

The History and Politics of Krip-Hop

LEROY F. MOORE JR. AND KEITH JONES

In this chapter the founders of Krip-Hop Nation discuss how and why they use music, history, politics, new language, and theory to uplift their Black disabled community and to educate Hip-Hop scholars, media creators, and the whole industry and culture about the absence of a disability framework.¹ Krip-Hop Nation's tagline is "*Krip-Hop is more than just music.*" Leroy F. Moore Jr. and Keith Jones are Black disabled activists, artists, and Hip-Hop and music lovers. Even their first face-to-face meeting was political—it was at the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston, where they got kicked out because of all the questions they were asking. Later, in a music studio recording Keith's latest CD, between songs Leroy asked Keith if he ever saw another physically disabled artist in Hip-Hop. They both laughed, then wrote out the framework of Krip-Hop Nation. "Krip-Hop" is a play on *Hip-Hop*. Although the "Krip" part of the name refers to "crippled," it is spelled with a *k* to avoid association with the Crips.

Since 2004 Krip-Hop Nation has become an international collective of Hip-Hop and other disabled musicians with a few chapters around the world as well as what we call Mcees With Disabilities (MWD) in Germany, the UK, Africa & more. Krip-Hop Nation has over 300 members worldwide. They have put out many music projects, performed internationally at festivals like DADAFest in Liverpool, UK, and created new terminology, theory, books, films and college lectures—so much that Krip-Hop today is a subculture of Hip-Hop. Krip-Hop is a community as well as style of music, an artistic space where people with disabilities can speak out and speak back to the social structures that exclude people based on disability, race, sexuality, and a host of other marginalized identities. Krip-Hop Nation has its own politics, lingo, culture, history, and of course music.

EXCERPT FROM "MESSAGE TO GANGSTER RAPPERS"

(JONES AND MOORE 2021B)

You can't survive what I've been through
 Got the strength of my Black disabled ancestors who created the Blues
 Already tasted death so I've nothing to lose
 Was that little kid on that short yellow bus with my cripple crew
 We grew up and made Krip-Hop
 To put Hip-Hop on the spot

But you don't like to be in the spotlight
Like Teddy Pendergrass it's a TKO referee called the fight

I was born D.O.A.
Get out of my way
Hard life from the start
Can't stand up against me you got no heart

The primary goal of Krip-Hop Nation is to increase awareness in music and media outlets of the talents, history, and rights of people with disabilities in the Hip-Hop industry. Moore hopes that by listening to his music the audience will understand the need to question authority and the information provided to them. He wants his listeners to learn about their community and become open to all people. Issues such as racism and sexism are commonly discussed in his music, and Moore hopes that people will examine possible ableism in their attitudes too. Krip-Hop Nation goes beyond producing music and the bling-bling associated with Hip-Hop; the movement is about advocacy, education, and overcoming oppression. The movement has sought to reclaim negative terms associated with the disabled (such as *crazy*, *lame*, *retarded*, and *cripple*), using them to shock people into understanding and respecting the disabled African American community. Krip-Hop Nation addresses discrimination against disabled artists in Hip-Hop by publishing articles and hosting events, lectures, and workshops.

There is a process to get to Krip-Hop politics: empowerment and deep education that is desperately needed in the Hip-Hop arena and in the Black community. What can Krip-Hop Nation offer to students and community members for a more inclusive Hip-Hop culture, Hip-Hop studies, and industry? Most important, an open and welcoming community locally, nationally, and on an international level.

Leroy F. Moore Jr. and the Roots of Krip-Hop

Krip-Hop founder Moore is an African American writer, poet, and community activist who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Moore was born in New York in 1967 to an activist father loosely connected to the Black Panthers. Moore's upbringing sensitized him to the challenges faced by African Americans and the disabled. As a youth, he discovered that most people had little knowledge of the historical impact of disabled African Americans. This led him to begin research, initially in the music industry.

Moore first spotlighted disabled Hip-Hop artists in the early 2000s. He coproduced and cohosted a three-part series on what he called "Krip-Hop" for a Berkeley, California, radio station. The Krip-Hop series appeared on KPFA's *Pushing Limits*, which focuses on news, arts, and culture for the disabled community.

The series' popularity inspired Moore to create Krip-Hop Nation for disabled musicians, since little cultural work or music by people with disabilities had been recognized. "The Krip-Hop movement really makes the pain of the people visible," Moore said. "It goes a lot deeper than what people can see."²

With two Black disabled friends back in 1980, Moore started a letter campaign to Black leaders about the lack of Black disability anything back then. That and many experiences as a Black disabled youth have led him to his work today. His father's record collection back in the late 1970s was his early education about being Black and disabled because he saw Black disabled male Blues, Jazz, and Soul singers, from blind Willie Johnson to Walter Jackson with his crutches, on their album covers. He saw the Black opera *Porgy and Bess*, which has a character who is a Black physically disabled man; that changed his life. Unfortunately he wasn't empowered until he brought what he saw at home into school—his father's records, *Porgy and Bess*, and the story of how Harriet Tubman became disabled and how she used it to guide other Black people to freedom—and felt oppression for the first time in an education institution, which attempted to hush-hush that history; that is, his full identity.

Black Ableism

Although the term *ableism* has been defined by disability advocates from the dominant culture, if you put *Black* in front of anything coming out of disability, it must first be stripped down, then reshaped in the experiences, histories, and words of the Black disabled experience. By now, we know that the Black disabled experience in America has different roots from our white disabled counterparts. Because of the need of Black disabled people to heal the wounds inflicted by our Black community, it is imperative that—one by one or collectively—we tell our stories and define new terminology, definitions, art, music, and political views and provide education and resources for our Black community. That is why Moore has coined the term *Black ableism*, knowing that there are many Black disabled people who have asked, "What is ableism in the Black community?"

Ableism is defined as bias and discrimination against disabled people. As Talila A. Lewis (2022) explains, it is "a system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism."

If we take this definition and apply it to the Black experience in the United States, the long history of slavery and anti-Blackness helped shaped Black ableism toward Black disabled people. Due to the lack of awareness of race and the racism that continues to exist in the disability rights movement, it is not surprising that the Black community has not taken steps to recognize their own ableism.

Moore has defined Black ableism as discrimination and social prejudice against Black people with disabilities or who are perceived to have disabilities from Black nondisabled people as far back as slavery. For example, slave owners used disability as a reason to devalue a slave because of what he or she could contribute to the plantation. And we, a new people, emerged out of slavery and saw by the slave master's example that disability meant devalued.

Unchallenged Black ableism not only holds back the Black community from advancing, it also makes the Black community hurtful toward Black disabled people and their families. Yes, it is surprising that an oppressed group can oppress others in their own group. Black ableism can cause many deep-rooted problems in a Black disabled person. The problems range from having low self-esteem, to trying to reach the unreachable—also known as overcoming or hiding one's disability—to, most importantly, not having a community.

Ableism, like racism, manifests from the individual to the institutional level when it corrupts Black institutions. Black ableism can only be eradicated by stripping what the Black community has been taught about disability through the lens of oppression and then rebuilding. This rebuilding process must be conducted by coordinated teams of Black disabled people and family members who have had a presence in both the disability and Black communities.

Krip-Hop Nation's Politics

Krip-Hop Nation unlearns what has been forced on us about disability. We reject the erasure, exploitation, pity, and overcoming approaches to disability. We understand ourselves politically and culturally through speaking, singing or rapping, writing, and most importantly living with an activist lens on what affects us in our community, in institutions, and as allies. Through song, poetry, visual arts, and writing, we realize that we are stepping up and helping to correct how society views us as people with disabilities or artists with disabilities, and at the same time we know we wear many hats when we want to advocate and when we just want to party.

We learn from disability justice and its principles (see Sins Invalid 2015). The disability justice movement was begun by Black and Brown artists and activists with disabilities like the members of Sins Invalid, the National Black Disability Coalition, and the Harriet Tubman Collective. We also recognize our disabled ancestors from the Blues to minstrel shows to freak shows to the circus to Jazz all the way up to Hip-Hop.

As an international network, we realize that many times we will not agree and there will be conflicting politics, views, and goals; however, we try to stay open for the growth of our communities. Although we believe and uphold disability justice and our mission, we also are aware that we live under capitalism and we all need to eat and survive, so we also see Krip-Hop Nation as a venue where

artists can display their art and receive some monetary value or investment and travel opportunities in their careers as musicians, activists, journalists, authors, and organizers.

Krip-Hop Nation tries to live up to our own standards:

- 1) Use politically correct lyrics.
- 2) Do not put down other minorities.
- 3) Use our talents to advocate and teach not only about ourselves but about the system we live under as it pertains to being a person of color in conjunction with having a disability.
- 4) Challenge mainstream and other media about the ableist ways they frame disability.
- 5) Increase the presence of voices that are missing in popular culture.
- 6) Recognize our disabled ancestors, knowing that we are building on what they left us.
- 7) Increase disability solidarity and collaboration around the world.
- 8) Help to increase the visibility in Black museums and cultural centers of Black disability art, music, and historical involvement in art and activism of the times.
- 9) Promote the disability justice movement's Ten Principles.
- 10) Be a space for the Black community to gain disability and Krip-Hop political education, cultural expression, and activism while understanding the importance of Black disabled individuals at various times in history.
- 11) Know that sometimes we fail to meet the preceding standards but continue trying.

Just as Hip-Hop can and is being used to educate and inspire people, especially Black and Brown youths and adults, Krip-Hop has been doing the same with our own terminology like *Krip-Hop*, *Black ableism*, *Afro-Krip*, and more, as well as our politics, journalism, and activism.

The Krip-Hop Institute

We close with a letter to Hip-Hop about our planned Krip-Hop Institute.³

MISSION

Krip-Hop Institute will be a cultural, activist, and inclusive platform meeting space for the community. KHI will specialize in the accurate representation of those who are marginalized, especially those who are disabled, Black, and at the intersection of the Black disabled community. This will be achieved both locally and internationally by having a music studio, visual art gallery, and archival

historical material, as well as a Krip-Hop virtual reality and screening floor where Krip-Hop chapters all over the world can talk to each other. Ultimately, the goal of KHI will be to create an international hub for disabled and nondisabled activists, artists, and researchers around the world. It is essential that KHI be based in the Black and disabled community in order to truly represent it. Through adequate collaboration within the community, KHI will conduct outreach to educational institutions in the hope of gaining more allies and acquiring the institute's much-needed materials. Examples include but are not limited to hard-to-find books, scholarly articles, and specific types of art.

Dear Hip-Hop,

We, Krip-Hop Nation, an international collective of Hip-Hop artists and other musicians with disabilities, are writing this letter to you to not only give thanks for a platform but also to push this artistic international movement to become more politically aware and play an active role with us to reeducate the Hip-Hop and music industry and our communities about not only the ableism in Hip-Hop. We must go past the charity model of disability to step up and acknowledge what Krip-Hop Nation calls the politically and culturally disabled with disability justice and Krip-Hop politics, language, and international solidarity.

This process of unlearning ableism and the charity model of disability will take rebuilding relationships within the disability community. Although Hip-Hop from the beginning gave us a platform to see and express ourselves, it has become an ableist and harmful environment for not only disabled, especially physically disabled, artists but also people with disabilities who want to work in Hip-Hop, such as journalists, scholars, TV show hosts, and more.

Musicians with disabilities have always been here, but there has been a lack of cultural activism, especially in Hip-Hop, with a disability justice approach to continue to display the talents of musicians with disabilities and at the same time advocate and celebrate our history and intersectional cultures and politically educate ourselves and our communities locally, nationally, and internationally.

For almost thirteen years Krip-Hop Nation has provided public education through our music CDs, lectures, workshops, YouTube conversations, short video clips, activism, visual arts, articles, and political education locally and internationally. We have made strides, but it has been outside the mainstream Hip-Hop arena, so we are pushing ourselves in 2021 and beyond to collaborate in the Hip-Hop popular arena to help make Hip-Hop a more open political and cultural environment where disabled Hip-Hop artists and activists, journalists, and scholars can not only work but be proud to share and welcome others like them.

You ask how? Krip-Hop Nation knows that this process has to be bigger than a one-time event. It must be an ongoing process with local, national, and international Hip-Hop, organizations, partners like the United Nations, and others. It

can start off as a conference that will spell out the goals of this ongoing reeducation with materials like books, films, curricula, and media campaigns. Considering that people with disabilities around the world are the poorest of the poor, Krip-Hop Nation knows if we want to make an impact that will change attitudes, institutional beliefs, and actions, the movement must be well funded and uplifted by local to international organizations and spokespeople.

Are you committed to partner with Krip-Hop Nation and pull in resources and institutional backing to spread Krip-Hop Nation's mission and work, not only to organize and hold this conference but most importantly to accomplish what comes out of this conference with Krip-Hop Nation's leadership? One of our big goals is to open what we call the Krip-Hop Institute and get into the upcoming Hip-Hop Museum in New York. We have work to do, and this letter is the beginning. We hope you will learn from our letter and our work and then join us in doing the work!

Leroy F. Moore Jr. and Keith Jones

August 9, 2021

NOTES

- 1 Some material in this chapter previously appeared on the Krip-Hop Nation website, kriphopnation.com
- 2 KQED. Interview with Leroy Moore, Founder of Krip Hop Nation. https://www.kqed.org/arts/43903/interview_with_leroy_moore_founder_of_krip_hop_nation.
- 3 This letter was previously published as an audio file on SoundCloud and can be accessed here: https://soundcloud.com/blackkrip/dear-hip-hop-audio-letter_

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