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Chapter 1: How Has Hip-Hop Shaped Modern Society?

Overview: Hip-Hop Has Had a Global Impact
Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett

With its origins firmly in the African American community, hip-hop has evolved to become a global cultural community whose members are united by a common language and knowledge base. Hip-hoppers come from diverse backgrounds but share a set of understandings about aesthetic, social, intellectual, and political identities, and about beliefs, behaviors, and values. Hip-hop ideology influences young people throughout the world.

Hip-Hop Defines Today’s Youth Culture Worldwide
Dalton Higgins

Hip-hop has come a long way since its beginnings in the South Bronx in the early 1970s. What was once a local street scene created primarily by and for African American youths has grown into a global music and cultural phenomenon. The unique adaptability of the genre has allowed it to be adopted in countries from Japan to Nairobi, giving voice to disenfranchised youth worldwide.

Hip-Hop Is a Powerful Force for Global Sociopolitical Change
Sujatha Fernandez

Hip-hop is the most popular music style in the world, and it has become a major player in the democracy movement in the Middle East and Africa. Political rap songs have ignited powerful protest movements and have become the soundtrack for revolution in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere. Rap’s ability to give voice to the oppressed and to quickly spread viewpoints around the world make it a powerful force for sociopolitical change.
American Rap Has Lost Its Political Voice to Apathy

Mark Gunn

The origins of American rap lie in efforts to raise political and social awareness, so it is especially disappointing that today’s rap is so heavily commercialized and focused on glitz, guns, and girls rather than on the serious social and economic justice issues that affect communities of color. The hip-hop generation must set aside its apathy and put the political voice back in American rap.

Rap Lyrics Are a Literary Art Form

Alexs Pate

The foundation of rap music is rhythm and rhyme, and rap/poetry is a significant mode of African American linguistic expression. Most raps are written first as poems, and to understand the true significance of rap, one must acknowledge the poetry inherent in the form. Rap is the most vibrant element in African American literature today.

Chapter 2: Is Hip-Hop a Negative Influence on Society?

Overview: The Hip-Hop Generation

J.D. Gravenor

Anyone who wants to understand youth culture must pay close attention to hip-hop. The wide range of visual and physical expressions encompassed by hip-hop—from rapping and DJing to graffiti and breakdancing—have all helped influence the look and style of what has become the dominant youth subculture today.

Yes: Hip-Hop Is a Negative Influence on Society

Rap Music Is Harmful to African American Communities

E. Faye Williams
Every day, the African American community is bombarded with misogyny, violence, and obscenity in the form of gangsta rap. Greedy corporate executives have capitalized on the alienation of young African American men and women to fuel an entertainment industry that is destructive to African American culture. With the right of free speech comes responsibility, and the public airwaves should not be permitted to present an immoral, degrading image of an entire race of people for entertainment.

Girls Are Especially Vulnerable to Hip-Hop’s Hypersexual Message

Beatrice Koehler-Derrick

Girls as young as five or six imitate the hypersexualized dance moves that are so common in rap and hip-hop videos, thereby internalizing the idea that so-called video vixen behavior is the right way to attract male attention. Rap needs a new generation of women to break free of the objectified female stereotypes and to model more positive behaviors for young girls.

No: Hip-Hop Is Not a Negative Influence on Society

Rap Has the Potential to Expose Social Injustice

Jeff Chang

Rap began as an inherently political art form, shining a spotlight on police brutality and socioeconomic inequalities in the inner cities. However, today’s version of so-called gangsta rap has turned into a mainstream commercial force and moved away from its roots as a protest medium. When rap “keeps it real” instead of glamorizing thug life and going after corporate success, it functions as an essential voice for the social injustice movement.

American Rap Can Promote Political Empowerment

Lester Spence
President Barack Obama is living proof of the influence of hip-hop in American politics. During his election campaign, Obama gave himself an instant cool factor by making a gesture that young people recognized as coming from a popular rapper. It showed that he was in touch with the hip-hop generation, and it helped inspire young people to vote. Since his election, hip-hop has become a platform to critique Obama’s performance.

**Hip-Hop Gives Youths a Needed Outlet for Self-Expression**

*Carolee Walker*

Young people in urban environments need a way to deal with the serious stresses of their lives, and hip-hop is a way for them to tell their stories and express their concerns, fears, and causes for anger. The narratives in the music appeal to a broader audience of suburban youths as well because it taps into their own sense of alienation. The majority of hip-hop is positive and consciousness raising.

**Chapter 3: Is Rap Music Harmful to Women?**

**Overview: Rap Lyrics Face Scrutiny**

*Brian Garrity*

Major record labels are coming under increasing public pressure to censure offensive content in gangsta rap and hip-hop music, though it is uncertain how they will respond to the media scrutiny. While such controversy is not new to the industry, the current battle could significantly change the power dynamics in the music business. Some experts see this as an opportune time for the recording industry to ask hard questions about itself and adopt, rather than oppose, progressive values when it comes to publishing and promoting rap music.

**Yes: Rap Music Is Harmful to Women**

*Rap Music Objectifies, Degrades, and Exploits Black Women*  
*Tracy Sharpley-Whiting*
The misogyny in Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia and the fact of his long-term sexual relationship with a slave woman established a racist and sexist trend in US culture, which unfortunately continues today in rap music. Despite their significant contributions, African American women remain degraded and objectified in rap music, and rap performers and record labels make millions off doing so.

Take the Debate Over Degrading Rap Videos Off Mute

Michele Goodwin

The horrible images portrayed of black girls and women in rap videos could lead to violence. Male rappers portray women as hypersexual, insolent, and irresponsible. A public conversation discussing the impact of rap’s degrading images of women is long overdue.

No: Not All Rap Music Is Harmful to Women

Hip-Hop Feminism Can Change the Hip-Hop Community and Society

Akoto Ofori-Atta

Even though they may not be as well known, there have always been female voices who have carried the banner of hip-hop feminism. In years past, that meant fighting misogyny in rap and working to get female MCs time at the mic. Today’s hip-hop feminists are moving their agenda forward by incorporating a women-centric worldview in their music, so the realities of the hip-hop generation’s women are given voice.

The Hip-Hop Community Works to Address Misogyny Issues

Davey D

Many in the hip-hop community acknowledge the serious problem of misogyny in rap music. A group of black and Latina activists has come together as the “We Are the 44% Coalition” to keep the issue of sexual violence against girls and women on the forefront of the hip-hop community’s consciousness. As musicians learn more about sexual violence and hear stories from women who have been affected by it, the hope is that they will become more self-reflective and voluntarily move the industry in a more positive direction.
Chapter 4: Does Rap Music Perpetuate Violence?

Overview: The Complex Debate About Violence and Rap

Tricia Rose
The controversy about violence in rap music is long-standing and complex. Proponents argue that rap exposes socioeconomic disparities and bears witness to harsh urban realities. Opponents argue that rap simply glorifies and encourages violence, and thus causes more of it. The truth of the matter is not as simple as either of these views.

Yes: Rap Music Perpetuates Violence

The Rap Music Industry Exploits Violence for Profit

L. Brent Bozell III
Record companies have made millions by spreading a message that glorifies the violent and criminal thug lifestyle. The payment that rappers receive for their songs does not justify their participation in violent and degrading music. Consumers should not purchase music from record companies or rappers that promote violence for the sake of profit.

Violent Rap Lyrics Make Listeners More Accepting of Violence

Karen Dill
The media plays a large role in creating culture, and it is one of the main ways that people learn how they should act, feel, and think. Therefore, it is troubling, from a psychological standpoint, that rap music is filled with so much violence. Research shows that watching violent rap videos makes people more accepting of relationship violence, increases aggressive thoughts and feelings, and amplifies adversarial sexual beliefs. Rap music in these ways directly affects social behavior and beliefs.

No: Rap Music Does Not Perpetuate Violence

Violent Rap Lyrics Do Not Affect Listener Behavior or Attitudes

Jennifer Copley
There is a growing body of research that investigates whether listening to rap music causes aggressive or deviant behavior. A variety of studies have been conducted, and while the results are somewhat mixed, there is no consistent evidence that listening to rap music significantly influences behaviors or attitudes. The negative effects that some people ascribe to rap may be caused by subconscious racism.

**Gangsta Rappers Can Be Effective Violence Prevention Messengers**

*Shoshana Walter*

A rapper with a violent criminal past and current pending charges may seem like an unlikely candidate to teach young people about the importance of nonviolence and conflict resolution, but that is exactly the kind of role model that can be effective in reaching jaded inner-city youths. Violence-prevention programs are increasingly trying to recruit such youth mentors because of their credibility with young people.

**Organizations to Contact**

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