

The Social Significance of Rap & Hip-Hop Culture

Becky Blanchard
Poverty & Prejudice: Media and Race

*"Keep in mind when brothas start flexing the verbal skillz,
it always reflects what's going on politically, socially,
and economically." --Musician Davey D*

In recent years, controversy surrounding rap music has been in the forefront of the American media. From the hype of the East Coast-West Coast rivalry that shadowed the murders of rappers Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. to the demonization of modern music in the wake of school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, it seems that political and media groups have been quick to place blame on rap for a seeming trend in youth violence. However, though critics are quick to point out the violent lyrics of some rappers, they are missing the point of rap's message. Rap, like other forms of music, cannot be understood unless it is studied without the frame of its historical and social context. Today's rap music reflects its origin in the hip-hop culture of young, urban, working-class African-Americans, its roots in the African oral tradition, its function as the voice of an otherwise underrepresented group, and, as its popularity has grown, its commercialization and appropriation by the music industry.

Hip-hop music is generally considered to have been pioneered in New York's South Bronx in 1973 by Jamaican-born Kool DJ Herc. At a Halloween dance party thrown by his younger sister, Herc used an innovative turntable technique to stretch a song's drum break by playing the break portion of two identical records consecutively. The popularity of the extended break lent its name to "breakdancing"--a style specific to hip-hop culture, which was facilitated by extended drumbreaks played by DJs at New York dance parties. By the mid-1970s, New York's hip-hop scene was dominated by seminal turntablists DJ Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, and Herc. The rappers of Sugarhill Gang produced hip-hop's first commercially successful hit, "Rapper's Delight," in 1979'.

Rap itself--the rhymes spoken over hip-hop music--began as a commentary on the ability--or "skillz"--of a particular DJ while that DJ was playing records at a hip-hop event. MCs, the forerunners of today's rap artists, introduced DJs and their songs and often recognized the presence of friends in the audience at hip-hop performances. Their role was carved out by popular African-American radio disc jockeys in New York during the late 1960s, who introduced songs and artists with spontaneous rhymes. The innovation of MCs caught the attention of hip-hop fans. Their rhymes lapped over from the transition period between the end of one song and the introduction of the next to the songs themselves. Their commentaries moved solely from a DJ's skillz to their own personal experiences and stories. The role of MCs in performances rose steadily, and they began to be recognized as artists in their own right.

The local popularity of the rhythmic music served by DJs at dance parties and clubs, combined with an increase in "b-boys"--breakdancers--and graffiti artists and the growing importance of MCs, created a

distinctive culture known as hip-hop. For the most part, hip-hop culture was defined and embraced by young, urban, working-class African-Americans. Hip-hop music originated from a combination of traditionally African-American forms of music--including jazz, soul, gospel, and reggae. It was created by working-class African-Americans, who, like Herc, took advantage of available tools--vinyl records and turntables--to invent a new form of music that both expressed and shaped the culture of black New York City youth in the 1970s.

While rap's history appears brief its relation to the African oral tradition, which provides rap with much of its current social significance, also roots rap in a long-standing history of oral historians, lyrical fetishism, and political advocacy. At the heart of the African oral tradition is the West African³ idea of *nommo*. In Malian Dogon cosmology, Nommo is the first human, a creation of the supreme deity, Amma, whose creative power lies in the generative property of the spoken word⁴. As a philosophical concept, *nommo* is the animative ability of words and the delivery of words to act upon objects, giving life. The significance of *nommo* in the African oral tradition has given power to rappers and rap music within many African-American communities.

Rap's common designation as "CNN for black people" may result from the descendance of rappers from *griots*, respected African oral historians and praise-singers. *Griots* were the keepers and purveyors of knowledge, including tribal history, family lineage, and news of births, deaths, and wars⁵. Travelling *griots* spread knowledge in an accessible form--the spoken word--to members of tribal villages. Similarly, in the United States, many rappers create songs that, through performances and records, spread news of their daily lives, dreams, and discontents outside of their immediate neighborhoods. Rappers are viewed as the voice of poor, urban African-American youth, whose lives are generally dismissed or misrepresented by the mainstream media. They are the keepers of contemporary African-American working-class history and concerns.

Additionally, rap's potential for political advocacy stems from the function of its predecessors, African-American rhyming games, as forms of resistance to systems of subjugation and slavery. Rhyming games⁶ encoded race relations between African-American slaves and their white masters in a way that allowed them to pass the scrutiny of suspicious overseers. Additionally, rhyming games allowed slaves to use their creative intellect to provide inspiration and entertainment. For example, by characterizing the slave as a rabbit and the master as a fox, "Bre'r Rabbit tales" disguised stories of slaves outwitting their masters and escaping plantations behind the facade of a comical adventure. Hip-hop journalist Davey D connects the African oral tradition to modern rap: "You see, the slaves were smart and they talked in metaphors. They would be killed if the slave masters heard them speaking in unfamiliar tongues. So they did what modern-day rappers do--they flexed their lyrical skillz."⁷ Rap has developed as a form of resistance to the subjugation of working-class African-Americans in urban centers. Though it may be seen primarily as a form of entertainment, rap has the powerful potential to address social, economic, and political issues and act as a unifying voice for its audience.⁸

Rap shares its roots with other forms of traditionally African-American music, such as jazz, blues, and soul. Rap may also be closely linked to reggae music, a genre that also developed from the combination of traditional African drumming⁹ and the music of the European ruling class by youth of limited economic means within a system of African economic subjugation. In an ironic circle of influence, Jamaican reggae was played on African-American radio stations in New York in the 1960s. DJs used rhymes to introduce reggae songs. These AM stations could be received in Jamaica, where listeners picked up on the DJs' rhyming styles, extending them over reggae songs to create "dub"--another forerunner of rap¹⁰. Kool DJ Herc, before introducing his innovative turntable style, brought his dub style to New York, but it failed to gain popularity. He concentrated on developing his DJing skills, which later allowed for the acceptance of MCing and, eventually, rap.

The development of rap and reggae has been an intertwined path of two different styles, which have grown from and have thrived, in similar circumstances. Finally, just as reggae has been under attack for some artists'

seeming advocacy of violence to solve social, political, and economic problems, rap has become the scapegoat of the American musical fabric, as it, too, has faced mass popularity and commercialization. Just as reggae is now under threat of losing its power as an art form and a social voice" after being appropriated by those outside of the Rastafarian culture, rap struggles to survive adoption and commodification by those outside of the world of hip-hop.

In the last decade, hip-hop music has followed the path of commercialization that destroyed African-American radio stations in the 1970s. Whereas prior to commercialization, African-American owners, programmers, and DJs had the freedom to use their stations to serve the specific needs of their listeners -- New York's working-class African-American community. They were able to promote local artists and events and to address news events and social concerns as members of the same community from which they drew their audience. However, as corporations owned by businesspeople outside of the community consolidated power by purchasing local stations, African-American AM stations were forced out of the market by more economically-powerful stations owned and controlled mainly by members of the white upper-class. African-American DJs lost their power as the modern-day *griots* of their communities and as the presenters of hip-hop music and culture.

Similarly, with the "discovery" of hip-hop artists by corporate record labels, rap music was stolen from its community, repackaged by money-minded businesspeople looking to create a wider appeal by erasing hip-hop's historic function, and sold back to the streets through marketing ploys such as music videos and Top-40 charts. By the 1980s, hip-hop had become a business and rap music was a valuable commodity³. However, according to journalist Christopher John Farley, rap's commodification has also disenfranchised it as a form of resistance:

Corporate America's infatuation with rap has increased as the genre's political content has withered. Ice Cube's early songs attacked white racism; Ice-T sang a song about a cop killer; Public Enemy challenged listeners to "fight the power". But many newer acts are focused almost entirely on pathologies within the black community. They rap about shooting other blacks, but almost never about challenging governmental authority or encouraging social activism. 14

Though not new themes, many of the aspects of rap that have been pointed out by politicians as "objectionable"--violence, misogyny, and homophobia in the lyrics and lifestyles of some rappers--may be seen as a function of rap's commodification. While rappers struggle to "keep it real"--a term which reminds those inside hip-hop to be true to their roots--some admit that many rappers do as their record labels wish--simply, they write lyrics that sell¹⁵. In an audience which has become increasingly ethnically and economically diverse⁶, business-minded rappers have been pressured to take on the limited roles that have proven profitable for young, African-American male artists--that of the "pimp", the "gansta", and the "playa." According to African-American musician Michael Franti, "In order to be real, we don't all have to be the same. Through the commercialization of today's music, there is a lot of pressure for young black men to conform to very specific roles." 17

The commodification of rap has allowed large paychecks and platinum records to erase the historical, social, and economic contexts, out of which rap has emerged, from public consciousness. According to Davey D, "The business of music has bastardized rap."¹⁸ From its roots as resistance against slavery to its connection to the reggae movement in Jamaica to the appearance of rappers as modern-day *griots*, rap has traditionally been the music of the subjugated African-American working class. While it is important to celebrate hip-hop culture today as inclusive of vastly diverse ethnic and economic groups, it is equally important to recognize and preserve the function that rap has served for its original community. In order to understand the themes and forms of rap music, it is important to follow the history of African-Americans from their beginnings in West Africa, to their enslavement throughout the early history of the United States, to their struggles against racial prejudice and segregation after Emancipation, to the continuing battles against *de facto* economic

segregation and reclamation of cultural identity of many African-Americans today.

If rap music appears to be excessively violent when compared to country-western or popular rock, it is because rap stems from a culture that has been seeped in the fight against political, social, and economic oppression. Despite the theatrics sometimes put on for major-label albums or MTV videos⁹, for many artists, rapping about guns²⁰ and gang life is a reflection of daily life in racially- and economically-stratified inner-city ghettos and housing projects. Violence in rap is not an affective agent that threatens to harm America's youth; rather, it is the outcry of an already-existing problem from youth whose worldviews have been shaped by experiencing deep economic inequalities divided largely along racial lines.

The nihilistic approach to violence and criminal activity for which rap is often criticized is defended by some artists as the understandable result of the disparities that face African-American communities, from which rap originated and remains rooted. America's most recent census reported that African-American youth are the most likely group in the nation to live in poor households and neighborhoods, to be unemployed, to be the victims of homicide or AIDS, or to spend time in prison at some point in their lifetimes . According to Cornel West, a professor of Religions and Afro-American studies at Harvard University, "It's no accident that one would see various [rap] songs and various lyrics that revolve around death. „²² Perhaps some of the popularity of the "thug life" celebrated in the "gangsta rap" sub-genre²³ is the opportunity it may provide for economic and social power in neighborhoods where hope has been lost. For many poor, inner-city youth, the gun, which has had a central role in the lyrics of many gangsta rappers, represents a way to empower oneself ²⁴ and gain respect within continuing cycles of racial and economic prejudice.

Additionally, some rappers defend the presence of violence in their lyrics as the manifestation of American history and culture. Journalist Michael Saunders writes: "[T] he violence and misogyny and lustful materialism that characterize some rap songs are as deeply American as the hokey music that rappers appropriate. The fact is, this country was in love with outlaws and crime and violence long before hip-hop."²⁵ Specifically, the African-American experience has been shaped by the legacies of slavery, segregation, and economic and political subjugation, and has been marked by institutions and incidents of violence. Rapper Chuck D thinks that much of the violence and nihilism in rap music is the legacy of the hate that minorities have faced in the United States: "We [African-Americans] were a product of what hate produced. We were taught to hate ourselves, so a lot of [intra-racial conflict] is bred off of ignorance." ²⁶

Further, these rappers claim that it is not only African-Americans who are gangsters, but rather that American history, also, has been characterized by conquest, rebellion, and bloodshed. Rapper Ice Cube points to the hypocrisy of politicians, who use bombing campaigns to kill on a worldwide level, to blame gangsters for violence in American culture: "We do things on a small level, but America does it on a big level. It ain't just us. White people do everything we do."²⁷

Politicians ²⁸ and groups searching for easy solutions to America's struggle with youth violence have tried to blame rap music for desensitizing teenagers to the effects of guns, drugs, and gangs and inciting violent incidents, such as the recent shootings in Littleton, Colorado. They have attempted to present the "objectionable" aspects of some songs as a universal aspect of the rap genre. Groups have attempted to set up musical rating systems, parental advisory warnings, and outright censorship of albums that contain lyrics or images that could be harmful for young people ²⁹.

Yet, is music regulation worth the censorship of artists, especially when it targets certain genres, such as rap? It would be virtually impossible to implement a system of regulation that could be entirely objective and free of cultural bias regarding the definition and execution of blanket-definitions of obscenity and potential for harm. In the end, a system that would regulate the lyrical content of music would hurt rappers and their audiences and further weaken rap's ability to reflect and express the true concerns of inner-city working-class youth³⁰.

It seems that an increasing number of public figures have attempted to capitalize upon remaining cultural biases and fear of African-American uprising to vilify rap music as the causative agent in a recent string of incidents of youth violence ³¹ . Although some rap songs may appear to focus on themes of violence, they are reflections of preexisting political, social, and economic disparities. In a statement to the Senate Hearing on Lyrics & Labeling, the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression wrote:

Discussions about direct correlation between media messages and actual acts of violence distract us from getting at the real causes of mediated violence [...] The discussion distracts us from the real causes of crime: things like child abuse, poverty, parental neglect in care and time spent with their child.³²

Violence in rap, and in other forms of self-expression, is the manifestation of a feeling of hopelessness and discontent in America's working class, especially working-class minority communities. By pointing to rap as the cause of violence, politicians attempt to erase from the consciousness of their constituents the history of oppression that has given birth to hip-hop culture.

In order to truly change the looming presence of violence in American society, as symptomized by violence in movies, television, and music, the remaining problems of poverty and prejudice in America's cities must be aggressively addressed. Ironically, many of the same politicians and groups who cry out against violence in rap music are also leading the attack on Welfare, Affirmative Action, funding for education, and proposals for universal health care. It is disparities in economic and political power, not hip-hop music, that create violence in American society. Cutting programs that provide social services to help alleviate the unequal opportunity to jobs, resources, and social mobility will only serve to aggravate problems. Voters must not allow themselves to be fooled into believing that censorship can safe-guard children from the ramifications of violence in American culture; they must not play into the problem by cutting programs that provide hope for escape from economic and political discrepancies that feed into the cycle of violence.

Instead, those who truly wish to put an end to the problems expressed by some rappers in their lyrics and lifestyles, must focus on providing services and opportunities that will combat the feeling of nihilism in many of America's communities today. Social services must be supported, expanded, and reorganized to more effectively administer programs for those who have been economically and politically disadvantaged. It is necessary to address the basic needs of the urban working class--affordable housing, health care, and food--before there can be any attempts to eliminate violence in America's cities.

Additionally, it is necessary that working-class adults are able to earn a living wage before they may begin to be expected to have hope for their future or the future of their children. Minimum wage, as it exists today, is not an adequate family wage, and, as a result, many parents have been forced to work several jobs, keeping them away from the home, in order to provide for their children and relatives. Finally, in order to prevent violence and crime before it begins, federal, state, and local funding should be diverted from law enforcement and prison systems into public education and youth programs. Youth cannot have hope unless they have access to a useful, relevant education that can provide them with the opportunity to choose the path of their futures. I believe that few youth, given sufficient resources, respect, and support, would choose violence. However, for many youth today, options are limited by a disparity of access to the resources that provide that choice.

For many youth the heroes and success stories of the inner-city are rappers. The popularity of rap and the spin-offs of hip-hop culture--fashion lines like FUBU and Tommy Hilfiger³³, movies such as *Boyz N Da Hood* and *Friday*, and television shows like *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and *In the House*--have had a major impact on American marketing trends. The appeal of hip-hop culture has pushed out of urban areas and into the suburbs. Hip-hop has had a tremendous influence on mainstream fashion, television, movies, advertising, and language ³⁴.

Hoping to follow the success of rappers like LL Cool J, Will Smith, Sean "Puffy" Combs, and Wyclef, many youth see the music industry as one of their only opportunities to achieve the notoriety and money to escape the hopelessness of the inner-city. However, those who attempt to succeed in hip-hop music face a difficult challenge. In an industry controlled by mainly by upper-class white men, young, urban minority musicians are often treated as commodities, not as artists. They must balance a need for artistic control and "keepin' it real" with the limitations and pressures from record companies interested in generating sales and massive appeal. Often the message and artistic integrity of rappers can be lost amidst national marketing campaigns and concern for approval by important commercial allies such as Wal-Mart and MTV. In the growing success of the hip-hop market, musicians have struggled to maintain rap's potency as a form of resistance and empowerment.

In order to preserve rap's cultural function and, simultaneously, to promote artistic and commercial progress, the communities that have traditionally been the ones making the music should be the ones that control its production and distribution. Hip-hop must be recognized as a musical form and not merely a commercial trend. Hip-hop, including its history, its forms, and its social importance, should be taught in school music curriculum alongside classical music, folk music, and jazz³⁵. The inclusion of rap in music education programs may also allow students and teachers to have an open discourse on related issues such as the relationship between rap and gangs, the presence of violence, misogyny, and homophobia in some rap songs, and the debate over musical rating and advisory systems. Hip-hop should be embraced in public school music programs as an American innovation and a way to relate student interests with curriculum. Additionally, rap could be integrated into English and language arts curriculum as a form of both poetry and drama. Allowing students to write and perform their own rap encourages them to think critically, to practice writing in the narrative form, to increase vocabulary, and to develop an understanding of rhyme and rhythm.

Inner-city youth organizations, such as the Boys & Girls Club or the YMCA, can implement programs that promote an interest in hip-hop music. These organizations give youth the discipline, self-confidence, leadership, and other tools necessary for success in the music industry. They may be able to work with local radio and television stations and record labels--especially those started and owned by African-Americans, such as Def Jam and Bad Boy--to provide opportunities for internships, tours, and job shadow days that give youth experience in the music industry. They may allow youth to organize, promote, and perform in hip-hop concerts held regularly at the club. Involving youth at all levels of planning provides valuable experience that empowers them in the music industry and other facets of business³⁶. Ultimately, by allowing youth to see and experience the way that hip-hop is shaped, negatively and positively, by the business of the music industry, they have the knowledge to make informed musical decisions and, possibly, to make change in the workings of the music industry.

In conclusion, despite the blame placed on rap for the prominence of violence in American society, hip-hop music is a symptom of cultural violence, not the cause. In order to understand hip-hop, it is necessary to look at it as the product of a set of historical, political, and economic circumstances and to study the role it has served as voice for those subjugated by systematic political and economic oppression. If the issue of violence in rap music is to be effectively addressed, the root of the problem--disparity in resources and opportunities for urban minorities--must be aggressively dealt with. Rap music is a form of resistance to the systems of subjugation that have created class discrepancies in the United States. In order to put an end to violence, we must focus on alleviating the burden of the inner-city working class. In order to put an end to the cycle of nihilism present in the contemporary culture of inner-city minority youth, we must provide them with the resources and opportunities to view the future with hope.

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1. Information on rap history found in Davey D's "Why Is Rap So Powerful?" and the University of Maryland's "A Brief History of Hip-Hop Culture"
 2. Information on MCs drawn from the University of Maryland's "Mcing: The Past" and "MCing: The Present" in "A Brief History of Hip-Hop Culture"
 3. According to historian Eric Wolfs "The Slave Trade", the vast majority of slaves captured and shipped to the United States came from West Africa's Gold Coast.
 4. As defined by the "African Glossary" of "The Kennedy Center Interactive African Odyssey"
 5. As defined by the "African Glossary" of "The Kennedy Center Interactive African Odyssey. Griot is the French term for the Mandingo word jali (m) or jalimusolu (fi). This is similar to the role played by the limusizi in Rwanda, the imbongi in Zulu, and the kwadwumfo in Ghana.
 6. Some word games that have been popular within the African-American community include "Signifying Monkey", "John the Conqueror", and "Stag 0 Lee." A more modern example is Double Dutch jump rope rhymes.

7. As quoted from Davey D's "Why Is Rap So Powerful?"
8. Another important cultural artifact of the African oral tradition is the importance of the spoken word in African-American religious life. Many African-American congregations emphasize the oratorical style of the preacher and involve the congregation through a call-and-response style of preaching. African-American preachers have been prominent community leaders, including Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Jesse Jackson.
9. In Dick Hebdige's *Cut 'n' Mix*, he writes: "By preserving African drumming traditions, by remembering African rhythms, the slaves could keep alive the memory of the freedom they had lost" (p.26)
10. Information gathered from Davey D's "Why Is Rap So Powerful?"
11. Hebdige's *Cut 'n' Mix* also states: "The second feature common to all traditional West African music is that it serves an important social function. As one writer puts it, music acts as a 'social glue', binding the people together as a group" (p.30)
12. According to Davey D's "Why Is Rap So Powerful?" African-American DJs played an important role in their communities and were some of the most powerful orators in the African-American community during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. applauded them for their work in the civil rights movement. Minister Louis Farrakhan did the same in 1980.
13. In 1998, rap outsold country, formerly the top-selling genre in the US, for the first time ever, selling more than 81 million CDs, tapes, and albums, according to the February 8, 1999 issue of *Time*. Farley writes: "[H]ip-hop, like every culture of resistance in this country, has been co-opted to sell fast-food, beer, liquor, and soda." S.Craig Watkins further discusses the unique market position of African-American youth in his book *Representing: Hip-hop culture and the production of black cinema*: "[A]t the same moment black youth have become the targets of a fiercely determined social and political backlash, they have also flowered as a source of entertainment upon which the growth and cross-fertilization of the various popular culture industries--film, television, music, sports, and advertising--have enabled new regimes of cultural production, performance, and representation to emerge. It is, in fact, a great irony that at the same time black youth are so prominently figured in the nation's war on drugs, the largest prison industrial complex build-up in history, and tightening welfare restrictions, they are equally prominent in the marketing of \$100 athletic shoes, the corporatization of collegiate athletics, and the breaking of new trends to a robust youth consumer economy"(pp. 1-2). The popularity of hip-hop can also be illustrated by the marketing success of Sprite soda. According to Farley's "Hip-hop nation", Sprite brand manager Pina Sciarra claims that after the company ran an ad campaign featuring rap music, the number of people who named Sprite as their favorite soda quadrupled. Farley also notes the economic success of the hip-hop label Def Jam records, which took in nearly \$200 million in 1998.
14. As quoted from Farley's article "Hip-hop nation".
15. According to music critic Daredevil of the hip-hop zine *The Bomb Hip-Hop Magazine*: "Mass popularity leads to oversaturation, which in turn leads to redundancy, predictability, stagnance of the form [...] Another factor in hip-hop's stunted musical growth is the industry's reliance on fashions, symbols, and stereotypes perpetuated through music videos."
16. According to *Time Magazine*, more than 70% of hip-hop albums are purchased by whites. The suburbs are now the major markets for hip-hop music. However, I believe that this is because of the tremendous buying power of wealthier suburban youth and the infusion of hip-hop into mainstream culture through movies, advertising, and MTV, not because hip-hop as a whole has been taken over from inner-city youth by suburban youth. Oliver Wang addresses the movement of hip-hop music across cultures in the zine *Addicted to Noise*: "While the gender barrier remains hard to break, DJs are one of the most diverse hip-hop communities, pioneered by African-Americans, innovated upon by Asian-Americans, and now dominated by DJs of all classes and cultures." According to playwright and hip-hop fan Danny Hoch, "Hip-hop is the future of language and culture in the multicultural society. It crosses all lines of color, race, economics, nationality, and gender, and hip-hop still has something to say" (p. xvii).

17. From the film *The Darker Side of Black*.
18. As quoted from Davey D's "Why Is Rap So Powerful?"
19. According to an *LA Times* article by D. James Romero, it is the commodification of rap and the demand for gangsta rap that allows the subgenre to thrive: "[C]ritics say the music industry and suburban audiences only work to keep the gangster game going, that is, young, white youth fuel America's voracious appetite for gangsta rap that encourages violence."
20. In the film *The Darker Side of Black*, African-American scholar Cornel West claims, "America is a gunfighter nation. It's a nihilistic response to a nihilistic situation."
21. As reported in *Time Magazine* February 8, 1999 in Farley's "Hip-hop nation."
22. As quoted from the film *The Darker Side of Black*.
23. In a March 10, 1996 *Boston Globe* article, Michael Saunders reports: "'Gangsta rap' songs are street tales told in ragged unblushing rhymes, where life is often a race to 'get paid and get laid' before a bullet stops the party. Women are usually absent from this million-record-selling landscape of guns and money, except in their roles as gold-digging 'bitches' and sex-dispensing 'hos'. This world is distinguished by its colors, the ones that identify friend or foe, and those cordoned behind yellow crime-scene tape: brown bodies with congealed blood, a lifeless maroon, and the red-rimmed eyes of a new statistic's mother."
24. This is similar to the prominence of the gun in reggae. In *The Darker Side of Black*, reggae artist Ranks provides justification for the presence of the gun in reggae music: "They just be preaching about the gun, because we see the gun dong such damage within our circle and our society--so we talk about the gun. What else can we do?"
25. As quoted from his *Boston Globe* article "Gangsta Warfare"
26. From the film *The Darker Side of Black*
27. From the film *The Darker Side of Black*
28. One example is Senator Joseph Lieberman, who has attacked the music industry, especially rap music, for inciting violence in youth. Henry Jenkins, Director of Media Studies at MIT, said in a 1997 interview with *Next Generation Magazine*, as quoted by the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression: "'I think [Sen. Lieberman's] focus is on the symptom rather than the problem. I think it's part of a larger denial of where the real violence in children's lives falls. Senator Lieberman and his political allies cry crocodile tears over violence in children's media and proceed to vote to cut down welfare funds for young children, encourage us to try juveniles as adults so that they're thrown into adult prisons, vote in favor of taking illegal immigrants' children out of public schools, and do relatively little about the financial support that dead-beat fathers owe to their children. We have a whole culture of economic deprivation and domestic violence, and these are the real problems confronting children."
29. According to a statement written for the Senate Hearing on Lyrics & Labeling, Nina Crowley, Director of the Massachusetts Music Industry Coalition expresses her belief that it is important to allow youth access to music as a means of fostering freedom of expression: "For many teenagers, one of the most important statements of who they are and what they believe, is their favorite band or the music they enjoy. Whether that music contains the political statements of a band like Rage Against the Machine, or the message of individuality of Marilyn Manson, the sexuality of Li'l Kim, or the affirmation of community of Public Enemy, teens express themselves through their musical preferences."
30. In a statement in Romero's *LA Times* article, rap mogul Simmons describes the unique function and significance of hip-hop music: "It gives voice to people who wouldn't otherwise have one. Rock 'n' roll never got to do what hip-hop does."
31. This is disputed in the article "Lyrics aren't lethal", as quoted from the Massachusetts Music Industry Coalition website: "Kids struggle to understand violence in society; not just in entertainment. It is difficult for a child who is taught in the home and in school that America is the land of opportunity to reconcile the fact that inner-city kids and adults are pushed to violent behavior in order to survive in neighborhoods where there is no opportunity, no services, and no rewards."

32. As reported by the Massachusetts Music Industry Coalition website.
33. *Time Magazine* reports that in recent years, Tommy Hilfiger has made nearly a billion dollars a year on its hip-hop-inspired apparel.
34. According to Saunders, "Hip-hop has forced advertisers, filmmakers, and writers to adopt 'street' signifiers like cornrows and terms like 'player hater'. Invisibility has been a long-standing metaphor for the status of blacks in America. Hip-hop has given invisibility a voice."
35. In his "Why Is Rap So Powerful?" Davey D explains the need that he sees for urban African-American youth to understand their history and the history of rap music: "My ideal hope is for all of us to become better educated. It's important that today's rappers learn their history and that folks who know sit them down and explain things to them ~ .1 Once this happens, hip-hop will move forward and reach its true potential."
36. Inner-city youth have played an important historical role in the early commercial success of hip-hop. According to a 199~ *Newsweek* article by John Leland and Allison Samuels: "Hip-hop was born of the drive to make the most of limited resources. When shut out of radio and TV, the companies made their own media. Labels developed street teams--corps of hungry urban youth looking for a break in the business and a few free CDs-4o get the word out. An outgrowth of the culture's mid-70s roots, when entrepreneurial DJs like Kool Di Herc and Afrika Bambaataa aggressively promoted their parties through graffiti-style fliers, street teams carpet-bomb urban neighborhoods and clubs with posters, stickers, fliers, a and even free cassettes of upcoming music.



Hip-hop music originated from a combination of traditionally African-American forms of music--including jazz, soul, gospel, and reggae. It was created by working-class African-Americans, who, like Herc, took advantage of available tools--vinyl records and turntables--to invent a new form of music that both expressed and shaped the culture of black New York City youth in the 1970s. While rap's history appears brief its relation to the African oral tradition, which provides rap with much of its current social significance, also roots rap in a long-standing history of oral historians, lyrical Hip-hop culture is a subculture, which is said to have begun with the work of DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five, and Afrika Bambaataa. The four main aspects, or "elements", of hip hop culture are MCing (rapping), DJing, urban inspired art/tagging (graffiti), and b-boying (or breakdancing). The most known "extended" elements are beatboxing, hip hop fashion, hip hop slang.