

“Tryin’ to Make a Dollar Out of Fifteen Cent”

The Emergence of Hip Hop as an Industry

By: Mike Schepker

Starting in the late 1970's America saw the emergence of a new form of music called hip hop. Few people believed it would last. They saw it as a passing fad. This music was called hip hop. Much can be written about the origins of hip hop, its influences reach as far back as the 1930's, but this is not what this paper is about. Instead, this paper will focus on the emergence of hip hop culture as an industry, more specifically, the hip hop industry (in art, music and movies) during the mid to late 1980's and the people and companies that transformed hip hop culture into an industry, but this cannot be achieved without some mention of its origin.

Hip hop culture is a child of New York more than any other place. Its streets, ghettos, parks, and clubs gave hip hop its start. Not just the music, but also break dancing and graffiti art. The break dancing was never thought of as real dancing, and the break dancers, or b-boys as they were called, were frowned on in the streets where they performed their art. Graffiti was definitely not considered art by the art world. It was a nuisance, a form of destruction of property. Once the hip hop culture was embraced by the mainstream, graffiti, and the people who created the art, taggers, were embraced, but that wasn't until the music made graffiti and break dancing a focus of the mainstream.

Graffiti is not a product of hip hop. Hip hop adopted the art because they both represented the same feelings of the artists that created it, the outcasts and people who were not given voices. Graffiti's history can date back to World War II.¹ The artists who sprayed graffiti around the cities, especially in New York, were called taggers, because they never signed their work with their real names. Doing so could result in destruction of property charges. Much of the art was focused on subway cars, tunnels, and buses. As Nelson George observes in *Hip Hop America*, "to those young or observant enough to see

¹ George, Nelson. Hip Hop America. New York: Penguin Books, 1998. 11.

beyond the nuisance caused to travelers, graffiti was the voice of kids using spray paint and Magic Markers to scream for attention and make art.”² In the early 1980’s, the art world, always looking for the next big thing, finally decided that graffiti was an art form. Several artists of the day were commissioned to create murals for wealthy patrons.

Several galleries were opened by “Fab 5” Freddy Braithwaite, the “Fab 5” being his graffiti group’s moniker, with the help of some friends in the art world.³ Some of these taggers were able to sell twelve foot canvases of their work for upwards of ten to twelve thousand dollars.⁴ Some of the graffiti could be found in *Subway Art*, a glossy publication which shows the fascinating pop culture that grew up around community art graffitiists in New York. “In 100 pages of photographs and interviews, innovatively captured on film and gleaned over several years, a dynamic world is revealed of underground artists who go to elaborate lengths to make their marks in an otherwise bleak world.”⁵ Tony Shafrazi, a gallery owner in Soho stated that “it is time to wake up to the fact that we are in a new era. The new artists are the heirs to the continuing tradition of rebellion, play and adventure which is art.”⁶ Graffiti still wasn’t about the money though, and would never be more about the money than the art.

Lee Quinones, a tagger in New York, transformed his grimy, run-down neighborhood into a graffiti wonderland. “He changed the grimy place near Brooklyn Bridge into spectacular and incredible famous gallery of graffiti. He painted almost every night the walls next to a baseball fields, some people thought that it was an immense and

² Ibid., 12

³ Light, Alan. *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999. 40.

⁴ *The History of Graffiti*. 12 Apr. 2005 <<http://www.jam2dis.com/j2dgraffitihist1.htm>>.

⁵ McEwen, Mike. "Graffiti: Art or Vandalism." *The Advertiser* 4 Oct. 1986: 1-3. Nationwide News Pty Limited. 12 Apr. 2005

⁶ "Graffiti on Canvas." *Newseek*. 18 Apr. 1983: LexisNexis. 12 Apr. 2005. Keyword: Graffiti.

very essential split in graffiti. The writers started to paint the walls not a subway.”⁷ Feb 5 Freddy was one of the people who became interested in this occurrence and wrote an article to *Village Voice* newspaper about the innovative transformation in graffiti art.

Insiders affiliated with major labels never thought hip hop would make it onto radio. It was something that only the cool people listened to; something you had to seek out and find in order to hear. It started out as two turntables mixing records together with a Master of Ceremonies introducing each track. It evolved into a DJ show with disc jockeys scratching and mixing the records while the MC (now Mic Controller instead of Master of Ceremonies) spoke words over the instrumentals. Then, you finally had “rap,” where artists would speak in rhythm over the music. These DJs and MCs would play on the streets and parks of their neighborhoods, such as the Bronx, Queensbridge, and other New York boroughs. They would eventually make it into local clubs, but many of the larger venues were hesitant to book hip hop acts because of the potential loss of revenue and because the rebellious nature of the music. Hip hop music was still not a genre that would be considered as a genre by major record labels and music critics. They thought it was “too edgy and nothing more than a fad.”⁸ The main reason was because hip hop lacked a song that could propel it to the mainstream.

Until 1979 the sole documentation of Bronx hip hop was cassette tapes either clandestine tapes made by would-be bootleggers at parties and clubs,

⁷ The History of Graffiti Writing. Institut for Graffiti-Research. 12 Apr. 2005
<<http://www.hiphop-network.com/articles/graffitiarticles/historyofgraff-arpone.asp>>.

⁸ "Russell Simmons Unplugged." 60 Minutes II. CBS, New York. 11 Feb. 2004. 2 Feb. 2005
<<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/02/09/60II/printable598970.shtml>>.

or tapes made by groups themselves and given out to friends, to cab drivers or to kids with giant tapes boxes...⁹

The DJ was one of the most important characters in the hip hop arena in the 1980's. Innovators such as Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc, and Grandmaster Flash turned the "wheels of steel" into a bona fide instrument. Grandmaster Flash popularized the scratching that Grand Wizard Theodore invented.¹⁰ Flash was a showman who not only mixed the records, but enjoyed putting on a show for the audience. He could spin with his back to the turntables, as well as using his feet to mix the records. He also is credited for some major innovations with the turntable. "Punch phrasing," playing a quick burst from a record on one turntable while it continues on the other, and "break spinning," alternately spinning both records backward to repeat the same phrase over and over, are credited to Flash.¹¹ Because of his showmanship, Flash played to sold out shows, at places like 116th Street's Harlem World Disco, as his legend grew and people from all over came to see him. Nelson George, writer of *Hip Hop America*, reminisces about one of the first times he was introduced to hip hop. He remembers hearing a song on a passerby's boombox. "Yo, yo!" He asked, "Who's that?" "Hollywood" he said over his shoulder. George started doing a little investigation after that and found that "homemade tapes like his were floating around the five boroughs, forming an underground musical economy way before the music found its way onto vinyl."¹²

This all changed in 1979 when an unknown hip hop group called The Sugarhill Gang recorded "Rapper's Delight" that was released on Sugar Hill Records, an

⁹ David Toop, *Rap Attack African Jive to New York Hip Hop*, New York, Serpent's Tail, 1991, p 78.

¹⁰ George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

independent, black-owned, label that was one of the first companies to make hip hop a product to consume. The song became a huge success as a single and eventually sold over two millions copies, peaking at number four on the *Billboard* R&B charts and number thirty-six on the pop charts.¹³ This was really the first time hip hop left the New York area and hit the entire world. None of the artists and DJ's that were making the music ever thought about making a living because of it. They did it because it was fun, they did it out of boredom, and they did it out as a form of expression. At the same time that "Rapper's Delight" was blowing up the charts worldwide, someone who could be considered the most influential person in hip hop music was getting started.

Russell Simmons was brought up in Hollis, Queens. His father, Daniel, was supervisor of attendance in Queens School District 29. Russell Simmons studied sociology at the Harlem branch of City College. It was there that he teamed up with fellow student Curtis Walker to throw parties in Harlem and Queens at which the first generation of rappers competed. He went on to manage Walker, who as Kurtis Blow became the first big solo rap star in 1979. Simmons worked with Blow in the completion of "Christmas Rappin.'" He also managed other successful acts such as Run-D.M.C., Will Smith, as DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, as well as legendaries DJ Hollywood and DJ Kool Herc.

"Christmas Rappin'" was Simmons' first time of his illustrious career, that he entered the studio. When the song was completed, Simmons began shopping it around to various labels for release. As Simmons said in *Life and Def: Sex, Drugs, Money + God*, "There was interest, but no one was biting. The industry's attitude was that "Rapper's

¹³ Light, Alan. TheVibe History of Hip Hop. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999. 13.

Delight,” despite its US sales and international appeal, was an unrepeatable fluke.”¹⁴

While it was a fluke for the artists that recorded the song, the genre was by no means a fluke. “Christmas Rappin’” gained moderate success on radio. In places around the South, the single was still being played in late July. Simmons, who needed distribution for the record, approached PolyGram to distribute it. PolyGram wasn’t too interested in investing in a hip hop record, but Simmons decided to show them the power of hip hop. He decided to go around to the various stores that expressed interest in the record and told them to order the record from PolyGram. When PolyGram started receiving orders from stores, they saw this as an immediate opportunity to cash in on hip hop. Kurtis Blow signed a record deal with Mercury Records, a label under the PolyGram umbrella. This marked the first time a hip hop act was signed to a major label.¹⁵

Sugar Hill Records did find some more success on their roster. The legendary Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five signed to Sugar Hill Records and made its mark in hip hop in 1980. The group released the record “Freedom” which hit the top 20 on the R&B charts. 1981’s “The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel” was the first record to feature complex cuts and scratches, and introduced the name Grandmaster Flash as their originator. But it was 1982’s “The Message” which became the first hip-hop social commentary on ghetto life, and which became a critical crossover hit for Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Simmons was out on tour with Blow promoting the “Christmas Rappin’” single. Though Blow had two Gold singles (sales of five-hundred thousand each), hip hop was still far from the minds of the major labels in the industry. They still didn’t see it as a marketable form of music.

¹⁴ Ogg, Alex. The Men Behind Def Jam. London: Omnibus Press, 2002. 53.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Grandmaster Flash: Biography. 15 Apr. 2005 <<http://www.grandmasterflash.com/bio.html>>.

While there were many very successful independent hip hop labels that started in the mid-eighties, Russell Simmons and Def Jam turned the underground hip hop movement into an industry, and made hip hop music and culture a marketable, successful product.

In 1984 two very different people with very different backgrounds met and would come to create one of the most successful musical ventures in the industry's history. Not only was it that successful, but it was successful with a music the major labels didn't see as becoming successful. The first guy was Rick Rubin, a former punk musician who loved the rebelliousness of this new form of music. The other was Russell Simmons, the concert promoter in New York who was booking the hottest MCs and DJs of the time at small venues, parties, and other small gatherings. These two met when Simmons saw a little logo on an album by T. La Rock & Jazzy J. This logo read "Def Jam." The record was nothing like Simmons had ever heard. He immediately began searching for the producer of this record. He tracked Rubin down and found out he attended New York University. It was in a NYU dorm room that he met Rick Rubin and formed a partnership that would change music history.

Around 1984, Simmons candidly told Gary Harris, a former Def Jam executive, "I'm sick of making people rich. I want to own my own shit, my own record label, my own movie company."¹⁷ It was this mentality that drove Simmons to find Rubin. When Simmons found Rubin, he was surprised to find a white kid, but then "realized that Rick Rubin and I had a lot in common."¹⁸ Simmons decided to ask Rubin to co-produce an album by RUN-D.M.C., a group that Simmons was working with that also included his brother, Joseph Simmons. RUN-D.M.C. were probably the most popular and successful

¹⁷ Ogg, Alex. The Men Behind Def Jam. London: Omnibus Press, 2002. 34.

¹⁸ Simmons, Russell. Life and Def: Sex, Drugs, Money + God. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001. 78.

hip hop act of the time, but that did not mean they garnered much chart success. It wasn't until Rick Rubin convinced the boys of RUN-D.M.C. to collaborate on a song with Aerosmith. The result was "Walk this Way," which became the first rap record to appear in heavy rotation on the MTV network. By this time, Simmons knew he did the right thing in pairing up with Rubin, even though Simmons had been working with the group prior to meeting Rubin, and the group was never signed to Def Jam. His mind was made up, and with visions of success in his eyes, he went to create Def Jam Records with Rubin, using the signature name and logo that Rubin had come up with for the T. La Rock & Jazzy J record.

Simmons and Rubin each put up four-thousand dollars for the formation of Def Jam Records. Simmons immediately started using his contacts from his promotion and management business, Rush Management, to gain the attention of *Billboard* magazine. Def Jam was officially founded in the summer of 1984. Simmons stated that, "The purpose of this company is to educate people as to the value of real street music by putting out records that nobody in the business world would distribute but us."¹⁹ Surprisingly, it was their work with people not on the label that gave them their initial notoriety. It was working on the album *King of Rock* by Run-D.M.C. that gained Rubin and Simmons recognition from major labels interested in what Rubin and Simmons were doing with the new phenomenon called hip hop. Not only was Simmons having huge success as a concert promoter, manager of such acts as Kurtis Blow and Run-D.M.C., but he also orchestrated one of the first hip hop clothing partnerships.

Simmons and Lyer Cohan, who worked for Simmons' Rush Management and would become head of Def Jam Records, set up a deal with German shoe manufacturer,

¹⁹ Ogg, Alex. *The Men Behind Def Jam*. London: Omnibus Press, 2002. 26.

Adidas. While playing at New York's Madison Square Garden, Run-D.M.C. played thousands of fans, and the two Adidas representatives, the group played their song "My Adidas," a song about the preferred shoes of the group. When the song came on, the thousands of fans in the Garden took off their Adidas and held them in the air. This was quite impressive to Adidas, impressive enough to offer a deal to the group. The Run-D.M.C. Adidas were shipped in a black box with no laces, the style that was set by the group. If not for Simmons, hip hop's first sponsorship deal might not have been made.

About the same time that Rubin and Simmons started meeting with major labels for distribution, a young MC from New York came to the attention of the pair. He was LL Cool J, real name, James Todd. Rubin started working with the sixteen year old when Todd refused to quit calling Rubin to see if he had listened to his demo, a demo that had been sitting un-opened in a pile in his NYU dorm room. Rubin finally gave it a chance and saw Todd becoming the next big thing. After recording some tracks, Rubin and Simmons saw Todd as the future and decided to take the song "I Need a Beat" to Los Angeles for a meeting with associates from Warner Brothers Records. According to Simmons, when they put on LL Cool J's "I Need a Beat," "the whole room just sat there—some of them stared at the speakers, some of them just sat looking at their hands. It was like they were hearing music from another planet." They left the building that day without a distribution deal with Warner Brothers. But before they left LA, they were playing "I Need a Beat" twelve times a day on KDAY, which had recently become an all-rap format station.²⁰ This success with an un-established artist later helped pave the way for negotiations with CBS Records. "I Need a Beat" was just the first of seven singles released that first year by Def Jam. After meeting with CBS, they settled at a six hundred

²⁰ Simmons, Russell. Life and Def: Sex, Drugs, Money + God. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001. 84.

thousand dollar promotion and distribution deal.²¹ Todd's next single, "Rock the Bells" went on to sell over nine hundred thousand copies, his biggest single to date.²²

With the new distribution deal, Def Jam could finally afford to move out of the dorms and into real offices. They moved into a three-storey building in Greenwich Village. Simmons' Rush Management took up the first floor, Def Jam the second, and Rubin lived on the third.²³ Def Jam also was making enough money to hire a staff, many of whom would go on to be presidents of other labels, or even founders of their own. The reason why Def Jam was becoming more and more successful is that they stayed true to what Simmons and Rubin considered the real hip hop culture. They weren't selling out to a white mainstream audience. After the contract was up with CBS records, Simmons went back to the negotiation table. Simmons used the success of the past year to negotiate a deal with Columbia Records. Columbia, at the time, was the biggest recording label. Though the amount for the deal was never disclosed, it is believed to have been around one million dollars.²⁴ If it was LL Cool J and Run-D.M.C. that gave Def Jam its street credibility and its rise to the public eye, it was three white boys from New York that took them to the next level.

The Beastie Boys only released one album on Def Jam Records before leaving because of royalty issues. But it was this one album, *Licensed to Ill*, which can be considered the most important album in Def Jam's and even hip hop's history. *Licensed to Ill* was the product of the rebel punk attitude that ran rampant in the 1980's. In fact, before converting to the rap style in which they became famous, the Beastie Boys were

²¹ Ogg, Alex. The Men Behind Def Jam. London: Omnibus Press, 2002. 39.

²² Ibid., 38.

²³ Ibid., 39.

²⁴ Ibid., 58.

members of various punk bands. It was this attitude that got them recognition from millions of teens. It was their rebellious behavior on tours with Run-D.M.C. and even Madonna, which won them fame in the media. With major exposure like this, it was no surprise to Simmons or Rubin that they would have a hit on their hands.

The album's first single was "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (To Party)." Columbia heard the single and "flipped."²⁵ Columbia shipped only one hundred thousand copies of *Licensed* near the end of 1986. They quickly saw that demand was greater than the supply. On November 29th, 1986, *Licensed to Ill* debuted on the *Billboard* charts at number forty-nine. In the same issue of the magazine, Def Jam ran an advertisement stating that "in the past four weeks 500,000 copies sold."²⁶ By the next week, the December 6th issue, *Licensed* jumped to number eight.²⁷ *Licensed to Ill* became the best selling debut LP in Columbia's history and the first *Billboard* number one rap album.²⁸ The Beastie Boys only recorded one album for Def Jam. They left after having disagreements with Rubin, in the direction their music was going, and Simmons, over money issues. *Licensed* remains the Beastie Boys' highest selling album. Even with Def Jam's most commercially successful group leaving the label, Def Jam was far from failure, capitalizing on the current trends in society and hip hop culture. Def Jam continued its success throughout the rest of the 1980's, releasing albums from LL Cool J, Slick Rick, and Public Enemy, among others. It continues to be a major force in the industry, even today, and is more than a label. For many, Def Jam is the brand of hip hop with everything it does, be it video games, records and clothes. Simmons sold his share

²⁵ Ibid., 59.

²⁶ "Top Black Charts." *Billboard* 29 Nov. 1986: 25.

²⁷ "Top Black Charts." *Billboard* 6 Dec. 1986: 28.

²⁸ Ogg, Alex. *The Men Behind Def Jam*. London: Omnibus Press, 2002. 61.

of the company in 1999 for one hundred million dollars. He continued to remain part of the company as a member of the board of directors, but sold his shares to develop his other ventures, such as Phat Farm, his four-hundred million dollar clothing line, the DefCon3 energy drink, and his own Visa card.²⁹

Def Jam wasn't the only label that helped hip hop become what it is today. The reason it receives so much attention in this paper, is because it is *the* company that demonstrates it the best out of all the others, and also because Simmons' willingness to take chances in other industries, like movies, which will be addressed later. Now, it is appropriate to discuss briefly some of the other labels that helped propel hip hop forward.

Tommy Boy Records, started in 1981, and released the definitive hip-hop 12" single, "Planet Rock" by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force. This was the record every DJ coveted and had in their crates, this was the record that inspired countless MC's to pick up the mic, this was the record everyone rhymed over, in the parks and in the clubs. Planet Rock exposed millions to the exciting New World of an urban Bronx street culture. The single would go on to sell over six hundred thousand copies.³⁰ Tommy Boy would continue its success with albums from De La Soul, Naughty By Nature, Digital Underground and Coolio. While Def Jam is still going strong, Warner Music Group, Tommy Boy's longtime partner, acquired the 21-year-old label's recorded music and music publishing catalogs for a little over ten million dollars, along with the majority of its hip-hop roster: De La Soul and Prince Paul went to Elektra, while Tony Touch, Coo Coa Cal and Everlast headed to Warner Bros.³¹

²⁹ Chappell, Kevin. "The Half-Billion-Dollar Hip-Hop Empire of Russell Simmons." *Ebony* July 2003: 169.

³⁰ Lee, James. *Tommy Boy Records*. 12 Apr. 2005 <<http://www.tommyboyfulfillment.com/story.html>>.

³¹ Reid, Shaheem. *Hip-Hop is History*. VH1. 11 Apr. 2005
<http://www.vh1.com/artists/news/1452827/03082002/digital_underground.jhtml>.

Sugar Hill Records, the company that introduced the world to hip hop in a big way, never experienced success like their first record. As Russell Simmons said in *Life and Def*, “Sugar Hill should have been as successful and enduring a label as Def Jam, but they weren’t able to build on that early monopoly position. As more labels moved into the rap game, Sugar Hill’s deals looked less attractive, and the newer talent signed elsewhere.”³² In 1986, Sugarhill Records declared bankruptcy and ceased to be active in the hip hop industry.

Ruthless Records was one of the first independent labels to hit it big on the West Coast. Founded by Eazy E, born Eric Wright, Ruthless was surrounded by controversy from its inception. Shortly after its formation, the Federal Government started investigating the label, claiming it was financed with drug money. The controversy became even bigger when Eazy E and friends Dr. Dre, MC Ren, DJ Yella, and Ice Cube formed N.W.A. Their records sold millions and created controversy with the single “Fuck the Police,” an indictment on corrupt police officers in Compton, California. Eazy E died in 1995 of complications with AIDS. The label continued on and released albums by Bone Thugs-n-Harmony, who have sold more than fifteen million records world wide.³³ The label still exists under the Atlantic Records umbrella.

With all the success that these record labels had, it was only a matter of time before Hollywood would come knocking on hip hop’s door. Hip hop movies grew out of “Blaxploitation” films of the 1960’s and 1970’s, such as *Shaft*, *Superfly* and *The Mack*. It was these films that paved the way for the movies targeted at the black audience in the

³² Simmons, Russell. *Life and Def: Sex, Drugs, Money + God*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001. 56.

³³ Bone Thugs-n-Harmony. Sony Music. 11 Apr. 2005 <<http://bonethugsnharmony.com/>>.

1980's, but instead of using soul and funk in the soundtrack and score to the movies, hip hop was used.

One of the first movies to incorporate the hip hop culture was *Breakin'*, a story of a jazz dancer that meets up with two break dancers. To date, this movie has grossed upwards of thirty-six million dollars.³⁴ Because this was a low budget movie that grossed so much, the producers thought it necessary to create a sequel, entitled *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*. In the sequel, break dancers prevent their local recreation center from being bulldozed. This movie was not as near successful, grossing only six million dollars.³⁵ What *Breakin'* tried to do was copy from the successful movie *Wild Style* but wound up exploiting it. *Wild Style*, a film starring a variety of rappers, is considered one of the best hip hop movies. Not only did this 1982 movie expose more of the world to hip hop, but its soundtrack spread the music to areas where the film had not been shown. "The people in the film are the ones who helped create the original rap scene."³⁶

The next major movie to be made by Hollywood was a movie starring Mario Van Peebles called *Rappin'*. The story revolves around Peebles' character coming home from a stint in prison to see his little brother rapped up in a life of crime. Throughout the movie he tries to convince his younger brother that a life of crime is not worth it. In a review from a 1985 *New York Times*, the movie was deemed "likable enough" with a good-natured mood.³⁷

³⁴ Business Data for Breakin'. IMDB. 12 Apr. 2005 <<http://imdb.com/title/tt0086998/business>>.

³⁵ Business Data for Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo. IMDB. 12 Apr. 2005 <<http://imdb.com/title/tt0086999/business>>.

³⁶ Palmer, Robert. "The Pop Life; Rp and Hip-Hop Music in Wild Style." The New York Times 22 Feb. 1984, Late City Final ed., sec. C:18.

³⁷ Maslin, Janet. "The Screen: Rappin Opens." The New York Times 11 May 1985, Late City Final ed., sec. 1:14.

One of the biggest hip hop movies of the 1980's was, not surprisingly, based on Russell Simmons' life. *Krush Groove* was loosely based on Def Jam Records' formation, and included LL Cool J, Run-D.M.C., the Beastie Boys, Kurtis Blow, and Rick Rubin. The film had a three million dollar budget, and went on to gross fifteen million in theatres. The movie had a fun, light-hearted approach to the hip hop scene, focusing on the formation of the label and the ultimate prize for all the rappers in the movie, a contest in which the winner would get a recording contract with a major label. Of course, it was filmed as more of a hip hop musical, with the acts breaking out into songs throughout the movie. Even though this was produced with Rubin and Simmons, creative control went to the director. According to Simmons, "There were a lot of scenes that embarrassed us. They were too bubble-gum."³⁸ This led Simmons to create an edgier film, whose story was similar to the one in *Krush Groove*.

The resulting "edgier" movie was *Tougher than Leather*. The story was about Run-D.M.C. getting harassed by a group of gangsters. This film also featured Def Jam acts, including the Beastie Boys, Slick Rick, and Rick Rubin, as well as Simmons himself. The movie cost only seven-hundred thousand to make, but that was almost lost when Simmons couldn't find anyone to distribute it. Finally, he sold the rights to New Line Cinema and made the cost of the movie back. The movie was criticized deeply. One *New York Times* reporter claiming it was "vile, vicious, despicable, stupid, sexist, racist and horrendously made."³⁹ It did gross over three-million dollars in the US, but according to Simmons, he never saw a dime in royalties.⁴⁰ This stumble into the movie business kept Simmons away from the movies for a while, but in the 1990s he would

³⁸ Simmons, Russell. *Life and Def: Sex, Drugs, Money + God*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001. 101.

³⁹ Harrington, Richard. "Movies; Leather: Rap Rip-Off." *The Washington Post* 17 Sept. 1988, Late ed.: C5.

⁴⁰ Simmons, Russell. *Life and Def: Sex, Drugs, Money + God*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001. 101.

once again find success on television with *Def Comedy Jam* and in movies with *The Nutty Professor* and its sequel, as well as *Gridlock'd*, the final film made by Tupac Shakur which won an award for best picture at the esteemed Sundance Film Festival. Hip hop became the common theme in all movies targeted at the urban youth, and is still the theme featured to this day.

In the 1980s you saw hip hop music and culture become a major industry. Graffiti galleries were highly successful in New York, even though it was for a short time. Break dancing, accompanied by hip hop music was a phenomenon that spread across the nation and touched urban youth all across America, and later won over the hearts of its main consumer, suburban youths. After this, it is obvious to predict where else hip hop would show up, in Hollywood. Hip hop based movies, usually cheaply made, grossed more than what many people thought and transferred the culture even further. This was just the beginning. Hip hop would become the dominant force in music for a time in the 1990s, and more hip hop movies, like *Boyz in the Hood*, would be made. It was because of Russell Simmons, that the culture grew as much as it did in the 1980s to propel it to what it would become in the next two decades.