

Academia Hip Hop Are There Tensions

Written by Reyhan Harmanci, Chronicle Staff Writer ID3393
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When hip-hop journalist and former emcee Davey D, a.k.a. David Cook, turned in his undergraduate thesis titled "The Power of Rap" in 1987, he didn't think he had a problem with sources.

"I handed it in with no footnotes," he remembers in a phone interview, "and my professor was like, "Cool. This is good but there aren't any footnotes. You need footnotes." I mean, I'm talking about something I was a part of, something I knew a lot about, and he was like, "Footnote something. There's got to be books about hip-hop." "

But there really weren't any source books on the subject, so Cook the student ended up footnoting emcee Davey D -- himself -- as someone who had been quoted in Bomb magazine.

"I got an A and left," he says.

Today, Cook would have no trouble filling a bibliography. With hip-hop itself hitting its third decade, hip-hop studies has become one of the most explosive subjects to hit academia in decades -- as UCLA Professor H. Samy Alim says, "It's reinvigorating the academy." But Cook's story highlights some of the tensions inherent in the ivory tower taking on a street-born culture such as hip-hop: namely, who are the experts? David Cook from UC Berkeley or Davey D the emcee? According to a 2005 survey by Stanford's Hip hop Archive, more than 300 courses on the subject are now offered at colleges and universities across the country.

"There is a literary flood," says Jeff Chang, a writer, UC Berkeley graduate and sometime Chronicle contributor, whose award-winning book "Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation" is one of the primary texts in many classes. "It's becoming a tidal wave. Right now, I have six or seven books on my desk for me to review or blurb. They weren't there a year ago."

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Visit the web site of Davey D at <http://www.daveyd.com/>