

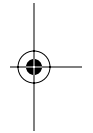
hip-hop AND THE CHURCH

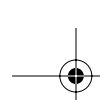
Opposition or Opportunity?

Sunday morning in Minneapolis: The auditorium of Patrick Henry High School in North Minneapolis reverberates with hip-hop beats. The Sanctuary Covenant Church is a growing multi-cultural church of over six hundred children, youth and adults, and this urban church is engaging the emerging generation through its distinctive approach to worship. Today is Hip-Hop Sunday, featuring four local Holy Hip-Hop groups, break dancing and spoken word.

During the praise and worship, Christian rap artists take turns leading the congregation in hip-hop praise. "When I say Jesus, you say Christ" starts the call and response between the rapping worship leader and the congregation. The youth and young adults rise from their seats and surge toward the stage with their hands up. One young man break dances, using his whole body to give God glory.

After the praise and worship ends, two youth recite a spoken word piece, "Inner City Blues," dealing with the recent shooting of a young man at a neighborhood restaurant in broad daylight. They cry out for a community that can find alternatives beyond violence to solve conflict.





The sermon, titled “Rules of Engagement,” is based on the account of the apostle Paul’s visit to Athens in Acts 17 and calls on the church to reach those living in hip-hop culture. During the sermon a deejay plays instrumental hip-hop beats to the rhythm of the black preaching art form.

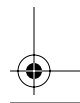
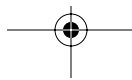
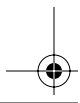
This Sunday morning, a young African American man and a young European American woman give their lives to Christ, and others approach the altar committing themselves to reach those living in hip-hop culture for Jesus.

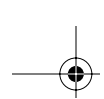
This is the church’s first Hip-Hop Sunday, and plans are now in place for this special worship experience to happen six times a year. Though the Sanctuary Covenant Church has a contemporary, soulful flavor to its worship week by week, putting together a hip-hop service has been a stretch for this congregation. But the lives that have been transformed as elements of hip-hop have been incorporated into the worship experience make it all worthwhile.

Saturday night in Chicago: A long line of young people wait to get inside Lawndale Community Church, home of the first youth and young adult hip-hop church in the Midwest, known as The House. The topic tonight is sex. The flyers promoting the service looked like condom wrappers and had been placed in local music stores and other hang-out places of the hip-hop crowd.

This packed-out evening service features local Holy Hip-Hop emcees, videos on multiple screens, information on the outcomes of promiscuous sex, and drama. The night ends with a sermon calling attention to the Bible’s teachings on sex. Lives are changed, commitments are made.

Many of the teens in attendance wish this service happened more than just twice a month. Such services are followed up, though, with Bible studies that take place daily all over the west side of Chicago, where youth and young adults can grow in the





knowledge of God, with communication at a level they can truly understand.



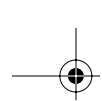
These vignettes are previews of what the book you are about to dive into is all about. We will wrestle with what it looks like for the church not only to engage hip-hop culture but to use elements within it as means for bringing the message of Jesus Christ to those living in hip-hop. Both of us are pastors who have grown up in the church and in hip-hop.

A WORD FROM EFREM: GROWING UP IN HIP-HOP

Though I am now the senior pastor of the Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, I consider myself a hip-hopper as well. I grew up on hip-hop and in the church. I was born in 1969, and Bakari Kitwana in *The Hip Hop Generation* says the birth years of hip-hop were between 1965 and 1984. So in some ways I was raised by hip-hop. I remember the first smash rap hit, “Rapper’s Delight,” like it was yesterday. I was only a fifth-grader when the song hit the charts in 1979. One of my favorite lines in the song is this: “You ever been over your friends’ house to eat / the food just ain’t no good / the macaroni’s soggy the peas all mushed / and the chicken taste like wood.”

My journey and upbringing in hip-hop thus began with rap music. I began to get into artists and groups such as L.L. Cool J., Whodini, Run-DMC, Soul Sonic Force, UTFO, Eric B. and Rakim. Some of my favorite songs were “Funky Beat,” “Five Minutes of Funk,” “Roxanne Roxanne,” “It’s Like That,” “I Need Love” and “Planet Rock.” I grew up on Prince, Midnight Star, Cameo, Luther Vandross and New Edition mixed with Heavy D., 3rd Bass, KRS-ONE and M.C. Lyte in the same way that I grew up on collard





greens, sweet potatoes, peach cobbler and catfish.

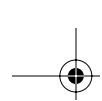
When I entered middle school my parents allowed me to start going to parties, and thereafter hip-hop captured me even more, not just as a music form but as a culture and community. Whether at Folwell Junior High School or at Martin Luther King Center, the party became my introduction to the elements of hip-hop. A series of movies called *House Party*, starring the rap duo Kid and Play, that came out during my high school years really captured my experience of the hip-hop party.

At the hip-hop party you see the deejay, whose job it is to “rock the party right” and keep people on the dance floor to the break of dawn (unless you had parents like mine who made you come home by midnight if not earlier). There was also the emcee, who would grab the microphone next to the deejay setup and rap lyrics of popular songs, showing creativity and great imagination. I will never forget Victor, a classmate of mine who was an awesome emcee. I don’t understand why he didn’t get a record contract. He rapped at talent shows, at parties and even in the hallway in between classes, battling others at our school on a regular basis. Then there were the break dance crews, breaking and pop locking; the rest of us would form a circle around them as various crews battled in dance with the same intensity as emcees battling in creative lyrics.

As I entered college, my taste in rap began to change as the genre itself began to change and expand. Consciousness—a more political and Afrocentric rap—came on the scene through groups like Public Enemy, X-Clan and Last Asiatic Disciples. Those hip-hop groups connected me to a deeper understanding of my culture and heritage.

So I grew up on hip-hop. When I didn’t understand why my parents wouldn’t let me go certain places and made me stay home while all my friends were out partying, hip-hop was there. When I starting dating girls, hip-hop was there. When I was feel-





ing depressed, hip-hop was there. When I graduated from high school, hip-hop was there. When I graduated from college and moved into my first apartment, there was hip-hop. Hip-hop has always been around me in one way or another.

I was raised up in the African American church and in an urban multiethnic church on the tail end of the civil rights movement and the beginning of the great American experiment known as integration, brought on by the passing of both the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. To put this all together, I grew up in a black church, hip-hop, integrated, increasingly multicultural world. I also grew up in an increasingly fast-paced, high-tech world. Sometimes my hip-hop life and my church life have intersected one another, other times they've seemed like two totally different worlds, and sometimes they've seemed like bitter enemies.

A WORD FROM PHIL: WHEN I CONNECTED TO HIP-HOP

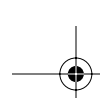
Hip-hop is a way of life, an attitude, a strength that comes when the emcee, the deejay or even the tagger (graffiti artist) connects with you to say, "I understand, I feel where you are at." Hip-hop really spoke to several points in my life, but it wasn't until a friend died that I became deeply connected to the culture of hip-hop.

We sat in the parking lot of the funeral home as one of our friends was being hauled off on a hearse. There I was in my boy's ride, drinking and listening to "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Mellie Mel dropped the hook: "Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge / I'm trying not to lose my head / a huh huh huh, huh huh / it's like a jungle sometime / it makes me wonder how I keep from going under."

We sat quietly, drank and meditated on "The Message." In some weird way, almost like a Negro spiritual sung by a soloist at church, the song brought us relief as we tried to deal with all the pain we felt.

That was when I knew that hip-hop had found its home in my life;



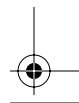
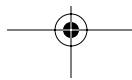
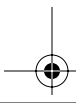


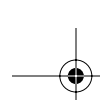
it spoke to my pain, my struggle as a young man seeking to find his way in the hood. This music was to me what Negro spirituals were to the church mothers of Jamison Temple CME Zion church in Kansas City, Missouri. Through hip-hop I was able to find myself and negotiate the issues of life in the city and realize at the same time that my situation was not helpless, that I was more than the shoes I could not afford or the gear I could not have.

What is so crazy about this feeling is that I never really knew that I needed this comfort in music, but when it hit me I knew I felt complete. This was the start of a marriage with hip-hop that would help me find myself, lose myself and find it again. I needed someone to hear my cry as a young boy growing up in the city; even though I went to church with my parents every Sunday, the church didn't hear me. I listened to my parents like kids do, but it was hip-hop that fed my soul. Rap as an element of hip-hop was the first way I was introduced to hip-hop, but what really engaged me to hip-hop was breaking and popping. I used to hit every park party, every house party and any club party I could find just to get with my little crew and pop. We would practice and then put it to work.

This element of hip-hop brought me more into the culture as I experienced it's impact on my life. What is great about the culture of hip-hop is that you don't have to rap, dance, tag or deejay; you just have to be.

It is in this *being* that God has called me to extract the components of hip-hop. Like Saul who met Christ on the Damascus road and whose message Christ flipped, using this wicked man to bring people to the kingdom, this is my passion and calling from inside the hip-hop culture. How can anything good come out of hip-hop to be used for the kingdom of God? Take some time, remove your prejudices or even misconceptions, and examine what God is doing through hip-hop in the church.





EFREM: CONNECTING HIP-HOP AND THE CHURCH

In November 2004, Oakcliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas hosted a summit that carried the title “Hip Hop and the Church: Collision, Compromise or Co-exist?” The purpose of this event seemed to be to connect parents to hip-hop as a culture, equip youth to think more critically about the types of rap music they listen to, and expose both groups to Holy Hip-Hop culture and music.

Such an event raises a lot of questions. Would bringing hip-hop into the church merely create a *collision* with churched adults who believe that this is just “worldly” music that is sending kids to hell? Are those in the church who advocate engaging with hip-hop culture and even creating a Holy Hip-Hop culture *compromising* the gospel of Jesus Christ? Can a hip-hop culture and Christianity *co-exist*, so that hip-hop actually becomes a relevant ministry? These are some of the questions this books seeks to wrestle with and even answer.

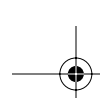
Collision. Are the church and hip-hop on a collision course, as both battle for the hearts and minds of young unchurched people within hip-hop culture? This position sees hip-hop as rap music that is corrupting our youth. The two are thus in a battle for young people—and it seems that rap music is winning:

A further indication of what they deem a withering sense of values and social responsibility among the younger generation, they say, is the steady drop in youth membership and attendance in the Black church—long a community haven of spiritual centeredness and respectable values. According to the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, attendance for eighteen to thirty-five year olds has dropped 5.6 percent from 1995 to 2000.

(BAKARI KITWANA, *THE HIP HOP GENERATION*, P. 22)

No doubt about it, hip-hop is a major influence among youth





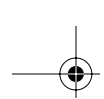
and young adults today. Unfortunately, the collision position pits rap music against the church, where the church might rather seek to engage hip-hop as a culture for a kingdom purpose. The collision position on the church and hip-hop works only if you see the church as good and hip-hop as evil rap music, the church as godly and hip-hop as worldly. Then if the church attempts to hip-hop in any way, it is using things of the world, and in a collision theology it is wrong to use the things of the world to advance God's kingdom. This is not the perspective of all Christians, but some Christians take this position, pitting the church in opposition to hip-hop. Julian writes in his song "Hip-Hop It Don't Stop" on his *Fruit of the Spirit* CD: "There's a faction whose reaction is to condemn using hip-hop music to win souls / for Him / Haters who can't seem to think outside the box, / Whose thoughts and minds are held shut with padlocks / Not realizing the impact that hip-hop has on the youth and young of today."

This book will explore hip-hop as more than just music, treating it as a culture that has a history as well as founding principles. Because of its significant influence, we believe hip-hop culture must be engaged by the church.

Compromise. Is it compromising the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, for the church to use hip-hop elements as tools for evangelism and discipleship? When gospel artists such as Kirk Franklin or Hezekiah Walker use the work of mainstream hip-hop artists such as R. Kelly or Sean "Puffy" Combs, are they compromising their mission? Is it okay to take a "secular" instrumental track and put Christian lyrics to it? Can your home music collection contain both Cross Movement and Mos Def? These are all questions that must be wrestled with when tackling the compromise question.

In some ways the collision position and the compromise position are practically the same. But it is possible for one to not see





the church and hip-hop as being at war but still consider that there is no need for the church to use elements of hip-hop culture for ministry purposes. There may be many in the church who feel that incorporating any elements of hip-hop culture into the church's ministry would mean compromising its mission or its biblical principles. This book, however, will present a theology for engaging hip-hop culture as well as explore the movement known as Holy Hip-Hop.

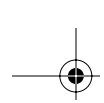
Coexistence. By now you have probably guessed that coexistence is the position that will be explored in depth in this book. As pastors, we lead churches that use elements of hip-hop not only in the worship experience but also as outreach tools. The coexistence position sees hip-hop not just as music but as a culture, a milieu in which we are living and growing up. Hip-hop culture can be used as a vehicle to express the good news in a relevant way to the current generation.

Using elements of the culture we live in to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ is not a new approach; the apostle Paul and Jesus himself did the same. Examining Scripture with care, we will seek to develop a theology of church and culture and also present ministry models that use elements of hip-hop culture to engage those who have been influenced by it. We will look at how, as Christian hip-hop artist Fred Lynch says, one of the most influential cultural forces today can be "spiritually hijacked" for purposes of building God's kingdom here on earth—especially in our urban centers, where youth and their families face many difficult barriers and challenges. This perspective should be taken under serious consideration especially in the African American church, which has a history of being focused on both evangelism and social justice.

USING THIS BOOK WHEREVER YOU ARE

Because hip-hop is a major influence in our world today, it's likely



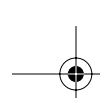


that several different kinds of readers will pick up this book. That's why we have divided the book into three major parts. Part one, "Why Should the Church Care About Hip-Hop?" encompasses one chapter that explores commonalities between hip-hop and the black church. In the African American church there should be a passion for those living in hip-hop culture, given its roots in the African American community as well as its connection to social justice. Because hip-hop is a movement rooted in the urban context but has influence beyond it, leaders of churches outside the city can glean from this section as well. This first section makes a biblical and theological case for why the church should engage hip-hop culture. Drawing from Scripture, a theology of church and culture is presented and is specifically applied to hip-hop culture. This section also considers those living in hip-hop culture and calls the church to develop a heart for them.

However, if you are outside of both the African American and urban contexts, you may want to jump right into part two, dealing with hip-hop as a postmodern cultural influence. Part two, "Understanding the Hip-Hop Culture," is designed for those who need to understand hip-hop as a culture, its elements and founding principles, its historical influence and even its spirituality. If your ministry is not in an urban area but you are in relationship with youth who are influenced by hip-hop and you want a greater understanding of it, this section will be helpful. If you're an older adult in an ethnic-specific urban setting and to you hip-hop is just rap and unintelligible noise, again this section is a great starting point.

Part three, "Bringing Hip-Hop into Your Church," presents Holy Hip-Hop as its own culture bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to hip-hoppers—those living in hip-hop culture. Hip-hop ministry models are explored in order to encourage further development of hip-hop churches and youth-targeted hip-hop ministries within existing churches. If you are already knowledgeable of hip-hop





culture and are ready to incorporate hip-hop ministry into your church or are feeling the call to plant a hip-hop church, feel free to jump right to part three and the resource section that follows.

Not every church will or should become a hip-hop church, but that is not really the point. The point is to move the African American urban church further along in its heart for unchurched youth and young adults growing up in hip-hop culture. The point is also to provide insight and tools for churches outside the African American urban context to engage youth who are influenced by hip-hop. Wherever you are, we want to connect you with the movement of hip-hop for ministry purposes, that together we may advance the kingdom of God among today's generation of youth and young adults.

