdrop, including 1993's "Flyy Girl" and 1997's "A Do Right Man." Tyree remembers former Howard student Sean "Puffy" Combs (before he was Diddy) making a grand entrance during 1991's homecoming.

"Conversations about Puff were already going around campus. Then he shows up on Georgia Avenue in the back of a truck with a whole bunch of New York dudes, and he was wearing a purple sheepskin coat. So I'm like, okay, this is the dude everybody's talking about," says Tyree.

That same day, the Philly native and his friends went to a Puffy party in downtown D.C. that he calls "one of the best Homecoming joints."

Lewis also knew Combs as the party man, whose weekly shindigs attracted hip-hop heavyweights like Heavy D, Slick Rick, and Doug E. Fresh.

"Obviously, Puffy wasn't who he is now. But [back then], Puffy's name was on flyers handed

“

All fashion came from what we wore in the streets. It was a reflection of how we lived and the music we listened to.”

out on the corners. We didn't know who Puffy was, we just knew he threw good parties," she says with a laugh. (*Visit thedig.howard.edu for a digital exclusive interview with Ananda Lewis.*)

Lee had a closer association with Puff and was part of an East coast clique with future Bad Boy Hitmen Deric "D-Dot" Angeletti, Harve Pierre, and Ron "Amen-Ra" Lawrence.

"I saw the humble beginnings. I saw the grind and the hustle," he says.

During his two years at Howard, Combs commuted to New York City between his studies to intern for Andre Harrell at Uptown Records. In 1991, he left school to work at the label full time, where he produced for Jodeci and Mary J. Blige. When he was fired from Uptown in 1993, Combs launched Bad Boy Entertainment, where his roster included Craig Mack, Faith Evans, Total, and scrappy Brooklyn rapper Biggie Smalls (his stage name later changed to The Notorious B.I.G.).

Keeping it all in the Howard family, in 1996 Lee signed to alum and Biggie manager Mark Pitts' ByStorm Entertainment. Lee's 1997 debut, "Many Facez," included the street buzzed track "Keep Your Hands High," featuring The Notorious B.I.G.

"When I sent demos to Mark [Pitts], B.I.G. was in the car listening. Essentially, he was giving the co-sign like, 'Your man is nice.' I don't think Mark would have offered me a deal without B.I.G.'s stamp of approval," Lee says.

■ ■ ■

TWEAKIN' INTO A WHOLE NEW ERA
The Notorious B.I.G. at Homecoming in 1995; Warner Music/Blavatnik Center director Jasmine Young (BA '94) with DMX; former student Sean "Puffy" Combs.

THE EAST VS. WEST COAST BEEF'S BITTER END

Near the close of the decade, the overhyped rivalry between Suge Knight's Death Row Records and Diddy's Bad Boy Entertainment culminated with the senseless murders of each label's brightest star, 25-year-old



Tupac Shakur in 1996 and 24-year-old Christopher “The Notorious B.I.G.” Wallace in 1997. Lee was in Los Angeles with B.I.G. the night of his murder.

“I was at the party with him, at the [Petersen] Automotive Museum in L.A. We were leaving out together, and for some strange reason, I just didn’t feel right. And [B.I.G.] looks at me and says, ‘Yo, Tray, what’s wrong man? We’re about to go to a party at the Playboy Mansion.’ So I started to perk up a little bit. Then [B.I.G.] goes to the right [to his car]. I go to the left to my car [with] Mark Pitts and a couple partners. Probably two or three minutes later, Mark’s phone rings and he says, ‘Big got shot.’ [We] made a U-turn to the hospital. Mark goes inside and I’m outside with Foxy Brown and a bunch of people. Mark comes out of the hospital, grabs me and says, ‘He’s dead.’ It was an eerie moment in L.A.,” Lee vividly recalls. The loss of these two rap icons was mourned on campus.

“They provided the soundtracks to [my] college experience,” says Bennett. “I was in my car on the way to a Howard vs. Hampton game when I heard the news of Tupac’s passing on the radio. Traffic literally stopped. I also remember waking up one Sunday morning to everyone blasting Biggie at 7 a.m., and that’s when I found out he died.”

In 1994, Blackman founded the Freestyle Union, which functioned as a hip-hop boot camp for emerging emcees. On the day Biggie died, she hosted a cipher and recalls it was a somber event full of tears and rage. She says Biggie and Tupac’s authenticity is sorely missed.

“There are people whose flow is just as nice as theirs. But it was their level of commitment and sincerity, and their pure love of just rhymin’ that made them beautiful. You cannot question the genuine love they had for the art form,” she says.

“There was so much hip-hop entrepreneurship that it just made sense for me to do what I wanted to do.”

■■■
MAY SEE ME IN D.C.
Howard home-coming became a major stopping point for many up-and-coming artists in the 1990’s.



IT WASN'T ALL A DREAM: HIP HOP IS WORLDWIDE

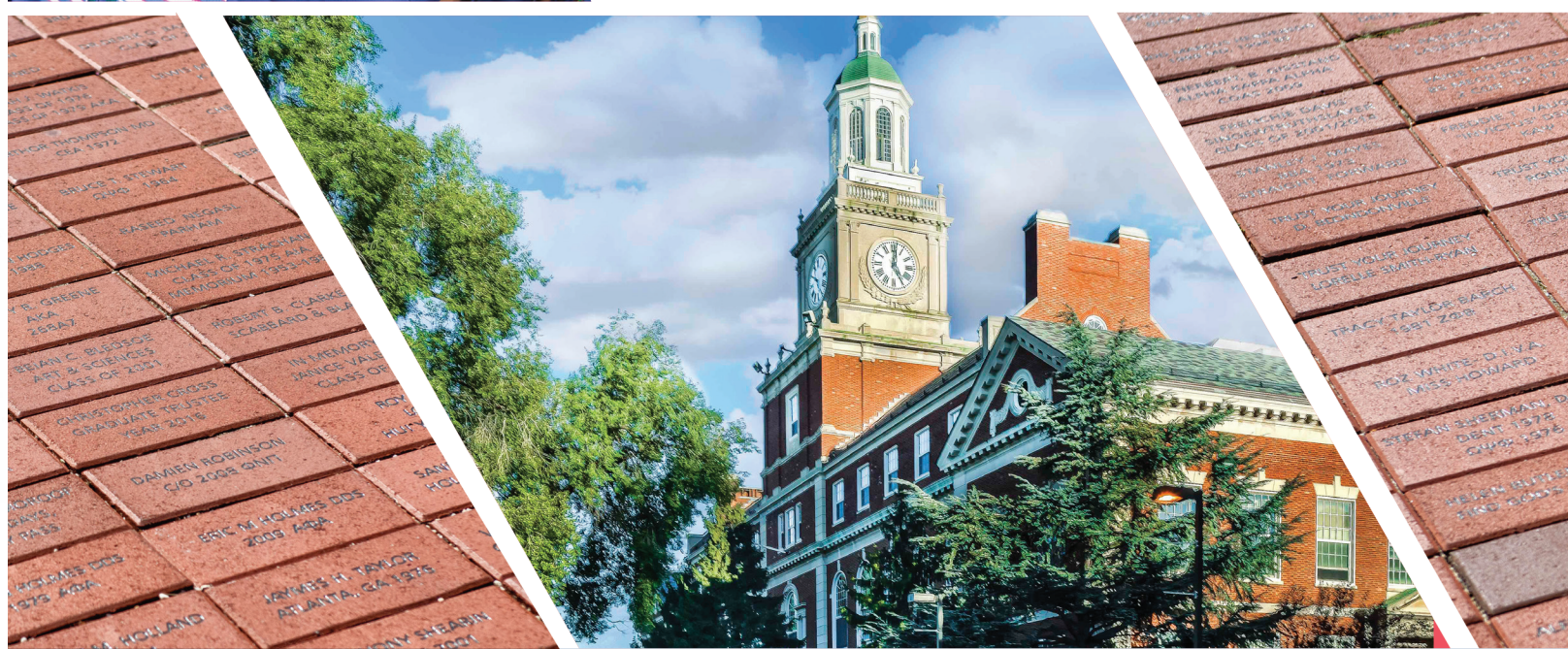
In 2001 Blackman became the first U.S. Hip-Hop Ambassador, and she’s traveled to 50 countries representing the culture through performances, workshops, speaking engagements, and collaboration with artists local to the country or region.

The self-proclaimed “hip-hop head” credits the “powerful proximity to success at Howard” during the ’90s with fueling her drive.

“It wasn’t just Diddy. It was also the other level of folks [like] the tour promoters, the booking agents, the producers, the engineers, and the people selling t-shirts. There was so much hip-hop entrepreneurship that it just made sense for me to do what I wanted to do,” says Blackman.

Lewis agrees this time period was pivotal, not just at Howard, but as a collective culture.

“People were individually expressing themselves in a way that impacted more and more people until it was everybody. That’s really the magic and the beauty—especially when you look at groups like N.W.A. and Public Enemy. [They] were using [their] voice musically to make political, cultural and societal statements that were necessary. That’s how hip-hop becomes the voice of the people. It starts with the voice of the one.”



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2000s

Political
Power and
the World
Wide Web

In the new millennium, an edgier, e-version of Russian Roulette emerged: Napster. Launched six months before 2000 by Sean Parker and Shawn Fanning, the digital music download site revamped music access so anyone in the world could access any song, any genre, anywhere. All you had to do? Hook into that dial-up, search songs, and click the download button.

But veteran DJs prepping their latest gigs could click on the “same” download .mp3 link as students in Founder’s Library did. Results could differ. Maybe your computer never turned on again.

Maybe Outkast’s André 3000 would yell “ONE, TWO THREE-UGNH!” over bulky computer speakers to start ‘Hey Ya!’ in its correct key of C major, cruising at 80 beats per minute. ‘Hey Ya!’ is the first song to reach one million downloads on iTunes, another music platform launched on January 9, 2001. It won the 46th Grammy Award for Best Urban/Alternative Performance.

Technology changed the world, but it also digitized hip-hop’s ongoing dominance. The 2000s were a decade that brought along tech advancements that reshaped the music business while Black media outlets strategized new ways to strengthen hip-hop’s stardom. It even holds one of hip-hop’s defining examples of the genre’s ability to convey the relationship between Black people and American politics, a message so unifying that it elects the nation’s first Black president.

HIP-HOP GOES TO COLLEGE

But, even in its worldly success, the genre still faced criticism for the violence associated with it. Tia C.M. Tyree (PHD ’07) studies the relationship between hip-hop and media and elaborates on BET’s new responsibility of diversifying hip-hop’s perception.

“Coming out of the nineties, BET had an incredibly bad PR nightmare,” Tyree explains. “People were

very upset that the network that should have been celebrating us was only showing that which was negative imagery. That’s when they became more narrowed in on subjects like HBCUs because, again, you really don’t have too many people who are going to say that HBCUs are not important to us.”

Immediate lines between hip-hop and HBCU culture were drawn. “College Hill,” the fly-on-the-wall reality show that gave insight to the lives, cultures, and connections between HBCU students, was popular on the network. BET began its “HBCU College Tour” in 2001. College students spent spring break with hip-hop’s hottest stars during BET’s annual Spring Bling party in Riviera Beach, Florida with live performances and bikini beach parties. BET then outsourced Spring Bling’s content through a series of live performance music videos, photo catalogues, and more with fellow media entities under Viacom such as MTV.

BET’s “106 & Park,” a program dedicated to playing the top-10 hip-hop and R&B hits with hosts AJ Calloway (BA ’97) and Marie Antoinette “Free” Wright, would have special episodes including voter encouragement and gun violence discussions.

“BET had to [ask], what is important to the Black community? What are the positive things that we can showcase? What can we do to make sure that, if this network is supposed to be for Black entertainment, what is it that we know can be a positive influence?” Tyree explains.

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES HOWARD TRADITIONS

As TV still reigned king, digital download services like LimeWire became melting pots to diversify consumer music access and palettes. Digital file sharing websites also ushered in the rise and the commercial dominance of Southern hip-hop, including its subgenres that dazzled in its infancy such as crunk, early trap, and snap music.

New Jersey native and Apple Music podcast host



Nile Ivey (BA ’06) says that Howard’s diverse student body benefited as its traditional, song-swapping process evolved when digital platforms widened access.

“I’m from the Northeast, and our taste in hip-hop is very spoiled, very pretentious,” Ivey says. “You know we’re going toward The LOX, Jay-Z, DMX, Wu-Tang, but when I got down [to Howard] in 2002, they’re talking about Pimp C, Bun B. Now I’m getting to taste my own medicine. I didn’t know [Southern rap’s] extent and my Southern palette got very exclusive.”

Tech advancements eventually trickled down to WHBC, the student radio station. Howard’s hip-hop community added another stellar addition to its roster in the 2000s: Angela Hailstorks (BA ’06), better known as Angie Ange, a native of Prince George’s County, Maryland who came to the Yard to follow in the footsteps of Cathy Hughes.

“This Black woman built this billion-dollar radio company, so it was an honor,” Hailstorks says, pointing to Hughes’ creation of the iconic radio late night series, WHUR’s The Quiet Storm.

“When I first came here, my focus was to get on BET... but WHBC was so important for my career. Howard in general created a platform for someone like me to experiment without any experience.”

Hailstorks cites WHUR’s general manager Jim Watkins’ investment in board systems which she refers to as an actual “one stop shop.”

“When our technology got upgraded, it was a game changer. Now we could upload music, commercials, and promos all in one place. We were operating how a real terrestrial radio station would, but as college students,” Hailstorks says.

Her deejay aspirations start at some of Howard’s music landmarks. She remembers shopping for fashion at Up Against the Wall where deejays would spin records through loudspeakers to gather crowds. Store manager Al Nice overheard Hailstorks’ bright and projective voice that would be, and is, great for radio.

“He comes up to me and [says], ‘You’ve got a different voice,’ and I said, ‘Well, I am a host.’ He said, ‘Ok, well we’ve got Freestyle Friday, you should audition to be a host,’” Hailstorks recalls.

As part of her audition, Hailstorks stood on the corner of Georgia Avenue and promoted the store’s assets to potential shoppers while deejays scratched in the booth during rush hour.

“All the deejays you could think of today that are really popular today, they probably were scratching at Up Against the Wall,” she says. She credits tech-

nology for pushing both the genre and her career forward, allowing a new hip-hop generation to sprout.

“We were the early pirates, so my generation is Napster and LimeWire,” Hailstorks recalls. “We could go to the I-Lab, and everything was Mac, but iMacs were terrible and not user-friendly at the time. My dad brought me a new Mac which came with an iPod.

“Now that my music is on this iPod. I didn’t have to keep putting on CDs. Well, when technology like Napster and LimeWire comes out, who’s adopting that? College kids, because we can’t afford to buy CDs [that] were \$19 to \$20, but you could download for free all day now.”

’04: VOTE OR DIE: HIP-HOP TAKES THE POLLS

Hip-hop began another transformation in the political sphere when Sean “P. Diddy” Combs (H ’14) created Vote or Die, a political campaign under the nonprofit Citizen’s Change that zeroed in on securing the Black vote during the 2004 presidential election. Vote or Die’s target audience was 18-34 Black Americans since they were first-time voters who witnessed the Electoral College override the popular vote between Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican pick George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election. The Electoral College gave Bush a tight 271-266 electoral victory despite Gore winning the popular vote by 544,000 ballots.

“The same way we make a Biggie album, a Sean John shirt ... hot, we’re going to overwhelm you and excite you with the urgency of our message,” Combs said in a Women’s Wear Daily article. “We have the power to make things cool, hot and sexy, from the clothes we wear to the cars we drive to the bling we buy.”

With the University just 2.5 miles north of Capitol Hill, democracy, political action, and advocacy are three ingredients baked into the institution’s fabric.

“Howard students have always been active in supporting the community,” says historian and Washington, D.C.’s state archivist and public records administrator Lopez Matthews (MA ’06, PHD ’09). “They protested against the apartheid in South Africa throughout the ’80s, they called out politicians through The Hilltop. There’s a great photo in the Library of Congress of Howard students protesting the crime conference in 1934 because they were protesting for an anti-lynching bill.”

Vote or Die accompanied other hip-hop-centered political events around the Yard’s election awareness. Amanda Nembhard (BA ’07) was one of

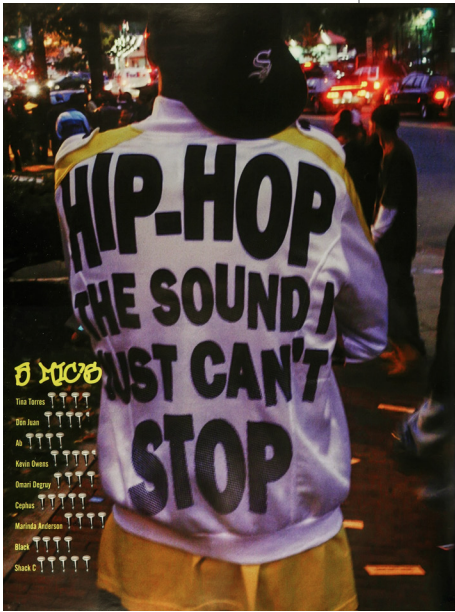
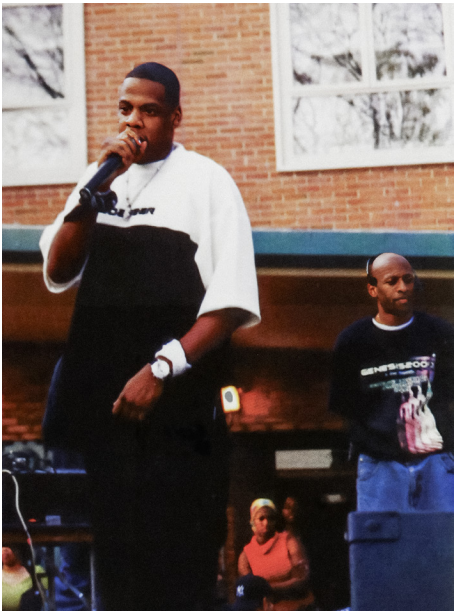
The Hilltop’s contributing writers, and covered events such as, “The power to choose, which side are you on?” for a discussion on the importance of voting. Nembhard spoke of the conversations in her article, “How to Court Black Voters Prone to Vote Democratic, Bush and the Black Vote.”

“Many Blacks, who feel frustrated with the state of our nation and believe that neither candidate truly has their best interest at heart, feel it is unnecessary to vote,” Nembhard wrote in The Hilltop on September 14, 2004.

During the 2004 election season, Howard held the very first Hip Hop Caucus on campus with help from HBCU students such as Florida A&M University and local institutions like Georgetown and George Washington University. BET’s public affairs director Sonya Lockett, official hip-hop reverend and current president of the Hip Hop Caucus Lennox Yearwood, and rapper Common were some of the event’s guests.

“There were celebrities showing us that we have a voice through our vote,” Nembhard recalls. “You’re already attracting a large crowd with music or through music, so it just seemed like an organic way to try and reach the masses.”

John F. Kennedy (BA ’07) (not the former president) wrote for both The Hilltop and Cover2Cover Magazine about student uncertainty regarding the election, and how visits from hip-hop figures soothed young students and encouraged political participation.



HIP HOP
HOWARD

■■■
**CAN'T STOP,
WON'T STOP**
Jay-Z performed at
Yardfest in 2000;
hip-hop ushered
Howard into the
new millennium.

“Vote or Die having representatives across the hip-hop, R&B, and entertainment spectrum really helped its reach,” Kennedy says. “It was pretty popular. I remember people wearing the shirts, seeing the shirts on different celebrities. I remember like either Election Day or right before Election Day, ‘106 & Park’ talking about Vote or Die.”

**’08: YES WE CAN—HOWARD WEAVES
A BLACK AMERICAN DREAM**

On February 10, 2007, Illinois senator Barack Obama announced his run for presidency to become the first Black president in U.S. history. Vote or Die is a preview to another three-word political phenom that changed America forever: Yes We Can.

“Vote or Die was saying ‘You can affect change,’” Matthews says. “It was reaching out to young people of the 2000s hip-hop generation that a lot of people were trying to discount because it said ‘Oh, hip-hop is just violence and misogyny.’ But no, this is more than that. We can get active. We can be politically motivated.”

Melech Thomas (BA ’11), Mr. Howard of the 2008-09 academic year, remembered being deeply entrenched into Howard’s student organizing world, witnessing the campus’ energy during the Obama-McCain election cycle. “It was just this very energetic moment,” Thomas says. “That was back when people used to freestyle on the Yard. Howard is everything that they say it was.”

The symbiotic relationship between hip-hop and politics expanded into Howard’s political involvement within their traditional events such as Yardfest. In 2005, Young Jeezy was a standout Southern with his project “The Recession” and performed at Yardfest that Fall. Jeezy made headlines again in 2007 when he released the Obama anthem “My President’s Black” featuring Nas two months before the 2008 Election Day. It became a hip-hop anthem that lyricized the Black

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**People were posting,
‘My president is Black’ as their
Facebook status and ‘my lambo’s
blue.’ ... It was the first time a lot of us
were nationally involved politically.”**



■■■
ROCK THE VOTE
Melech Thomas
(right) remembers
when President
Obama was elected.

community’s efforts to vote and lift Obama in the polls.

However, Howard’s exclusivity before “My President’s Black” was officially released to the University’s song scourers and deejays. LimeWire and the download platform Morpheus granted Thomas unreleased access.

“People were posting, ‘My president is Black’ as their Facebook status and ‘my lambo’s blue.’ ... For most of us, it was the first time a lot of us were nationally involved politically,” Thomas says. “It was just such a special song. You can hear it blasting in cars. They’ve played it at every Howard party.”

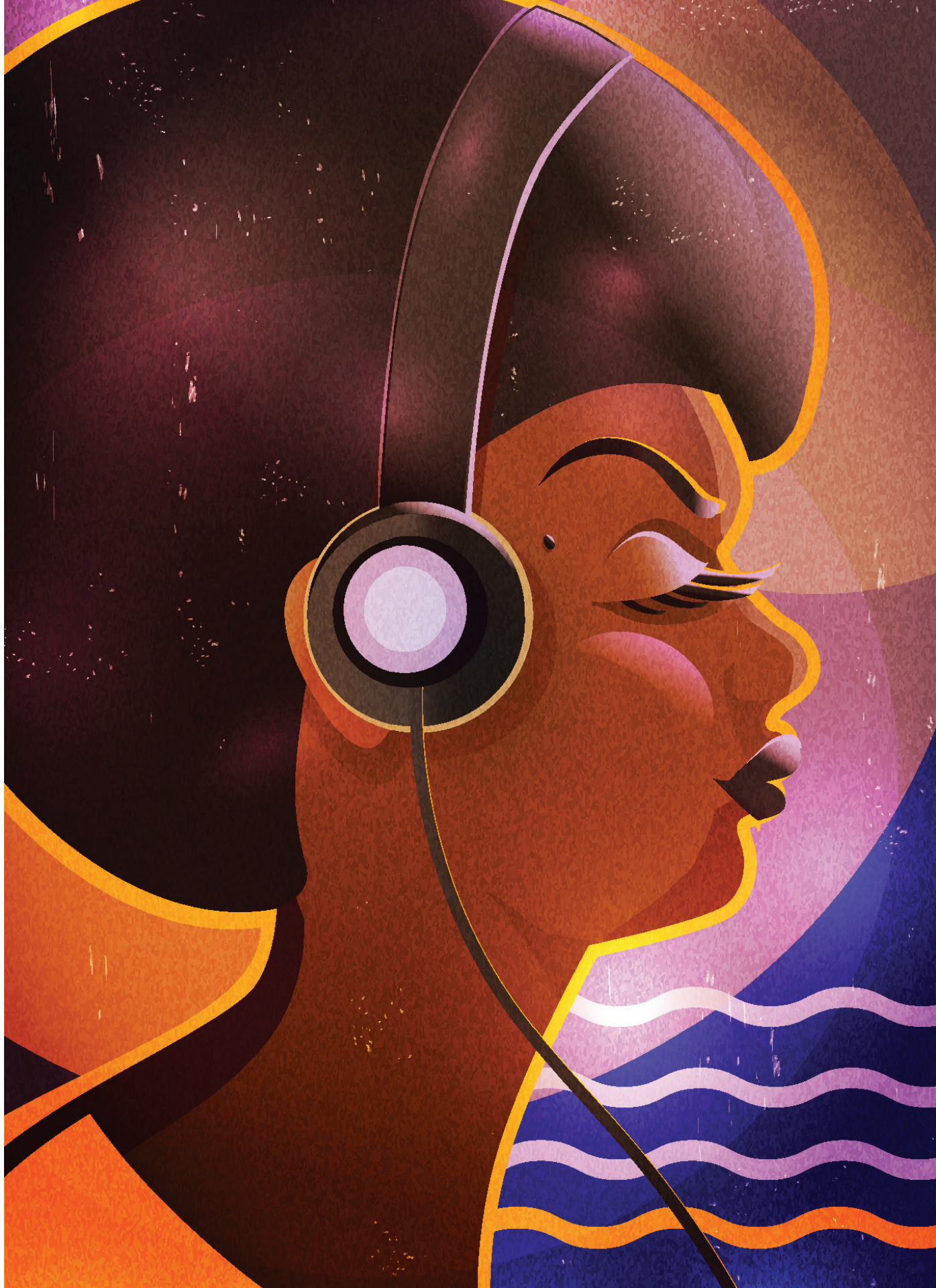
The biggest party on campus in 2008 was the election watch party in Blackburn. “There were at least 3,000 people there,” Thomas says of the ballroom. “Every major news station was there, CNN, NBC, everybody.”

As the night went on, Thomas says that the energy of Howard grew more intense by the minute, until CNN broke the news that Obama had won the 2008 presidential election, becoming the first Black president of the United States of America.

“We went bananas. The entire building shook,” Thomas recalls. “I’m getting goosebumps thinking about it because it was just such a magical moment. Not a dry eye in the house.”

The late-night student crowd spilled out onto Georgia Avenue, where the Howard University community cried, laughed, and cheered at yet another collective contribution to Black history. The Mecca embodied Black America and, of course, hip-hop was there to seal the moment.

“The cops let me use the bullhorn from the top of their car to get everybody hyped but keep everybody organized,” Thomas says. “We felt God that night, and Young Jeezy’s ‘My President is Black’ was essentially a gospel song. That’s the best way to describe it: it was spiritual.”



IN THE DIGITAL AGE, WOMEN DETERMINED THEIR OWN ROLE WITH THEIR OWN WORDS. BUT THE COURTS DID THE SAME WITH OTHER LYRICS.

by Rin-rin Yu

HIP HOP
HOWARD

2010s

Freedom of Expression

In the 2010s, a silence was broken—the one created when major record labels stopped signing women hip-hop artists in the start of the millennium. Though the '80's and '90's were defined by the likes of Lil' Kim, Missy Elliott, Queen Latifah, Foxy Brown, Salt-N-Pepa, Lauryn Hill, and others, suddenly, only three held contracts in the 2000's. Even the Grammys scrapped its Best Female Rap Solo Performance two years after it introduced the category—awarded to Missy Elliott in 2003—due to the lack of women artists.

The reason? Some say because it's a misogynistic industry, women—both the artists and those who would help promote them—had to work three times as hard to be noticed. And that only a certain number of slots were allotted to women, pitting them against each other rather than partnering them. Others say women artists cost much more than men because of wardrobe, hair, and makeup. Jasmine Young disagrees with the latter. "Presentation plays a great part in the marketing of females in general," says Young, professor and director of the Warner Music/Blavatnik Center for Music Business at Howard University, "but I don't attribute that to the lack of female artists." Young argues that there were always women artists, but they were not being highlighted because there were limited opportunities for women in general.

Thanks to digital media and social platforms, artists bypassed the traditional outlets and grew their own fanbase and, therefore, their own strength, brand, and power. By the 2010s, women began to make their debut again. Nicki Minaj uploaded songs to Myspace. Cardi B started as a social media personality on Vine and Instagram. Megan Thee Stallion posted viral videos on Instagram of her freestyling while a student at Prairie View A&M. Rico Nasty's YouTube single, "iCarly," propelled her into stardom. And an original poem of Howard's own Lady London

(née Zaire Miylaun, BS '16) went viral on Instagram, pivoting her career from sports medicine to music.

Women emcees in the 2010s removed themselves from classic hip-hop archetypes: the Fly Girl, the Queen Mother, the Sista with Attitude, and the Lesbian, according to researcher Cheryl L. Keyes in her paper, "Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance," published in *Journal of American Folklore*. They formulated themselves into unique, independent personalities—authentic individuals that fans could relate to. Their songs told stories of their lives, hometowns, growing up, preferences, personal problems, goals, and acceptances. They showed emotions—anger, frustration, joy, sadness, pride—letting fans know it's okay to have these these feelings and stories.

GET IT, GIRL

Artist Saweetie performed at Howard Yardfest in 2019. The 2010s saw a resurgence in female hip-hop artists.



History



On May 10, 2014, Sean “Diddy” Combs received an honorary degree from Howard University and delivered the keynote address at commencement. “Howard University didn’t just change my life — it entered my soul, my heart, my being, and my spirit.”

differently, notes Justin Hansford, professor and director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center at Howard Law School. He says that while perhaps police may use lyrics as a tip, using them to prosecute individuals is going too far—and definitely intertwined with racial motives.

“Rap music has that type of police oversight. If you hear about some country music song describing domestic violence, or watch an action movie with buildings exploding and fighting scenes, they don’t investigate that,” Hansford says. “The fact that hip-hop lyrics are being analyzed and combed for evidence when no other art is being analyzed like this speaks to the injustice of it.”

In 2005, an aspiring hip-hop artist named Vonte Skinner was charged with attempted murder of a fellow drug dealer. The prosecution relied heavily on two contradicting eyewitnesses and some notebooks found in Skinner’s car with lyrics he wrote, years

“Hip-hop feminism gave us a lot of the language to address some of the issues my generation deals with like misogyny. It allowed us to have a lot of good conversations,” says Msia Clark, PhD, associate professor of African cultural and feminist studies in the Department of African Studies.

Women artists have women fan’s attention, Young says, because they “speak their truths” and don’t hold back. Because they started their journeys on digital platforms on their own accords, they no longer had to fit the box—their fans already accepted and loved them. “[Women] act on a free will and don’t care about the noise,” she says. “That’s the beauty of it. The artist is more relatable.”

WHEN RHYME BECOMES A CRIME

As women embraced the freedom of expression during the 2010s, other artists found theirs being used against them in the court of law. Back in 1992, 2 Live Crew faced obscenity charges in federal appeals court that their lyrics were too sexually explicit for young ears. Fast-forward to 2010, and rappers’ lyrics were being examined to convict them of murder. Through 2009–2019, at least 500 court cases cited rap lyrics as evidence, according to researchers who wrote the book, “Rap on Trial: Race, Lyrics, and Guilt in America.”

The rise in policing lyrics paralleled the rise of mass incarceration, and rap has always been associated with young Black men, and thereby treated

WORDS MATTER
HU’s Lady London chose music over sports medicine; Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y., talks about how the RAP Act protects artists.



before the crime, about gang violence and murder in general. In 2014, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the lyrics were “fictional material” and could not be used unless there was a “direct connection” to the case. Though it was a victory for Skinner, it wouldn’t be the last time someone used tried to use lyrics against hip-hop artists in court.

Rapper Drakeo the Ruler was charged with a 2016 murder outside a California party where the prosecution sought to paint him as the instigator. It presented lyrics about guns and violence in his music and showing the jury videos of Drakeo rapping with weapons in his hands. Florida artist YNW Melly released “Murder on My Mind” a year and a half before he was arrested for the double murder of two friends, but the song was still used in court. Brooklyn artist Bobby Shmurda was already on an NYPD “hip-hop” watch list when he plead guilty to conspiracy and weapons charges in 2016, but the lyrics to his hit song “Hot N***a” was not allowed in court—though police tried, believing his rap group, GS9, was a gang (G-Stone Crips).

In September 2022, California’s governor signed into law a bill that would restrict the use of rap lyrics in the court of law. Shortly after, a federal version of that bill was introduced. Known as the Restoring Artistic Protection Act of 2022, or RAP Act, the bill would “limit the admissibility of evidence of an artist’s creative or artistic expression against that artist in court.”

The importance of protecting this type of artistic expression, Hansford notes, is to guard against a concept known as the “chilling of speech” where artists become so afraid of their lyrics being criminalized that they self-censor and fail to speak their truth. “You don’t want the First Amendment to let the government stop people from speaking their mind,” he says, which is the government’s stated reason as to why hate speech, like racial slurs and swastikas, are still protected by the First Amendment. “The government has been hypocritical—when it’s something like hip-hop lyrics, they have no problem criminalizing and thereby chilling the speech of these artists,” he says.

He calls the bill a “step in the right direction” but points out it would only apply to federal cases, not state. Hansford also notes that 95% of elected prosecutors are white males. “Trying to connect music to a particular crime as a piece of evidence is an example of targeting the Black community for prosecution,” he says. “It’s really a racial justice issue.”



Sa-Roc Reflects on Howard, Hip-Hop, and Representing “Herstory”

In August, female rapper Sa-Roc, née Assata Perkins, began her seven-city tour with Flipmode member Rah Digga. Perkins, a Southeast D.C. native who attended Howard University from 1998–2002, sat down with Howard Magazine to discuss the personal and musical impact Howard University has made on her life.

Q: How does it feel to be part of hip-hop’s female emcee representation? What do you think is special about your era?

SA-ROC: We’ve kicked down the doors and now we don’t have to vie for a single position or one “Queen of Rap” or whatever. I think that like women are having a moment and it’s not just a moment, it’s a movement. Male rappers would be commenting like “I don’t even press play on any women,” “This female rapper is so corny.” But it was just so negative and to have to fight through all that and to now be a part of an era where it’s like we are running things, it’s really dope.

Q: How did Howard help sharpen your tools to start your career?

SA-ROC: I was a biology major, but I

was always looking at the Fine Arts department, all jealous but loving them. They would come onto the Yard belting out in song, while I’m going down to the Valley. Just being supported and validated by so many intellectuals and incredible creators, it made me feel that [being a rapper] was possible. One of my good friends is Muhsinah [Abdul-Karim] (BA ’05), a producer. Years later, after we left Howard, both of us were doing our thing with music. She has toured around the globe with incredible artists. What Howard does is plant these seeds.

Q: Where do you think Howard stands in the history of hip-hop as we celebrate the 50th anniversary?

SA-ROC: I think Howard has been very pivotal. We are known for having these iconic performances on the Yard. These notable emcees and artists but also writers. To me, Howard is firmly entrenched in being a foundational place for hip-hop. And then also the reputation that Howard is one of the leading HBCUs that people gravitate towards. We are firmly entrenched in the legacy of hip-hop. —AMBER D. DODD

Visit magazine.howard.edu for a full-length digital exclusive Q&A with Sa-Roc.

2020s

Still
Roaring

2

2020 was a year that changed so much for everyone. But if history has taught us anything, it's that hip-hop is a versatile music genre, able to adapt and reinvent itself in challenging times. As the pandemic descended on the world, COVID pounced on the Black community. According to the COVID Tracking Project, Black people died at 1.4 times the rate of white people nationwide. The gap widened by age and location.

Fred the Godson, a 41-year-old Bronx rapper, was one of the first reported hip-hop artists to die from COVID on April 23, 2020. In his honor, the South Bronx corner of Leggett Avenue and Kelly Street was renamed Frederick "Fred the Godson" Thomas Avenue. Hip-hop legends, such as Mary J. Blige, Jay-Z, and Diddy, paid tribute to his work.

Social distancing took hold. Zoom meetings emerged. Howard University shut its doors and shifted to virtual events and online workflows. Even Yardfest was virtual. For hip-hop and Howard, COVID lockdown meant reinventing the music genre and HBCU culture.

And just as it always has, hip-hop transformed itself into a digital and stream-based landscape as people and the genre reemerged into a new normal.

TRAGEDY AS A CATALYST

While many were held to the confines of their homes and screens, community remained digitally accessible during the early stages of the pandemic. In the wake of the George Floyd protests, the longing for self-expression and creating safe spaces for young African Americans resurfaced.

Howard junior Alani Hodge, who spent her freshman year online, rekindled her love for music after realizing pre-law was not for her. "[At the





time] I was a part of a lot of activist groups... and on the front lines of the Black Lives Matter protests and it was emotionally draining for me,” Hodge says.

While her passion for music was self-cultivated, Howard contributed to her motivation through professors and music industry-based opportunities. She is now a television and film major with a concentration in audio production.

Other Howard students found other ways to keep hip-hop alive. “My freshman year began in 2021 and there were still some COVID restrictions, so I spent a lot of my time in my dorm creating music, but the issue was I couldn’t go out and perform, so it made it extremely difficult to advocate for myself publicly,” says junior Zuri Franklin. “It was a lot of personal growth that came from quarantine despite the mental struggles that ensued because of it. I was able to turn it around.”

Howard’s Warner Music/Blavatnik Center, a space run by School of Business professor Jasmine Young where students can learn from visiting music industry professionals, is not only a beacon of what is to come surrounding the relationship between hip-hop and Howard University, but also HBCUs.

Franklin mentions how Howard programs like the Warner Center and on the campus club, 360 Creativity Saves Lives, served as major support systems in his musical endeavors. “360 Creativity Saves Lives is my family at HU. We’re a community of people who use art to make a difference in the world,” says Franklin. “We use the word ‘artivism’ which is activism

■■■

LYRICAL LESSON
Msia Clark, who taught a hip-hop course, is leading a new hip-hop minor at Howard.

through art and advocating for creative expression, the protection of Black women, and really coming together as a community to spread love.”

SCHOOL’S IN SESSION

In the ’90s, artists used HBCU campuses as a platform to launch their careers, and slowly hip-hop found its way into the classroom as well. Howard fostered the established connection between hip-hop and HBCU culture through offering curriculum majors.

“The moment you step into that classroom, it’s like being front row to Black excellence every single day,” says Msia Clark, PhD, associate professor in the Department of African Studies. “These Generation Z students have no fear. I love the fact that we can talk about issues in our community and be vulnerable with one another.”

Beyond the curriculum, faculty members also hosted the Howard University Hip-Hop 50: Past, Present, Future conference which invited the Howard University community and hip-hop’s major players to showcase the genre’s multiple facets, from visual arts to its socio-cultural impact. A hip-hop studies minor is currently in the works at the University that will feature several courses ranging from fashion to dance, poetry, and hip-hop’s international history. *(For more information, visit magazine.howard.edu.)*

THE FUTURE OF HIP-HOP

360 Creativity Saves Lives founder and student artist Aisha June has high hopes for increased resources of artist development focused courses, majors, and recording studios on campus. She believes that Howard will continue to be one of the driving forces in changing the narratives surrounding hip-hop culture.

“The future of hip-hop at Howard will... [promote] music that is empowering our community while remaining true to the genre,” June says. “As for 360, I can see us navigating a label for college students on all campuses, but let’s start with the HBCUs first. Howard can be one of those schools that shows, you want to be a rapper? You should go to college, and you should come to Howard.”

The hip-hop genre is about the people. The message. The emotion. The culture. “Howard University is a centerpiece and emerging hub for hip-hop, not only in D.C. but on the East coast,” says Young. “When hip-hop comes to D.C., it considers Howard as its first stop. For hip-hop in 2023 and beyond, at Howard, it is unstoppable.” ●

BISON FAMILY

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Orientation

THE CLASS OF 1977

■ **FIFTY YEARS AGO**, the freshmen class of 1977 moved into their dorms at Howard for a new, exciting chapter in their lives down in D.C. Some were aware of the new phenomenon that had just birthed a little north of them in the South Bronx only a week before known as hip-hop, one that would inevitably have a most extraordinary impact on their lives, on Howard, and on generations to come.

RESTORATION

DREAM CARS AND WEDDINGS

How a restoration project taught alumnus Kaleab Debebe about cars, marriage, and the triumph of DIY.

by JANELLE HARRIS DIXON

■ **THE PROCESS OF RESTORING A VINTAGE** car is almost never romantic, but it became sort of a love story in a love story for Kaleab Debebe (MBA '22).

“My wife and I never threw a wedding and she really wanted one. I was like, let’s get a house first, trying to get my priorities right,” he recalls, laughing. “But eventually, she said, ‘it’s time. I’ve been waiting 10 years.’ I told her, okay, you get your dream wedding if I get my dream car.”

Their deal made and his deadline set to have the restoration done in time for the big day, the father of three started shopping for a 1971 Volkswagen Super Beetle, a car he admired as a kid in his native Ethiopia, where they’re still popular. His dad had come to America on political asylum when Debebe was six months old and his uncle Magaru, the

proud owner of a Volkswagen Beetle, stepped in as a father figure until Debebe moved to the States when he was 11.

“Whenever we’d go anywhere, it would be in that car,” remembers Debebe, the assistant director of alumni relations at Howard. “Every time I see one, I think of childhood memories.”

The search for the dream car didn’t start out dreamy at all, however. In 2020, he purchased a 1971 VW Super Beetle from a seller who had rebuilt the engine but mangled the bodywork, making it fundamentally useless. Debebe sold it off for parts and six months later, purchased another car—same year, same model—for \$900, this time calling every body shop he could find before a mechanic agreed to take on the project.

On his own, Debebe stripped down the frame, sandblasted the rust and paint, and removed the engine, then helped staff at Naz Auto Body & Paint in Accokeek, Maryland, add a convertible top and put it back together. It took the self-taught mechanic an entire year to rebuild his new-but-not-new vehicle.

“The process was tough but doable. It was a feeling of not giving up. I’ve learned to make sure I do my homework before I jump into anything,” he said. “It looks easy in videos. You’re like, oh yeah, I can do this. But it takes a lot of experience and time.”

On July 17, 2021, in the



bustling morning hours before his wife’s dream wedding, Debebe was at the body shop, still pushing staff to finish details on his dream car. It still needed a wiring harness and a fuel line, which made it undrivable, and the groom had to pivot from his plan to pull up with his bride in his newly restored car. Instead, he rented a Rolls Royce and had his almost-finished restoration towed to the venue to be featured in their wedding pictures.

From white wall tires to monogrammed upholstery, Debebe’s Super Beetle is a meticulous trophy car. Next up, he plans to earn his PhD from Howard and restore another vintage car—possibly a VW bus—because, challenges aside, he loved the experience. And the car.

■ ■ ■

LIVING A DREAM

Debebe promised his wife a dream wedding if he was allowed to restore his dream car—an antique Super Beetle.

JOURNALISM

Changing the World, One Story at a Time

Journalist Natalie Moore highlights the community and the people in her reporting.

by TAMARA E. HOLMES



■ **Growing up on the south** side of Chicago, Natalie Moore (BA '98) noticed that some media coverage often focused on negativity and violence, ignoring the other rich stories that resonated with her community. “I knew that I wanted to be a reporter in my hometown and tell different kinds of stories,” she says.

Moore got her wish, and has had an impact on how different audiences perceive news coverage. In fact, this year, the News Literacy Project, an organization that aims to help consumers identify credible news sources, named her a recipient of the 2023 News Literacy Change-Maker awards—an honor bestowed upon a journalist who has done important work to ensure a more news-literate America.

“We had this moment in 2020 where there seemed to be an awakening, and Americans at large were supporting Black lives and speaking out,” she says. “Now we see all this backlash. We are having really antiquated fights around books and banning, and our democracy is under siege. As a journalist, it’s my job to do as much as I can to write about it.”

She also feels strongly about holding disseminators of misinformation accountable. Recently, she hosted “Harm & Distrust,” a News Literacy Project interactive lesson that examines the history of racist mainstream news coverage.

It was at Howard where she honed her ability to see the impact of current events through the lens of race, she says. She recalls “having deep

discussions about ethics and morals and how to treat communities without doing harm” while she was a journalism student and serving as editor in chief at The Hilltop.

Moore has worked as a reporter at the Detroit News, the St. Paul Pioneer Press, the Associated Press and WBEZ—Chicago’s national public radio news station—where she is now editor on the race, class, and communities desk.

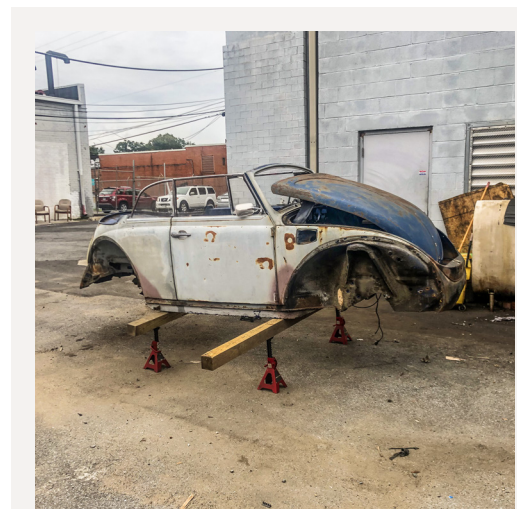
Moore also writes a monthly column for the Chicago Sun-Times, and has received numerous awards for her work, including being named journalist of the year by the Chicago Reader, a nonprofit newsroom and advocate for independent journalism. Moore also teaches at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism, where she earned her master’s degree.

Her writing also includes books and plays. She is also the author of “The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation,” and co-author of “The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall and Resur-

gence of an American Gang” and “Deconstructing Tyrone: A New Look at Black Masculinity in the Hip-Hop Generation.” She also wrote a play about abortion, titled “The Billboard,” for which she was awarded the inaugural Lydia Diamond Playwright Award by the Chicago Dramatists.

“I look at myself as a multidisciplinary journalist, who can do audio, digital, traditional newspaper writing, and playwriting,” she says. “All of my work is informed by my journalism, but I think art can touch hearts and minds in a different way.”

The most rewarding thing about her work is “people seeing themselves in it,” she says. She also takes her responsibility as a shaper of public opinion seriously. “Journalists can’t be afraid of the backlash and it’s our job to call out injustice,” she says. “We are the fourth estate. We are essential to democracy. And the things that we are seeing, whether it’s January 6th, book bans or [the fight for] body autonomy—these are attacks on democracy.”



PHOTOGRAPHY

Employment of Enjoyment

David “Oggi” Ogburn captures 50+ years of Black history

by JENNIE CHAPLIN

■ **Washington, D.C.’s** legendary photographer, David “Oggi” Ogburn (BS ’68) took Washingtonians and the rest of the country on a journey through the landscapes of Black American cultural arts and socio-politics during his long career that spans more than half a century. “I believe in photographing everyone,” he says, donning a t-shirt that says “Employment of Enjoyment,” his motto. And he did.

Most recently, in 2022, Oggi held an exhibit at the Harmony Hall Arts Center in Prince George’s County, Maryland, curated by artist and educator Ray Llanos. In the same year, Oggi received the Café Mocha’s Salute THEM Awards held at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the 2022 Mayor’s Award for Excellence in Visual Arts.

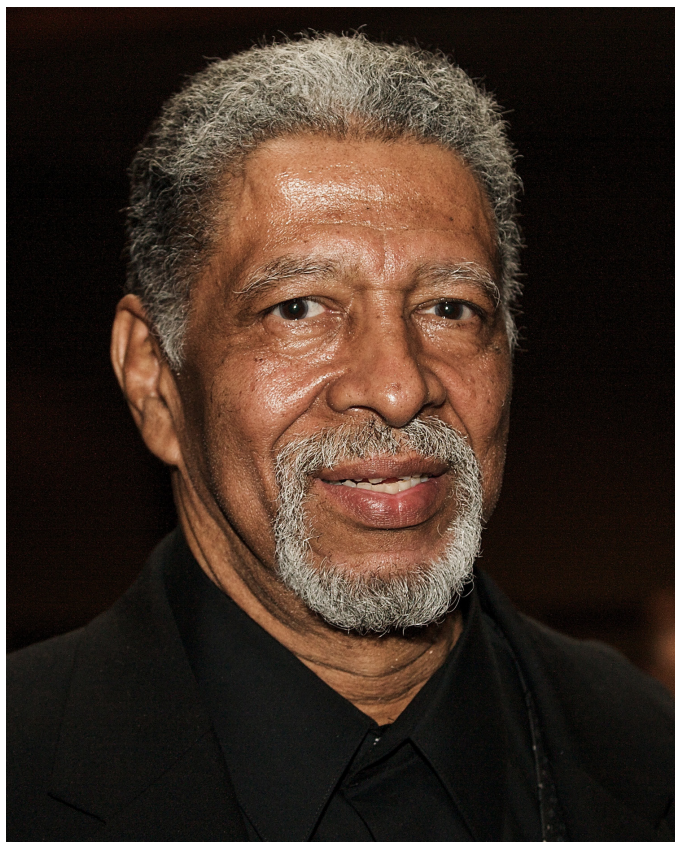
A native of Queens, New York, and a self-taught photographer, Oggi pursued his bachelor’s in sociology and master’s in urban studies at Howard. He photographed for WHUR-FM and WKYS-FM and for the National Association of Black Owned Business, BET, Congressional Black Caucus Dinners, and Sister 2 Sister Magazine. He also produced work for record labels such as Sony, Arista, Polygram, Motown, and MCA.

His published book entitled “Backstage Pass: Photography by ‘Oggi’ Ogburn” details his massive pictorial history. He calls his photo exhibits

“Backstage Pass,” because, as he says, “the creator told me to stay backstage. I was able to get my best shots.” His photographic exhibits were held at museums and galleries such as the Clinton Hill Art Gallery in Brooklyn and the African American Museum in Philadelphia.

Moments in political history can be seen through snapshots taken by Oggi of Walter Washington’s campaign to be D.C.’s first elected mayor;

“**OGGI GOT THE LIFESTYLE SHOTS—GOT THE SHOTS WHEN NO ONE ELSE WAS LOOKING.**”



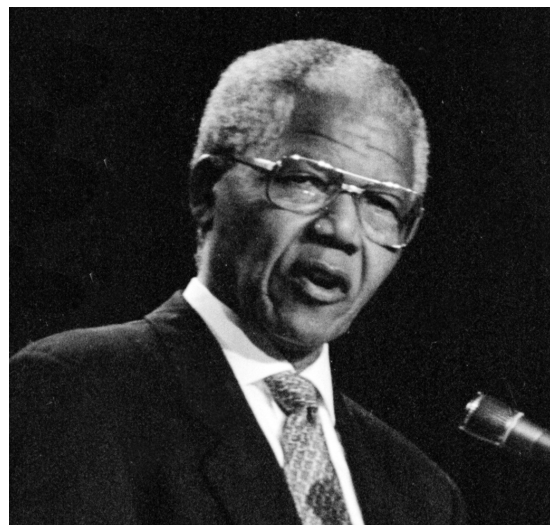
of Jimmy Carter during his presidential campaign; and a sobering, black and white photo of the late Bishop Desmond Tutu, protesting against apartheid in front of the South African embassy. He also captured Malcolm X’s widow and civil rights activist Betty Shabazz engaging in a friendly conversation with Denzel Washington and Spike Lee at a National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters dinner.

Oggi also served as the soundman for D.C. Black Repertory Theatre Company, and his representations documented Black cultural determination. Oggi captured the theatrical performances of Emmy Award winner Lynn Whitfield, seasoned actor Ken Holliday, and the launching of the singing career of Sweet Honey and The Rock, among other images. Oggi’s also photographed Stevie Wonder’s initial visit to WHUR; late radio personality Melvin Lindsay, who developed the “Quiet Storm” format for WHUR; and Anita Baker twirling her dress while performing.

As a tribute to Oggi, his friends, colleagues, and mentees conducted a virtual conversation with him for D.C.’s Funk and Harmony’s Black History Month in February 2022. Howard graduate Gwen Franklin, who met him in the 1970’s, recalls: “He brought the humanity and creativity to the art. Oggi got the lifestyle shots — got the shots when no one else was looking. Some people would get you to pose. Not Oggi.”

Oggi says he wants his images to “uplift and inspire” his viewers. He believes in “not giving up and rising to the occasion.” He also advises photographers to read contracts.

As he looks back on his career, he smiles. “How beautiful the world has been to me.”



■ ■ ■
CAPTURING MOMENTS Oggi photographed the likes of Nelson Mandela, Sweet Honey in the Rocks, Bob Marley, Dorothy Height, Betty Shabazz with Spike Lee and Denzel Washington, Desmond Tutu, Ken Holiday and Lynn Whitfield, and Jimmy Carter.



ADVOCACY

A REPRESENTING VOICE

Reverend Dr. DeWayne Davis, Minnesota Senate chaplain, bridges politics, social justice, and liberation theology to fight for the oppressed.

by TAMMARA SUTTON

■ REVEREND DR. DEWAYNE L. DAVIS (BA '93) believes in the inherent goodness of people. "Everything that I do is an invitation, a reconsideration and rewriting of your story and who you are, all under the assurance that you are loved," he says.

That message resonated beyond the church and into politics, when Davis became the first Black, gay chaplain appointed in the Minnesota Senate in January 2023. Davis' unwavering commitment to advocating for the oppressed has marked his life's journey. He left the Pentecostal church due to its lack of inclusivity and championed public policy on Capitol Hill. Despite initial resistance to ministry, a compelling force drew him back to seminary, affirming his purpose. As a reverend, he anchors his beliefs in liberation theology, a perspective that seeks liberation from all oppressive systems, emphasizing the principle of "do no harm."

The principles of human goodness and facilitating the exploration of identity and faith underpin Davis' political pursuits. He began his political career as a legislative aide, advising members of Congress on LGBTQ+ rights, healthcare, and law enforcement. As chaplain, he continues to do the same. "Since I have moved to Minneapolis, I have made it a point to go to the capital to fight and advocate. To have these same people recognize my ministry and voice, and have me be the spiritual face of the effort, was very humbling."



Upon his appointment, Davis aimed to inspire the Senate leaders through prayers highlighting their commitment to justice-focused objectives, including reproductive justice, Family Medical Leave Act, and safeguards for LGBTQIA+ individuals. He stressed their collective responsibility to serve every citizen, urging them to transcend partisan divisions and engage in respectful dissent without dehumanizing each other. Davis offered spiritual and pastoral leadership to a chamber that achieved several historic successes, including banning conversion therapy, restoring full voting rights for ex-offenders, and protecting abortion access.

Rooted in his own experiences, Davis' career has been defined by a commitment to speak up for the marginal-

ized and disinherited. "I am convinced that the God of my understanding impresses upon me that the existence of oppression ... is not what humanity was created for. It [white oppression] created in our religion and politics, a demonizing and oppressing of Black bodies, and by extension, the woman body and the queer body. And so, I have to speak up because I exist in that body."

Davis met his husband, Kareem Murphy (BA '94) at Howard. They met through Murphy's twin brother in calculus study sessions, built a strong friendship, and became inseparable. Despite existing intolerance and adversity on campus, Davis credits Howard for teaching him how to stand confidently within their queer love. "We had to fight for our right to exist and protect what we were creating. I know that better in hindsight, but at the time, it was difficult...And now, we remember our time there with joy and remember what we learned and what it meant," asserts Davis.

Today, Davis continues the fight for the rights of the oppressed, leveraging his intersectional social justice and theological principles. His courage and dedication to his mission have yielded substantial victories, uniting legislators and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities.

“TO HAVE THESE SAME PEOPLE RECOGNIZE MY MINISTRY AND VOICE, AND HAVE ME BE THE SPIRITUAL FACE OF THE EFFORT, WAS VERY HUMBLING.”

CLASS NOTES

'60's

William Lawson MD, PhD, DLFAPA (BS '66) was named president of Senior Psychiatrist Inc. He is a clinical professor at the George Washington University and also professor emeritus of Howard University's College of Medicine.

'70's

The Honorable Teta Banks, EdD (BA '73) was elected chair of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA).

'90's

Alaba Robinson, MD (BS '95, MS '99), a primary care doctor, recently hosted a "Breast Birthday Ever" mammogram event at Mercy Health in Cincinnati to ring in her 50th birthday. Outside the two mobile units, she served food and drinks while a deejay played tunes. This was the eighth year that she has hosted this event on her birthday in an effort to encourage area women to get a mammogram.

Melinda Spaulding Chevalier (BA '97), an Emmy Award-winning communicator, brand strategist, crisis management expert, and community affairs leader, is Rice University's new vice president for public affairs.



'00's

Kathryn Epps Roberson (BBA '08) is the new president and CEO for the Fund for the School District of Philadelphia. The Fund is an independent, not-for-profit organization that coordinates, identifies and leverages philanthropic resources for public schools in the city.

'10's

Duclas Charles (PHARM D '14), founder of Black Health Connect (BHC) which hosts mixers for Black health-



Yandy Smith-Harris and Wendy Raquel Robinson with singer/actress LeToya Luckett and Ft. Lauderdale reporter/anchor Alexis Frazier.

care professionals in major metropolitan cities, hosted its inaugural healthcare conference in Washington, D.C. in August. The two-day conference, BlackHealthCon, brought together healthcare experts and thought leaders to connect and share ideas to drive positive change in the industry.

Ariel Alford (BA '15), was awarded 2023 Mount Vernon History Teacher of the Year. This award is presented annually to one teacher in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area who brings creativity and passion to their teaching, generates a love of learning, and deepens their students' understanding and appreciation of history. Alford is a high school history teacher at Hayfield Secondary School in Fairfax County, Virginia. She received a cash award of \$5,000 and a fully funded field trip to Mount Vernon for her students.



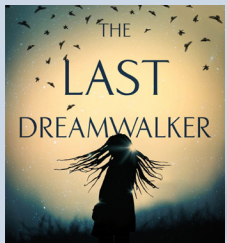
◀ The Elevation Experience presented by Visit Lauderdale, a diversity and inclusion initiative targeting women in leadership, featured Howard University alumni **Yandy Smith-Harris (BBA '02)** and **Wendy Raquel Robinson (BFA '89)**.

BISON BOOKSHELF

BY AUTUMN COLEMAN



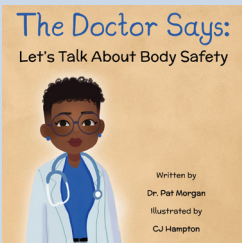
Southern Stories: The Family Secret by ALBE CHARLES
AKA LAWANZA SPEARS (BA '93)
In 1970s Mississippi, Cassie navigates how far she'll go to stand by her beliefs when she catches her husband's adultery with her younger sister.



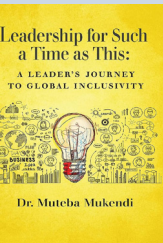
The Last Dreamwalker by RITA WOODS (MED '82)
After her mother's passing, Layla discovers the supernatural mystery of her Gullah Geechee roots as she uncovers family secrets off the coast of South Carolina.



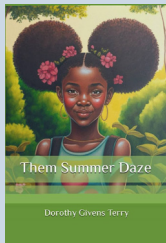
Chronically Loved by NATASHA GRAVES (BS '12)
Aaliyah loves her Aunt Nia who was diagnosed with a chronic illness. They use family time to talk about the disabled community and how children can be respectful and aware.



The Doctor Says: Let's Talk About Body Safety by DR. PAT MORGAN (BS '89)
To instill safety and awareness in children, author Pat Morgan teaches children about body parts, and consent!



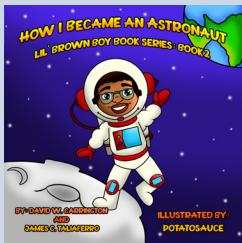
Leadership for Such a Time as This: A Leader's Journey to Global Inclusivity by MUTEBA MUKENDI (MBA '09)
This book offers perspectives on inclusiveness, intersectionality, and intercultural competencies to help solve problems plaguing today's society.



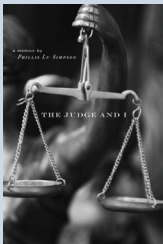
Them Summer Daze by DOROTHY GIVENS TERRY (BA '84)
Civil unrest, family disputes, and life-altering events shifts Dottie's South Carolina 1969 summertime in this coming-of-age story.



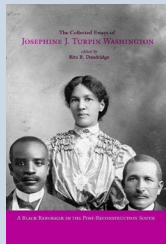
How I Became a Doctor: Lil' Brown Boy Book Series: Book 1 by DAVID W. CARRINGTON & JAMES C. TALIAFERRO (MS '03)
Part of an ongoing series about diverse jobs, the authors explore the innerworkings of how children can pursue their dreams of becoming doctors.



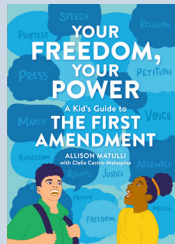
How I Became an Astronaut: Lil' Brown Boy Book Series: Book 2 by DAVID W. CARRINGTON & JAMES C. TALIAFERRO (MS '03)
This book explores love for the planets and how to transform fascination for the stars into a full-on career as an astronaut.



The Judge and I by PHILLIS LU SIMPSON (JD '81)
In her memoir, Simpson weighs the difficult decision between keeping her job or her unborn child, a story about the struggles of daily life and the unexpected triumphs that make it worthwhile.



The Collected Essays of Josephine J. Turpin Washington edited by RITA B. DANDRIDGE (MA '63, PHD '70)
Washington (BA 1886), a Reconstruction era activist, discusses how the Black community challenged oppression during that period.



Your Freedom, Your Power: A Kid's Guide to the First Amendment by ALLISON MATULLI (JD '03) WITH CLELIA CASTRO-MALASPINA
Young readers are invited to a nonpartisan explanation of the First Amendment and the fundamentals of American politics.



Is American Christianity Antichrist? The Root Cause of Hate in America by CAROLYN S. BYARS (MDIV '00)
Author Byars questions where religious leaders fall in society's modern battle with violence and divisiveness.

In Memoriam



■ **Bernard Ashe (BA '56, LW '61)** was the first African American chair of the labor and employment section of the American Bar Association (ABA). A labor lawyer, he was an active member of the ABA. In 2017, he received the Arvid Anderson Public Employment Lawyer of the Year Award, which recognizes lawyers who contributed to the development of public sector labor law.



■ **Kimberly Rachelle Willis Gagnier (BA '93, JD '96)** dedicated her life to public service for nearly four decades. After graduating from Howard Law School, she returned to her hometown of Los Angeles and advocated for the African American community through her work. She devoted her time to many organizations, including the Los Angeles Chapter of Links Inc., Black Women Lawyers, Black Women's Forum, Langston Bar Association, and the League of Women Voters.

■ **Mildred "Mit" Carter Joyner (MSW '74)** led social workers with passion and zeal in fighting for bettering their work and those they served. She served as president of the National Association of Social Workers until June, when she handed her reins to another Howard alumna, Yvonne Chase (MSW '73). Prior to that, she served as president of the Council on Social Work Education and the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors. She taught at West Chester University for over 32 years as chair of the department social work as well.



'40's

Norma Whitby Hill (BS '49), January 15, 2023, Detroit, Michigan

'50's

Charles Rosco Bridges, DO (BS '50), July 19, 2023, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

M. Beverly Hosten Dorsey (MD '54), May 9, 2023, Binghampton, New York

Shirley H. Simmons (BA '54), May 16, 2022, St. Louis, Missouri

John Willis Randall Anderson (DDS '59), June 7, 2023, Washington, D.C.

'60's

Betty Ann Ottinger (MSW '62), January 25, 2023, Washington, D.C.

Rafeal Aarndel (BS '63), December 8, 2020, Brooklyn, New York

Catherine Jerry Barbour (BA '64), June 1, 2022, Alpharetta, Georgia

Andrea Marcel Case (BA '65), April 28, 2023, Cape Coral, Florida

Clyde McDaniel Jr. (BA '66), December 8, 2021, Dix Hills, New York

Ulysses "Senior Steward" Samuel Little Sr. (BARCH '67), June 4, 2022, Washington, D.C.

Alton Maddox Jr (BA '67), April 23, 2023, Bronx, New York

Richard Hare Fitzhugh (BARCH '68), February 8, 2023, Washington, D.C.

Amos T. Mills, III (BA '69), July 1, 2023, Apex, North Carolina

'70's

Osby McMillan Jr. (BA '74), August 5, 2022, Stamford, Connecticut

Keith Arthur Bibbins (BS '79), May 15, 2023, Lombard, Illinois

'80's

Emmanuel "Effiong" Damascus Akpan (JD '80), May 11, 2020, Hyattsville, Maryland

Keysha Worrell-King (BBA '86), May 27, 2023, Westbury, New York

'90's

Clayton Sinclair (BBA '92), April 26, 2023, Atlanta, Georgia

'00's

Delila Pinckney (BA '03), February 11, 2023, Columbus, Ohio

'10's

Jason Isaac Wadley (BBA '11), July 7, 2023, Suffolk, Virginia



RAP CITY, TIMBERLANDS, AND THE GOLDEN ERA

A Howard deejay remembers hip-hop in the '90s at the Mecca.

BY *John E. J. Butler* (BA '94)

■ FEBRUARY, 1992 WAS A VERY SPECIAL TIME TO be at Howard University. The brisk winter air made it necessary to have clothing to keep you warm and fashionable in Timberland boots, hooded sweatshirts, and puffer jackets—a look that was 100% hip-hop. Me and my crew of East coast purists dressed and lived the part. We promoted parties at off-site venues close to campus and, naturally, I would deejay them.

This was the golden era of rap music when there were multiple lanes to choose from in the genre, from bohemian to Black conscious to gangster. Our crew was comprised of numerous talented emcees who would often have rhymes ciphers or battle all comers to a freestyle contest. Some of these competitions began on the Yard and ended at our parties.

Another group of Howard students, a few years older than my crew, created The Cultural Initiative. They held the second annual Hip-Hop Conference at Blackburn. These individuals were either working in or had ties to the music industry. They created panels with music executives, managers, and artists discussing the intricacies of the music business. Imagine Heavy D, Doug E. Fresh, Pete Rock, and CL Smooth giving real time insight to a room packed full of hip-hop enthusiasts. These discussions were held during the day. At night,

they would perform. Needless to say, me and my crew were in hip-hop bliss all weekend.

This was the era when BET was in D.C. and every guest who went to Rap City stopped by Howard's campus while in town. We were used to seeing the occasional rapper on campus, but this conference was a whole other level. The Cultural Initiative also held a deejay contest and the prize was to become a member of the newly formed weekend mix show team on WKYS 93.9.

I won the deejay contest. I am proud to say that I am among the chosen few to bring rap music to commercial radio in D.C. in 1992.

➔ **Johnny Butler** is the studio manager and deejay for *Bisa Butler Art*.



"While preparing my living trust, I wanted to ensure the institution that helped contribute to who I am today would continue to serve for generations beyond me."

Leave a Howard legacy, at any age!

"During my estate planning, I spoke with my attorney about establishing my Alma Mater as a beneficiary. I am a single woman with no children, so initially my mother was my only beneficiary. I needed my estate plan to be clear and concise.

Howard is one of the beneficiaries of my estate, and I made sure I documented my intentions with the University. This act of giving stands in line with the school motto that assisted in molding me, 'Truth and Service.'

My adoration for Howard has helped shape me into a successful entrepreneur and business owner. It was during my tenure at Howard where I learned and understood that intelligence plus character are the goals of true education."

—Tiffany L. Watkins, BBA '98
Owner and Designated Managing Broker for ART Property Management

Please let us know if you would like to include Howard in your estate plans.

Quina De Laine
Planned Giving Officer
202-238-2518
quina.delaine@howard.edu

Visit plannedgiving.howard.edu.

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