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Rapper behind 'Roxanne's Revenge' gets Warner Music to pay for Ph.D

BY [WALTER DAWKINS](#)
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Updated Monday, August 24th 2009, 4:38 PM



Watts/News

Roxanne Shante was a young rap star. When the music stopped, she didn't miss a beat.

Roxanne's revenge was sweet indeed.

Twenty-five years after the first queen of hip-hop was stiffed on her royalty checks, [Dr. Roxanne Shante](#) boasts an [Ivy League](#) Ph.D. - financed by a forgotten clause in her first record deal.

"This is a story that needs to be told," Shante said. "I'm an example that you can be a teenage mom, come from the projects, and be raised by a single parent, and you can still come out of it a doctor."

Her prognosis wasn't as bright in the years after the '80s icon scored a smash hit at age 14: "Roxanne's Revenge," a razor-tongued response to rap group UTFO's mega-hit "Roxanne, Roxanne."

The 1984 single sold 250,000 copies in [New York City](#) alone, making Shante (born [Lolita Gooden](#)) hip hop's first female celebrity.

She blazed a trail followed by [Lil' Kim](#), [Salt-N-Pepa](#) and [Queen Latifah](#) - although

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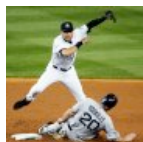
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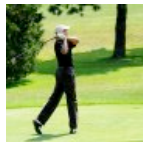
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She blazed a trail followed by LL Cool J, Salt-N-Pepa and Queen Latifah - although Shante didn't share their success.

After two albums, Shante said, she was disillusioned by the sleazy music industry and swindled by her record company. The teen mother, living in the Queensbridge Houses, recalled how her life was shattered.

"Everybody was cheating with the contracts, stealing and telling lies," she said. "And to find out that I was just a commodity was heartbreaking."

But Shante, then 19, remembered a clause in her Warner Music recording contract: The company would fund her education for life.

She eventually cashed in, earning a Ph.D. in psychology from Cornell to the tune of \$217,000 - all covered by the label. But getting Warner Music to cough up the dough was a battle.

"They kept stumbling over their words, and they didn't have an exact reason why they were telling me no," Shante said.

She figured Warner considered the clause a throwaway, never believing a teen mom in public housing would attend college. The company declined to comment for this story.

Shante found an arm-twisting ally in Marguerita Grecco, the dean at Marymount Manhattan College. Shante showed her the contract, and the dean let her attend classes for free while pursuing the money.

"I told Dean Grecco that either I'm going to go here or go to the streets, so I need your help," Shante recalls. "She said, 'We're going to make them pay for this.'"

Grecco submitted and resubmitted the bills to the label, which finally agreed to honor the contract when Shante threatened to go public with the story.

Shante earned her doctorate in 2001, and launched an unconventional therapy practice focusing on urban African-Americans - a group traditionally reluctant to seek mental health help.

"People put such a taboo on therapy, they feel it means they're going crazy," she explained. "No, it doesn't. It just means you need someone else to talk to."

Shante often incorporates hip-hop music into her sessions, encouraging her clients to unleash their inner MC and shout out exactly what's on their mind.

"They can't really let loose and enjoy life," she said. "So I just let them unlock those doors."

Shante, 38, is also active in the community. She offers \$5,000 college scholarships each semester to female rappers through the nonprofit Hip Hop Association.

She also dispenses advice to young women in the music business via a MySpace page.

"I call it a warning service, so their dreams don't turn into nightmares," she said.

Hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons said Shante is a shining role model for the rap community. "Dr. Shante's life is inspiring," Simmons said. "She was a go-getter who rose from the struggle and went from hustling to teaching. She is a prime example that you can do anything, and everything is possible."

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Adrian Wayne Aug 23, 2009 11:25:46 AM

Report Offensive Post

Roxxanne - Roxxanne...Can't you understand . Roxxanne - Roxxanne. I wanna be your man. Roxxanne Roxxane..

Dee1NYC Aug 23, 2009 12:43:48 PM

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Awesome!!!! You go girl! At least you read the small print and got them where it hurts!

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Despite the laughs and jokes at Letterman's expense, the Vogue magazine editor did little Monday night to melt away her icy image.



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upstater607 Aug 24, 2009 3:51:07 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Uh, it would be a nice story.. if it were true. I work for Cornell and there is no record of her attending, much less getting a PhD - neither under Lolita Gooden nor under Roxanne Shante. NYDN, don't you even bother to pick up the phone and fact-check this stuff? call the registrar, for god's sake!

giantnyc Aug 24, 2009 4:25:21 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Some people who claim to be in the know say she is a fraud. Who knows?

dogbreath Aug 24, 2009 4:57:20 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Upstater607 has it right. Any talk of Roxanne Shante having a Cornell Ph.D is untrue. It appears to have started as a rumor on a music-industry blog. Don't believe the hype!

ncresearcher Aug 24, 2009 5:53:29 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Upstater607, you and Dogbreath may want to check out this 2008 article by Daniel from Cornell's campus newspaper The Chronicle. Here's an excerpt: "Using her talent for improvising rhymes, Shanté was only 14 when her 1984 hit single "Roxanne's Revenge" sparked a series of answer records. "I didn't come into the industry to be a great female rapper, I came into the industry because I was a great rapper," she said. Shanté retired from hip-hop in 1995 and went on to earn a Ph.D. in psychology at Cornell." Now either Aloï didn't check either, or both of you are making libelous comments here. Link is here: <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Nov08/hiphopCover.da.html>

kalamitykatie Aug 24, 2009 7:41:44 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

I really hope this article is true, but I'm doubting it....I couldn't find her professional certification. Maybe someone else can <http://www.op.nysed.gov/opsearches.htm>

smtrtnu Aug 24, 2009 9:01:57 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

To the liars who claim there's no record of her: <http://classof91.alumni.cornell.edu/notable-cornell-alumni.cfm#Music> She's on Cornell's own list of notable alumni. Similarly, a google for her name on cornell's domain shows numerous confirmations of this reality. It's sad that the world is filled with lying racist scumbags who will lie about everything... right down to whether or not it's possible for a black woman to get a PhD. That said, this is the Daily News... so I guess I should've expected ignorant, racist dishonest nonsense.

laprofe63 Aug 24, 2009 9:39:55 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

I'm glad people found confirmation she was indeed a graduate of Cornell to refute the allegations the story is false. Why is it that some people hate it so much when a black person does well, against all odds? Oh, I know, because they could never accomplish anything remotely similar. Classic hater move.

upstater607 Aug 25, 2009 5:48:51 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Man, what is with you people? Nobody's saying black people can't accomplish things, no-one is hating on Roxanne - for chrissake, how do you know I'm not black? I did read the Cornell Chronicle article, in fact I attended that hip-hop event. But the writer who wrote that story obviously did not call the registrar's office to check on that "fact," otherwise he would have found out what I did, when I looked at the database - she does not have a degree from Cornell. PERIOD. After this, I was curious and did a little research to find out where she did get her degrees - she went to Marymount. A fine school, a fine accomplishment - but it's not Cornell. And Cornell has many fine African-American graduates, but Roxanne is not one of them.

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