

Rap Groups such as Public Enemy et al were all influenced by.....

GIL SCOTT - HERON

And here is the man's biography:

One of the most important progenitors of rap music, Gil Scott-Heron's aggressive, no-nonsense street poetry inspired a legion of intelligent rappers while his engaging songwriting skills placed him square in the R&B charts later in his career, backed by increasingly contemporary production courtesy of Malcolm Cecil and Nile Rodgers (of Chic). Born in Chicago but transplanted to Tennessee for his early years, Scott-Heron spent most of his high-school years in the Bronx, where he learned firsthand many of the experiences which later made up his songwriting material. He had begun writing before reaching his teenage years, however, and completed his first volume of poetry at the age of 13. Though he attended college in Pennsylvania, he dropped out after one year to concentrate on his writing career and earned plaudits for his novel, *The Vulture*. Encouraged at the end of the '60s to begin recording by legendary jazz producer Bob Thiele — who had worked with every major jazz great, from Louis Armstrong to John Coltrane — Scott-Heron released his 1970 debut, *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox*, inspired by a volume of poetry of the same name. With Thiele's Flying Dutchman Records until the mid-'70s, he signed to Arista soon after and found success on the R&B charts. Though his jazz-based work of the early '70s was tempered by a slicker disco-inspired production, Scott-Heron's message was as clear as ever on the Top 30 single "Johannesburg" and the number 15 hit "Angel Dust." Silent for almost a decade, after the release of his 1984 single "Re-Ron," the proto-rapper returned to recording in the mid-'90s with a message for the gangsta rappers who had come in his wake; Scott-Heron's 1994 album *Spirits* began with "Message to the Messengers," pointed squarely at the rappers whose influence — positive or negative — meant much to the children of the 1990s.

In a touching bit of irony which he himself was quick to joke about, Gil Scott-Heron was born on April Fool's Day 1949 in Chicago, the son of a Jamaican professional soccer player (who spent time playing for Glasgow Celtic) and a college-graduate mother who worked as a librarian. His parents divorced early in his life, and Scott-Heron was sent to live with his grandmother in Lincoln, TN. Learning musical and literary instruction from her, Scott-Heron also learned about prejudice firsthand, as he was one of three children picked to integrate an elementary school in nearby Jackson. The abuse proved to much to bear, however, and the eighth-grader was sent to New York to live with his mother, first in the Bronx and later in the Hispanic neighborhood of Chelsea.

Though Scott-Heron's experiences in Tennessee must have been difficult, they proved to be the seed of his writing career, as his first volume of poetry was written around that time. His education in the New York City school system also proved beneficial, introducing the youth to the work of Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes as well as LeRoi Jones. After publishing a novel called *The Vulture* in 1968, Scott-Heron applied to Pennsylvania's Lincoln University. Though he spent less than one year there, it was enough time to meet Brian Jackson, a similarly minded musician who would later become a crucial collaborator and integral part of Scott-Heron's band. Given a bit of exposure — mostly in magazines like *Essence*, which called *The Vulture* "a strong start for a writer with important things to say" — Scott-Heron met up with Bob Thiele and was encouraged to begin a music career, reading selections from his book of poetry *Small Talk at 125th & Lennox* while Thiele recorded a collective of jazz and funk musicians, including bassist Ron Carter, drummer Bernard "Pretty" Purdie,

Hubert Laws on flute and alto saxophone, and percussionists Eddie Knowles and Charlie Saunders; Scott-Heron also recruited Jackson to play on the record as pianist. Most important on the album was "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," an aggressive polemic against the major media and white America's ignorance of increasingly deteriorating conditions in the inner cities. Scott-Heron's second LP, 1971's Pieces of a Man, expanded his range, featuring songs such as the title track and "Lady Day and John Coltrane" which offered a more straight-ahead approach to song structure (if not content).

The following year's Free Will was his last for Flying Dutchman, however; after a dispute with the label, Scott-Heron recorded Winter in America for Strata East, then moved to Arista Records in 1975. As the first artist signed to Clive Davis' new label, much was riding on Scott-Heron to deliver first-rate material with a chance at the charts. Thanks to Arista's more focused push on the charts, Scott-Heron's "Johannesburg" reached number 29 on the R&B charts in 1975. Important to Scott-Heron's success on his first two albums for Arista (First Minute of a New Day and From South Africa to South Carolina) was the influence of keyboardist and collaborator Brian Jackson, co-billed on both LPs and the de facto leader of Scott-Heron's Midnight Band.

Jackson left by 1978, though, leaving the musical direction of Scott-Heron's career in the capable hands of producer Malcolm Cecil, a veteran producer who had midwived the funkier direction of the Isley Brothers and Stevie Wonder earlier in the decade. The first single recorded with Cecil, "The Bottle," became Scott-Heron's biggest hit yet, peaking at number 15 on the R&B charts, though he still made no waves on pop charts. Producer Nile Rodgers of Chic also helped on production during the 1980s, when Scott-Heron's political attack grew even more fervent with a new target, President Ronald Reagan. (Several singles, including the R&B hits "B Movie" and "Re-Ron," were specifically directed at the President's conservative policies.) By 1985, however, Scott-Heron was dropped by Arista, just after the release of The Best of Gil Scott-Heron. Though he continued to tour around the world, Scott-Heron chose to discontinue recording. He did return, however, in 1993 with a contract for T.V.T. Records and the album Spirits.

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