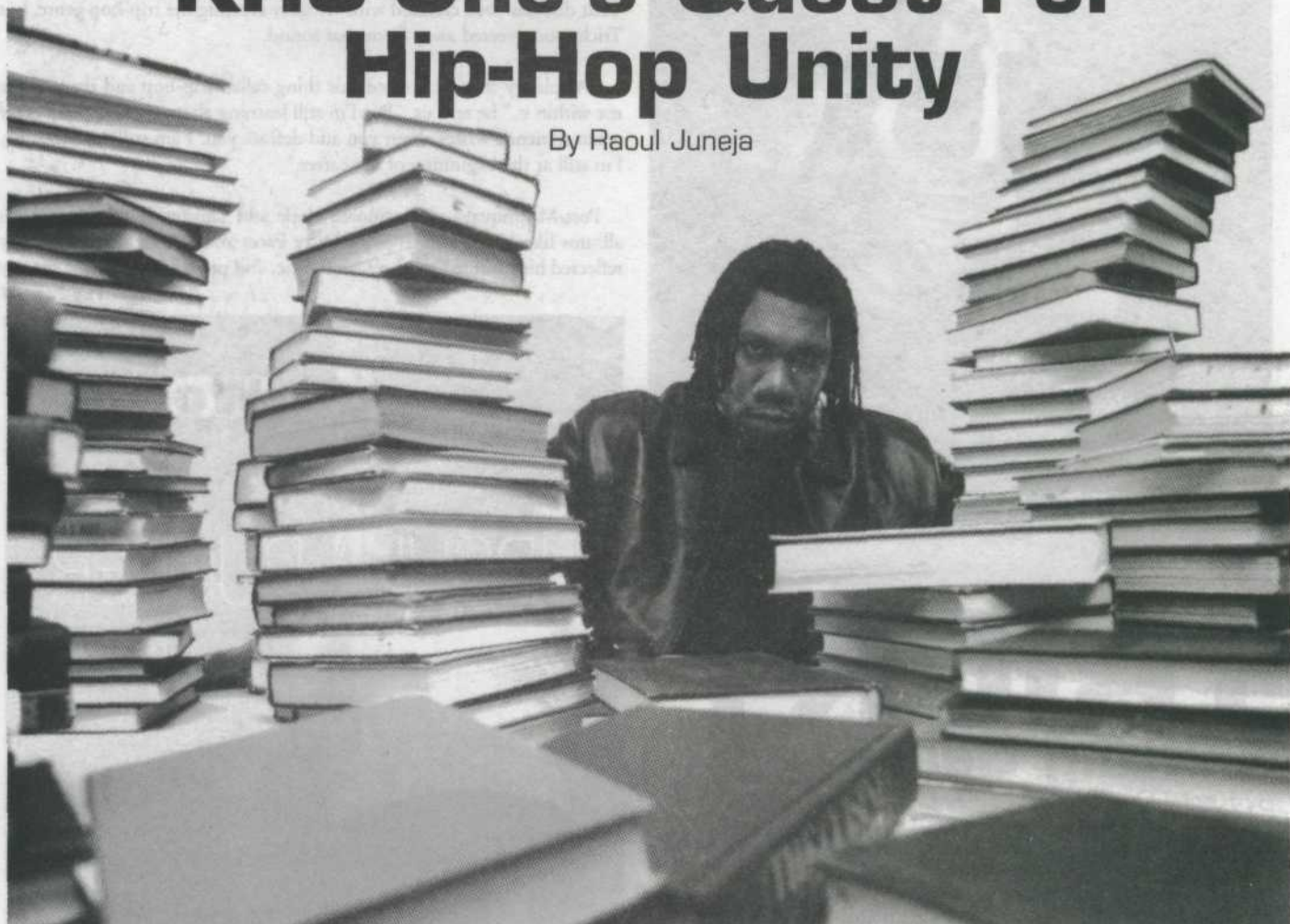


# KRS-One's Quest For Hip-Hop Unity

By Raoul Juneja



**W**ho was the first to go accapella in a video? Who was the first to teach at Yale? Who was the first to say 'Stop the Violence'? Who was the first to produce, mix, and write at the same time?

If you answered a MC other than KRS-One to any of these questions, you need to go diggin' in the crates - absorb the street enlightenment of "My Philosophy" and "Love's Gonna Get'Cha," feel the lyrical onslaught of "The Kenny Parker Show" and "Rappaz R. N. Dainja;" and bop your head to "Sound of Da Police" and "Step Into a World."

Or better yet, peep *The Sneak Attack* (KRS-One's latest and perhaps most inspiring album to date), which hit the streets courtesy of KOCH International earlier this year. On "Attendance," KRS proclaims "there's no way out except through knowledge and wisdom;" in "Why," he asks governments "why the call of the poor is always ignored," and on "Get Your Self Up," KRS asks commercial rappers "how you think you free when you act like property?"

But don't think that the artist currently known as 'Teacher' is stopping his efforts to change our lives in a record store. Take for example this West Hollywood press conference he held earlier this year to announce his May 'Hip-Hop Appreciation Week' and November 'Hip-Hop History Month.' Following are segments of KRS-One's 'preachings' that should be studied by all those who are concerned with the survival of true hip-hop culture.

## Thou Shalt Not Front

"What's the right hip-hop image? Well, I personally remember standing inline for free cheese and honey in the Bronx. I remember welfare. I was homeless, so I know what America's poverty is, and it's not too comfortable at all. But look at the 2nd hip-hop record to be recorded, 'Rapper's Delight,' in 1979 - 'After school, I take a dip in the pool, which is really off the wall / I got a colour TV, so I can see, the Knicks play basketball.' So from the very beginning, it seems that this striving for wealth and prosperity has been part of hip-hop culture. Rappers now are getting that wealth and prosperity, but only a few of them."

"Here's the downside - I'm all for prosperity, in moderation. But I don't see much moderation in the presentation of hip-hop today, when you show someone on TV with the diamonds and the platinum - very seldom do we see videos of someone working hard. Just working, like everybody else! That's what I think is imbalanced, and it might be incorrect to show this to our children. The truth is that you work for that, unless you're completely frontin', and it's all rented - then what BET and MTV should do really is the way they print the name of the artist and album, and most recently, in the last 5 years, they added the director's name; well now, the wardrobe person should get credit, the stylist should get credit, and the prop person should get credit - then that may be a bit more balanced to the viewer. This facade image that I just woke up one morning and kicked a rhyme and got the ice - that may be the wrong message to send."

**Protect Ya Neck**

"There are types of people [within the music industry] who are acting like the creators of hip-hop never existed. They are trampling the creators' rights, stealing their art form, giving them no credit, and acting like hip-hop is theirs for the taking, to do whatever they want to do with it, even though there are creators who worked hard toward bringing what we call hip-hop today into existence. Remember that the way hip-hop looks now, it didn't look like that when it started. Our first step was to just try to get hip-hop into mainstream television and radio - we simply got sold out along the way. It's a give and take fight about property and intellectual rights - who owns hip-hop has always been the battle. Hip-hop culture at large says we own it, but then rappers go and sign dotted lines and say we don't."

"It's important that you don't think of hip-hop exactly the way it looks and sounds today - I've seen this thing live, die, live, die many times. There is other hip-hop to come, but we have to decide what's it gonna look like, and what can we add to it. I personally wouldn't want my son or daughter to grow up, be 25, and say 'Dad, what did you do, while you had all that money and all that power, what did you do to make my life easier?' Some people are going to have to say 'Well, I was just a pimp - I was husslin! Just having a good time!' And our kids are gonna judge us. And when I'm judged by my children, I'm not gonna get a C-! I want my children to say 'Ah, KRS-One, you stand over here. Your work is well-documented.' See if you're a writer, your kids are gonna ask 'Mom, Dad, what did you write that influenced society? Can I see some of your writing?' Will they have to hide your work?"

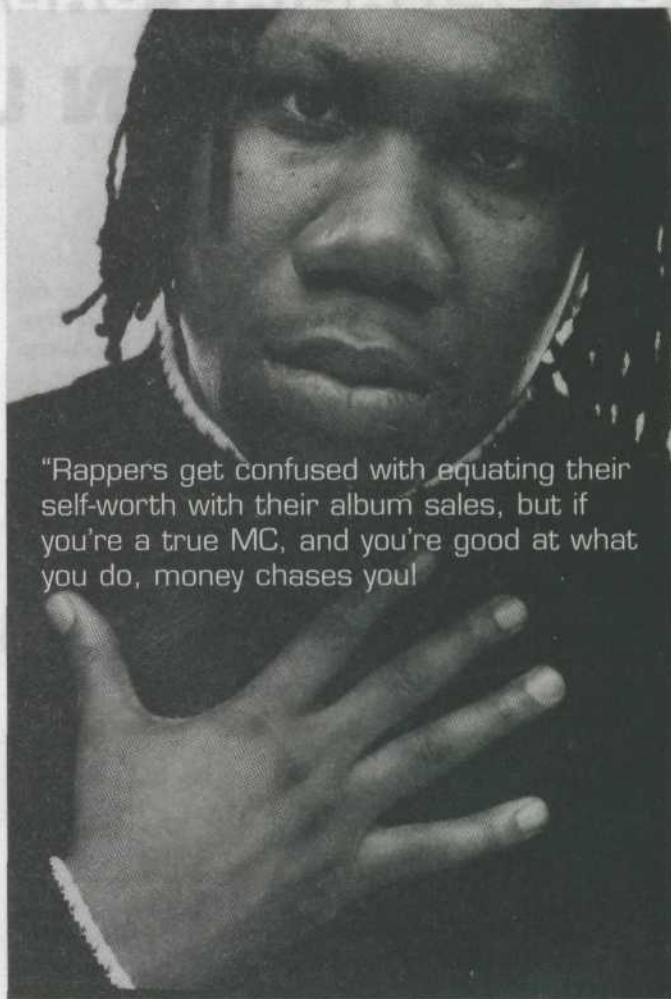
**Don't Get It Twisted**

"Rappers get confused with equating their self-worth with their album sales, but if you're a true MC, and you're good at what you do, money chases you! I got four kids and expenses like everybody else, but I seem to have enough money to do what I gotta do in my life and spend money on a Hip-Hop Appreciation Week! So the myth that you're somehow not making money if you stay with your core audience is just not true. If you have a core audience, that's really the only true money you'll ever get. But then again, it's not just the money, it's the respect."

You have to understand - if you have the honest respect from a fan base, it stays, even if it's just 100 people. But most of the time rappers don't appreciate the people that appreciate them! I always say I'll rock for 20,000 people or 20 people, and I've done it. There's been times where our shows bombed, but it didn't matter - we still got down and had a good time. There were times when nobody showed up and the promoter couldn't pay me, and I still did the show. You have to love what you do, and then doing it is your payment - I've rocked house parties for drinks! Even whole shows that I would charge \$20,000 for today, I've done those types of shows for free in parks! So where is your self-worth is really the question. And if it really gets too bad, form a mailing list of your fans, and ask them for money like a Church Minister does, and say 'Yo, you're my only 100 fans - I can't pay my bills anymore, but I want to keep true to my music, so send in a donation and I'll put your name in my next album? The fans will take care of you, because they love what you do!'

**Beware of Platinum**

"To be honest, I'm a little afraid of platinum plaques personally - I like being underground, and I truly enjoy it, because there's a certain surge you get when you know you're in the right place. I've been platinum in my day, with my first 3 albums, and I know what it's like - the 'Oh wow you're platinum' response! Years go by, and it means nothing. The only thing that really lasts is that surge of respect you get when you're in a super-market and the manager comes out and says 'This whole thing is free!' Or when you're in some hotel and the manager pops out and says 'Hey, free room for KRS!' This happens to me all the time - it's a daily occurrence.



"Rappers get confused with equating their self-worth with their album sales, but if you're a true MC, and you're good at what you do, money chases you!"

Other recording artists are unfortunately not enjoying this respect."

**Elevate Your Mind**

"We're obviously not gonna be able to save everyone who participates or is involved with hip-hop culture, but one way to try is to still remain in the culture but to not participate in the violence, through raising your consciousness above your race, religion, ethnicity, and occupation. Most violence comes from those areas, like 'This is my crew, that's your crew, you dissed me, I'm dissing you.' We need to manifest above that, which is what true hip-hop actually does. It takes you out of your tradition and recreates you according to the elements of our culture that we've been working with. I am more hip-hop than I am black. A lot of other black people won't agree with me though. But that's my decision. Not that I abandoned my training, or my race, but is it really my race? I mean I was born black, and I enjoyed it, but now that I'm a full-grown man, I realise that I'm not just the flesh - I'm the consciousness too."

We went over to the United Nations and we issued a rough draft during Hip-Hop Appreciation Week in an effort to have hip-hop recognised as an Official Culture. This is a step towards peace - when we can come together and form a new social contract, peace is established. I've been going around and getting opinions of how to create peace for our children in the future from various people, and we presently have over 30 different statements. So during next year's Appreciation Week, we'll return to the United Nations and seal the document with the statements, and then hip-hop becomes an Official Culture."