



DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 27, 2006

Eternally Hip Panthers' and Bowie's Styles Sing On

As recently implanted in the collective American mind by images in movies like *A Scanner Darkly* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, we seem to be stuck in a '70s moment. It's another chapter in our nation's frequent return to the revolutionary politics and radical fashion of that decade.

There's no doubt there is no hip without African-Americans and Americans of European descent, inventing new American identities, John Leland writes in his popular 2004 book *Hip: The History*. Best examples in the above groups: the Black Panthers and David Bowie.

There has long been a sense of hip in the music and fashions of African-Americans, but by the early '70s it had gotten to a high level of ubiquity - never had it been hipper to be black. It is no coincidence that the gritty social history played out in documentaries, like the brilliant *What We Want, What We Believe: The Black Panther Party Library* DVD collection set.

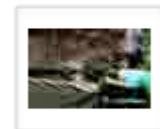
This deeply generous four-DVD set presents three real-life newsreels -- *Off The Pig!*, *Mayday*, and *Repression* -- augmented by several hours of discussions, analysis, and updates. Its combination of anarchistic hope and striking visual assertions -- perfect Afros, black wraparound shades, tight-



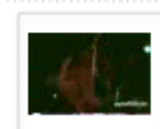
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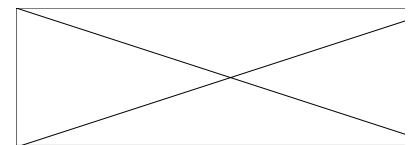
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fitting black leather sport coats, slinky black slacks - clearly shows a fashion inspiration still in evidence today.

Its perfect cultural juxtaposition might be David Bowie, *Under Review: 1976-1979, The Berlin Trilogy*. It is a combination of strikingly fashionable rock visuals and a motley collection of mostly pale British rock critics studying the race-defying creativity of the Thin White Duke, particularly on his career-high albums *Low*, *Heroes*, and *The Lodger*.

Another release from the same DVD company (MVD), the documentary's narrator, addresses Bowie's life as one man's constant desire for reinvention. As *MOJO* writer Mark Prendergast explains, Bowie dropped the political stuff, and brought other avant-garde ideas into the mass culture instead -- the way black musicians were starting to do in New York within a couple of years.

Through the next decade, Bowie's influence would continue strongly -- many in fashion. "Bowie's relevance in the 80s," journalist and ambient musician David Toop says, "his influence, was inescapable."

This great dialogue between the races continues - the use of R&B and doo-wop in indie rock is one example; the re-discovery of forgotten '70s soul-funk-reggae scenes and even the acknowledgment of feminist post-punk white funk another. (And the Slits are back on tour - femme punk dub!) This cross-pollination keeps spawning different connections: Check out the recent *Girlmonster* triple-CD anthology to see how black rhythms and electronic sounds meet as women and men of all colors create, together.

-Chris Estey



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