

Is hip-hop music beneficial to young listeners?

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SUPPORTERS ARGUE

Hip-hop is a diverse art form that has created jobs in impoverished inner-city communities and given an artistic voice to politically and socially marginalized youth. The ethnic and racial diversity of hip-hop's fan base helps to break down cultural barriers. Though some types of rap music promote immorality, that is not true of the genre as a whole.

OPPONENTS ARGUE

Though rap started out as a force for positive social change, popular subgenres of hip-hop such as "gangsta rap" have since eroded much of the art form's value to society. Impressionable young people are negatively affected by rappers' obsession with guns, drugs, sex, and material possessions. Since record companies do not seem to care about negative content as long as it sells albums, parents should assume a greater role in regulating their children's listening habits.

Rap music, also known as hip-hop, is a popular art form, distinguished by spoken, rhyming lyrics that are delivered rhythmically over a musical beat. Having risen from humble origins on the streets of New York City during the mid-1970s, hip-hop has since become a multifaceted cultural force, having an impact on art, politics and the economy. Indeed, observers say, hip-hop is more than just music. The culture that has blossomed around rap music in recent decades has influenced fashion, dance, television, film and—perhaps most controversially—the attitudes of American youth.



Rapper 50 Cent (born Curtis Jackson) is one of several popular rappers who have recently risen to stardom due, in part, to their songs' controversial lyrics.

Evan Agostini/Getty Images

Of particular concern to some parents, teachers, politicians and social critics are the violent lyrics and imagery found in some rap songs and music videos. Those critics of the genre say that hip-hop glorifies a violent and immoral lifestyle by promoting derogatory views of women and glamorizing drugs and alcohol, among other things. With

hip-hop's saturation of the nation's mainstream culture, they warn, rappers' negative messages are having a greater impact on young people than ever before.

At the same time, hip-hop also has staunch defenders who identify the music and the culture it has spawned as a force for positive social change. Supporters say that rap music has provided many people, particularly those within the nation's African-American community, with an important form of artistic self-expression and economic self-empowerment. Backers acknowledge that some of the most popular hip-hop artists of recent years impart dubious moral values to young, impressionable listeners. However, they contend that it is ultimately parents' responsibility to regulate what type of entertainment their children listen to or watch.

For many observers, hip-hop's status as a controversial cultural phenomenon was cemented during the 1990s, when a high-profile conflict between rap artists on the East and West coasts of the U.S. gripped both the nation's media establishment and hip-hop community. Hostilities reached a peak between late 1996 and early 1997, when two well-known rappers representing each coast—Tupac Shakur, from California, and Notorious B.I.G. (born Christopher Wallace), from New York—were murdered. The killings, which were dubbed by some as "assassinations" and remain unsolved as of October 2005, ushered in an era of reflection among artists, fans and music-industry executives alike.

But though the tension between rappers on the East and West coasts has subsequently subsided, critics remain concerned about the way hip-hop music influences the thoughts, actions and values of young people. It is not the first time that an older generation of Americans has expressed concern about a relatively new form of music corrupting their children. In the early 20th century, for example, many warned that jazz music would cause young people to adopt relaxed attitudes toward drug use and sexual activity. During the 1950s, the same concerns arose with the advent of rock and roll. But despite the controversy those two genres generated as they entered the nation's mainstream culture, they are now widely viewed as two of the most important American cultural innovations of the 20th century.

Since hip-hop became accepted as a mainstream art form in the early 1990s, the relationship between rap music and youth morality has stirred an increasingly heated debate. Do hip-hop artists need to clean up their act, or are they simply creating the music that listeners want to hear? Should violent content or imagery in hip-hop lyrics or videos be censored? And do all types of rap music perpetuate negative messages?

Critics of hip-hop culture's impact on young people allege that rap music is filled with references to violence and drugs. Additionally, many popular rappers degrade women and homosexuals in their songs and their videos, opponents say. Since children and teenagers are easily influenced by things they hear on the radio and see on television, such corrupting messages can lead young people morally astray, they warn.

Opponents also decry rappers' obsession with material wealth and fondness for sexual promiscuity. Those attitudes serve as further evidence that rap music embodies vice, rather than virtue, they contend. While the music industry should exercise greater restraint over the music it releases for public consumption, parents should help limit hip-hop's impact on young people by monitoring the music they listen to, critics say.

Hip-hop music's supporters counter by arguing that although some rap may feature frank portrayals of gang violence and the nation's illicit drug trade, it is simply illustrating what life is like for many artists who are born and raised in impoverished areas of urban America. As a result, backers say, rap music allows listeners to gain a greater understanding of the trials and tribulations experienced by a part of society that is often ignored by the nation's mainstream media. Furthermore, proponents insist, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees Americans the right to free speech, meaning that hip-hop artists are entitled to sing about anything they want.

Rap music's defenders also contend that hip-hop has generally had a positive influence both on its fans and the global community during the past three decades. Noting that societies throughout the world have embraced and adopted hip-hop, backers say that its near-universal appeal has allowed devoted fans, who share a common appreciation of the art form, to break down some cultural and racial barriers between young people.

Rise of the Hip-Hop Generation

At its inception in the mid-1970s, hip-hop drew on a variety of musical influences, including rock and roll, funk, soul, rhythm and blues (R&B) and disco. While those genres helped shape rap music's emerging sound, perhaps no style of music influenced the burgeoning culture surrounding hip-hop as much as "dub" and reggae music from the Caribbean island of Jamaica. Those musical styles were traditionally accompanied by powerful sound systems and a form of vocal performance known as "toasting," whereby disc jockeys (DJs) or other performers would accompany the music with spoken words delivered in rhythmic fashion.

During the 1960s and 1970s, many Jamaicans immigrating to the U.S. settled in New York City, bringing their musical traditions with them. Many of them settled in the Bronx, a New York borough beset by large-scale poverty and problems with drugs and gang violence. Eventually, young Jamaican immigrants, along with other New Yorkers, began to throw parties in Bronx parks, recreation centers and apartments, and even on street corners.

A common fixture of those gatherings was the DJ, who would play (or "spin") popular records on a set of turntables and utilize a powerful sound system to induce the crowd to dance and enjoy itself. For many, the parties offered a welcome respite from the violence and gang warfare that often plagued various neighborhoods in the Bronx. By and large, observers said, the gatherings fostered a positive atmosphere, where residents were brought together by their common affection for good music. Some even credited the parties with curbing crime in the community.

At times, a vocalist, known as the "master of ceremonies" (also referred to as an m.c. or "emcee") would speak over the DJ's music with the aid of a microphone. Utilizing the Jamaican art of toasting, emcees would organize interactive call-and-response chants with the crowd or simply sing or rhyme lyrics over the beat of a particular song. Gradually the role of emcees at such parties became more prominent, overshadowing the role of DJs by the early 1980s. Ultimately, that paved the way for the emergence of rap music's current form, where the rapper is the featured performer at hip-hop shows.

By the late 1970s, it had become apparent to audience members and other observers that a new form of music was being born. Labelled "hip-hop," it spread quickly throughout New York City and to other African-American urban communities around the country. As the music became more popular and better-known, a culture blossomed around it. Audience members attending hip-hop shows developed a unique style of dancing known as "break dancing." Outside of clubs, graffiti artists, influenced by the self-expression inherent in hip-hop music, spray-painted anything in sight, ranging from subway cars to highway overpasses to the sides of buildings.

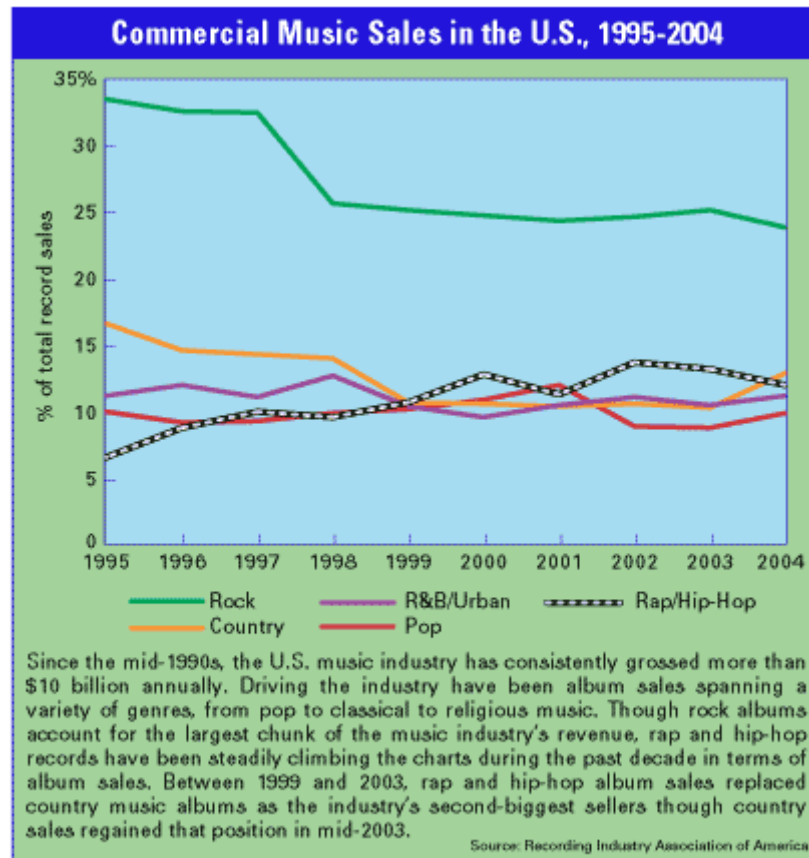
By 1980, hip-hop music had begun to receive some airplay on commercial radio stations around the U.S., largely due to catchy songs such as "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang. Though the first stations to play rap songs were urban radio outlets that catered to a predominantly African-American audience, hip-hop also attracted the attention of white city residents as well.

Throughout the 1980s, as rap music's momentum built, many popular hip-hop groups began to increasingly feature politically charged subject matter in their lyrics. The emergence of "socially conscious" rap music dealt with problems experienced in urban America, such as drug addiction, gun crime, domestic abuse and disillusionment with the nation's political establishment.

For many rappers and rap fans at the time, hip-hop provided an accurate, honest depiction of city life that was conspicuously absent from other media sources, such as television. Chuck D (born Carlton Ridenhour), frontman of the influential rap group Public Enemy famously declared that hip-hop music had become the "CNN of black America," referring to the Cable News Network (CNN), an Atlanta, Ga.-based global media outlet. With a growing number of rap artists using hip-hop as a platform to call for social progress and impart positive messages to listeners, the genre entered into a so-called Golden Age during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Commercialization of Hip-Hop Produces Mixed Blessings

Around the same time, rap music entered the nation's popular-music mainstream via radio stations that catered primarily to relatively wealthy white audiences located in suburban communities. Hip-hop proved popular with those new listeners, who purchased hip-hop records en masse, generating unprecedented sales figures for the genre.



Jeremy Eagle

One of the new subgenres spawned by hip-hop music at the time was so-called gangsta rap, a gritty form of rap that originated on the streets of Los Angeles and in other urban areas in California. Gangsta rap albums were eagerly scooped up by hip-hop's increasingly white audience, who seemed fascinated by rappers' tales of gang warfare, corrupt police, drug dealing and sexual promiscuity. In many ways, musical analysts said, gangsta rap was the antithesis of the more socially conscious hip-hop music that had, until recently, been the public face of hip-hop culture.

Laced with profanity, gangsta rap stood in stark contrast to any form of hip-hop music that had preceded it. But since gangsta-rap albums were selling briskly, record-industry executives, who were determined to maximize their profits, were loath to take such music off the shelves of the nation's music stores. Controversy soon followed. Concerned parents charged that gangsta rap was in effect polluting their children's ears by advocating violence and imparting negative values in its songs.

By the mid-1990s, major U.S. media outlets had begun publishing stories about the controversy brewing over the purported connection between hip-hop music and violence. Fueling such stories was an escalating war of words between rappers on the East and West coasts of the U.S. Hip-hop groups from those two parts of the country constantly threatened one another on albums, at shows and in interviews—a trend that concerned hip-hop's supporters and critics alike. The tensions boiled over between 1996 and 1997, with the murders of Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. But while the nation's hip-hop community mourned the loss of two of rap's most promising stars, rap critics alleged that the killings were proof that the level of violence in hip-hop music had spiraled out of control.

In fact, gangsta rap and other so-called hard-core rap constituted only a fraction of the music being released by the U.S. music industry. But due to the controversy surrounding it, gangsta rap was a favored topic for televised news

programs and newspaper reports. Some hip-hop fans began to complain that the media's extensive coverage of violence in hip-hop was conveying the impression that other, nonviolent forms of rap did not even exist.

Even the nation's political establishment began to respond to the outrage felt by some Americans regarding the perceived violence of much contemporary music. Lawmakers considered rap, along with heavy-metal rock music, to be a likely factor in antisocial behavior in U.S. children and teens. Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D, Conn.) went so far as to publicly discuss the possibility of censoring violent lyrics in commercial music.

In November 1997, Congress held hearings to explore the impact of violent or sexual content in music videos and songs on American youth. Dr. Frank Palumbo, representing the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), testified before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs subcommittee on oversight of government management, restructuring, and the District of Columbia. The AAP had released public statements to the media in 1989 and 1995 expressing concern about children's exposure to negativity in the media, whether it be on television, on the radio or in recordings.

"To date, no studies have documented a cause-and-effect relationship between sexually explicit or violent lyrics and adverse behavioral effects" in children and teenagers, Palumbo said. "Yet there is some music that communicates potentially harmful health messages, especially when it reaches a vulnerable audience."

Though no conclusive findings were presented during Palumbo's testimony, many adults already appeared convinced that hip-hop music was having a corrosive effect on the country. A 1999 poll, for example, found that 53% of Americans thought that rap had a negative influence on society. (In comparison, a 2002 poll conducted by NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* found that 34% of Americans thought that rock and roll has had a negative impact on American culture.)

Also during the late 1990s, Eminem (born Marshall Mathers), a white rapper from Michigan, emerged on the national hip-hop scene, quickly selling millions of albums. His lyrics, which were often filled with references to violence, drugs and sex, were appealing to his core fan base of white, suburban youths. However, a diverse coalition of critics quickly formed to rally against him. Parents, teachers, conservative-minded public policy organizations and gay-rights advocacy groups all publicly denounced Eminem, claiming that he openly promoted antisocial behavior, violence and intolerance for homosexuals.

Indeed, the outcry against Eminem—the latest in a slew of offensive, financially successful rappers, in the eyes of hip-hop's critics—did have some impact. In 2001, for example, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) levied a \$7,000 fine against a radio station in Colorado for playing a popular song by the artist. And during the 2000-01 academic year, a sixth-grade teacher in Iowa ended up in trouble after allowing some of her students to conduct a research project on Eminem. Some parents complained, alleging that their children were being exposed to obscene language while researching the rapper on the Internet. After the local school board pressured the teacher, Cassie Johnson, to terminate the projects, she refused and chose to resign instead. [See 2004 [Broadcast Decency Rules](#)]



In 2001, Russell Simmons (second from left), a well-known hip-hop entrepreneur, hosted a "Hip-Hop Summit" in an effort to address negative perceptions of rap music in the mainstream media. The event attracted artists, record-label executives and politicians, among others.

Scott Gries/ImageDirect

In an effort to examine the public's negative perceptions about rap music, Russell Simmons, a well-known hip-hop entrepreneur, organized a "Hip-Hop Summit" in New York City in 2001. The high-profile summit attracted members of Congress, artists such as Sean Combs and Will Smith, representatives from the music industry and prominent members of the nation's African-American community, such as Minister Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam. Among other things, the people who attended the meeting agreed that hip-hop albums containing violent or profane lyrics should be accompanied by warning labels designed to alert young people or their parents about the nature of the albums' content.

But while outbreaks of violence within the hip-hop community have marred rap music's public image during the past decade, hip-hop has occasionally garnered positive media attention as well. For example, at the 2004 Grammy Awards, the nation's premier music-awards ceremony, hip-hop duo OutKast took home the award for album of the year—the first time a rap group had won the award.

Rap Music Promotes Violence, Critics Assert

In general, critics of hip-hop music say that rappers are too focused on violence, sex and material wealth to have a positive influence on young listeners. Rather than impart uplifting messages to their audience, hip-hop artists tend to focus solely on the most negative aspects of life in urban America, opponents say. By absorbing the messages present in most popular rap songs, critics allege, impressionable children and teens are becoming morally corrupted.

In the view of many opponents of rap music, no one subgenre of rap is more responsible for the subversion of American youth's moral values than gangsta rap. Those critics contend that, though hip-hop music started out as a positive force in the African-American community, it has since lost its way. "Hip-hop...was intended to celebrate the revival of the age-old rhymed recitations of life's problems and aspirations set to music," said C. DeLores Tucker, founder of the National Congress of Black Women. "Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, some unscrupulous elements hijacked this influential conduit to our youth and loaded it with the evil and debasing, hate-driven messages in the lyrics we now know as gangsta rap," she added.

Opponents of rap music also lament the manner in which hip-hop artists portray women. They note that, in many popular rap songs and music videos, women are insulted and treated as sexual objects. Those depictions and images can have a very demeaning effect on young women, they warn.

Some prominent contemporary civil-rights leaders in the nation's African-American community, such as Rev. Al Sharpton, a 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, have chastised rappers for their derogatory treatment of women. Sharpton charges that hip-hop artists, under pressure from record labels to sell albums, might say or do anything in order to generate profits. "Don't let some record executive tell you that cursing out your mama is in style. Anytime you perpetuate a slave mentality that desecrates women and that desecrates our race in the name of a record I consider you a well-paid slave," he says.

Even some artists within the U.S. hip-hop community have expressed discontent with the state of contemporary rap music. Those critics argue that rappers are too often focused on material wealth such as cars, jewelry and expensive clothes, rather than on important social issues that concern impoverished inner-city communities. As a result, they say, hip-hop artists are not providing meaningful inspiration to their young fans. "Basically hip-hop is promoting a dog-eat-dog, greed-influenced, me-first capitalist ideology," members of the Florida-based rap group Dead Prez say. "Now that's an awful way to live."

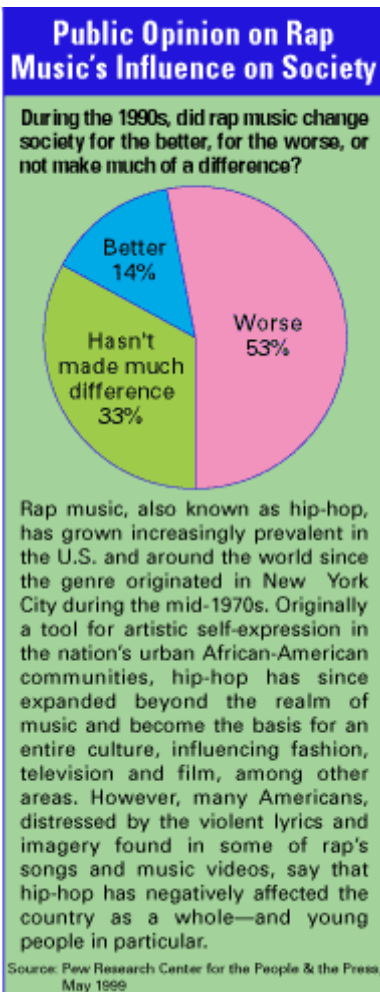
In addition to blaming rappers for communicating negative messages to young listeners, critics also condemn record-company executives for the phenomenon. Regardless of parents' concerns about the negativity prevalent in popular rap music, those opponents say, businessmen in the music industry are simply interested in making as much money as possible.

In an ideal world, critics say, record companies would focus on releasing hip-hop albums that embodied positive values in an effort to help children grow into responsible adults. But given the music industry's moral bankruptcy with regard to the rap albums they release, they argue, it is up to parents to ultimately regulate what young people should or should not hear. According to the AAP's Palumbo:

It is in the children's best interest to listen to lyrics or to watch videos that are not violent, sexist, drug-oriented, or antisocial. Parents should take an active role in monitoring music that their children are exposed to and which they can purchase, as well as the videos they watch. Ultimately, it is the parent's responsibility to monitor what their children listen to and view.

Hip-Hop Is a Unifying Force, Supporters Say

Many of rap music's defenders agree with critics' assertion that some popular types of hip-hop—such as gangsta rap and hard-core rap—exalt an immoral lifestyle. But while opponents tend to believe that those subgenres represent the entire scope of hip-hop music, supporters stress that there are many other forms of rap that advocate social responsibility and promote positive moral values. As a result, many proponents decry the fact that hip-hop music, as a whole, generates negative publicity in the media, since many rap artists denounce violence and material greed.



Jeremy Eagle

Supporters contend that during the past three decades of its existence, hip-hop culture has had a generally positive effect on fans both in the U.S. and around the world. Rap music, with its uniquely diverse fan base, helps to promote racial unity, backers assert. DJ Kool Herc (born Clive Campbell), one of the original pioneers of hip-hop music, says the genre "has universal appeal." He continues:

It has given young people a way to understand their world, whether they are from the suburbs or the city. I think hip-hop has bridged the culture gap. It brings white kids together with Black kids, brown kids with yellow kids. They all have something in common that they love. It gets past the stereotypes and people hating each other because of those stereotypes.

Some backers applaud hip-hop music for creating an honest portrayal of the tough nature of street life in many U.S. cities. Such music fosters introspection, they say, and allows artists to both express themselves personally and represent their communities. Furthermore, the pursuit of a career in the rap business has provided many young inner-city residents with an opportunity to support themselves financially, defenders assert. Rap music has "accentuated the profound reality of Black culture and has given hundreds and thousands of young people a viable means of making a living and furthermore encourages millions of people around the globe to examine their own lives," says Michael Eric Dyson, a humanities professor at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

The stark portrayal of urban life often featured in hip-hop songs also serves an important role in society, backers insist. Even if rap is sometimes negative in tone, they contend, it serves a valuable purpose by conveying to large audiences the frustration felt by many residents of politically and socially marginalized inner-city neighborhoods. Consequently, Kevin Powell, an author who frequently discusses hip-hop culture, argues that the anger expressed in many rap songs can be blamed on American society, rather than on immoral rappers. Powell says:

I think [hip-hop] music is merely a reflection of the conditions in our communities, which for the most part, have been ignored by the national leadership. Hip-hop is a reaction to the alienation, to disenfranchisement, and...to oppression. The finger should be pointed at a society which allows incredible misery to go on to the point where it infiltrates our popular music.

Other proponents of hip-hop music point out that U.S. rappers, like all other Americans, enjoy freedom of expression under the First Amendment. Though some listeners may be offended by the content of rap lyrics, supporters contend, hip-hop artists are legally entitled to discuss any subject material they desire. As a result, they say, lawmakers should cease issuing warnings about potentially censoring violent or offensive music, since banning such content would violate artists' constitutional rights. Simmons observes:

Throughout American history, the young and creative culture has always been accused of crossing the line.... The attacks from the mainstream on the hip-hop community's First Amendment rights to have freedom of speech are wrong and unconstitutional. In this country's past, no matter how different the points of view on various issues have been, we have worked hard not to place infringements on our democratic right to express [ourselves].

Finally, some supporters of rap music share the view of critics that it is the responsibility of parents, rather than rappers, to protect children from negativity in music. "I don't believe any form of entertainment is harming our youth," asserts Master P (born Percy Miller), a popular rapper from Louisiana. "It is up to parents to raise their own children and teach them."

The Future of Hip-Hop in the U.S.

Though once dismissed as a passing fad in the 1980s and early 1990s, hip-hop has proven that it has staying power. Though it remains as controversial as ever among parents, teachers and politicians, rap music is listened to by millions of young fans around the country and around the world.

Will rap music retain its position as one of the country's most controversial forms of entertainment? Or will the debate surrounding the values embodied by hip-hop culture eventually subside, like the controversies that swirled around jazz and rock and roll during the 20th century? The answers to those questions are unclear, observers say, since hip-hop's supporters and opponents continue to vigorously disagree over whether rap is a valuable American cultural innovation or simply a bastion of immoral values masquerading as art.

"The hip-hop culture is just like electricity," says Rev. Sharpton. "It can be used negatively or positively. The same electric current that lights up your house can also electrocute you. We must encourage the proper use of hip-hop culture. We are all influenced by the hip-hop generation."

Hip-Hop Culture Update (July 2009)

Since ICOF last covered hip-hop culture in November 2005, several high-profile rap artists have faced jail time for felonies ranging from theft to drug-related charges and a Grammy award-winning rapper convicted of illegal weapon possession was sentenced to community service. Among the key events:

- A jury acquitted hip-hop music mogul Irv Gotti and his brother, Chris Gotti, of charges of money laundering on December 2, 2005, in a U.S. District Court in New York City. Prosecutors had accused the Gotti brothers of funneling \$1 million of drug money for drug kingpin Kenneth (Supreme) McGriff through their record label, The Inc. The hip-hop record label, formerly known as Murder Inc., had previously been partnered with another rap label, Def Jam Music group.
- Twenty-four-year-old rapper Young Buck faced an assault charge for stabbing a man at a rap music awards show in November 2004 after the man threw a punch at Buck's mentor and fellow rapper, Dr. Dre. On

December 12, 2005, a Los Angeles County Superior Court sentenced Buck to three years' probation and 80 hours of community service after Buck pleaded no contest to the charge.

- Rap artist Proof, a member of Eminem's rap group D12, was shot and killed at a Detroit nightclub on Eight Mile Road on April 11, 2006. Proof had reportedly shot 35-year-old Keith Bender before Bender's cousin, Mario Etheridge, returned fire in what he claimed was self-defense. Bender died two days after the shooting. Proof, whose real name was Deshaun Holton, had been a close friend of Eminem. A Detroit judge sentenced Etheridge to time served and a \$2,000 fine for gun charges linked to Proof's shooting.
- The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inducted early hip-hop group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five during its 22nd annual induction ceremony held March 12, 2007. The honor marked the first induction of a rap group to the hall. On April 4, 2009, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inducted a second hip-hop group, Run-DMC.
- West coast rapping legend Snoop Dogg pled guilty to felony gun and drug charges on April 11, 2007, and was sentenced to five years' probation and 800 hours of community service. Later that month, Australia's immigration ministry denied Snoop Dogg entry into the country, where he was to host MTV's Australian Music Awards. The immigration minister described the rapper as "not the sort of bloke we want in this country." Snoop Dogg had twice been banned from entering Great Britain.
- On January 23, 2008, a New York City court sentenced rapper and movie actor Trevor Smith, known as Busta Rhymes, to three years probation, 10 days of community service and a \$1,250 fine for assault, driving while intoxicated and driving with a suspended license. The offenses related to four separate incidents that took place in 2006 and 2007.
- Southern rapper T.I. pled guilty to three charges of illegal weapons possession on March 27, 2008, in an Atlanta, Georgia, Court. The court ordered T.I. to complete at least 1,000 hours serving as a youth counselor before his sentencing scheduled for March 2009. A judge sentenced the rapper to one year and a day in prison, the minimum punishment allowed for the federal weapons charge, on March 27, 2009, after finding that he had successfully completed his community service requirements.
- On April 7, 2008, the *Los Angeles Times* retracted a story it had published in March about the 1994 assault on hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur. The article had pointed to alleged records from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) which were later proven to be forgeries. According to the counterfeit FBI report, two industry associates of hip-hop producer Sean (Diddy) Combs, later known as P. Diddy, had orchestrated the attack in order to impress Combs. An incarcerated con man was suspected of forging the documents.
- An investigative Web site probed the criminal history of R&B singer and rapper Akon, who had built part of his image as a hip-hop entertainer around claims of having led a major car-theft ring and served extensive prison time. The Web site, The Smoking Gun, published an article on April 16, 2008, saying its research had uncovered only one gun possession felony for which Akon served probation time, and one charge of car theft which was later dropped. According to the investigation, Akon had served only a few months in jail.
- New York Governor David Paterson pardoned hip-hop pioneer Slick Rick, or Ricky Walters, on May 23, 2008, for an attempted murder conviction in 1991. Walters, who had served five years in prison after convicted, faced renewed efforts by the U.S. government in 2006 to deport him to his native Britain. After the pardon, U.S. immigration officials could no longer deport Walters on the grounds of his attempted-murder conviction.
- Already serving jail time, rapper DMX was sentenced to another 90 days in jail and a minimum of 18 months probation on December 9, 2008, by a Phoenix, Arizona court. Among other charges, the hip-hop artist had pled guilty to several felonies, including theft, possession of marijuana, possession of narcotic drugs and a misdemeanor count of animal cruelty.

Discussion Questions

1) How do you think rap music has influenced mainstream culture in the U.S.? Do you think it has been a force for positive change or negative change?

- 2) Many critics of hip-hop music say rap lyrics' frequent references to violence, drugs and sex promote immoral values that are easily absorbed by young people. To what degree do you think children and teenagers are influenced by the shows they watch on television or the music they listen to?
- 3) Do you think that popular rappers, due to their celebrity status, need to act as role models to their fans? Why or why not?
- 4) Some historians say that the controversy currently surrounding rap music is similar to the controversies that accompanied the advent of jazz music and rock and roll music during the 20th century-two art forms that are now considered important American cultural innovations. How do you think hip-hop culture might be viewed by Americans 50 years from now?
- 5) Observe your classmates or people in your community. Do you see any evidence that hip-hop culture has influenced your school or town?

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Contact Information

Information on how to contact organizations that are either mentioned in the discussion of hip-hop culture or can provide additional information on the subject is listed below:

The Universal Federation for the Preservation of Hip Hop Culture
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Telephone: (718) 402-4087
Internet: www.zulunation.com

National Congress of Black Women
8484 Georgia Avenue
Suite 420
Silver Spring, Md. 20910
Telephone: (301) 562-8000
Internet: www.npcbw.org

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554
Telephone: (888) 225-5322
Internet: www.fcc.gov

Keywords

For further information about the ongoing debate over hip-hop culture, search for the following words and terms in electronic databases and other publications:

Misogyny
Tupac Shakur
Media violence
Eminem
Censorship

Citation Information MLA Chicago Manual of Style

“Hip-Hop Culture.” *Issues & Controversies*. Infobase Learning, 6 July 2009. Web. 28 Aug. 2015.
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