

# Urban Youth Development Graduate, Chris Muggler, Discusses The Roots' Impact on Culture and Society

INDIAN TRAIL, NC, UNITED STATES,  
November 4, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/

-- The Roots were a household name long before gracing televisions around the nation as the house band on NBC's Late Night with Jimmy Fallon and The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. Since its inception in 1987, the group helmed by Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter and Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson has been known as the face of a revolution. [Chris David Muggler](#), an Indian Trail, North Carolina resident and graduate in psychology and urban youth development, grew up in Holland, Pennsylvania, near the home of The Roots in Philadelphia. [Chris Muggler](#) here discusses the impact of The Roots on music, culture, and the world.

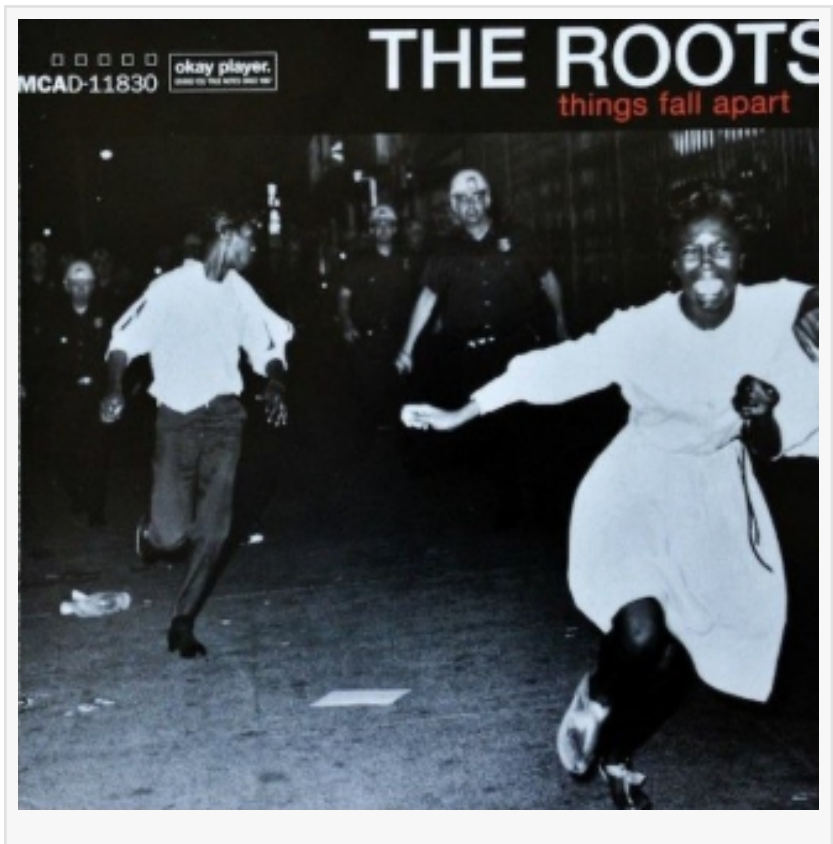
Although the 1980s are sometimes referred to as the "Post-Civil Rights Era," following the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, the fight for rights in many communities was far from over.

Coinciding with the Black Civil Rights movement in particular hip-hop became the voice of a cause and community. The Roots were at the forefront of the changing genre, particularly as the group evolved and matured in the late 1990s.

"They were a band that was transcending the meaning of 'real Hip Hop.' The Roots were 'real' in the sense that they spoke every word with conscientious meaning," Chris David Muggler said. "Even most of their album covers had an underlying meaning and a sense of empathy."

Chris Muggler points to the group's breakout album Things Fall Apart as an example. The cover depicts two Black teenagers circa 1960s running away from white policemen. The album title is a reference to critically acclaimed Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's novel of the same name.

"Instead of creating an artsy representation of the group, the design team used an old photograph as the cover. The artwork is a 1960s photograph of a New York race riot within the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant," [Chris Muggler said](#), explaining the group was inspired to delve deeper into political and social commentary through music as a result of the turbulent situation in the Middle East.



"The cover of the album not only illustrates conflicting cultural differences but also illustrates the blindness that some have toward past traditions," Chris David Muggler said. "Ultimately, The Roots are trying to convey the loss of traditional value specifically to the African American community through their album artwork."

The album was The Roots' first to sell over 500,000 copies, preceding the group's fifth item which reached Gold status.

"Things Fall Apart is a great album from a musical engineering standpoint, but what really catches attention is the cover art. The illustration of agony and fear in the girl running away greatly coincides with our cultural struggles today,"

Chris David Muggler explained that sometimes to advance and evolve, humanity must change and accept change. Unfortunately, not everyone embraces this concept. This is a theme central to Achebe's novel and The Roots' work as well.

"Just like in the photo, the white policemen are a product of their time, and they are trying to protect the immoral values that they grew up with," Chris Muggler said. "The miscommunication between cultures sometimes deals with massive amounts of false perception. In Achebe's novel, Okonkwo kills himself, ironically going against his traditional values, showing that the breakdown of one tradition can be detrimental to a certain society."

Referring to the album cover, Chris Muggler explains things are "falling apart" for the girl in the photo and her community. "Racism was very prominent during these years, and many African Americans wanted racial equality and equal opportunity. Their reasonable wishes did not come true without a fight," he said. "By looking at the army of police behind the two African American teens, you can tell that they were up against something bigger than color. They were up against something rooted in racist cultural belief that was passed down through some of the white generations."

The parallels to the issues of the 1990s are clear, Chris Muggler said. Terrorism was on the rise in 1997 and Islamic extremists were bombing various nations and groups in the Middle East. The turmoil of transition inspired The Roots and their art, he said, prompting them to convey a message that no matter what nationality, color, race, or religion you are, humans are all equal and deserving of equal respect.

In addition to its ties to the Middle East, the album and its artwork and title make a direct link to hip-hop and African and African-American tradition and culture. It also points to the fact that, despite the many setbacks in the struggle for Civil Rights, the community had made great strides in their struggle for freedom and equality and continued to do so.

Chris David Muggler mentioned the song lyrics too, many of which reference activism and cultural and political causes. Even their name, referring to "square root" in mathematics, identifies them as an outlier in pop culture going their own way against the grain.

"The Roots are a group who stay true to their musical art. Getting to the root of something means trying to get to the origin." Chris Muggler said. "As years pass on the group worries how generations will remember how far African Americans have advanced in society. They are committed to gaining and giving the black community respect and enlightenment."

Caroline Hunter  
Web Presence, LLC  
+1 7862338220  
[email us here](#)

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