

Assignment 8: Source Magazine Record Reports

Nelson George writes in his book *Hip Hop America*:

The Source: The Magazine of Hip Hop Music, Culture, and Politics was founded in 1988, by two Harvard students, Hip Hop fans/practitioners named Jonathan Shecter and David Mayes, and a businessman named Ed Young, in 1988. It started as a two-page newsletter, coming out of a Cambridge dorm room, and eventually became a monthly magazine, with offices and staff located in New York. The Source became known for... it's ongoing coverage of Hip Hop events, parties, upcoming talent, and cultural offshoots [Hip Hop and faith, sneaker culture, gang violence, sports] (72-73).

Watch part of the history here:



A huge part of the magazines' impact was in the "Record Reports," aka the album reviews. "The Mind Squad," who were a group of individuals who worked or gathered at *The Source*, and engaged in debates about the newest releases "dropped" (released) by producers and rappers. The outcome of these discussions resulted in record reviews featuring "**mic ratings**" (5 mics being a classic) and a description of the record. At one time, these reviews were taken extremely seriously by practitioners and aficionados alike.

RECORD REPORT

ALBUMS

DR. DRE

The Chronic

Death Row/Interscope

Production: artist

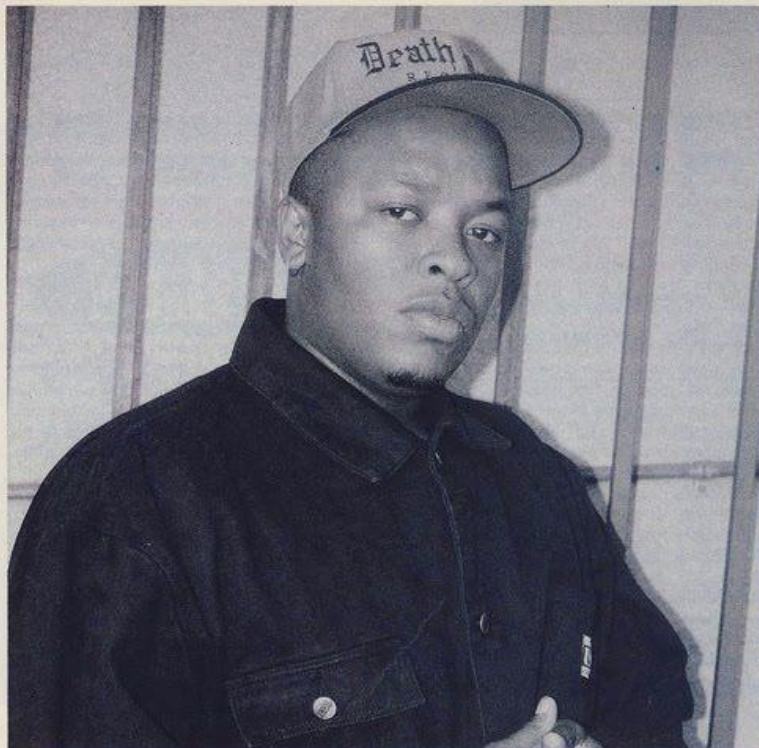


If Hollywood continues to make movies like *Scarface*, *Goodfellas*, and *King Of New York*, what makes you think gangsta rap will stop? More than just filling a void, NWA—the most successful real rap group of all time—unleashed the production wizardry of Dr. Dre, the man who put the funk in that gangsta shit like no one else.

Now with NWA broken up and everyone doing the solo thing, each ex-member faces the test of standing on his own. After hearing *The Chronic*, it is obvious who was the key ingredient to that platinum sound. On his own, Dre proves that innovative production skills and solid arrangements will take him the distance once again.

Following the hype behind one of his hardest tracks ever, "Deep Cover," Dre has unloaded all over this album with the same furified intensity. Cuts like "Nuthin' But A G Thang," "Deez Nuts," and "Bitches Ain't Shit" pack enough bottom to blow the frame out a Pathfinder, while the live keyboards coat the high ends with funky melodies. The result is that patented smooth gangsta groove combined with the flavor of the classic funkateers: an original flavor, both musically and lyrically, that rises well above a re-tread of gangsta cliches or over-used samples.

Snoop Doggy Dogg has no trouble carrying most of the weight behind the mic, and his Slick Rick-esque style—complete with creative boasts and singing—carves new ground for West Coast MCs. His presence is laid-back and ruff at the same time, but even when he's "chin checkin'," he doesn't sound anything like the typical gangsta. Dre exchanges rhymes with Snoop like he used to with Ren, and you get the feeling they're in perfect sync. Plus, Dre has enlisted a whole crew of new MCs to catch wreck, including Korrupt, Dat Nigga Daz, RBX, and a powerful new female MC named Rage. All five of them come together for one of the hardest cuts on the



LP, "Stranded On Death Row."

Whether it's gangs of brothers, big booties, or Blunts of the chronic indo, smoking is the preferred topic on this record. It's all about the "g thang," what Dre describes as the "difference between gang and gangster." No shorts are taken with any beef the Death Row crew has with other artists; Snoop breaks off Tim Dog, Eazy E, and Luke with "a big fat dick" on "Fuck Wit Dre Day," and in the intro, he calls Jerry Heller and Eazy E "Mr. Rourke and Tattoo."

One cut, "Lil' Ghetto Boy," could go, but that's about it. Even the skits are dope. Overall, an innovative and progressive hip-hop package that must not be missed.

TMS

HEAVY D & THE BOYZ

Blue Funk

Uptown/MCA

Production: various



With his fourth LP, Heavy D pretty much knows what he has to deliver in order to pay the bills. But that doesn't mean that he is just going through the motions. Even though he has been blessed with massive crossover appeal and frequent radio



play, Hev still keeps an ear to the streets that gave him his start. I would have to say that *Blue Funk* is Heavy D's most street oriented album since his 1987 debut. When I say street, I don't mean gangsta hardcore, I'm talking about meaningful and well-constructed lyrics and rich, rap-oriented production.

Putting the New Jack Swing behind him,

5 a hip-hop classic **4** slammin'—definite satisfaction
3 good, worth checking out **2** needs help **1** totally wack

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These ideas, which were reflected in print, represent the grassroots, lived experience of Hip-Hop, but also how the music was growing into a viable part of the popular entertainment industry while still, seemingly, maintaining some sort of autonomy from it. These reviews expressed *insider* information. Readers didn't have to agree with the reviewers' assessment of

the songs, but it was agreed upon that their critique was steeped in emic knowledge of the music and culture of Hip Hop.

RECORD REPORT

stripped down and pure. Songs like the "Mystery of Chessboxin'" or "Wu-Tang 7th Chamber" display furious freestyles that sting as the Clan lyrically combine and reform back-to-back-to-back.

While their depictions are graphic and extreme, the Wu are not studio savages looking for a gimmick. They are a clan of strong brothers who have banded together to survive in a world hell-bent on consuming them. And within the chaos there are sharp moments of reflection, understanding and clarity. "Can It Be All So Simple" is a look back at the hard days of the past. "Tearz" is about losses through the years and "C.R.E.A.M." (Cash Rules Everything Around Me) is an all out gotta-get-mine story of survival.

This record is harsh, but so is the world that we live in. For b-boys n' girls who come from the core of the hard, this is the hip-hop album you've been waiting for. Simply put: "The Wu-Tang Clan ain't nuthin' to fuck with."

THE GHETTO COMMUNICATOR

KURIOSUS

A Constipated Monkey

Hopph/Sony

Production: Beatnuts, SD50's, Bosco Money, Pete Nice & Daddy Rich



Since the very beginnings of hip-hop the Latino man has had a significant influence on this culture. From graffiti in underground tunnels to break dancing in Rock Steady Park, he has stood right beside the Black man in establishing hip-hop as an important part of world culture. To our shame he has not been given the props he has rightfully earned in hip hop. But those days are coming to an end. Kurious, a product of Cuban and Puerto Rican lineage and a NYC upbringing will see to that.

After years of paying dues and building a rep as one of the best freestylers in New York, Kurious finally gets the opportunity to correctly



represent with a full-length LP. True hip-hop heads will no doubt remember Kurious from last winter's "Walk Like a Duck," probably one of the most slept on singles in recent memory. This time around Kurious hits the streets with a number of definite underground hits. "Spell It With A J" is a wicked freestyle (packed with clever metaphors and similes) over a fat Beatnuts track. And whether he's hangin' with Psycho Les and holding his crotch 'cause he's "Top Notch" or utilizing a dope Q-Tip sample on "Baby Bust It (featuring the Grim Reaper)," Kurious rocks the mic like a true

MC should. There's even a smoothed-out cut, "I'm Kurious," that could get him some daytime radio play. There is even some East Coast/West Coast unity as Oakland's Hieroglyphics crew gets represented by a guest appearance from Casual on "What's The Real."

Production-wise, the Beatnuts hang snug and tight (as usual) allowing the lyrical skills to flow over the tracks like water from fountains. But there is also some solid work done by SD50's, Pete and Rich and Bosco Money. Rap purists and fans of bugged-out freestyle shouldn't hit the snooze button on this one.

THE DERELICT TODD B.

YAGGFU FRONT

Action Packed Adventures

Mercury

Production: New Vibe Messengers, artist



If you're confused by the name, Yaggfu Front is not a sandle-wearing, Seattle-livin' alternative rock 'n' roll band, dude. Rather this crazy original North Carolina-based hip-hop crew combines mad jazz and soul flavors that make them sound at times like a cross between a '93 version of the Fresh Prince and some ol' uptown shit. I kid you not, Yaggfu's debut hits you from more angles than KRS-One on a college lecture tour.

Uncharacteristic of many albums dropping these days, Yaggfu (Damaged, Mr. Spin4th and Jingle) gives you a full plate with 15 full cuts and five interludes. Song topics range from scientific tales ("Black Liquid") to sex ("Lena's Orgasm") or even the dangers of credit card ownership, but the cuts that seem to stand out the most are "Mr. Hook," "Busted Loop" and "Contract."

While many crews do half-assed production jobs when they jump on the jazz bandwagon, Yaggfu's beats are genuine, displaying their musical ability as well as a commitment to hip-hop quality control. With true basslines and nicely-filtered loops, the beats hit like a blunt of skunk. And on the mic, thanks to the re-emergence of the abstract kings like Ultra and De La Soul and new crews like Souls of Mischief, the left-field lyrical approach of this crew might find itself in the right place and at the right time to catch on.

DJ MIGHTY MI

MAC MALL

Illegal Business

Young Black Brotha Records

Production: Khayree



Those of you who drive know certain things are crucial to have in the car—money for gas, a tre-8 for the lap, a dub sack and a proper tape to bump. All the scratching and lyrical skills in the world won't help you in the car. The big 15's in your trunk don't know anything about flow or breakbeats, all they know is humps.

From this perspective, it appears that Mac Mall's debut album, *Illegal Business*?, was made expressly for automotive listening. Produced by Khayree, who brought us Ray Luv and Mac Dre, the album scores a "10" on the humps scale. Khayree's beats are pure G-Funk, Vallejo style.

They're like a combination of LA and Oakland styles. No sampling, just simplistic song structure with lots of bass.

Mac Mall comes with the straight game—street stories, brews, dank and money, not exactly socially conscious but entertaining nonetheless. Remember, it's just a record. His raps show influences from several of his Bay Area predecessors, including Mac Dre, Ray Luv, Spice 1, Dangerous Dame and Too Short. Now I know some of you are thinking, "all those people sound alike to me." And if that's the case then this album is not for you. I wouldn't say Mac Mall is biting anyone, he just does not attempt to hide his influences. At 75 minutes, the album is more than a little long. However there are several good songs worth playing. So twist up a fat one, turn up the bass and just ride.

JOSH LEVINE

JOINT VENTURES

It's Da Joint

Profile

Production: artist



Hailing from Bean Town (that's Boston, for those of you not in the flow) MC Fly Ty, Marc T., Wiz Dog and Chuck V's first effort is an attempt to return to the days of old by paying homage to those that came before (mostly by using Old School samples from the likes of James Brown and others). But upon closer inspection it is clear that this first effort suffers from more than a few structural weaknesses.

The flow of lead rapper MC Fly Ty is strikingly similar to Milk from Audio Two, but he tries too hard to come off hardcore. His rhymes are filled with the usual themes: drinking 40s, smoking blunts, hittin' the skinz that are accessible by his alleged stardom and smoking niggas that rub them the wrong way. Rather than his delivery, Ty's talent is in laying out a good narrative. From getting shot to observing the girls he grew up with falling into prostitution and drug addiction. Ty works best on tracks like "Ain't It a Shame" and "Pull the Plug," a track about a brother who ends up on life support after he's been shot and then has the plug pulled when it is realized that his condition will not improve.

Other good moments include, the lyrical flow of "Gotta Give It Up," "Time To Pay the Piper" and "Burgers on the Grill." But the album's best cuts are "F**k What Ya Heard," a posse cut that features a hardcore female who rips the mic like Lorena Bobbitt ripped her husband's... oh well, you know what I mean, and "Shouts Out!!," the last cut featuring shout outs backed by elements of Teddy Pendergrass' "Love TKO."

The album's production, while inexperienced, is usually solid and the rhyme delivery grows on you, but the crew goes wrong with their overkill of the hardcore stereotype. The idea of hardcore being equated with doing nothing in life but being a ruffneck and throwing your guns in the air to attract a buncha gangsta bitches, so you can get around to smoking niggas like blunts—all the while looking through the bottom of a 40oz—is really quite dead.

CURTIS SOUTHERLAND

Choose one of your favorite **Hip-Hop albums**, which has to have been **released before 2000**.

and write a record report/album review from your perspective in the style of *The Source* Mind Squad. If no album comes to your mind, at the end of the paper [*Bringin' '88 Back": historicizing rap music's greatest year*](#) by Loren Kajikawa, there is a list of *Selected albums released in 1988*, all classics and can be good candidates to review. Minimum 250 words.