

**New York's
lyrical
assassins
bring the
noise**

**BY MATTHEW J.X.
MALADY**

SYRACUSE U.

WU-TANG CLAN PHOTO
COURTESY OF RCA RECORDS
CRAIG MACK PHOTO
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NO DISRESPECT TO the West, true indeed// I rock it to the East/ The East is the seed."
— Lauren Hill of the Fugees, from "Nappy Heads" remix.

Don't look now, but the seed may be sproutin' again. We all know it's been a West Coast, Doggy Dogg world for the past couple of years. MTV and pop radio made heroes of Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, and Snoop — but no rapper from east of the Mississippi was invited to the party. Hip-hop shifted away from its birthplace in New York City as the media and the record-buying public began to favor lazy P-funk beats over intricate lyrics, gangstas over poets and Compton over all.

Then, by some form of divine hip-hop intervention, a chain reaction of sorts swept outward from the rotten apple. The Wu-Tang Clan dropped "Protect Ya Neck." Nas showed that the world was his, Craig Mack blew up the spot with "Flava In Ya Ear" and the Notorious B.I.G.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

began his barrage on the Billboard charts. Suddenly, there were whispers throughout the industry about an East Coast resurgence.

Manhattan transfer

"People on the East Coast began to realize that they had to take their music to a different level, because a lot of the stuff was gettin' old," says Kevin Powell, staff writer for *Vibe* magazine. "Things had to change."

And they have. In fact, change is everywhere.

"The East is definitely back in the ballpark," says Wu-Tang's Chef Raekwon. "We brought it to a level where skills are everything."

Newer East Coast artists are invoking an unyielding lyrical street flow — the kind of dense word play that echoes a time when Kane was Big Daddy, Rakim was king and Eric B. was president.

But this time around, the rappers are getting paid. Debuts by Wu-Tang and Biggie Smalls soared past the platinum mark, and first efforts by Nas, Mobb Deep, Method Man, Old Dirty Bastard and Smif n Wessun all reached

Stage," and the two also contribute a verse on a posse cut for the East Coast all-star album *The D&D Project*.

"I check brothers out there like AZ, Nas and Mobb Deep," says Raekwon. "They're making it more real... and you gotta respect that."

This type of camaraderie was nowhere to be found a few years ago, but the new breed of East Coast artists seems to value the opportunity to work with other talented rappers. "It's all one love, and we're a part of that," says Tek. "We're just doin' our thing, and keepin' the music alive."

Righteous brothers

New artists are also keeping the East Coast tradition of hip-hop innovation alive. Following in the lofty footsteps of innovators like A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, and Digable Planets, both the Roots and the Boogiemonsters are taking the musical form to new levels of creativity.

Both bands recently released stellar debuts that have critics and true hip-hop fans drooling over the welcome change of pace. The Roots are the first group to fuse purely live instrumentation and lyrical dexterity

while retaining street credibility. The Boogiemonsters, who refer to the Roots as one of their "brother groups," rely heavily on spirituality and an ever-fluid style, which they hope to use as a tool in changing hip-hop. One of their goals is to bring the music away from repetition and dryness — thus, the water imagery on their debut *Riders of the Storm: The Underwater Album*.

"When we talk about water, it's like we want to take hip-hop under water for a baptism, because a lot of it is dirty right now," says Yodared, one of the four-man Boogiemonster crew.

"We're trying to inspire a move toward righteousness. There's a line being drawn in hip-hop... with two definite sides — the side of the wickedness and the side of righteousness. There's people straight talkin' about murder as acceptable and degrading women as acceptable. We're trying to move away from that, and we know not everyone is going to follow, but we're trying to set the pace so those who want to come out and speak righteousness can follow our lead."

East Coast family

But will new East Coast artists follow the lead of the Boogiemonsters, Wu-Tang Clan, Biggie and the others? Are we seeing the opening stages of a long-term upswing in East Coast hip-hop or just being blessed by a very cool false alarm?

Powell is not sure. "I don't know if I'd call what we're seeing a resurgence," says Powell. "People are realizing that they have to change things up, and that's cool, but I don't know if a few groups blowin' up makes it a resurgence yet."

All seeds need time to grow. Let's hope this is only the beginning.

Matthew J.X. Malady is a senior magazine major at Syracuse U. He wants you to vote Q-Tip in '96.

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YODARED OF THE BOOGIEMONSTERS

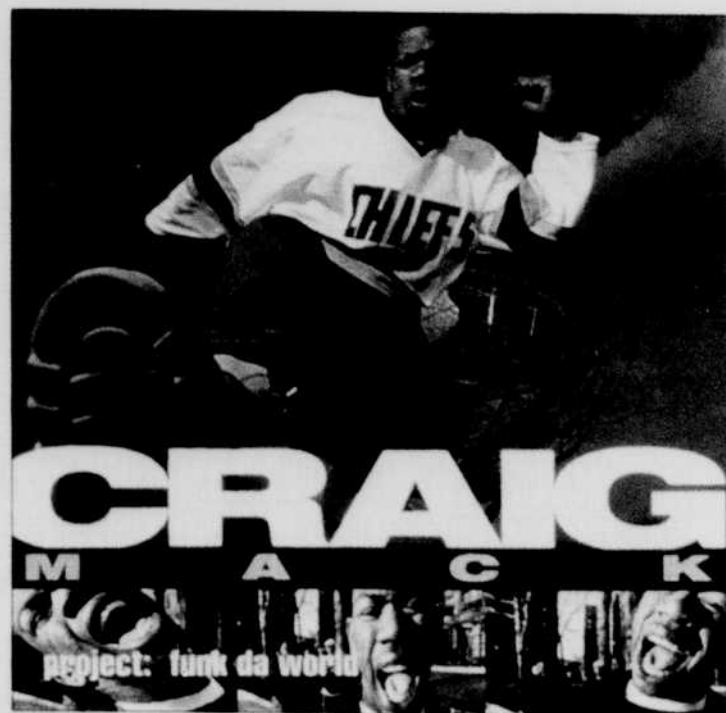
sale levels formerly achieved by only a select few veterans on the East Coast.

Change is also registering on the charts. Singles by New York artists now frequently show up on the Billboard top 10 and New York radio station Hot 97 (WQHT) saw its ratings skyrocket when it switched to a predominantly East Coast hip-hop format. More importantly, the new artists themselves are bucking past trends of competition and rivalry in favor of cooperation and unity. Guest spots on albums are now more common than ever, and there seems to be a real sense of community brewing as rappers realize the value of collaboration for the music's sake.

"Everybody's comin' together, and there's not as much jealousy, envy and animosity," says Tek of Smif n Wessun, one of the many new groups that have been more than willing to lend out their skills in an effort to help their brethren. Both Tek and his partner Steele rapped on Black Moon's debut "Entra Da



New York's Wu-Tang Clan — Obi-Wan has taught them well.



Craig Mack — the Force is strong with him.