**Preamble**

Let's talk about rappers we recall from hip-hop times past, how they've shaped the present, and will continue to affect the future. Hopefully, this will help answer the question - who's the greatest rapper of all time? To answer that question, we should start where Kool Herc started - the beginning.

We would have to go back to the 70s for early signs of hip-hop's development. Before we do, let us also examine what was happening in our communities and our world at that time. What were our budding hip-hop pioneers witnessing? Experiencing? While many were “having a Coke and a smile”, and others were saluting “nanoo, nanoo” or being alerted to “da plane, da plane boss”, hip-hop artists also encountered changes that put more distance between us, while also making the world a smaller place. A more noticeable rise in income inequality, a new frontier of technological evolution, and similar developments in transportation are a few of the many transformations that helped shape artists’ contributions to a new art form.

On a more global stage we witnessed many changes as well. There was country after country achieving independence from colonial rule, while others were suffering though revolutionary unrest. Hip-hop artists were also witness to the growth of movements by the conservative right, feminists, environmentalists and anti-war activists – to name a few. Below are some more notes on the comings and goings of the mid-to-late ‘70s:

* The energy crisis
* The world’s last guillotine execution
* Supreme Court ruled paddling unruly students legal
* Tom Wolfe coined the 70s the “me decade”
* Apple & Microsoft are formed
* The Twin Towers were created
* Patty Hearst found guilty
* 1st class of women accepted into the Naval Academy
* 30 minutes of snowfall in the Sahara Desert
* Puerto-Ricans in the Continental US: An Uncertain Future was released by the US Civil Rights Commission
* President Carter’s malaise speech
* Harvey Milk’s & George Moscone’s murderer used the Twinkie Defense
* The Lufthansa heist
* The Three Mile Island nuclear accident
* The Etan Patz disappearance helps spark the missing children’s movement
* Median HH income range: $11.8 M- $16.5 M
* US debt range: $542 MMM - $830 MMM
* US GDP range: $1,631 MMM - $2,558 MMM
* Unemployment rate range: 8.5% - 5.8%

So the above was part of the canvas from which African-American and Latino communities in The Bronx shaped their messages and expressions. From this landscape is where the hip-hop community then ripped a few pages out of the Jamaican dub music playbook, and started hosting their own sound-system parties - the block party. Pioneers like Kool Herc, DJ Hollywood, DJ Pete Jones, Grandmaster Flash and Grand Wizard Theodore led all DJs down the path still traveled today.

The Jamaican influence didn't stop with the music, for the practices of signifying and toasting were two vocal styles that helped lead to the emergence of rap. Soul singers, Bomba singers, griots of West Africa, musical comedians, and spoken-word poetry artists were certainly influential forces as well, but the Jamaican vocal methods have chronological and stylistic similarities that are as close to rap as any other type of music. Pioneers here were people like Clark Kent and Coke La Rock - whose work influenced the development of MC teams like Afrika Bambaataa's Jazzy 5 or Grandmaster Flash's Furious Five, and solo acts like Kurtis Blow or Spoonie Gee. Also at this time, [Afrika Bambaataa](http://www.digitaldreamdoor.com/pages/best_artists-bio/bambaataa.html), inspired after meeting Fab 5 Freddy, categorized what he called the 'Four Elements' of hip-hop: DJ’ing, breaking, graffiti artists and MC’ing. The various pieces of art and expression were now taking form under one umbrella.

As we approached the 80s, hip-hop began to gain more traction in the music industry, while also carving out a bigger space for itself in entertainment. By then, Rapper's Delight (arguably the 1st hit-single for the genre) had been unleashed on the music world for a year. New technology was helping the production potential and audio quality of the music, which in turn helped drive hip-hop into a new stage of its development. Also, styles like disco rap were fading, while styles like speed rap were emerging. Below are some other comings-and-goings that hip-hop artists experienced with us, while they informed and entertained us:

* 25-hour NYC blackout
* Son of Sam terrorized NYC
* Rock & pop music were splintering into many versions – like punk, disco, fusion & soft rock
* Disco Demolition Night in Chicago took place
* Polyester was the material of choice
* Sony Walkmans , Space Invaders, the Happy Meal & Stretch Armstrong were introduced
* Victoria’s Secret 1st opened
* The Blue Jays, Mariners & Seahawks are created
* Ali won the Thriller in Manila
* The Reds, Borg , Seattle Slew & Navratilova were on top
* NBA & ABA merge
* Family Hour was created on network TV
* Roots, Laverne & Shirley and Happy Days help ABC dominate
* Saturday Night Live & The Wheel of Fortune debuted
* Introduction of Asian cinema & martial arts films
* Alien, Jaws, Rocky I & II, King Kong, Star Wars and Godfather II debuted
* Crips co-founder Raymond Washington is murdered
* Karl Wallenda, Groucho Marx & Elvis died

So this was the early landscape of hip-hop. If you can add some of your observations or experiences to the above, I'd welcome your thoughts. Also, if you can add to the list below of top artists of the era, please do so:

* [Coke La Rock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coke_La_Rock)
* The Cold Crush Brothers
  + Almighty KG
  + DJ Charlie Chase
  + DJ Tony Tone
  + Dot-A-Rock (1980)
  + Easy A.D.
  + [Grandmaster Caz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grandmaster_Caz)
  + JDL
  + Money Ray
  + Mr. Tee
  + Whipper Whip (1980)
* The Crash Crew
  + Barry Bistro
  + DJ Larry C
  + EK Mike C
  + G-Man
  + MC La Shubee
  + Reggie Reg
* DJ [Afrika Bambaataa](http://www.digitaldreamdoor.com/pages/best_artists-bio/bambaataa.html)
* DJ Clark Kent
* DJ Clive Campbell
* [DJ Disco Wiz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DJ_Disco_Wiz)
* DJ Eddie Cheeba
* DJ Hollywood
* DJ Kool Herc
* DJ Mr. Magic
* DJ Pete Jones
* DJ Steve Gordon
* The Fatback Band
  + Johnny Flippen
  + Johnny King
* Funky Four Plus One
  + DJ Breakout
  + Jazzy Jeff
  + Keith Keith
  + Sha Rock
* Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five
  + Cowboy
  + DJ Grandmaster Flash
  + The Kidd Creole
  + [Melle Mel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melle_Mel)
  + Mr. Ness/Scorpio
  + Rahiem
* Grandwizard Theodore and the Fantastic Five
  + DJ [Grand Wizard Theodore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Wizard_Theodore)
  + [Dot-A-Rock](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dot-A-Rock&action=edit&redlink=1) (1980)
  + [Master Rob](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Master_Rob&action=edit&redlink=1)
  + [Prince Whipper Whip](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Whipper_Whip) (1980)
  + [Ruby Dee](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ruby_Dee_(rapper)&action=edit&redlink=1)
  + [Waterbed Kev](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Waterbed_Kev&action=edit&redlink=1)
* Jimmy Spicer
* Jocko
* Joe Bataan
* Kurtis Blow
* Lady B
* Lovebug Starski
* MC Rock
* Ron Hunt
* [The Sequence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sequence)
  + [Angie Stone](http://www.discogs.com/artist/31752-Angie-Stone)
  + [Cheryl Cook](http://www.discogs.com/artist/287411-Cheryl-Cook)
  + [Gwendolyn Chisolm](http://www.discogs.com/artist/824125-Gwendolyn-Chisolm)
* Sickle Cell and Rhapazooty
* Spoonie Gee
* The Sugarhill Gang
  + Big Bank Hank
  + [Master Gee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_Gee_(musician))
  + [Wonder Mike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonder_Mike)
* Sweet Tee
* The [Treacherous Three](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treacherous_Three)
  + DJ Easy Lee
  + [Kool Moe Dee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kool_Moe_Dee)
  + [LA Sunshine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LA_Sunshine)
  + [Special K](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_K_(artist))

So - who was the best rapper of this era? Since we were witnessing the birth of a musical genre (and a movement), there was not enough published material to clearly separate the best from a worthy roster of pioneer MCs. The Furious Five, The Cold Crush Brothers & The Fantastic Five gave us a bunch of rappers to choose from. Kurtis Blow was a shining star due to the fact that he was the first solo artist to stand out – something he continued to improve upon well into the ‘80s. While all the aforementioned may be true, I do feel that there was one rapper that stood out amongst them all. His style combined with his quality of published works made **Spoonie Gee** stand out as the best MC of 1970s. Below is the rest of the ‘70s best:

* Cowboy
* [Dot-A-Rock](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dot-A-Rock&action=edit&redlink=1)
* Easy A.D.
* [Grandmaster Caz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grandmaster_Caz)
* JDL
* The Kidd Creole
* Kurtis Blow
* [Melle Mel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melle_Mel)
* [Prince Whipper Whip](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Whipper_Whip)
* Rahiem
* Ruby Dee
* Scorpio
* Sha Rock
* [Waterbed Kev](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Waterbed_Kev&action=edit&redlink=1)