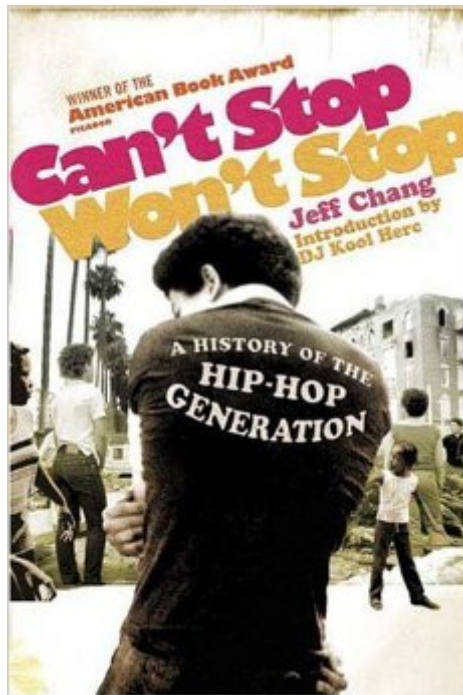


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Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History Of The Hip-Hop Generation



Synopsis

Can't Stop Won't Stop is a powerful cultural and social history of the end of the American century, and a provocative look into the new world that the hip-hop generation created. Forged in the fires of the Bronx and Kingston, Jamaica, hip-hop became the Esperanto of youth rebellion and a generation-defining movement. In a post-civil rights era defined by deindustrialization and globalization, hip-hop crystallized a multiracial, polycultural generation's worldview, and transformed American politics and culture. But that epic story has never been told with this kind of breadth, insight, and style. Based on original interviews with DJs, b-boys, rappers, graffiti writers, activists, and gang members, with unforgettable portraits of many of hip-hop's forebears, founders, and mavericks, including DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, Chuck D, and Ice Cube, Can't Stop Won't Stop chronicles the events, the ideas, the music, and the art that marked the hip-hop generation's rise from the ashes of the 60's into the new millennium.

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Customer Reviews

Unfortunately I think the previous reviewer may have missed the point of my book. As I've said, in the book and in talks I've given on the book, I never set out to do a "definitive" history of hip-hop culture, let alone one simply about rap music. I don't believe that any one book could capture the breadth and depth of the hip-hop generation's contributions to culture and politics. In 14+ years of writing on hip-hop from the street level around the globe, working (and often battling) in an international cipher of incredibly talented, passionate, and committed hip-hop artists (not just rappers), journalists, activists, writers, and scholars, I have developed a very strong opinion on this

point: there are millions of ways to tell the story of the hip-hop generation. Mine is but one version. It's not "the" history, it's just "a" history. I want to point everyone to some of the incredible writing that is available—in anthologies edited by people like Raquel Cepeda, Oliver Wang, and Rob Kenner, in books by Joan Morgan, Selwyn Seyfu Hinds, Bakari Kitwana, Raquel Rivera, Michael Eric Dyson, Mark Anthony Neal, S.H. Fernando, Adisa Banjoko, and Cheo Hodari Coker, and in fiction by Danyel Smith, Black Artemis, Erica Kennedy, and Adam Mansbach. There are classics of hip-hop writing by Tricia Rose, Brian Cross, Steven Hager, David Toop, Greg Tate, Billy Upski Wimsatt, James Spady, Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn. As I write this, I know of future classics still coming by people like Dave Tompkins, Brian Coleman, and many others. Nor am I trying to exclude the many other worthy and important writers out there—trust me, I've only scraped the surface of this expanding field of hip-hop generation (not just rap) books. Before long, our shelves should be bending from all the great stuff.

Let me talk about this book. In *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, I wanted to explore the notion that hip-hop is one of the big ideas of my generation. It's a powerful idea that unites us, divides us, that we feel deeply passionate about, that for many of us helps to define our identity, around the world. So what I've tried to do here is to present the emergence of the hip-hop generation, through the cultural and the political changes that we've made and that have made us. In doing so, I chose to tell many less-told stories, both because I wanted to add to the shelf of books above and because each of these stories revealed a certain truth about the generation we have come to be. I wanted the book to be a window on the last three decades of the 20th century, the so-called American Century. In another three decades, this will sound like common sense even if it doesn't right now: you can't talk about America without talking about hip-hop. And you can't talk about hip-hop without talking about America. This is why the book moves back and forth between hip-hop's content and hip-hop's context. I think they are inseparable. Understanding one only helps the understanding of the other.

Personally, I came to hip-hop as a young boy growing in Honolulu in the early 80s, so I am a product of the culture's global reach, and I document its global roots beginning in Jamaica and moving through to its role now as both an indispensable commodity for the multinational media corporations and a grassroots community movement that bridges people and places all over the map. Finally, I've tried to capture and celebrate the joy that this culture has given to me and to millions of others—not just through rap, but through all of the aesthetic forms hip-hop has moved through and transformed. All throughout the book, my generation's promethean creative powers are on full and glorious display. Hip-hop has grown from being a local culture to something bigger, something that frames the very way that we see and live in our world. So I wanted *Can't Stop Won't Stop* to be a history that also begins from the neighborhood level and expands into a

generational worldview, with a lot of dope stuff to move to and think about along the way. Thanks for reading this and please do check out some of the other books I've mentioned above.

As a deaf Asian-American, I didn't grow up in a house where music was a big priority. It was the purchase of the album "Dark Side of the Moon" that opened the floodgates for me and now I grasp not only the music, but the history behind the people and socio-auditory changes. I can't help but compare "Can't Stop, Won't Stop" to the recent movie "Cidade de Deus" about a young boy who manages to somewhat avoid the gangs, drugs and cyclical poverty of Brazil's slums. The movie's protagonist Rocket could be analogous to hip-hop itself, struggling to find an alternate path to the violence and ignorance brought on by apathetic governments, organizations and a few evil people in the right places. Chang gives us remarkably well-done portraits of the various social changes that combined to give us some of the most transcendent expressions of thoughts and feelings I've ever heard. The book is worth the time and money. The shortage of Tupac and Biggie material arises from the book's focus on the "original generation" itself, as the creators of the format got older and had to deal with not only a changed society, but also the question of "Where to go next?" Chang does point out the commercialization of hip-hop has had, on the whole, a mostly negative impact upon the validity and "goodness" of the music being made; that the industry executives have managed to create a system where decent beats, attractive musicians and shoddy lyrics are rewarded more often than the intelligent, expressive and fun block party spirit in the beginning. Read this book.

Any weaknesses in Jeff Chang's groundbreaking Can't Stop Won't Stop come from what is also the book's lifeblood: an ambition to create a coherent disquisition of the braided threads of art-making, culture-making, commerce, exploitation, appropriation, political oppression, and resultant activism that characterize what has, over twenty years, become "hip hop" (a term itself which, in the book, casts a wide net over a wildly conflicted and contradictory territory of music, culture, techniques, and theoretical structures.) He's trying to do a hell of a lot. And the writing succeeds when he sticks to a specific story in a specific time: reggae in the 1970s; the birth of hip-hop in the Bronx; the rise and fall of the Source. His narratives are clear and exciting; just the very fact of this information being documented with such strength and legitimacy makes it exciting. However, the text starts to slip and slide when Chang tries to tell too big of a story all at once. As the book proceeds, it is dragged down by the accumulation of narratives he keeps trying to follow, threads he tries to tie up with generalizations; summary statements that lose power with each

iteration. I feel like if the book had tried less to make all the points connect; presented a more consciously disconnected juxtaposition of these various stories--various chapters of the development of hip hop, even out of chronological order--if Chang had left it up to the reader to hear the echoes between his beautifully narrated case studies--it would have been a far stronger work. That being said--no one, to my knowledge, has attempted a project about hip-hop on such a grand scale. It's always difficult to be the first--Chang sets up a theoretical framework in whose wake many great books will follow. For a similarly exhilarating/groundbreaking work with similar problems, check out Judith Halberstam's terrific "Female Masculinity."

I love this book. As a person who was involved in my local hip hop community, this book helped me go deeper into the roots of hip hop and where it began. I love that it covers all aspects of hip hop culture. Before they had this book translated in Korean, I used to translate the text to help share knowledge with my fellow Korean hip hop heads so that they could better understand the culture. A must read for anyone who loves hip hop culture.

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