

# **From Oppressed to Obsessed: The Black Influence**

By Shemari Salkey

From beauty to politics, to entertainment, and the abundant aspects of mainstream media within pop culture, black culture has engraved its deeply rooted history into American culture and it is evident within today's society and media. "It is not just a culture, it is a state of being, a way of life, and a state of mind," says Lisa Harris. The term "black culture" outlines a broad array of traditions, beliefs, artistic expressions, dialects, and social habits that evolved as a result of African Americans' experiences. It encompasses and unites black people's ancestry and commonalities, which have developed over the generations, showcasing to the world our capabilities. With the influence being so extensive, the top two divisions heavily impacted by African Americans are the music and fashion industries.

"Every genre that is born from America has Black roots," says music journalist and podcast host Sidney Madden. It is challenging, if not impossible, to try to capture the full extent and diversity of African-American influence on American music. The American music industry would not exist without the essential contributions of African-American influences. The rich musical legacy that African immigrants brought with them helped to build a new American musical culture that blended African customs with those of Europe and the Americas. African roots can be heard in gospel, blues, and jazz music. Together with constructed instruments, spirituals, and chants evolved into ragtime, blues, and rhythms. Later they produced jazz, rock & roll, hip hop music, and R&B. Our ancestors' musicality defined our heritage, and musicians such as Rosetta Tharpe, Louis Armstrong, Big Mama Thornton, and Little Richard, to name a few,

helped promote that history and pave the way for a newer generation of artists while still keeping the culture alive.

Fashion trends are ever-evolving and can capture the spirit of the cultural era in which they are created. The fashion industry has been greatly influenced by black culture, which has set styles ranging from the Harlem Renaissance to modern streetwear. The African-American neighborhood of Harlem, New York, is where the Harlem Renaissance first began, hence the name. It became known as the "rebirth of African-American arts" because it enabled black people the ability to use fashion and other arts to express their individuality. It was an era of pride in one's cultural background and self-expression. This period could be deemed as the origin of several modern streetwear concepts. It urged people to abandon boring, traditional attire. Rather, it inspired them to embrace vivid designs, striking colors, and dramatic silhouettes.

Hip-hop brands swept the fashion world by storm by the mid-1990s. Artists such as Tupac, Snoop Dog, Aaliyah, and others embodied this urban streetwear trend. Streetwear was featured in even well-known television programs and motion pictures like *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and *Poetic Justice*. Hip-hop culture's style and identity have been heavily influenced by both modern and old-school fashion trends. Along with the fashion influence of hip-hop, black fashion designers and models continue to be at the center of the fashion industry, breaking barriers and rewriting the concept of being "fashionable." People like Dapper Dan, Virgil Abloh, Naomi Campbell, André Leon Talley, and have utilized their platforms to promote diversity and inclusivity in the fashion realm, helping boost the industry's exposure of and appreciation of Black culture.

By far the most powerful and true movement in existence is black culture. It is powerful, breathtaking, and remarkable. Black culture has made countless contributions to modern

civilization, ranging from business to politics to entertainment to beauty. Therefore, its significance cannot be overlooked. It has made a difference, promoted black success, and encouraged pride in black people everywhere. The lives of black people, including black children, have been deeply touched by the remarkable representation of black culture in every part of our society. This has motivated people in other backgrounds to acknowledge, value, and incorporate black people into every important aspect of society. We can only be grateful for the degree of influence that black culture has had and still has on our society over the years.