

# African American Voices Lesson Plans

**Lesson Plan:** The Birth of Zulu Nation and Hip Hop Culture

**Subject:** American History

**Grade:** 11

**NGSSS-SS:** **SS.912.A.1.2-** Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity.

**Description/  
Abstract of Lesson:** The students will demonstrate appreciation and understanding for the roots and origins of Hip Hop and the formation of Hip Hop's first activist organization, Zulu Nation, by organizing a project based on their foundations.

**Objective(s):** The students will accomplish the following:

- Demonstrate understanding for Hip Hop culture.
- Demonstrate sensitivity for various perspectives.
- Understanding historical documents.
- Develop "Cause and Effect" perspectives on historical events.

**Materials:**

- Davey D article: ***Zulu Nation: From Gang to Glory***
- Reference: Biography of Afrika Bambaataa (available at <http://www.zulunation.com/afrika.html>)
- MP3s, CDs, cassettes or records of 70s Funk, late 70s/early 80s Hip Hop music, mid 80s Electrofunk and late 80s/early 90s Hip Hop.
  - Preferable examples of Funk: *Funky Drummer* by James Brown, *Sol Makosa* by Mano Dibango, *Think (About It)* by Lynn Collins.
  - Preferable examples of late 70s/early 80s Hip Hop: *Wildstyle* soundtrack
  - Preferable examples of Electrofunk: *Trans Europe Express* by Kraftwerk, *Planet Rock* by Afrika Bambaataa and the SoulSonic Force, *Renegades of Funk* by Afrika Bambaataa and the SoulSonic Force
  - Preferable Examples of late 80s/early 90s Hip Hop: *You Must Learn* by KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions
- Computer (with speakers), portable stereo and/or a portable turntable.
- Multimedia: Internet, TV and DVD player
- Documentaries and movies on Hip Hop culture (including *Wildstyle*, *The Freshest Kid*)

**Duration:** 1-2 class periods

**Lesson Lead In/  
Opening:**

1. As students walk into the classroom, play 70s Funk music.
2. As soon as class is in session, ask the students what the first Hip Hop music was like. Write responses on the board within a circle.



3. After all of the responses, explain to the students that the first Hip Hop music was in fact the type of Funk music that they were listening to as they entered the classroom.

**Activity 1:**

1. Have the students read the biography of Afrika Bambaataa (either Individually or as a class)

2. Discuss the Davey D article with the class. Highlight major events outlined:

- Bambaataa's movement away from street gang activity to bringing peace in the Bronx community by throwing parties and forming Zulu Nation.
- The manner in which many Zulu members began to develop the community through their community service.
- Bambaataa giving back to his community by hiring Zulu members as security, road managers, etc.

3. While discussing the type of music that was originally played at Hip Hop parties organized by Bambaataa and his contemporaries, play music from the *Wildstyle* soundtrack or play portions of the movie *Wildstyle* and/or the documentary *The Freshest Kid* to show students how DJs looped music (played portions of a song back and forth) and had emcees (or rappers) rhyme over the various beats.

4. Emphasize to students that there are 5 basic elements to Hip Hop culture:

- Emceeing or MCing (Master of Ceremony, Moving the crowd with words)
- Deejaying or DJing (Moving the crowd with music)
- Breaking or B-Boying/B-Girling (Dance)
- Graffiti (or urban art)
- Knowledge (Wisdom taught by groups like Universal Zulu Nation)

5. The teacher will further explain how Bambaataa influenced the course of urban music with Electrofunk (as heard in songs such as *Planet Rock*, George Kranz's *Din Daa Daa* and much of the dance/freestyle music of the 1980s) and knowledge-based music (as expressed in much of late 80s/early 90s Hip Hop, including *You Must Learn* by KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions). Play the music to facilitate student understanding.

6. Optional: Read aloud the "Zulu Beliefs" as outlined on the Zulu Nation website ([www.zulunation.com](http://www.zulunation.com)) to facilitate student understanding about Zulu Nation's knowledge base and its aim towards peace and prosperity in the community.

7. After discussing Bambaataa's achievements, divide the students into groups. Each group should nominate a "leader." Have each group write out a plan to develop an event to be held at their school that would promote peace through culture (incorporating the 5 elements of Hip Hop culture).

8. The groups will share and discuss their plans with the class.

**Activity 2:**

1. The student leaders will meet with the teacher in order to synthesiz each groups' plans.
2. The teacher along with the student leaders, will meet with the school's Activities Director about possible ways of organizing such an event at the school.

**Assessment:**

- Consider giving cooperation and creativity grades
- Teacher observation and evaluation of the quality of group plans
- Proper incorporation of the 5 elements of Hip Hop culture

**Higher Order****Thinking Questions:**

1. If Hip Hop was surrounded by a strong knowledge base in its early beginnings, why do you suppose the Hip Hop music of today lacks the same substance?
2. What challenges might you encounter while encouraging peace in your community?
3. The fact that Bambaataa named his organization "Zulu Nation," indicates that the organization was centered on what type of knowledge and wisdom?
4. What examples of the 5 elements of Hip Hop culture are present in your community?

**Suggested Books  
In Lesson:**

Chang, J. (2006) Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation, Picador.

Cobb, W. J. (2007) To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip-Hop Aesthetic, New York University Press.

Vibe Magazine (1999) The Vibe History of Hip Hop, Three Rivers Press.

Fricke, J. (2002) Yes Yes Y'All: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade, Da Capo Press.

Cooper, M. (1988) Subway Art, Holt Paperbacks.

**Web Resources:**

<http://www.zulunation.com>

<http://www.cantstopwontstop.com/>

<http://www.daveyd.com>

<http://www.b-boys.com/classic/hiphoptimeline.html>

[http://www.mrwiggles.biz/hip\\_hop\\_history.htm](http://www.mrwiggles.biz/hip_hop_history.htm)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/17/5pointz-new-york-hip-hop-history>

<http://www.breakcheck.com/>

<http://www.jam2dis.com/j2dbreakdancehist1.htm>

## **ZULU NATION: FROM GANG TO GLORY**

by Davey D



Hip Hop's oldest and largest organization, the Universal Zulu Nation is set to celebrate its 26th Anniversary this weekend [November 10-12]. They will be paying tribute to soul music and funk music God fathers, Sly Stone, James Brown, and George Clinton. They will also pay tribute to Hip Hop's seminal figures Kool DJ Herc, Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa. For those who are unfamiliar with the Zulu Nation, they began as an organization founded by Afrika Bambaataa at Stevenson High School in the Bronx. Back then it was simply known as 'The Organization.' Bambaataa, who once lived the gang lifestyle and was trying to change his ways, saw the newly formed group as a way out. Bambaataa, who was known for reading and staying up on the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and other African American leaders, changed the name to Zulu Nation after watching a movie that told the tale of the well known South African tribe. Bam was inspired by their resistance to Dutch settlers. As Hip Hop became popular, the group became known as the Mighty Zulu Nation and as later the Universal Zulu Nation (UZN).

The story behind the evolution of UZN is significant. Back in the days Zulus struck fear in many who lived outside of their Bronx River Housing Project strong hold. While they gave birth to Hip Hop's first B-Boys and B-Girls (Break Dancers), the group for the most part was made up of former gang members. Many of them were from the Notorious Black Spades, who once reined terror throughout the Bronx in the early to mid 70s. It used to be a real big deal for people to hang out at Bronx River and not get stuck (find oneself in a bad situation). It was a sign of toughness and brought much prestige. Many of the early crews tried to associate themselves with Zulu Nation for protection from roving bands of stick up kids (robbers) and other gangs. It was in this backdrop that Bambaataa and other conscientious men spent a lot of time teaching and preaching and working with Zulu members to bring about positive change. Bambaataa often talks about how he would do simple things like bestow titles like 'King' and 'Queen' upon Zulu

members in an attempt to instill pride and confidence. His feeling was that if you treat people like royalty then they would turn around and act like royalty in their actions. As Bambataa's recording career prospered, he saw too it that many of folks who were from the streets got an opportunity to go on tour with him and his group, the Soul Sonic Force. Sometimes they were employed as roadies. Other times they worked as security. Again, Bambataa's main objective was to see to it that local people got a chance to see that there was a much bigger world outside the Bronx.

Change didn't happen over night, but today the testament to all that hard work is the fact that there are vibrant Zulu chapters in more than 20 countries all over the world with estimated membership of over 10 thousand. They have come to embrace and preserve Hip Hop's key elements and have exemplified what is often considered Hip Hop's 5th Element-'Knowledge'. To me the beauty of it all is seeing what was once considered a 'ruthless gang' evolved to a group that has strived and succeeded in serving the community. There are all sorts of stories about Zulus ridding their housing projects of drug dealers and many of the older guys spending time mentoring younger people. There are stories about Zulus escorting women to and from their apartments as well as looking out and helping those in need. This of course is in addition to various Zulu chapters that have involved themselves in local politics including the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal and get him a new trial. We also can not overlook the fact that it was Zulu Nation members who put out some of Hip Hop's first records as well as among the first to establish Hip Hop's first radio shows. Who could forget Zulu Beats with Afrika Islam on WHBI (in New York). It's a shame that there hasn't been more of a public celebration and acknowledgment of this organization and its accomplishments. In any case, props to them on their 26th anniversary.

This article was originally posted on [www.daveyd.com](http://www.daveyd.com), November 1999.

# Afrika Bambaataa

## The Godfather of Hip Hop



Afrika Bambaataa is one of the three main originators of break-beat deejaying, and is respectfully known as the "Grandfather" and "Godfather" of Hip Hop Culture as well as The Father of The Electro Funk Sound. Through his co-opting of the street gang the Black Spades into the music and culture-oriented Zulu Nation, he is responsible for spreading rap and hip-hop culture throughout the world. He has consistently made records nationally and internationally, every one to two years, spanning the 1980's into the next Millennium 2000.

Due to his early use of drum machines and computer sounds, Bam (as he is affectionately known) was instrumental in changing the way R&B and other forms of Black music were recorded. His creation of Electro Funk, beginning with his piece "Planet Rock," helped fuel the development of other musical genres such as Freestyle or Latin Freestyle, Miami Bass, Electronica, House, Hip House, and early Techno.

Bam is responsible for initiating many careers in the music industry, and his early association with Tom Silverman of Tommy Boy Records helped propel the label to its success. Bam was instrumental in launching the R&B group New Edition, Maurice Starr and the Jonzun Crew, Tashan, and Bernard Fowler of the Peech Boys, to name a few. Bam is also recognized as a Humanitarian and a man of peace, who has applied elements of Afrocentric, spiritual, and health-conscious teachings to his philosophy. He is also a historian on Hip-Hop roots, who traces the culture back to the times of the African Griots.

At a time when DJs-Hip Hop or otherwise-were recognized for the distinctive records they played, Bam was called the "Master of Records," and was acclaimed for the wide variety of music and break records he presented to the Hip-Hop crowd, which included Go-Go, Soca, Salsa Reggae, Rock, Jazz, Funk and African music. He is responsible for premiering the following records and songs to Hip Hoppers, which are now staples in rap and Hip-Hop culture: "Jam on the Groove" and "Calypso Breakdown" by Ralph McDonald; "Dance to the Drummer's Beat" by Herman Kelly; "Champ" by the Mohawks; themes from The Andy Griffith Show and The Pink Panther, and "Trans-Europe Express," by Kraftwerk and hundreds of others.

Bam joined the Bronx River Projects division of the Black Spades street gang in the southeast Bronx in Act, where he soon became warlord. Always a music enthusiast (taking up trumpet and piano for a short time at Adlai E. Stevenson High School), Bam was also a serious record collector, who collected everything from R&B to Rock. By 1970, he was already deejaying at house parties. Bam became even more interested in deejaying around 1973, when he heard Bronx DJs Kool DJ Dee and Kool DJ Herc. Kool DJ Dee had one of the first coffins (a rectangular case that contains two turntables and a mixer) in the Bronx area circa 1972. West Bronx DJ Kool DJ Herc was playing funk records by James Brown, and later just playing the instrumental breaks of those records. Noticing that he had many of the same records Herc was playing, Bam began to play them, but expanded his repertoire to include other types of music as well.

As the Black Spades gang began to die out toward 1973, Bam began forming a Performing group at Stevenson High School, first calling it the Bronx River organization, then later the Organization. Bam had deejayed with his own sound system at the Bronx River Community Center, with Mr. Biggs, Queen Kenya, and Cowboy, who accompanied him in performances in the community. Because of his prior status in the Black Spades, Bam already had an established party crowd drawn from former members of the gang.

About a year later he reformed a group, calling it the Zulu Nation (inspired by his wide studies on African history at the time). Five b-boys (break dancers) joined him who he called the Shaka ZULU Kings, a.k.a. ZULU Kings; there were also the Shaka Zulu Queens. As Bam continued deejaying, more DJs, rappers, break dancers, graffiti writers, and artists followed his parties, and he took them under his wing and made them members of his Zulu Nation.

By 1976, because of the proliferation of DJs, many sound system battles would occur to determine which DJ had the best music and sound. Although the amount of people gathered around a DJ was supposed to be the deciding factor, the best DJ was mostly determined by whose system was the loudest. Held in parks and community centers, DJs would set up their gear on opposite sides, playing their records at the same time at maximum volume. However, Bam decided that all challenges to him would follow an hour-by-hour rule, where he would play for an hour, and the opposing DJ would play for an hour.

Bam's first official battle was against Disco King Mario at Junior High School 123 (a.k.a. the Funky 3). A few other important battles Bam had later on were against Grandmaster Caz (known as Casanova Fly at that time and who later was one of the Cold Crush Brothers) at the P.A.L. (Police Athletic League) circa 1978, and a team battle against Grandmaster Flash and an army of sound systems, with Bam teaming systems with Disco King Mario and Tex DJ Hollywood. Bam formed additional systems for battling as well, like the Earthquake Systems with DJ Superman and DJ Jazzy Jay. There were also many MC battles, where rappers from Bam's Zulu Nation would go against other outside rappers. Later, Bam also jointly promoted Shows with Kool Herc under the name Nubian Productions.

Many cassette tapes were made of Bam's parties and MC battles, which were sometimes sold for \$20 to \$40 apiece. During long music segments when Bam was deejaying, he would sometimes mix in recorded speeches from Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and, later, Louis Farrakhan.

Influenced by James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, George Clinton, and the many separate-but-same Groups that he created, Bam formed the SoulSonic Force, which in its original makeup consisted of approximately twenty Zulu Nation members. The personnel for the Soul Sonic Force were groups within groups that Bam would perform and make records with, including: SoulSonic Force (1)-Mr. Biggs, Queen Kenya, DJ Cowboy  
SoulSonic Force (#2)-Mr. Biggs, Pow Wow, G.L.O.B.E. (creator of the "MC popping" rap style), DJ Jazzy Jay Cosmic Force-Queen Lisa Lee, Prince Ikey C, Ice Ice (#1), Chubby Chub; Jazzy Five-DJ Jazzy Jay, Mr. Freeze, Master D.E.E., Kool DJ Red Alert, Sundance, Ice Ice (#2), Charlie Chew, Master Bee; Busy Bee Starski, Akbar (Lil Starski), Raheim.

Around ~1980, Bam and his groups made their first recordings with Paul Winley Records, who recorded Bam's "Death Mix" piece. Winley also released Cosmic Forcers "ZULU Nation Throwdown," after which Bam (disappointed with the results) left the company.

Bam's parties had now spread to places like the Audubon Ballroom and the T-Connection. In the early 1980s, news about Bam and other DJs', parties-and the type of music Bam played-started traveling to the downtown sections of Manhattan. Tom Silverman visited Bam at one of his parties and did an article on him and the Zulu Nation for his own Dance Music Report magazine. The two became friends, and Silverman later recorded Bam and his SoulSonic Force with a group of female singers called Cotton Candy. The first song Silverman recorded around 1981 with both groups (without Bam's name listed) was a work titled "Let's Vote," after which a second song was recorded and released, titled "Having Fun."

Thereafter, Silverman met producer Arthur Baker, and together with then-KISS-FM radio mastermix DJ Shep Pettibone, Silverman recorded Bam and the Jazzy Fives "Jazzy Sensation" on Silverman's own Tommy Boy Records label. The record had three mixes,

one with Bam and the Jazzy Five, and the other with a group called the Kryptic Krew. The third mix was an instrumental. The record was a hit with Hip Hoppers.

Around 1982 Hip-Hop artist Fab 5 Freddy was putting together music packages in the largely white downtown Manhattan New-Wave clubs, and invited Bam to perform at one of them, called the Mudd Club. It was the first time Bam had performed before a predominantly white crowd, making it the first time Hip Hop fused with White culture. Attendance for Bam's parties downtown became so large that he had to move to larger venues, first to the Ritz, with Malcolm McLaren's group, Bow Wow Wow (and where the Rock Steady Crew b-boys became part of the Zulu Nation), then to the Peppermint Lounge, The Jefferson, Negril, Danceteria, and the Roxy.

In 1982 Bam had an idea for a record revolving around Kraftwerk's piece "Trans-Europe Express." Bam brought the idea to Silverman and both tried working on it in Silverman's apartment. Bam soon met John Robie, who brought Bam a techno-pop oriented record titled "Vena Carva" that he was trying to release. Bam then introduced Robie to Arthur Baker, and the three of them, along with Silverman and the Soul Sonic Force (#2), worked on the "Trans-Europe Express" idea, resulting in the piece "Planet Rock"-one of the most influential records in music. Bam called the sound of the record "Electro Funk, or the "Electro-Sound," and he cited James Brown, Parliament, and Sly and the Family Stone as the building blocks of its composition. By September of that year "Planet Rock" went gold, and it continued to sell internationally throughout the 1980s into the next millennium 2000 and still sells today with the many remixes. Planet Rock is the most sample record ever in Hip Hop.

In the autumn of 1982 Bam and other members of the Zulu Nation (which included Grand mixer D.ST, Fab 5 Freddy, Phase 2, Mr. Freeze, Dondi, Futura 2000, and Crazy Legs, to name a few) made one of their first of many trips to Europe. Visiting Le Batclan theater in Paris, Bam and the other Hip Hoppers made a considerable impression on the young people there, something that would continue throughout his travels as he began to spread Hip-Hop culture around the world.

Bam's second release around 1983 was "Looking for the Perfect Beat," then later, "Renegades of Funk," both with the same SoulSonic Force. Bam began working with producer Bill Laswell at Jean Karakos's Celluloid Records, where he developed and placed two groups on the label Time Zone and Shango. He did "Wildstyle" with Time Zone, and in 1984 he did a duet with punk-rocker John Lydon and Time Zone, titled "World Destruction" which was the first time ever that Hip Hop was mixed with Rock predating Run DMC's duet with Areosmith "Walk This Way". Shango's album Shango Funk Theology was also released by the label in 1984. That same year Bam and other Hip Hop celebrities appeared in the movie Beat Street. Bam also made a landmark recording with James Brown, titled "Unity." It was admirably billed in music industry circles as "the Godfather of Soul meets the Godfather of Hip Hop."

Around October 1985 Bam and other music stars worked on the antiapartheid album Sun City with Little Steven Van Zandt, Run-D.M.C., and Lou Reed and numerous others.

During 1988, Bam recorded another landmark piece as Afrika Bambaataa and Family. The work featured Nona Hendryx, UB40, Boy George, George Clinton, Bootsy Collins, and Yellowman, and it was titled The Light. Bam had recorded a few other works with Family three years earlier, one titled "Funk you" in 85, and the other titled Beware (The Funk Is Everywhere) in 1986.

In 1990 Bam made Life magazine's "Most Important Americans of the 20th Century" issue. He was also involved in the anti-apartheid work "Hip Hop Artists Against Apartheid" for Warlock Records. He teamed with the Jungle Brothers to record the album Return to Planet Rock (The Second Coming).

Around this same period, Greenstreet Records, John Baker, and Bam organized a concert at Wembley Stadium in London for the A.N.C. (African National Congress), in honor of Nelson Mandela's release from prison. The concert brought together performances by British and American rappers, and also introduced both Nelson and Winnie Mandela and the A.N.C. to Hip-Hop audiences. In relation to the event, the recording Ndotemnyama (Free South Africa) helped raise approximately \$30,000 for the A.N.C. Bam also helped to raise funds for the organization in Italy.

In 1991, Bam received some notice for his remix work on the group EMF's gold single "Unbelievable." He also did an album for the Italian label DFC (Dance Floor Corporation), titled 1990-2000: The Decade of Darkness.

By 1992 Bam had his own Planet Rock Records label, releasing Time Zone's Thy Will "By" Funk LP. In 1993 Bam's Time Zone recorded the single "What's The Name of this Nation? . . . Zulu!" for Profile Records. Toward 1994, Bam regrouped his SoulSonic Force for the album "Lost Generations." In that same year he began deejaying on radio station Hot 97 FM in New York City on Fridays, hosting the show Old School at noon which Bam changed the show's name to True School at noon. Bam has released other records throughout the world from many different countries as well as always stayed on top of his deejaying throughout the world from the 90's, straight through the next millennium 2000. He is truly one of the hardest working men in Hip Hop.

**Source: [www.zulunation.com](http://www.zulunation.com)**