



Roxanne Shante

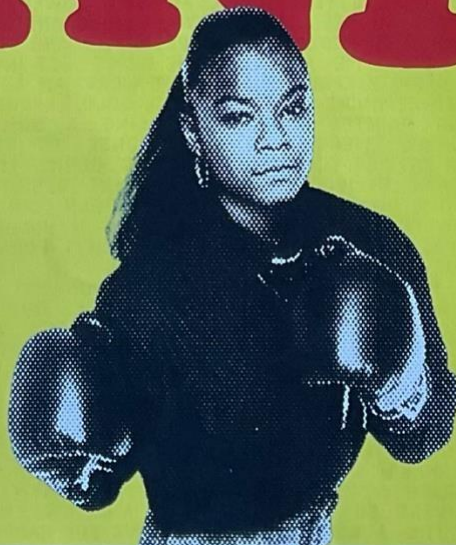




ROXA



ROXA NES, HANTÉ



COMING IN AT 120 POUNDS AND FIVE FEET AND THREE INCHES, FROM QUEENSBRIDGE NEW YORK, ROXANNE SHANTÉ, IN 1984 ROXANNE SHANTÉ CAME OUT SWINGING WITH HER TRACK 'ROXANNE'S REVENGE'. IN A SINGLE 7 MINUTE TAKE, SHANTÉ, ON BEHALF OF DJ MAGIC AND DJ MARLEY MARL DISSSED U.T.F.O. OVER THEIR OWN BEAT FROM THEIR SONG 'ROXANNE, ROXANNE'. AFTER U.T.F.O. THE THREE PIECE HIP-HOP GROUP FROM NEIGHBOURING BROOKLYN, CANCELLED A SHOW THAT HAD BEEN PROMOTED BY THE D.J.S. DID THEY THINK THEY WERE HOT BECAUSE THEIR B-SIDE 'ROXANNE, ROXANNE' WAS A HIT? LITTLE DID THEY KNOW THAT POUND FOR POUND THE BADDEST MC IN NEW YORK WOULD STRIKE BACK. THE 14 YEAR OLD PRIZE FIGHTER WOULD CHANGE NOT ONLY THE COURSE OF THE SUMMER OF 1984 BUT ALSO HIP-HOP ITSELF. DJ MARLEY MARL AND DJ MAGIC RUSHED TO PRESS 100 COPIES OF THE TRACK. BY THE TIME THE CLEAN VERSION OF THE TRACK WAS RECORDED IN 1985, 250,000 COPIES OF THE TRACK HAD BEEN SOLD IN NEW YORK ALONE. THE SUMMER OF 1984 WAS KNOWN AS THE SUMMER OF ROXANNE SHANTÉ AS THE BOROUGHES BECAME FRENZIED WITH ITS APPETITE FOR THE EMBROILING FEUD. OVER 100 ANSWER TRACKS WERE RELEASED UNTIL THE WAR WAS OVER. A 14 YEAR OLD GIRL HAD TURNED HIP-HOP'S SPOTLIGHT ON HERSELF. THEY WERE KNOWN AS THE ROXANNE WARS. THIS WAS THE FIRST EVER RECORDED RAP BEEF. FROM ASANTEHENE AND PHARAOHS TO ELIZABETH TAYLOR AND LIBERACE, ADORNMENT HAS LONG BEEN A SYMBOL OF STATUS AND WEALTH. WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RACE AND POLITICS IN AMERICA, HIP HOP EMERGED FROM COMMUNITIES WITH LITTLE GENERATIONAL WEALTH, WHERE ACCESS TO TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS OF SUCCESS WAS LIMITED. AS A RESULT, HIP HOP AND BLACK CULTURE EMBRACED CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AS A WAY OF ASSERTING THAT THE AMERICAN DREAM BELONGED TO THEM TOO. IN THE 1980S WALL STREET ERA, JEWELLERY BECAME A CENTRAL PART OF HIP HOP CULTURE, A TIME OF GETTING RICH AND GETTING HIGH. MORE THAN JUST EXTRAVAGANCE, THIS DISPLAY OF WEALTH WAS ABOUT TRANSCENDING ONE'S CIRCUMSTANCES. THE 1980S WAS A PERIOD OF GROWING PROSPERITY FOR WHITE AMERICANS BUT ALSO A TIME OF MOMENTOUS LOSS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS. THE CRACK EPIDEMIC HAD DESTROYED SO MANY LIVES, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES. WHEN YOU GROW UP WITH LIMITED RESOURCES, FINALLY ACQUIRING LUXURY TAKES ON A DEEPER MEANING. IT BECOMES PROOF OF SUCCESS, A FORM OF SELF-EXPRESSION AND RESISTANCE. ROXANNE SHANTÉ'S JEWELLERY WASN'T JUST A DISPLAY OF WEALTH; IT WAS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH. THE JEWELLERY WAS AN INVESTMENT AND PART OF WHAT I WOULD CONSIDER OUR COSTUME. THIS WAS OUR WORK UNIFORM. THIS IS WHAT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO WEAR BECAUSE WE ARE REPRESENTING HIP-HOP. WE WERE REPRESENTING WEALTH AND STRENGTH. SHE WAS THE ONLY FEMALE MEMBER OF THE LEGENDARY JUICE CREW TO OWN A SIGNATURE RING, A SYMBOL OF HER STATUS AND IMPACT IN HIP-HOP'S EARLY DAYS. THIS RING WAS LATER FEATURED IN 'ICE COLD' AN EXHIBITION OF HIP-HOP JEWELLERY AT THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY. RECOGNISING THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HIP-HOP'S AESTHETIC LEGACY, JEWELLERY, FOR ARTISTS LIKE SHANTÉ, WAS MORE THAN AN ACCESSORY; IT WAS A STATEMENT OF POWER, RESILIENCE, AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE. HIP-HOP ARTISTS USED JEWELLERY AS A MEANS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION, CHALLENGING THE NOTION THAT WEALTH BELONGED ONLY TO THE PRIVILEGED. 'PEOPLE HAD A MISCONCEPTION THAT RAPPERS WENT AND SPENT ALL THEIR MONEY ON JEWELLERY. IN REALITY, WE DIDN'T. SOME OF THOSE PIECES WERE ACQUIRED AFTER WE PURCHASED HOMES.' THESE WERE CALCULATED, STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS, TOOLS OF EMPOWERMENT THAT SYMBOLISED FINANCIAL SUCCESS, CREATIVE IDENTITY, AND THE RIGHT TO BE SEEN AND CELEBRATED. TODAY, THE CULTURE OF ADORNMENT CONTINUES TO EVOLVE, BUT ITS CORE MESSAGE REMAINS: HIP-HOP IS HERE TO STAY, AND IT BELONGS TO THOSE WHO BUILT IT. BLACK WOMEN HAVE LONG BATTLED STEREOTYPES AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THEIR WOMANHOOD AND SEXUALITY. THESE REALITIES BECAME INTENSIFIED IN THE 1980S. THIS WAS DUE IN PART TO THE 1965 MOYNIHAN REPORT WHICH FUELLED THESE HARMFUL NARRATIVES BY BLAMING BLACK WOMEN FOR THE STRUGGLES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES. BLACK WOMEN SERVED AS BOOGEYMEN IN THE MISOGYNISTIC NARRATIVE OF SOCIOECONOMIC DECLINE SUSTAINED BY CONSERVATIVES DURING THE DAWN OF THE NEOLIBERAL REAGAN ERA. IN 1976, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RONALD REAGAN'S SPEECHES HE RAILED AGAINST THE 'WELFARE QUEEN'. IT WAS A CARICATURE THAT WAS USED AS A METONYM FOR BLACK WOMEN IN AMERICA. THIS 'WELFARE QUEEN' WAS UNEMPLOYED, NO WAGED OR LOW WAGED, UNWED AND STATE SUPPORTED. AS WHITE FLIGHT AND THE CRACK EPIDEMIC RESHAPED AMERICA'S INNER CITIES, HIP HOP EMERGED AS A POWERFUL VOICE DOCUMENTING URBAN DIVESTMENT, CRIME AND OPPRESSION. THESE STEREOTYPES LEFT BLACK WOMEN WORKING TWICE AS HARD FOR RESPECT. ROXANNE SHANTÉ NAVIGATED WHAT IT MEANT TO EXIST IN A MALE DOMINATED GENRE AND USED STYLE TO RECLAIM HER POWER. SHANTÉ, LIKE MANY OTHER EARLY FEMALE MCS, ADOPTED THE BAGGY CLOTHING AND BOLD ATTITUDE OF OF THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS TO ASSERT THEIR CREDIBILITY AND RESPECT. SHANTÉ SAID THAT 'DRESSES AREN'T REALLY ME' AND THAT SHE DIDN'T GET INVOLVED IN SHOWS BY GETTING DRESSED UP. DESPITE EMBRACING STREET WEAR, AN ALMOST UNISEX STYLE, SHE STILL INCORPORATED FEMININE TOUCHES. LARGE GOLD EARRINGS, NEATLY PRESSED SILKY HAIR AND LONG PAINTED NAILS, SIGNALLING A UNIQUE EXPRESSION OF WOMANHOOD. STREETWEAR EMERGED AS A RESPONSE TO THE BLACK PANTHER MOVEMENT'S REJECTION OF RESPECTABILITY POLITICS. DENIM, TRAINERS AND CASUAL DRESS THEREFORE BECAME SYMBOLS OF DEFIANCE AND RESISTANCE. IN HER BOOK 'WHEN CHICKENHEADS COME HOME TO ROOST', JOAN MORGAN COINS THE TERM 'HIP-HOP FEMINISM' TO DESCRIBE THE WAYS IN WHICH WOMEN IN HIP-HOP HAVE NAVIGATED THEIR PRESENCE IN A SPACE THAT OFTEN OBJECTIFIES THEM. ROXANNE SHANTÉ WAS AN EARLY EMBODIMENT OF HIP-HOP FEMINISM BEFORE THE TERM EVEN EXISTED. AT JUST 25, ROXANNE SHANTÉ RETIRED. THROUGHOUT HER HIP-HOP CAREER, SHE FACED IMMENSE CHALLENGES. HER MOTHER BATTLED ALCOHOLISM, AND SHE SPENT TIME IN A GROUP HOME. SHE ENDURED PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND RESORTED TO STEALING CLOTHES TO SURVIVE. AS SHE ROSE IN THE INDUSTRY, SHE WAS BETRAYED BY THOSE SHE TRUSTED AND ROBBED OF HER EARNINGS BY MANAGERS. IN THE END, SHE CHOSE TO WALK AWAY TO FOCUS ON MOTHERHOOD AND HER OWN HEALING. TODAY, SHANTÉ HAS BUILT A FULFILLING AND HAPPY LIFE AS A MARRIED MOTHER OF TWO AND THE HOST OF A DAILY RADIO SHOW PODCAST ON ROCK THE BELLS' SIRIUSXM. IN 2024, THE PAID IN FULL FOUNDATION HONOURED HER WITH A GRANDMASTER AWARD, GUARANTEEING HER A \$100,000 ANNUAL STIPEND FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. IN 2025, SHE WAS AWARDED A GRAMMY FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT. 'MY LIFE IS AN OPEN BOOK. IT'S JUST NOT AN EASY READ. BUT I COULDN'T WRITE A BETTER ENDING. WHEN IT COMES TO FAIRY TALES, IT'S ALWAYS BETTER TO HAVE THE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.'