

Hiphop music is the latest in a long line, which has been created by people of African descent. However, Hiphop encompasses more than just music. It is in fact a culture, with its own style of art, dance, and language. The definitions of Hiphop are varied as some claim that it is merely an inner-city subculture while others believe that it is in fact an expression of a collective consciousness reflected by and affecting the inner city environment from whence it came.

As time passes, it becomes increasingly apparent that Hiphop culture shares many similarities with African based religions, such as Santeria, Vodou and Rastafarianism, particularly in terms of the context of its genesis among people of African descent, in the midst of societal oppression. In addition, descriptions given by attendees of early Hiphop events in the South Bronx, New York City are very similar to the descriptions recounted of those of the various ceremonies of the aforementioned religions, in that they seemed to have possessed ritualistic overtones.

Now, has Hiphop elevated to the status of religion? Who or what decides which practices and interpretations are worthy of being elevated to the status of religion? It would seem that this would be determined by a combination of their popularity and also the level of spiritual development achieved by the religion's purported advocates and practitioners. Judging from the wide spread dissemination of Hiphop inspired trends, I fashion, for example, worldwide, it is now without a doubt one of, if not the, most influential cultural art forms among the youth of this planet. However, it must be noted, that Hiphop culture itself has reached the 30-year mark, and many persons above 40 years old claim Hiphop as their culture as well. But, Hiphop's popularity alone cannot confer to it the status of religion

What is religion? What is its supposed purpose? A break down of the etymology of the word religion might be helpful in discerning its correct meaning and purpose. Dr. Muata Abhaya Ashby writes in The Ausarian Resurrection: The Ancient Egyptian Bible,

The term religion comes from the Latin 'Religare' which uses the roots 'RE' which means 'Back', and 'ligion', which means 'to hold', to link to bind. Therefore the essence of true religion is that of linking back, specifically, linking its followers back to their original source and innermost essence. In this sense the terms 'religion' and 'yoga' are synonymous. This source which is the underlying reality behind every object in creation is described as unborn, undying, eternal and immortal, and is known by an endless number of names, some of which are: Consciousness, Self, Higher Self, God, Goddess Supreme Being, Divine Self, Eternal Self, Soul, Pure Consciousness, Brahman, All, Allah, Jehovah, Neter Neteru, Creator, Absolute, Heavenly Father, Divine Mother, Great Spirit. These Various names, while arising from various traditions and separate cultures, in reality represent the same divine and transcendental principle. (18)

Based on this definition, we can conclude that the various interpretations of this source/force known as God and the practices intended to manipulate its energies, with the purpose of connecting people to this source/ force, are known as religions. For the most part, members of the Hiphop culture are not conscious of its spiritual characteristics; therefore those who practice them cannot properly measure the effectiveness of these elements, if they in fact do exist. However, it can be said that Hiphop's popularity is testament to the power of these very same elements, which its followers are not aware of. Consequently, an examination of these elements, whether or not they exist and if so whether or not there are similarities to those found within the religions of the African Diaspora, is warranted.