

PHOTO BY NICOLE HOOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Author Bakari Kitwana writes about the parallels between hip hop and the Civil Rights movement in his book "Why White Kids Love Hip Hop."

Why White Kids Love Hip Hop

continued ▲ from Front

dent that rap has crossover appeal.

His opinions and theories are formed by interviews with white hip-hop kids and by documenting hip-hop for over 10 years.

One thing that Kitwana heard consistently from both white hip hop fans and artists is that they had a fascination with black culture early on in life that they couldn't explain.

In the movie *Malibu's Most Wanted*, comedian Jamie Kennedy played the lead role of a white suburban kid who thinks he's a black person named B-Rad. At a young age his parents weren't there for him, but his black nanny was and turned him on to hip-hop. B-Rad's parents take him to a psychiatrist as if something is wrong with him because he identifies with black culture and he is diagnosed with "gangsterfrenia".

To Kitwana, the story tells of the profound social implication of white kids loving hip-hop. Since B-Rad's parents aren't home, Yo! MTV Raps and *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* is how he learns life lessons.

"Culture used to be translated from parent to child," he said. "Now culture is transmitted through telecommunications."

In *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*, Kitwana discusses the 'wiggers' or 'wankstas,' words that many would describe the B-Rad character. Can white kids really understand hip-hop or is it just something they play to anger their parents?

Kitwana believes that a line is crossed when there isn't a sincere appreciation for the beginning of hip-hop.

"As a white kid in hip-hop you have a responsibility to not only engage in hip-hop as music but to look at the politics and cultural stem of the music," Kitwana said. "You can't just go to a concert, learn how to break dance and go home."

He believes hip-hop will go far when rappers change what they are talking about because it offends their white audiences.

As a journalist and author, Kitwana's work has been praised but also dissed.

"It bothers me when people misquote me or belittle me. I think that we as a country need a healthy conversation about race," he said.

Why White Kids Love Hip Hop challenges the musical genre as a both cultural movement and a political one to ensure that what our parents fought for in the Civil Rights era will not be forgotten.

Small City, Big Hip Hop

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They're still very humble and very hungry."

When musicians still have that hunger, Sokoni said, it makes their music real.

"Hip hop is about talking about what's going on in the street and the things that the everyday person goes through," he said. "You'll get that from an artist before he blows up. You're going to get those types of everyday struggles."

Once an artist goes mainstream, he said, those struggles begin to mean dealing with success, haters, and bling bling - issues not everyone on the streets can relate to anymore.

Considering Portland's African American community is slowly diminishing (only making up 6 percent of the city's population in the year 2000) there's a stark reality at the forefront of his hip-hop messages.

"Portland is super, super white," Sokoni said. "Even though you have a northeast Portland, you still have white people everywhere on MLK (Martin

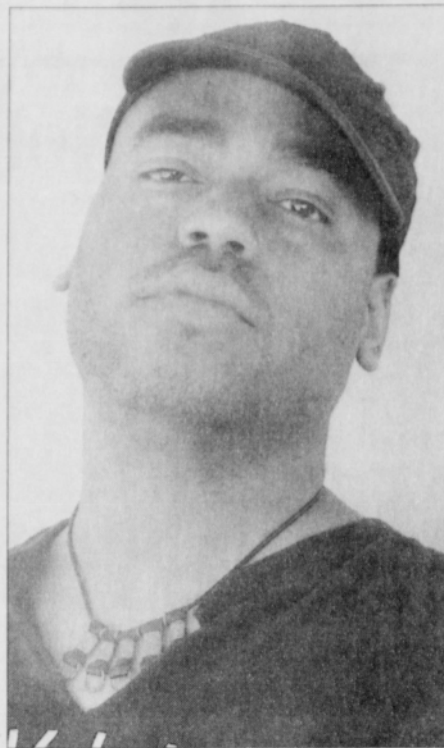


PHOTO BY KATHERINE BLACKMORE
Opio Sokoni brings light to Portland's hip hop community, a hub for impressive but undiscovered talent.

"It shows about how these people do business. It shows some of the positive things they deal with," Sokoni said. "You get the young people at the same time talking about how the adults don't understand. We bridge that gap."

Sokoni's primary hope for the film, though, is simply to get the message out that in the world of hip hop, the Rose City definitely shouldn't be overlooked.

"I made it as a teaching tool for people outside to see what's going on. I like to say I made this for the bootleggers. I just want to get it out there," Sokoni said. "When the street cats pick it up, they can learn to appreciate something intelligent. They'll begin to think about respect."

Locally, it's going to take collaboration to put the city on the map with hip hop.

"The people here need to be appreciated what they have and really begin thinking the unity that's needed for a city to blow up. You're not going to get any help anywhere else unless you have your own community," Sokoni said.

Appearances in the film include community members Turiya Aury, Kamari Lohar-Singh, Bosko, Soul Plasma,

Libretto, U Krew, Liquid Anthrax, Rodeezy, Mic Crenshaw, DJ Chill, Marlon McClain of Pleasure, Maniac Lok, Good Sista/Bad Sista, Paul Knaus Sr., Nzinga Sokoni,

Kevin Berry, Afrodjio, Elijah Hasan, Walidah Imarisha, Rob Ingram, Stephen Spyrit, Wolverine, Monique Serrell and Pastor W.G. Hardy.

"Small City, Big Hip Hop" will debut at the Hollywood Theatre at 4122 N.E. Sandy Blvd. on Saturday, Aug. 20 at 7 p.m.

For more information or to reserve seating, visit 503-493-1128 or 503-335-9305, or visit hollywoodtheatre.org. Sokoni and participants in the film will be available for a question and answer period following the screening.

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—Opio Sokoni

world, but it did it the way a bastard would do it - without a father. It did it without learning from the adults. It's doing it the way it wants to do it," Sokoni said. "Inside the music, they talk too much about issues that adults really can't support. The images are so strong - always talking about drug dealing, pimping, strip clubs - that adults never really get to see too much of the positive side."

"Small City, Big Hip Hop" is consciously appropriate for all audiences, with no strong language or foul content.

In the Neighborhood

How has hip-hop music influenced society?

Everyone wants to be into hip hop because it's in. Other cultures besides African-Americans are trying to get on the bandwagon. All of the sudden it's cool. I don't like it and I take it personal. Everyone is trying to steal rap.

--Rashad Salter



People are showing a lot more skin, it's more mainstream to sing about sex and body parts. It's made people feel more comfortable with sexuality and it's okay to have a bigger butt now.

--Erin Morgan



It's given an opportunity for young black men like Jay-Z and Snoop Dogg to open their own businesses that are outside of rap. Businesses are now catering to hip-hop music lovers.

--Linda Scott



I think hip hop is a real culture most of society wants to be a part of it. I think hip hop has taken over everything like clothing and cars; you can't get away from it.

--Rashaad Pilcher



It's music that for the first time gives people who aren't affluent a venue to get their point across. It has influenced art with graffiti. It's a chance for people to be political especially those who have been kept from having a voice. It's great that everyone likes hip hop and it has a collective voice.

--Jen Hackworth



Overall it's just caused a blending and this "anything goes" mentality. It's sort of like a culture pastiche. Hip-hop has made its way into every form of art and pop culture and every day conversation.

--Nick Bruno



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