

AFRICANA STUDIES 214: HIP HOP CULTURE AND POLITICS



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Africana Studies 214: Hip Hop Culture and
Politics --Professor Daniel Davis

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Black Power Era - Precursor to Hip Hop

Introduction to Module

Immediately following the civil rights movement, the next distinct period in African American history, which immediately preceded the hip hop era, was the Black Power Era. This era witnessed the Black Power Movement, which began as a revolutionary movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It emphasized racial pride, economic empowerment, and the creation of political and cultural institutions ([Citation](#)). This week, we discuss the tenets, motivations, events, and impact of the Black Power movement. The progress made during the civil rights movement, namely, the complete recognition of African Americans "American-ness" as U.S. citizens allowed for figures during the Black Power era to demand society to recognize their "African-ness." The accomplishments, philosophies, and cultural norms of the Black Power Era, laid the groundwork for the development of hip hop culture. Students will read "Black Nationalism and Black Power" and watch the video "The Panther Party."

Student Learning Outcomes/Course Objectives Covered

This module will:

- Explain the difference between the civil rights movement and the Black power movement
- Identify some key figures, events, and organizations during the Black power era
- Discuss the purpose and goals of the Black Power movement

Upon completion of this module, students will be able to:

1. Recognize how race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexual orientation continues to hamper social mobility in the United States;
2. Identify and assess the role various movement political strategies, including legal challenges, direct action, and community organizing played in Civil Rights

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1.1: Black Power Era - Precursor to the Hip Hop -- Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about various components of the Black Power Era.

Readings and Videos

What Was Black Power?

Black Power began as a revolutionary movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It emphasized racial pride, economic empowerment, and the creation of political and cultural institutions. During this era, there was a rise in the demand for Black history courses, a greater embrace of African culture, and a spread of raw artistic expression displaying the realities of African Americans.

The term "Black Power" has various origins. Its roots can be traced to author Richard Wright's non-fiction work *Black Power*, published in 1954. In 1965, the Lowndes County [Alabama] Freedom Organization (LCFO) used the slogan "Black Power for Black People" for its political candidates. The next year saw Black Power enter the mainstream. During the Meredith March against Fear in Mississippi, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Chairman Stokely Carmichael rallied marchers by chanting "we want Black Power."

This portal highlights records of Federal agencies and collections that related to the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The selected records contain information on various organizations, including the Nation of Islam (NOI), [Deacons for Defense and Justice](#), and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP). It also includes records on several individuals, including Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Elaine Brown, Angela Davis, Fred Hampton, Amiri Baraka, and Shirley Chisholm. This portal is not meant to be exhaustive, but to provide guidance to researchers interested in the Black Power Movement and its relation to the Federal government.

The records in this guide were created by Federal agencies, therefore, the topics included had some sort of interaction with the United States Government. This subject guide includes textual and electronic records, photographs, moving images, audio recordings, and artifacts. Records can be found at the National Archives at College Park, as well as various presidential libraries and regional archives throughout the country.

The Black Arts Movement was a Black nationalism movement that focused on music, literature, drama, and the visual arts made up of Black artists and intellectuals. This was the cultural section of the Black Power movement, in that its participants shared many of the ideologies of Black self-determination, political beliefs, and African American culture.

The Black Arts Movement started in 1965 when poet Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones] established the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem, New York, as a place for artistic expression. Artists associated with this movement include Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, James Baldwin, Gil Scott-Heron, and Thelonious Monk. Records at the National Archives related to the Black Arts Movement primarily focus on individual artists and their interaction with various Federal agencies.

The Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was founded in October 1966 in Oakland, California by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, who met at Merritt College in Oakland. It was a revolutionary organization with an ideology of Black nationalism, socialism, and armed self-defense, particularly against police brutality. It was part of the Black Power movement, which broke from the integrationist goals and nonviolent protest tactics of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The BPP name was inspired by the use of the black panther as a symbol that had recently been used by the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, an independent Black political party in Alabama.

The BPP's philosophy was influenced by the speeches of Malcolm X of the [Nation of Islam](#), the teachings of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung of the Communist Party of China, and the anti-colonialist book *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la Terre*, 1961) by the Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. The BPP's practice of armed self-defense was influenced by African American activist Robert Williams, who advocated this practice against anti-black aggression by the Ku Klux Klan in his book *Negroes with Guns* (1962). Newton and Seale canvassed their community asking residents about issues of concern. They compiled the responses and created the Ten Point Platform and Program that served as the foundation of the Black Panther Party. The ten points are:

- We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.
- We want full employment for our people.

- We want an end to the robbery by the Capitalists of our Black Community.
- We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.
- We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.
- We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.
- We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.
- We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
- We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
- We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

Because of its practice of armed self-defense against police, as well as its Communistic and revolutionary elements, the BPP was frequently targeted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's COINTELPRO program as well as by state and local law enforcement groups. However, despite its militant stance, the BPP also provided free breakfast for school children, sickle cell anemia screening, legal aid, and adult education.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

In the early 1960s, young Black college students conducted sit-ins around America to protest the segregation of restaurants. Ella Baker, a Civil Rights activist and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) official, invited some of those young Black activists (including Diane Nash, Marion Barry, John Lewis, and James Bevel) to a meeting at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in April of 1960. From that meeting, the group formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). It was made up mostly of Black college students, who practiced peaceful, direct action protests. Ella Baker recommended that the group keep its autonomy and to not affiliate itself with the SCLC or other civil rights groups.

SNCC participated in several major civil rights events in the 1960s. One of the earliest was the Freedom Rides in 1961. Members of SNCC rode buses through the South to uphold the Supreme Court ruling that interstate travel could not be segregated. They faced violent acts from the Ku Klux Klan and law enforcement, and many members were jailed. In 1962, SNCC embarked on a voter registration campaign in the south as many believed that voting was a way to unlock political power for many African Americans. Many SNCC members again dealt with violence and arrests. The Freedom Summer of 1964 saw SNCC focus its efforts in Mississippi. Voter registration campaigns were the primary focus for SNCC members in Mississippi, and their efforts gave momentum for the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#).

In 1966, Stokely Carmichael was elected chairman of the organization. His more militant and anti-white agenda went against the original mission of the Committee. After Stokely left the Committee, Hurbert "Rap" Brown became the leader of SNCC in May 1967 and further alienated whites as Brown formed an alliance between SNCC and the Black Panther Party. In July 1967, with the expulsion of white members, SNCC's annual income decreased dramatically. In 1970, SNCC lost all 130 employees and the majority of their branches. By 1973, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee no longer existed.

Women in Black Power

African American women played an important and influential role in the Black Power Movement. They held leadership roles in various black nationalist organizations, including the [Black Panther Party for Self-Defense](#), while at the same time fighting against the sexist ideologies of the male members. Black power women worked in organizations or on their own to bring attention to issues of gender identity, classism, racism, and sexism. Many of the women involved in the Black Power Movement continued their fight into the 1970s and 1980s, within the growing Black feminism movement. New organizations such as the Third World Women's Alliance and the Combahee River Collective argued that the liberation of Black women would lead to freedom for all people.

Frankye Adams-Johnson was born in Pocahontas, Mississippi to a sharecropper family. When she was seventeen years old, she became involved in the NAACP Youth Council after learning of civil rights protests occurring in nearby Jackson, Mississippi, which included lunch counter sit-ins. She participated in numerous civil rights events and marches, including a walk-out of her high school to support the sit-ins that she helped organize. In the summer of 1964, she was selected to attend the pre-freshman program at Tougaloo College where she became involved in the [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee \(SNCC\)](#). In 1967, she left Mississippi for New York City, where she met and joined the Black Panthers. She became the founder of the Black Panthers chapter of White Plains, New York, while also obtaining two degrees and teaching as a college professor. She later moved

back to Mississippi to continue teaching, speaking and writing, and eventually became the Chair for the Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement.

Grace Lee Boggs was a Chinese-American activist, philosopher, and feminist. She graduated from Barnard College with a bachelor's degree and received a Ph. D. in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College. Boggs was influenced by the political and social activism of Richard Wright, Katharine Dunham, and C. L. R. James, and became an active member in the Socialist Workers Party and the Johnson-Forest Tendency. Upon moving to Detroit to further immerse herself in the work of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, she began publishing and writing for the radical newsletter, *Correspondence*, and met fellow Johnsonite activist, James Boggs, whom she married in 1953.

Together, Grace and James fought for and wrote extensively about labor and civil rights, feminism, and Asian American rights, and became involved with both local and national Black Power movements. In the 1960's, they took part in the Great Walk to Freedom in Detroit led by Martin Luther King Jr., hosted [Malcom X](#) when he delivered his "Message from the Grassroots" speech, and worked with groups like the Revolutionary Action Movement.

In the 1970's, the focus of her activism shifted toward the youth of Detroit. She joined Save Our Sons and Daughters (SOSAD) to push for school curriculum reform and help lead marches against violence, and launched a program called Detroit Summer, which encouraged youth participation in improving the community.

Angela Yvonne Davis is a prominent political activist, scholar, and author. She emerged as the leader of Communist Party USA in the 1960s and had close ties to the [Black Panther Party](#). She has advocated for the abolishment of prisons and the prison-industrial complex. She is currently Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she taught in the History of Consciousness Department and is the former director of the Feminist Studies Department.

Davis was born in Birmingham, Alabama, where she attended elementary and middle school. Her mother Sallye Bell Davis worked for the Southern Negro Youth Congress, which had ties to the Communist Party. She attended the Elisabeth Irwin High School, a progressive high school in New York City. Later she received a scholarship to Brandeis University, where she studied one year in France and graduated with honors and a degree in French in 1965. She continued her education at the University of Frankfurt in Germany, where she studied philosophy, and the University of California-San Diego, where she earned a Master's degree. She went on to earn a Ph.D. at Humboldt University in Germany. In 1969 she was hired to teach philosophy at the University of California-Los Angeles. The University of California Board of Regents, at the direction of Governor Ronald Reagan, dismissed Davis because she belonged to the Communist Party. Although a court ruling blocked the firing, the Board fired her again in 1970, this time for using "inflammatory language." Governor Reagan declared that Davis would never teach in the University of California system again. Davis's vocal support for the Black Panther Party was another reason for her persecution by Governor Reagan and the FBI.

Angela Davis is well known for a notable arrest and trial in 1970. In January 1970 George Jackson, an inmate at Soledad Prison in California, and two other prisoners were charged with killing a prison guard. During the trial, Jackson's 17-year old brother Jonathan Jackson took over a Marin County courtroom where he armed the black defendants and took the judge, prosecutor, and three female jurors hostage. By the end of the whole ordeal, the judge, Jonathan Jackson, and the armed defendants were killed while the prosecutor and one of the jurors were injured. Davis was accused of purchasing the guns used in commission of the crimes so she was charged with "aggravated kidnapping and first degree murder."

Black Power. The National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/research/af...ns/black-power>.

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1.2: Black Power Era - Precursor to Hip Hop -- Classroom Activity

Black Power Era - Precursor to Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

The Black Panther Party was a major contributor to the general philosophy of the Black Power Era. Their activism also proved to be of great benefit to the community, specifically, their before school breakfast program was incredibly impactful.



This module is exploring the Black Power Era. After viewing History Brief: the Black Panther Party, respond to the questions below.

1. What was the purpose of the Black Panther Party?
2. What impact did the Black Panther Party have?

Reading Through History. "History Brief: the Black Panther Party." YouTube video, 5:19. May 14, 2018. <https://youtu.be/rNBPewOfL7o?si=6XkcNRFas2yZIIqi>.

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1.3: Black Power Era - Precursor to Hip Hop -- Assignment

Black Power Era - Precursor to Hip Hop - Assignment

For your discussion posts assignments, you will read or watch the prompt and then make two posts: 1) a response to the prompt (minimum 250 words) and 2) you will respond to a classmate's post (minimum 75 words).

Prompt: Now that you've learned about African American's struggles, achievements, and activism during the 1950's and 60's, how do you think these realities will connect to the birth of hip hop culture? You obviously don't have to be correct. This discussion's purpose is to get you to think about your present general knowledge (or lack thereof) of hip hop and theorize about how the civil rights and Black power movements may have somehow influenced the culture. Once you learn more about hip hop's actual beginning, you will have the opportunity to reflect again and discuss how different your theory was from reality.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop

This week you will be viewing the video "History of Black Music: Civil Rights to Hip Hop." This video focuses on how the Civil Rights Movement and the music of that era. The video discusses African Americans' struggles during the mid 20th century and how Black music reflected the energy of the time. The video also discusses how the music of that generation influenced the content and spirit of hip hop culture and music and highlights some of the similarities between the two.

This module will:

- Discuss the purpose of the Civil Rights Movement to Black America
- Discuss the similarities between the music of the Civil Rights Movement and that of the hip hop era

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Debate the significance of Hip-Hop and Hip-hop culture and politics on their communities and the world

[2.1: Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop - Reading and Media](#)

[2.2: Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop](#)

[2.3: Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop](#)

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2.1: Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop - Reading and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about Black music from the civil rights era to the hip hop era.

Readings and Videos



Serato. "History of Black Music in America Pt. 1." YouTube video, 57:43. February 10, 2021. <https://youtu.be/mLWs-6-Iscg?si=8SKtChL-dtOcEQvs>.

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2.2: Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop

Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop - Classroom Activity - "How Does Music Impact Your Life?"

After viewing the video about the history of Black music which includes an examination of Black music's significance to activism, culture, and overall experience, each student should think about how music impacts their own lives. Each student and their assigned partner will interview each other about how music has impact their life. They should take notes on each other's story and share out to the class. How has music helped you get through a difficult time? Do you ever use music to match an emotion you're going through? How has music ever motivated you? Do you use music to celebrate? These are some examples of questions students can ask each other.

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2.3: Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop

Black Music from Civil Rights to Hip Hop - Assignment

Discuss how African American music during the civil rights era reflected what was happening at the time. Also, discuss the mentioned similarities between the music of the civil rights era and hip hop music.

Your initial post must be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 350 words.

You must also respond to one other student's post in 75 to 100 words. Remember to use evidence directly from the video (feel free to time stamp your video reference).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation

This week covers the birth and early years of Hip-Hop. You will learn about the societal setting that hip-hop was born into and its early style, focus, and norms. You will also learn about the "hip-hop generation" and "hip-hop generationers." This week will lay the groundwork for our semester's focus on various components of hip-hop music and culture.

This module will:

- Introduce students to the hip hop generation

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify the hip-hop generation
- Identify a hip-hop generationer
- Recall the early years of hip-hop

[3.1: The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Readings and Media](#)

[3.2: The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Classroom Activity](#)

[3.3: The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Assignment](#)

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3.1: The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will introduce students to the formation of the hip hop generation.

Readings and Videos

"At its inception, hip hop was a positive, socially conscious party culture. The youth who founded this culture, naturally merged each of these characteristics into what would become a global phenomenon. In fact, a phenomenon may not be the appropriate term to describe hip hop; that word implies the occurrence or presence of a remarkable wonder with a temporary existence-hip hop is here to stay. The continued evolution of hip hop's music, fashion, politics, population and overall attitude make the culture more similar to a living organism than a trend or fleeting sensation. This being has encountered many struggles, obstacles, and disappointments during its life, but continues to persevere. It feeds on the energy of those who identify with its spirit. It breathes life into those who yearn for its guidance, message and influence, and their artistic expression is the blood in its veins." (Davis, 2012)

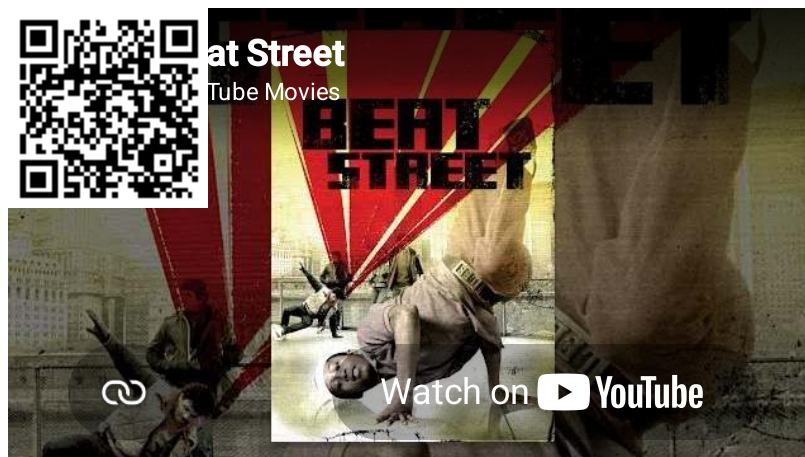
According to hip hop writer Bakari Kitwana, the hip hop generation consists of those born between 1965-1984. (Kitwana, 2002) This time period is outdated and must include those born at least a couple of decades after 1984, but its starting point of 1965 is appropriate.

Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis of African American Culture*, New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002.

Daniel Davis, "The Charisma of Crack Cocaine: The Impact of Crack on Black America, 1984 - 2010." PhD diss. Michigan State University, 2012.

Video/Film - *Beat Street*

Please view the film *Beat Street* "Widely considered the most influential hip-hop movie of all time, this "gritty, streetwise musical" (LA Herald-Examiner) features a who's who of the movement's early stars Kool DJ Herc, Kool Moe Dee, Doug E. Fresh, Afrika Bambaataa and Melle Mel as well as the famous Rocky Steady Crew vs. New York City Breakers battle at the Roxy. Uniting the four elements of hip-hop break dancing, DJ-ing, MC-ing and graffiti into an unforgettable experience, *Beat Street* is a true classic, packed with sharp lyrics, powerful moves and the flashiest dance sets the screen has ever seen! When rapper-DJ Kenny (Guy Davis) meets cultured jazz artist Tracy (Rae Dawn Chong), he is so inspired by her dedication that he vows to use his talents to escape the ghetto. But when his friend, a gifted graffiti artist, is killed in a tragic accident, Kenny comes face to face with the high price of artistic passion."



YouTube Movies & TV. "Beat Street." YouTube video, 1:46:17. 1984. <https://youtu.be/4o5nrZGxyZQ?si=8wK9JXRrLxOKjSXSE>.

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3.2: The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Classroom Activity

The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Classroom Activity - The Birth of Hip Hop

Provide students with the provided list of questions (also in attachments) and have them answer the questions as they watch the video. Follow the video with an oral quiz and allow them to answer and discuss their answers out loud as a class.

Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation – The Birth of Hip Hop Video Questions

1. What year did hip hop start?
2. Who is credited as the founder of hip hop?
3. What city was hip hop born?
4. What year did Rapper's Delight come out?
5. Who performed "The Message" and what year did it come out?



Black History in Two Minutes or so. "The Birth of Hip Hop." YouTube video, 3:16. November 6, 2020. <https://youtu.be/10C-Q3NIlzU?si=PQyKWMyABrWtHKUz>.

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3.3: The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Assignment

The Emergence of the Hip Hop Generation - Assignment - What do you know now?

After completing the readings and videos of this module, you should know about the origins of hip hop culture. Please make two discussion posts 1) discuss what you now know about hip hop's birth and early years that you didn't know before 2) respond to a classmate's post.



CrashCourse. "Rap and Hip Hop: Crash Course Black American History #47." YouTube video, 14:54. September 20, 2022. <https://youtu.be/RHCA5b9TkVg?si=jUJ0xBcFIUwUEh1x>.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: America During Hip Hop's Formative Years

This week focuses on the general economic climate of the United States during hip-hop's formative years and beyond. The assigned chapter "America's Outcasts: The Employment Crisis" discusses America's changing economy in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, and its impact on hip hop generationers. The assigned video "Hip Hop Lives" by KRS-One is an ode to hip hop's transcendent impact on the world and a journey through hip hop's past and present. Pay special attention to the scenes in the video and combined with the "knowledge" (which is the honorable 5th element of hip hop) being given by the MC, you'll see each of the other four core elements of Hip-Hop illustrated: (MC'ing, Breakdancing, DJ'ing, Graffiti).

This module will:

- Analyze United States' society during hip hop's formative years
- Introduce students to early hip hop culture

At the end of this module, students will be able to:

- List the five core elements of hip hop
- Recall the economic status of the United States during Hip-Hop's formative years
- Identify the connection between the United State's economic situation and Black hip hop generationers labor, criminal, and social behaviors

[4.1: America During Hip Hop's Formative Years - Readings and Media](#)

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4.1: America During Hip Hop's Formative Years - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will introduce students to American society during hip hop's formative years.

Readings and Videos

In the 1970s, New York City's northernmost borough fostered the newly emerging hip-hop music and cultural scene. During this time, the Bronx was beset with poverty, drugs, and gang culture, but was also home to a strong, diverse, family oriented community. Hip-hop artists gave voice to these contradictions by offering a potent mix of anger, aspiration, hope, and despair. An early leader in this scene was Bronx native Angelo "DJ Tony Tone" King, a founding member of the legendary Cold Crush Brothers group. This turntable was used by DJ Tony Tone to create music that went on to define not only the Bronx, but an entire generation. (National Museum of African American History and Culture).

The South Bronx: Where Hip-Hop Was Born

Hip-hop's foundations were being laid in the 1970s, brick by brick, by DJs in the South Bronx, sometimes even in burnt out or deteriorating buildings. These pioneers invented **sampling** (isolating one sound and reusing it in another song) and hip-hop's other key elements through trial and error, mostly by fooling around with records at home.

DJ Kool Herc, a.k.a. Clive Campbell, laid the first building block of hip-hop down in 1973. That was when he reportedly hosted a party in his building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue with a **sound system**, or sound equipment used to DJ a party. Herc's sound system was a guitar amp and two turntables.

"Kool Herc brought the idea of the Jamaican sound system to America," says Marcus Reeves, journalist and the author of *Somebody Scream! Rap Music's Rise to Prominence in the Aftermath of Black Power*.

Herc also invented the now commonplace DJing technique of breaks, or **breakbeats**. He would, for example, play James Brown's "Give It Up or Turnit A Loose" on two turntables, and would spin one of the records back to the break repeatedly. "His innovation was bringing the breakbeat to the sound of this new movement," Reeves says. "He would just kind of drop a needle on the record, and just kind of go back and forth."

DJ Afrika Bambaataa, who formed the famous non-violent hip-hop crew Universal Zulu Nation in the Bronx, used DJ Kool Herc's breakbeats in his own DJing. "Then you would have innovators of that sound, like Afrika Bambaataa, who would take global sounds like West Indian music, salsa music, great beats from rock records," Reeves says. "Bambaataa may be best known for his 1982 song "Planet Rock," which samples an electronic piano sound from the German group Kraftwerk.

Grand Wizzard Theodore, a.k.a. Theodore Livingston, also incorporated breakbeats into his music in the Bronx. And he added another technique to the hip-hop toolbox: **scratching**. Grand Wizzard Theodore reportedly invented the technique (when DJs move records back and forth while they are playing) in his bedroom; while talking to his mother one day, he started moving a playing record back and forth. "He thought it would be a great percussive sound to add to the arsenal," Reeves says.

Then, there was Grandmaster Flash, or Joseph Sadler, who may be best known for his song "The Message," which was made with The Fabulous Five. Flash began experimenting with turntables and records at home, and the results were astounding. He invented cutting, which is achieved by playing the same record at two turntables at the same time and cutting back and forth between the two turntables (and records) to repeat a phrase or sound. Another Grandmaster Flash innovation, Reeves says, was "**back spinning**, pulling the record back, so you could make it repeat."

Not only did these DJing techniques invented in the South Bronx form the basis for the hip-hop we know today, they also brought about the rise of a new kind of aggressive dancing: **b-boying**, known to most people by its more generic term, break dancing. B-boys' moves are physically demanding: the top rock (steps in a standing position), the downrock (footwork on the floor with the hands supporting the dancer), power moves (athletic moves like head spins), freezes (suspending oneself off the ground with one's arms) and suicides (a controlled movement that looks like loss of control).

Ringo is a b-boy who began dancing with the Mastermind Rockers of New York dancing crew when he was 13. At 48, he's still representing his crew and teaching a dance called uprock to young interested b-boys. Uprock is performed while standing, but involves two dancers, instead of one, and emulates street fighting.

"It's a confrontational dance," says Ringo at an old school DJ battle in Crotona Park packed with dancers spinning on their heads on a square of white linoleum. "It's ballet, jazz, salsa, meringue."

A new movement of street art and graffiti also came out of the beginnings of hip-hop and gang culture in the Bronx in the late '70s. Lee Quiñones and Fab 5 Freddy were two of the earliest street artists in the Bronx. Then their tags were a nuisance, but these days, much of their work now hangs on the walls of major art museums.

Bronx resident [Buddy Esquire](#) remembers the Bronx back then. He is selling T-shirts now, but he used to make flyers for DJing groups like the Cold Crush Crew. He says the Bronx was much more violent in the '70s and '80s, but the music that DJs were putting out then was less violent than hip-hop today.

"They used to come out with music at 6 in the afternoon, and it [the performance] was packed up to 2 at night," Esquire says. "It was a lot wilder back then." Now, he says, hip-hop music is more violent and the Bronx has been cleaned up.



Hip-hop historian Marcus Reeves says that the bustling energy that laid the groundwork for today's hip-hop culture came out of gang culture in the '70s. Then, gangs sprouted up all over the Bronx due to widespread urban decay, from heavy arson activity from slumlords seeking insurance money to the lack of basic services like law enforcement, firefighters, sanitation and health.

"When you have those conditions and...a group of people...trying to survive...and people getting tired of that, then you begin to have this growing new cultural movement that comes out of the gangs to counteract the violence...and the negativity that come out of gang cultures," Reeves says. He adds that the diverse population in the Bronx then--Latino, West Indian, African, White--added to the rich cultural mix that became hip-hop culture. "You have all those ingredients, and, you know, you just take it from there."

Reeves says that hip-hop, dancing and street art were significant Bronx teen and young adult contributions that spread to New York City and beyond.

"Back then...you had a lot of black popular culture going towards disco and mainstream [music]," Reeves says. "It was very important to see that this music come to the forefront because it allowed this voice of the poor and the working class back into the mainstream."

"Hip-Hop in the Bronx." *National Museum of African American History & History*, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/hip-hop-bronx>. Accessed 4 May. 2026.

Swanson, Abbie. "The South Bronx: Where Hip-Hop Was Born." *WNYC News*, 2010. <https://www.wnyc.org/story/89709-sou...hop-year-zero/>. Accessed 4 May. 2026.

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4.2: America During Hip Hop's Formative Years - Classroom Activity

America During Hip Hop's Formative Years - Classroom Activity - "Hip Hop Lives"

Students will watch the video "Hip Hop Lives" by hip hop pioneering legend KRS-One. Upon completion of the video, have students (as a class) identify what elements of hip hop they saw represented in the video. Also, lead students in a discussion about what message the video was giving.



HipHopLivesToday. "KRS-One & Marley Marl - Hip Hop Lives (I Come Back)." YouTube video, 3:49. December 12, 2009. <https://youtu.be/ZRmbCa4FLnY?si=Kmf2VDRCKbB0wij0>.

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4.3: America During Hip Hop's Formative Years - Assignment

America During Hip Hop's Formative Years - Assignment - "Was Hip Hop Intended to Only Be an Art Form or Something More?"

After reading and watching videos about hip hop's early years and the formation of the culture within the context of American society during the 1970s, have your students write a two-page short paper answering this question: "Was hip hop intended to be an art form or something more?" Students should consider the impact hip hop had on inner city culture during the time of its inception. Students should also think about how African Americans were largely situated within American society to help address this question.

The paper should be 12 point Times New Roman font and double spaced. The grading rubric for short papers is attached.

Here is another article to assist with answering this question.

Hip Hop: A Culture of Vision and Voice

Hip hop is global, lapping on every shore and landing at every airport. But what does *hip hop* mean? Is it the music with a chest-thumping beat? The rapid-fire lyrics rapped into a handheld mic? Gravity-defying dance steps? Writers turning walls into canvases with larger-than-life letters and illustrations?

Lesson Content

The answer is all of the above—and more. Hip hop embraces these artistic elements, most definitely. But it also has blended and transcended them to become a means for seeing, celebrating, experiencing, understanding, confronting, and commenting on life and the world. Hip hop, in other words, is a way of living—a *culture*.

The elements of hip hop came together in the Bronx borough of New York City. It was the early 1970s and times were tougher than usual for the poorer parts of urban America. From a whole lot of nothing—and a whole lot of imagination—hip hop took form.



DJ Tony Tone and DJ Kool Herc, 1979 © Joe Conzo, Jr. photographs and ephemera, #8091. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

DJ Kool Herc is credited with throwing the switch at an August 1973 dance bash. He spun the same record on twin turntables, toggling between them to isolate and extend percussion breaks—the most danceable sections of a song. It was a technique that filled the floor with dancers who had spent days and weeks polishing their moves.

The effect that night was electric, and soon other DJs in the Bronx were trying to outdo Herc. It was a code that has flowed through hip hop ever since: 1) Use skills and whatever resources are available to create something new and cool; 2) Emulate and imitate the genius of others but inject personal style until the freshness glows. Competition was, and remains, a prime motivator in the hip hop realm.

Like a powerful star, this dance-party scene quickly drew other art forms into its orbit. A growing movement of hopeful poets, visual artists, and urban philosophers added their visions and voices by whatever means available. They got the word out about what was happening in their neighborhoods—neighborhoods much of mainstream, middle-class America was doing its best to ignore or run down. Hip hop kept coming, kept pushing, kept playing until that was no longer possible.

Today, some hip hop scholars fold as many as six elements into hip hop culture. They include:

- **DJing**—the artistic handling of beats and music
- **MCing**, aka **rapping**—putting spoken-word poetry to a beat
- **Breaking**—hip hop's dance form
- **Writing**—the painting of highly stylized graffiti
- **Theater and literature**—combining hip hop elements and themes in drama, poetry, and stories
- **Knowledge of self**—the moral, social, and spiritual principles that inform and inspire hip hop ways of being.

From its work-with-what-you-got epicenter in the Bronx, hip hop has rolled outward to become a multibillion-dollar business. Its sounds, styles, and fashions are now in play around the world. DJs spin turntables in Sao Paulo, Brazil. MCs rap Arabic in the clubs of Qatar. B-boys and b-girls bust baby freezes in Finland. Graffiti rises on the Great Wall of China. Young poets slam poetry in D.C.

So what is hip hop? All of the above and more—whatever we love enough to bring.

"Hip Hop: A Culture of Vision and Voice." *The Trump Kennedy Center*. <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education-and-voice/>. Accessed 4 May 2026.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Women in Hip Hop

This module focuses on the history of women in hip hop. Although mainstream hip hop music and entertainment are male-dominated, women have been a part of hip hop culture from its' inception and continue to play a major role the culture today. Unfortunately, women have had to continuously overcome rampant misogyny, sexism, and unfair treatment as both artists and executives. The story of women in hip hop is one of pioneering, advocacy, perseverance, and displaying amazing talent.

This module will:

- Introduce women figures in early hip hop years
- Discuss the role women continue to play in hip hop culture

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Analyze how Hip-Hop has impacted their identity formation;
- Discuss the impact women had on hip hop's development
- Debate the significance of Hip-Hop and Hip-hop culture and politics on their communities and the world
- Discuss the influence women continue to have on hip hop culture

[5.1: Women in Hip Hop - Readings and Media](#)

[5.2: Women in Hip Hop - Classroom Activity](#)

[5.3: Women in Hip Hop - Assignment](#)

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5.1: Women in Hip Hop - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about women in hip hop.

Readings and Videos

Women in Hip Hop

Fifty years ago, a new sound was born. On Aug. 11, 1973, hip-hop emerged from a party in the recreation room of a Bronx building at 1520 Sedgwick Ave. From that first party on, women—despite their marginalization in much of the music—have had a significant role to play.

“Women were there from the beginning,” said Dee Barnes, a hip-hop journalist and emcee who was part of the rap duo Body and Soul and a host of Fox’s late-night show *Pump It Up!* in the late ’80s and early ’90s. “Everybody talks about Kool Herc, but not enough people talk about his sister, Cindy. She was the catalyst for the party. She was part of the culture too.”

Ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt concurred, adding: “We’ve always been there. Because there are no parties in a heteronormative culture without women.”

This is how hip-hop’s “origin story” is told: Cindy Campbell, a Jamaican American Bronx resident, hosted a back-to-school jam for the young people on her neighborhood block. Her brother, Clive Campbell—better known on the streets as DJ Kool Herc—provided the musical entertainment.

During the final days of summer, Herc migrated the sound system culture popular in Jamaica’s dance halls to New York City, while he emulated the two-turntable technique of DJs at the popular discos of Manhattan. Out of this mixing style, he created a continuous looping of the musical breaks of a James Brown funk record with Black and brown underground music—the kind not yet played on the radio.

This style caught fire, and as the youth drifted from house party to block party and from neighborhood to neighborhood, other innovators—from break-dancers to emcees who “rapped” to these new records to graffiti artists tagging their signature and affiliations on walls and subway cars—fleshed out a distinct underground culture that would soon dominate the world.

As hip-hop feminist studies pioneer Gwendolyn Pough explained, this new sound was also intergenerational, since “hip-hop has always borrowed from the musical past [through sampling]. It’s always been old and young at the same time.”

Gaunt, the ethnomusicologist, is willing to challenge the origin story, however.

“Some say it started in Brooklyn long before 1973,” she contended. “People were popping and locking in L.A. before then. Graffiti was at least 10 years old, and rapping dates back to African forms of griot performances from the Niger delta region.”

Nonetheless, she asserts that a feminist history of the past five decades of hip-hop ought to be told. Far from being secondary players, women and girls have been integral to this cultural phenomenon. Gaunt’s award-winning book, *The Games Black Girls Play*, makes the argument that much of hip-hop is shaped by the sounds and beats of Black girlhood: their handclaps, rhyming songs and double Dutch jump rope games. These were easily sampled since they were in the public domain and, as Gaunt put it, these beats could “sound novel” to someone who was outside the culture.

Apart from providing the domestic and sonic spaces for hip-hop, women also participated as rappers, DJs, breakdancers (or B-girls) and graffiti artists. Earlier this year, MC Sha-Rock (née Sharon Green) was featured in an Instagram post and podcast highlighting women emcees from the early years of hip-hop and reclaiming her own history as the first female rapper, part of the group Funky 4 + 1.

“You gotta fight and fight and fight for your legacy,” she insisted.

Much of hip-hop is shaped by the sounds and beats of Black girlhood: their handclaps, rhyming songs and double Dutch jump rope games.

A coed rap group signed by the early hip-hop label Sugar Hill, Funky 4 + 1 premiered in 1979 alongside the first commercially successful rap song, “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugarhill Gang, whose producer, Sylvia Robinson, was a key player behind the scenes.

Journalist Barnes, who claims Sha-Rock as an influence, along with several early women rappers—including Mercedes Ladies, Lady B, Sparky D and Roxanne Shanté—also counts Robinson in the hip-hop “herstory,” even though Robinson was an executive, not an artist.

“I know there’s a lot of controversy as far as record companies, [exploitative] contracts and things that didn’t go well in the beginning,” Barnes said. “Nevertheless, what Robinson has done in creating this label and having hip-hop brought into the mainstream, that was historical. ‘Rapper’s Delight’ was the introduction to hip-hop for many people.”

Drew Dixon, a former executive at Def Jam Recordings, a record label that launched the careers of many prominent artists, said this was the case for her.

“The New York kids dropped ‘Rapper’s Delight’ on me,” she recalled. “I’m like, What is that? This is crazy!”

A Washington, D.C., native whose mother, Sharon Pratt, served as D.C. mayor from 1991 to 1995, Dixon admitted that she was able to access hip-hop music through summer vacations at Martha’s Vineyard, a staple of her Black middle-class childhood.

“I loved going to Martha’s Vineyard because I met the New York kids,” Dixon said. “I got out of D.C., and the New York kids were bumping this hip-hop. The music was so rebellious, so in-your-face and lyrically dense. I fell in love with it!”

This is how hip-hop would cross the country and, indeed, the globe. It followed along with Black and Latinx youth who were listening to the music via bootleg cassettes, mixtapes and guerrilla radio. The music began to permeate the airwaves. Over the decades, hip-hop would eventually remix and mutate across diasporic communities in the U.S., and from Jamaican dancehall to Nigerian Afrobeats to Ghanaian Hiplife, from Latin reggaeton to Punjabi bhangra to K-pop and J-pop.

Southern hip-hop scholar Regina Bradley gets impatient when hip-hop fans focus on one place.

“Hip-hop started in New York, but it didn’t end there,” she argued. “It got stamped. It’s a passport full of stamps.”

She highlights the significance of the Atlanta-based rap duo Outkast and other Southern artists who gave us trap and bounce, subgenres with distinctive beats and lyrical themes. These artists emerged not long after the controversy surrounding another Southern rapper, Luke Campbell, whose Miami-based 2 Live Crew fought a high-profile court battle over censorship of their music and videos.

This regional representation matters. No longer was hip-hop relegated to the cold climate of the Northeast—a region where most hip-hop videos featured fully clothed residents from the neighborhood, and where women rappers like Queens-based Salt-N-Pepa, Brooklyn-based MC Lyte and Newark, N.J.-based Shanté and Queen Latifah proved their rap skills or defended women against the sexism in rap lyrics and the community at large.

Of course the history of women in hip-hop would be incomplete without the case against 2 Live Crew’s 1989 album, *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*, which a Florida court found to be obscene under state law. As legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw [has written](#), most of what was viewed as “obscene” were the hypersexualized images of Black women’s bodies, both lyrically and visually in the album art and music videos. When 2 Live Crew ultimately won their case in the U.S. Court of Appeals, an explosion of fetishized depictions of Black and brown women’s bodies took off, including the birth of the booty-centric music video.

Enter the video vixen from the “dirty South,” her scantily clad body on display in the hot climate of the region: on a Miami beach, or a Freaknic (later spelled Freaknik) gathering in Atlanta among Black college students, and especially in the strip clubs, a ubiquitous spectacle in millennial rap and trap music. Her objectified presence in lyrics, on album covers and in music videos ignited public conversations over obscenity, including from Black feminists and elder members of the community—most notably C. Delores Tucker, the late politician and civil rights activist who vocally denounced hip-hop as morally detrimental to Black women and Black communities.

Despite these debates, hip-hop was often dismissed as “party music,” not to be taken seriously, even though its political potential could be heard in “conscious rap” by groups like Public Enemy, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, the Fugees and L.A.-based groups like N.W.A, who caught national attention (including from the FBI) with their 1988 anti-police-brutality record. The international hip-hop scene is also filled with politically conscious and feminist rappers in places like Cuba, Gaza, Brazil and South Africa.

Tricia Rose, whose 1994 book *Black Noise* helped launch hip-hop studies in academia, recognizes the balance needed in criticisms of the culture, one that resists racially profiling the music while also calling out the rampant misogyny inherent in the

culture.

“In my work, I tried to distinguish between affirmational and transformational love,” Rose explained. “Affirmational love is critical—people need to know that they’re loved no matter what. But transformational love, which is ‘This is off-limits and let me tell you why,’ is also critical for our growth.”

This has been a constant dilemma for women in the culture: How do we love hip-hop when hip-hop doesn’t always love us back?

In the 1990 *Ms.* article “Women Rap Back,” author Michele Wallace highlighted how women rappers have created necessary space for love, critique and feminist resistance, citing Queen Latifah’s “Ladies First” (1989), featuring U.K. rapper Monie Love, and also complicated sexual politics (think Salt-N-Pepa’s “Let’s Talk About Sex” [1990] or TLC’s “Ain’t 2 Proud 2 Beg” [1992]), made space for body positivity (as Missy Elliott did with her Afrofuturistic queer-adjacent videos), gave the video vixen her voice back (through the sexually explicit lyrics and videos of Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown) or protested gender-based violence.

This includes street harassment—Queen Latifah’s “U.N.I.T.Y.” (1993)—and intimate-partner violence—Eve’s “Love Is Blind” (1999), featuring Faith Evans, the latter of whom opened up about the turbulence during her marriage to slain rapper Christopher Wallace, aka Biggie Smalls (“the Notorious B.I.G.”).

Dixon, a music lover who came from a political family, immediately recognized the potential for activism through hip-hop. She wanted to carve out a career path that bridged her twin interests in Black political empowerment and music.

Dixon eventually landed what she called her “dream job” as an A&R (artists and repertoire) representative at Def Jam, responsible for recruiting, signing and nurturing new talent to the label. In this capacity, she signed artists like Capleton and Kali Ranks during the golden age of hip-hop in the 1990s, which Dixon argues reached its “apex” with Lauryn Hill’s critically acclaimed mega-success album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998)—for which Hill was the first hip-hop artist and last Black woman to receive a Grammy Award in the coveted Album of the Year category.

Dixon worked with promising talent like Hill, Kanye West and John Legend, and she sparked the idea behind the hit *I’ll Be There for You/You’re All I Need to Get By* (1995), featuring rapper Method Man and hip-hop soul singer Mary J. Blige. But her success was violently disrupted, she said, when Def Jam cofounder Russell Simmons sexually assaulted her, a story that she shares in the HBO Max documentary *On the Record*, which features interviews with 20 survivors of sexual assault and harassment speaking out against the hip-hop mogul.

“I’m really proud of the role that I played in hip-hop,” Dixon said. “It’s very painful to me, though, that I have very little to show for it because it was untenable for me as a woman to remain in the industry. And to find myself again and again having to navigate around sexual harassment, sexual assault and the constant 3D chess game that I had to do again and again in interactions with men after the trauma of the rape. It’s just very hard to do your job.”

By speaking out, Dixon resists her cultural erasure, as does Dee Barnes, who is also a survivor of violence. The same year (1991) that the nation was horrified by the release of the Rodney King video (which gave visual evidence supporting N.W.A’s anti-police-brutality song), Barnes was brutally beaten by then-N.W.A member Dr. Dre over a perceived “diss” by former N.W.A bandmate Ice Cube that Barnes aired on *Pump It Up!*

“I still suffer from migraines,” Barnes said. “That’s the physical pain that I get, right on the side where my head was smashed repeatedly against a brick wall. It’s hard when you’re living paycheck to paycheck and you don’t have the proper insurance, so I can’t go to the doctor and get my head fully scanned.”

The fallout from these violent acts pushed Barnes and Dixon from the culture, while both Simmons and Dr. Dre have become multimillionaires. Such major disparities have caused scholar Elaine Richardson, founder of the Hip-hop Literacies Conference, to question “racial capitalism,” she said, “[when] we really have to be thinking about collective empowerment.”

While Simmons has denied allegations of sexual assault, Dr. Dre has tried to minimize his violent past (including reports by Barnes and his ex-girlfriend, R&B singer Michel’le, among others) in a bid to secure a respectable legacy exalting his commercial and artistic success.

However, Barnes also has her own legacy to protect.

“I really want people to go back to the focus of the show *Pump It Up!*” Barnes said. “I was the first young Black woman to host a hip-hop show, the first hip-hop journalist on television on a major network on a show that lasted three years.”

I'm really proud of the role that I played in hip-hop. It's very painful to me, though, that I have very little to show for it because it was untenable for me as a woman to remain in the industry.

Drew Dixon

Dixon is likewise breaking the silence about her place in hip-hop history.

"It's gratifying to me that people remember me," Dixon said. "Five years ago, I was totally invisible and erased from the story of hip-hop—in some ways buried by me because it was tied to so much trauma and pain. But what I've been most encouraged by since I came forward and [participated in *On the Record*](#) has been the scholars, the thinkers who love hip-hop but who are really smart, grounded and clear. Those are the voices that have stood up for Megan Thee Stallion, called out the misogynoir regarding Russell Simmons, R. Kelly, across the board. It's really this generation ... this squad that I believe is going to keep this conversation going in a way that I hope starts to trickle back into the music, into the art, into the blood- stream of the culture."

This is the collective voice of what Joan Morgan, author of the seminal text *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*, has coined "hip-hop feminism"—whose throughline can be traced from hip-hop artists to writers and scholars.

Hip-hop scholar Aisha Durham, an original member of the [Crunk Feminist Collective](#), which popularized terms like *intersectionality* and *misogynoir* on social media, remains optimistic about women's future in hip-hop, despite the intersecting inequalities of race, class and gender.

"I'm always going to have this push-pull reaction to hip-hop," Durham admitted. "We can celebrate the success of contemporary rappers like Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B, but we can't really think about hip-hop's radical potential within a capitalist, heteropatriarchal, white supremacist system. We can, however, talk about moments of rupture, so I'm always invested in those moments of rupture."

Those moments are at the core of the survival and subversions of hip-hop, as well as women's participation in it.

"Hip-hop is still here when everyone thought it was a fad that would fade away," Barnes mused. "Well, I'm OG now. It's up to me to uplift women and make sure that younger generations know about them. That's my job."

To reiterate Sha-Rock, this is a legacy worth fighting for.

Hobson, Janell. "Turning 50: Writing Women into the story of Hip-Hop, Five Decades After Its Founding." Ms. July 5, 2023. [Turning 50: Writing Women into the Story of Hip-Hop, Five Decades After Its Founding - Ms. Magazine](#).

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5.2: Women in Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

Women in Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

The content of this module explores the history and contribution of women in hip hop. Please use the information provided and respond to the questions below.

1. Why is it important to know about women's history in hip hop?
 2. How does the role, influence, and contributions of women in hip hop mirror or contrast women's positioning in general society?
 3. What do you think women's future in hip hop culture looks like?
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5.3: Women in Hip Hop - Assignment

Women in Hip Hop - Assignment

Watch "[The First Female Rappers No One Talk About: a history of women in hip hop](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6niAAJqwIE&t=904s)" and write a 500 word response paper. Your paper should be 12 point Times New Roman font and double spaced.

Grading rubric for short papers is attached.



Black Femininity TV. "The First Female Rappers No One Talk About: a history of women in hip hop." YouTube video, 21:49. December 9, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6niAAJqwIE&t=904s>.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation

This module will focus on how the "war on drugs" in the 1980s impacted Black youth in particular during hip hop's formative years. You will discuss how politics, the justice system, and increased drug activity all collectively changed, and often times defined, the experiences of inner-city Black youth. As a result of this climate, this module will highlight the behavior of police in Black communities and in dealing with young Black people overall.

This module will:

- Analyze how Hip-Hop has impacted identity formation
- Debate the significance of Hip-Hop and Hip-hop culture and politics on their communities and the world

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify some of the policies and laws that contributed to the mass incarceration of Black people
- Recall how the war on drugs impacted the incarceration rates of United States' citizens, particularly Black people

[6.1: Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Readings and Media](#)

[6.2: Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Classroom Activity](#)

[6.3: Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Assignment](#)

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6.1: Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation.

Readings and Media

Policing and the Hip Hop Generation

On April 20, 1995, U.S. Attorney James Burns and Cook County's Illinois State Attorney Jack O'Malley held a press conference to announce the indictments of twenty-three members of the Traveling Vice Lords for federal drug conspiracy charges. An additional eight members of the Chicago street gang, including several juveniles, were indicted on separate state narcotics or weapons charges. Authorities alleged that the gang ran a crack cocaine and heroin market that netted anywhere from \$5,000 to \$30,000 a day. The gang operated what prosecutors described as one of the city's most lucrative open-air drug markets in the 2700 block of West Flourney street in Chicago's East Garfield Park 54 The Hip Hop Generation neighborhood. "We have taken down one of the major street gang, drug-dealing factions in the city," Burns said. The three-and-a-half-year sting operation, dubbed Operation Flourney, which led to the arrests, began in July of 1991 and joined Chicago police forces with the ATF and the FBI. However, this herculean effort culminated with the seizure of only four and one-half pounds of powder cocaine at the apartment of the alleged gang leader, Andrew "Bay-Bay" Patterson, and less than \$2,000 from two other defendants. Only several gold chains, a watch, and beepers were seized from the remaining defendants. Despite the limited physical evidence, the criminal charges were based on prosecutors' claims that the gang made as much as \$24,000 a day from selling crack cocaine in 1994. Further, prosecutors alleged that in 1995, when members started dealing heroin, too, they doubled their daily cash intake. One year later, nineteen of those indicted for conspiracy were tried simultaneously. Most of the defendants were hip-hop generationers, ranging from twenty-one to forty-one years old. The case had the largest number of defendants for a single trial in the history of the Northern District of Illinois Court.

In June 1996, after a trial that lasted five months, fifteen of the defendants were convicted of federal drug conspiracy charges. The remaining four defendants were acquitted. Two of those four were returned to state custody to finish serving sentences on weapons and drug charges. Due to federal sentencing guidelines and mandatory minimum sentencing laws, none of those convicted were sentenced to less than seventeen and one-half years. Three received life sentences. Operation Flourney offers a glimpse into young Blacks' involvement in the criminal justice system and the type of criminal charges and state and federal laws that have landed Race War 55 a disproportionate number of young Blacks behind bars, during the past two decades. The lengthy mandatory minimum prison sentences for drug crimes, coupled with the general drug prohibition hysteria focused on urban (read: Black and Latino) communities that has come to dominate law enforcement at local, state, and federal levels, are characteristic of the 1980s and 1990s. The end result has been the prison crisis, a crisis that has profoundly influenced our generation. The war on drugs is the focal point for this crisis. In our lifetime, the population incarcerated in U.S. state and federal prisons and local jails has climbed from fewer than 200,000 in 1965 to nearly 2 million today. According to the Bureau of Justice, approximately 50 percent of federal and state prisoners are African American, a startling imbalance. Consider the statistics. According to a 1997 survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Blacks make up only 13 percent of monthly illegal drug users, whereas whites constitute 74 percent of monthly illegal drug users. Yet, in 1995, the National Criminal Justice Commission reported that 74 percent of those sentenced to prison for drug possession were Black. At the state level, which houses the bulk of America's prisoners, the Justice Department found that the number of Blacks incarcerated for drug offenses increased 707 percent during the decade between 1985 and 1995 (compared to a 306 percent increase for whites). By 1996, drug offenders made up 23 percent of the state inmate population and 60 percent of the federal incarcerated population. Of all drug offenders admitted to state prisons in 1996, according to the 2000 Human Rights Report ("Punishment and Prejudice: Racial Disparities in the War on Drugs"), 62.6 percent were Black, and 36.7 percent were white.

These statistics reveal that race is clearly a factor. Approximately 1 million Black men are currently under some form of correctional supervision. And the hip-hop generation is suffering the greatest casualties; approximately one third of all Black males age 20-29 are incarcerated, or on probation, or on parole. In the past two decades, few issues have altered Black life as much as the incarceration of young Blacks. (Kitwana)

Hip hop music is heavily influenced by the harsh and arguably abusive relationship young African Americans have with police. Not only are the artists themselves often entangled in legal issues, the larger hip hop community and African American community overall feels the impact of these realities. A thorough examination of hip hop must include the culture's music as a reflection of its consumers and practitioners problematic connection to law enforcement.

Kitwana, Bikari. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*. New York: Basic Civitas Books. pg 53-57.

Suggested relevant film recommendations for students:

Straight Out of Compton

Colors

Boys in the Hood

Film: [Rap Sheet: Hip Hop and the Cops](#)



Westside Love by Johnny Chiang. "Rap Sheet: Hip Hop and the Cops (DVD) 2006. YouTube video, 1:20:20. March 20, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fRecKHrBY0>.

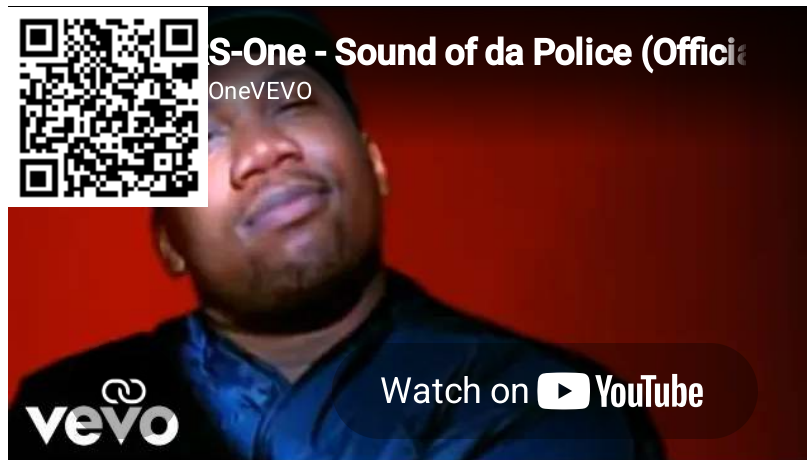
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6.2: Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Classroom Activity

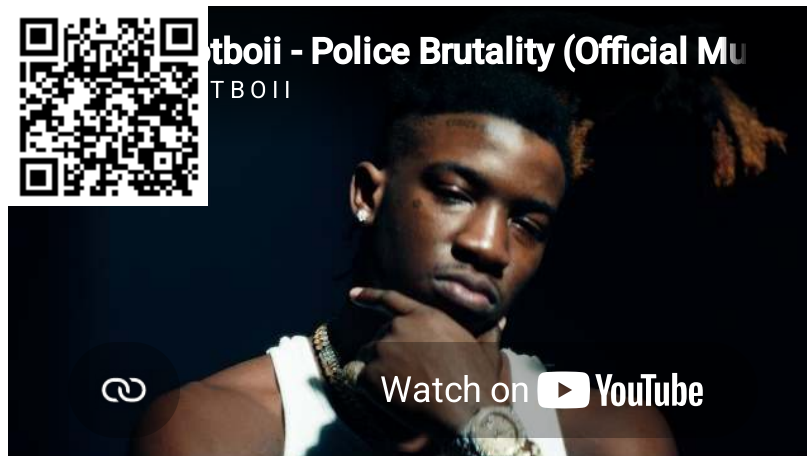
Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Classroom Activity

Have your students watch the following videos about hip hop and the police in class. Individually or in groups, have them answer the following questions:

- 1) What message was the artist trying to convey in the song and video?
- 2) Did the artist effectively convey their intended message?
- 3) In your opinion, are the messages of these videos important? Why or why not?



KRSOneVEVO. "KRS-One-Sound of da Police (Official Video)." YouTube video, 4:20. June 5, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZrAYxWPN6c>.



H O T B O I I. "Hotboii - Police Brutality (Official Music Video)." YouTube video, 3:58. November 24, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nsk5EZVjYLI>.



Mass Appeal. "Nas - Cops Shot The Kid (Official Video)." YouTube video, 2:50. January 7, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBT7ytgVB9c>.

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6.3: Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Assignment

Policing Black Youth in the Hip Hop Generation - Assignment

This module has been about hip hop generationers troubled relationship with police and law enforcement. Whether you consider yourself a part of the hip hop community or not, we all have varying perceptions and experiences with police. Your assignment is to write a two-page reflection paper about your perception of and experiences with the police and possibly the court system. Did you grow up with a positive or negative of police? Why? In your teenage/adult years, has that perception changed? Why? Do you believe media attention about police and the African American community is accurate, exaggerated, or under acknowledged?

These are just questions to possibly help you write your paper. There are no right or wrong approaches to this paper's content because it is based on your own personal opinions, experiences, and perceptions. Your paper should be two-pages, 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced.

Short paper grading rubric is attached.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Hip Hop Protest Music

This module will focus on some of the revolutionary content created by hip hop artists. In response to the social climate discussed in previous modules, specifically, the often confrontational relationship between police and Black youth in the hip hop generation, MCs have consistently spoke up as representatives of the people. The artists highlighted in this module: Public Enemy, Kendrick Lamar, Kanye West, and Nas, are just some of the many hip hop artists that used their talents to bring attention to the injustices, oppressive realities, and struggles of many Black people of this generation.

This module will:

- Discuss how hip hop artists used their musical talent to resist various forms of perceived oppression and injustice
- Introduce students to specific songs that highlighted struggles African Americans face in society

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Discuss how hip hop artists have commented on the social climate of Black people
- Recall some of the hip hop lyrics that speak directly to the plight of Black people

[7.1: Hip Hop Protest Music - Readings and Media](#)

[7.2: Hip Hop Protest Music - Classroom Activity](#)

[7.3: Hip Hop Protest Music - Assignment](#)

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7.1: Hip Hop Protest Music - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about hip hop protest music.

Readings and Videos

Decolonial Resistance in Hip Hop: Re-Colonial Resistances, Love, and Wayward Self-Determination

Although many forms of black expressive culture contain elements of political resistance, hip hop is a form that has been recognized by numerous scholars for its unique, complex, and nuanced forms of offering political discourse. As Damon Sajani notes, the origins of hip hop are inherently political, specifically rooted in the politics of the "decolonization of local urban space". Hip Hop today, the most popular genre in the United States (if not the world), is quite disconnected from these political roots in a radical anti-colonial politic built through creating livelihood out of structure-based psychological pain.

What is the nature of resistance in hip hop, and what do scholars have to say about its current status? Many note that hip hop has been co-opted by a white-controlled market and has been manipulated so as to promote limited narratives of Blackness, many of which are derived from minstrel tropes. Sometimes, these tropes can be manifested as partial resistances to white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal settler-colonialism. Sometimes, when they rely on European notions of political resistance that are either inherently capitalistic or statist/nationalist, they reify colonial structures and are thus re-colonial. Sometimes they flip the narrative of oppression or expose it for what it is, as Tricia Rose notes, but do so in a way that constitutes a solid first step to resistance but does not completely answer the question of how one wants to exist and live in a world beyond the reality of this oppression.

In my eyes, the only types of resistant expressive culture that can actually spur Black liberation *must* create alternative visions that denounce resistances that rely on other closely related forms of oppression and toxic psychologies. Building off the ideas of Cornel West, Zoe Samudzi, and William C. Anderson, these visions must be centered in both collective love and individualist, wayward, and deviant lifestyle choices. By wayward and deviant, I mean prone to reject the boxes imposed by American culture and its depictions of Blackness. I draw on the idea that Black and indigenous people in the United States exist liminally, not as citizens. This means that as the state is functioned to precipitate our extinction and/or suffering and to prevent our full integration into the benefits of society, and that our existence as colonial subjects, regardless of socioeconomic advancement, renders our status perpetually ambiguous and subject to a constantly uncertain chaos and threat of violence that reinforces a spiritual feeling of collective subordination. This chaos can be overcome by a moment of creation and establishment of what the state deprives us of and excludes us from: self-love. Hip Hop originally sought to achieve this, but it has been co-opted by the market and the limited narratives it promotes, with some notable exceptions. Once based in love, and dedicated to the creation of love-based communities, these forms of culture can help spur mobilization against white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal settler-colonialism (WSCPSC) to defend ourselves against it and eventually overthrow it; or, more immediately, find a way to create communities that employ social rules and customs that promote Black and indigenous love, rather than relying on the false promises of liberal reformism and partial resistances.

Although it remains true that hip hop has been co-opted by a powerful white media establishment, it also remains true that hip hop is an inherently resistant genre in that it constantly engages with the "politics of having fun," a framework that can be perceived as seemingly apolitical, but is actually quite focused on the psychological effects of socio-political hierarchies. Where songs can be differentiated in their political efficacy is the degree to which they promote a liberational Black politic. As Cornel West notes, a truly liberational Black politic is committed to fighting racism at its root: capitalism. And is also determined to end all associated forms of oppression that result from capitalism and colonialism: homophobia, sexism, ableism, and transphobia. Within hip hop, although the 80s and 90s featured a number of artists for whom the legacy of Black Power reigned eminent, the modern mainstream genre is primarily full of either market-driven resistances, partial resistances, or their associated re-colonial resistances.

Partial resistances vary as to the terms to which they reify colonial resistances, but most do to one extent or another. N.W.A's "Fuck tha Police" emphatically decries the historically biased and anti-Black prosecuting tendencies of the City of Los Angeles quite creatively while also reifying the colonial oppression of gay people by using homophobic slurs. The sexual domination narratives promoted by Cardi B and Nicki Minaj take a step towards a less subordinate position for Black women and do promote positive narratives that Black women can be proud of their sexuality, but also reify the objectification and exploitation of the Black female body by offering limited options for how a famous Black woman is to present herself and her body. This is not to say that other options are not presented by other Black females; to do so would be myopic. I am rather emphasizing that the female rappers with

the most prominence do not fit these narrow images, coincidentally; they are approved by a white-controlled media elite that has never shied away from aligning Black female exploitation and lucrative profits. In the wake of the death of Nipsey Hussle, an LA rapper known for his generosity and devotion to community uplift, Jay Z exclaimed that Black people should look to gentrify their own neighborhoods before white people can. Given that gentrification is fundamentally aligned with the same ideologies of settler-colonialism and economic exploitation that hip hop was founded on alleviating and eliminating, suggesting such a notion is especially re-colonial. All of these are examples of when artists in hip hop use their platforms to promote the advancement of an oppressed group, but somehow reify a hierarchy that exists to make Black people and Black women suffer.

Then how can hip hop be completely resistant and neither partial nor re-colonial? As Sajani notes, the diasporic nature of Black nationalism is an effective liberational alternative to the pain of WSPCSC, a nationalism distinct from its European analog. This nationalism has been referred to vaguely by scholars such as Bakari Kitwana, specifically to his conception of a Hip-Hop Generation, and was cited positively by West in his analysis of Morrison's *Beloved*. Many arguments regarding Black self-determination usually rely on this statist conception. Sajani's analysis of the Black national bourgeoisie, of which Jay Z is a prominent member, is particularly revealing. He claims that partial resistances are often performed by prominent Blacks as a means to receive compensation from the white cultural gatekeepers while Black exploitation is upheld by the national order. To Sajani, to support the American Dream is to ignore economic stratification, which in the US is always a racial topic. Black capitalists, especially in hip hop, engage in the rhetoric of the American Dream quite regularly, relying on a misguided bootstraps ideology. But even if Black capitalism can't be a true form of resistance to WSPCSC, can diasporic nationalism constitute a more complete resistance? As Zoé Samudzi and William C. Anderson propose in their powerful novel on the anarchism of Blackness as *Black as Resistance*,

"attempting to reclaim and repurpose the settler state will not lead to liberation, and it will not provide the kind of urgent material relief so many people desperately need, though electing empathetic officials sometimes can arguably mitigate against harm. Only through a material disruption of these geographies, through the cultivation of Black autonomy, can Black liberation begin to be actualized."

As such, a legitimate response to WSPCSC must not consider the future of Blackness as reliant on a statist solution. Although Sajani's support of a somewhat re-colonial nationalism, no matter if distinct from European nationalism, is misguided, his emphasis on "resisting the appropriation of Hip Hop and elaborating its original mission" (I would replace appropriation with misappropriation) is quite relevant to establishing a liberatory Black politic through hip hop. What is the next step?

While resistance in Black politics today often calls for criminal justice reform instead of radical restructuring of the industrial-prison complex, 2018 saw some powerful forms of resistance enter the mainstream, most notably Childish Gambino's "This is America." Gambino's Grammy-award-winning song and video effectively criticizes the current state of hip hop and minstrel tropes. As Frank Guan notes, "It's a tribute to the cultural dominance of trap music and a reflection on the ludicrous social logic that made the environment from which trap emerges, the logic where money makes the man, and every black man is a criminal." Gambino's work helped bring a critical element of reflection into the mainstream of pop and hip hop: that the limited, minstrel-reproducing narratives of Blackness in popular culture contribute to past and present forms of social subordination. It is a crucial step towards finding a liberatory politic and is quite close to a complete form of resistance. Where it falls short however is along two fronts: an explicit embrace of a collective love ethic, and a moment of creation that accepts the reality of Black liminality and becomes devoted to a deviant determination of one's self that allows for the complexity of Blackness to live freely and waywardly, away from the psychological boxes imposed on us by WSPCSC.

I have come to learn that hip hop has an extremely high potential for being politically resistant to WSPCSC, but it is going to take a lot of work to return it to what it once accomplished. Very few forms of hip hop are directly engaged with a love ethic nor with an explicitly deviant rejection of WSPCSC based in self-determination. Two legacies of Black expressive culture will serve as my examples for such a cultural politic in this section: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, as cited and analyzed by West, and the work of Prince, a genre-less Black artist whose influence on and connections to hip hop are understated. These forms of culture are committed to examining how Black people can create their own worlds under oppression, and even as they strive for radical changes, they are pragmatic and understand that a complete rejection of WSPCSC would constitute a violent revolution. As such, they utilize Black art as a means of peaceful resistance and alleviation of colonial pain, as hip hop once did. West noted that Morrison's *Beloved* was an active buffer against the pain of Black nihilism derived from WSPCSC, stressing that "Self-love and love of others are both modes toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one's community."

Black literature's emphasis on self-love and reflection must be replicated in hip hop. Prince understood that "Transcending categories however is not synonymous with abandoning ones' roots." After his death, Alicia Garza, a BLM founder noted that he "was from a world where Black was not only beautiful, but it was nuanced and complex and shifting and unapologetic and wise." Prince does not allow the chaos of Blackness (as constructed by WSCPSC) to render him a slave to reifying some form of colonial oppression, rather he recognizes that "it's about being comfortable in an unfixed state while improvising the topography of your life and music as you go along." Such a mindset and perspective are directly derivative of African religious culture. Thus, a liberational politic must be Afrofuturist. It must avoid the categorical labels offered by WSCPSC because of how much they limit us and function to constrict us. Perhaps a contemporary example of such a wayward, liberational politic comes in Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments*, in which she reimagines the deviant and radical lifestyles and love-ethics of early 20th century upper-middle-class Black women. When Black people have the socioeconomic privilege to be able to transcend the limits of WSCPSC's social construction of race using a collective Black love ethic and staying true to the root cause of Black uplift, a promotion of a more plentiful array of types of Black existence can proliferate. And the commodification of Black art can start to dissipate, pushing more and more colonial subjects to reimagine their humanity away from internal colonialism.

This is the future I see for hip hop, one that returns it to its political roots. I understand that the pull of the market is strong, and that hip hop's decolonial future will require some serious changes in cultural discourse. Hip hop must return to its basis as a means of cultural self-defense, of engaging with the politics of having fun in a way that is more cognizant of decolonial motives. Taking down WSCPSC will require both explicit and implicit resistance, most of which will be anti-capitalist. Black expressive culture and its dynamism, specifically with regard to hip hop, have extreme potential for creating radical Black communities in the United States that are neither re-colonial nor based in the European need to monopolize violence, and embrace the duality of Black liminality, the complex nuances of double consciousness, and consider Blackness on one's own determined set of terms.

John Hinton, "[Decolonial Resistance in Hip Hop: Re-Colonial Resistances, Love, and Wayward Self-Determination](https://www.hamptonthink.org/read/de...-determination)." Hampton. August 5, 2019. <https://www.hamptonthink.org/read/de...-determination>.

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7.2: Hip Hop Protest Music - Classroom Activity

Hip Hop Protest Music- Classroom Activity

Have your students watch these three hip hop videos as a class. Instruct them to note their thoughts as they watch each video. After viewing all three videos, have students break into groups based on which was their personal favorite. Have each group answer these questions about their chosen video and then share out group by group.

- 1) What was the main theme of the video?
- 2) Why was this your favorite video of the group?
- 3) How do you think society at large will perceive this video/song?



Channel ZERO. "Public Enemy - 911 Is A Joke." YouTube video, 3:23. August 30, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZDIitWz8Go>.



Kendrick Lamar. "Kendrick Lamar - Alright." YouTube video, 6:54. August 11, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-48u_uWMHY.



whiterhinoXXL. "Kanye West - New Slaves." YouTube video, 4:10. July 9, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1uuSm0GoI0>.

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7.3: Hip Hop Protest Music - Assignment

Hip Hop Protest Music - Assignment

Discuss how the selected videos for the week speak to the social climate of Black people during the hip hop generation. Highlight the artists' commentary on social justice (or injustice) and the overall plight of African Americans. Make sure to cite (quote) at least one lyric or "bar" from one of the songs in your discussion post.

Your initial post must be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 350 words.

You must also respond to one other student's post in 75 to 100 words. Remember to use evidence directly from the video (feel free to time stamp your video reference).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop

This module will focus on the impact of mass incarceration on hip hop generationers. We will specifically discuss incarcerated Black hip hop generationers from an economic/employment perspective as well as mass incarceration's impact on the Black community. The psychological, physical, emotional, familial, and societal health of individuals is impacted when someone is incarcerated. The prevalence of imprisonment among hip hop generationers has undoubtedly had a significant influence on the wider Black community and hip hop culture as a whole. Many hip hop artists have songs, videos, and albums based around their incarceration. This is telling of the influence jail and prison has on hip hop practitioners and cultural norms, value systems, and even expectations. The apparent normalization of incarceration is consequential.

This module will:

- Discuss hip hop's relationship with incarceration
- Examine the impact mass incarceration has had on hip hop generationers overall

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify the connection between mass incarceration and "prison culture" and hip hop culture
- Identify some of the long term effects mass incarceration has on the Black community

[8.1: Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Readings and Media](#)

[8.2: Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Classroom Activity](#)

[8.3: Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Assignment](#)

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8.1: Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Readings and Media

Mass Incarceration's Impact on the Community

Nearly 50 percent of America's prison population is Black, with hip-hop generationers making up a significant proportion of that population. What will be the long-term effects of this warehousing of such a disproportionate number of young Blacks in the criminal justice system? For starters, consider the following. At most, what we have today is a foundation for what could become a prison industrial complex in the future. Although the drug war's use of mandatory minimums has proven disastrous for Black youth, it has been ineffective at curbing drug use and trafficking. Because mandatory minimums for drug crimes are overburdening tax dollars and catching more and more young whites in their net, lawmakers may begin to rethink these policies. This in itself would probably end any potential reality of a true prison industrial complex. In the meantime, the inroads that have been made in privatizing the prison industry have created a profit motive for keeping young Blacks locked up. Despite the inherent problems with the criminal justice system, a lobby has been created that has coffers deep enough to fight for its survival. They have as their allies counties, cities, and towns nationwide who compete for the construction of prisons in their communities. Many are suffering from economic decline, and community leaders realize that prisons can bring jobs to revive communities devastated by the changing economy. With these incentives, the future for hip-hop generationers in the criminal justice system doesn't look like it will change anytime soon.

Prison Culture's Influence on Black Youth Culture One of the best indicators of the degree to which prison culture has been infused into Black youth culture can be seen in the transformation of Black street gangs from the mid-1970s into the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1970s, arrest and imprisonment of gang members led to organized structures within prisons. Prison gangs inevitably became connected to their street gang counterparts. In fact, many gang members report that they first joined gangs while in prison. (Most cite protection as their motivation.) This phenomenon has also affected what experts call gang migration and the evolution of ionic grown gangs that in the 1980s and 1990s began to be reported in hundreds of American cities. As the line between street gangs and prison gangs blur, so do the distinctions between prison culture, street culture, and Black youth culture. The blurring can be observed in the evolution of hip-hop music. As hip-hop culture became more commercialized in the late 1980s and early 1990s, primarily through the success enjoyed by rap music, aspects of prison culture became more apparent in rap music and Black youth culture, from the use of language and styles of dress to extensive commentary on crime and prison life. With so many Blacks entering and exiting prison this influence is inescapable.

2. Black Families In Transition The immensely destructive impact that slavery had on the Black family intensified in an age of high imprisonment rates, where hundreds of thousands of young Black men and women with lengthy prison sentences are separated from their families. This arrangement affects relationships between children and their parents, relatives, and friends.

Increased Rift Between Young Black Men and Women Not to be overlooked is imprisonment's impact on already fragile relationships between young men and women. Interpersonal relationships between men and women are put to the test as partners who aren't incarcerated struggle to fulfill physical, emotional, and financial needs in an incarcerated partner's absence and still maintain the relationship. Ten inmates end up hundreds of miles away from their families, making visitation difficult if not impossible. They lament, even for years after their incarceration has ended, time lost from their children and families that can never be regained. Some mothers struggle to keep incarcerated fathers involved in the lives of their children. Those who opt not to often breed longtime resentment. Families are further stressed by having to rely on a single income and the inability of incarcerated fathers to provide for their children does immeasurable psychological damage in a culture where ideals of manhood are connected to a man's ability to provide for his family.

4. Rising Rates of AIDS Among Young Blacks According to the most recent statistics available from the Centers for Disease Control, by 1999 AIDS was the leading cause of death for Black men and women between the ages of 25 and 44. The CDC also estimates that at least half of all newly reported HIV infections in the United States occur among those under 25 and that most of these young people were infected through sexual activity. Although high rates of AIDS among young Blacks has been widely discussed, researchers have been reluctant to add high incarceration rates.

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5. Mental Health America's prisons are environments where the most basic notions of civilization are routinely abandoned, where women are separated from men, where strong rule the weak, where gangs abound, and where survival skills are critical. "The experience of being incarcerated is a negative one, says Judy Stanley, Director of Accreditation for the National Commission on Correctional Health Care and a clinician with twenty-plus years experience in mental health in corrections. "When individuals aren't solid emotionally, they are going to be damaged by that. Very rarely do individuals of young Blacks to the list of

primary contributors. However, given the number of young Blacks in American's prisons, such a factor must be considered; it is highly likely that Black men who have sex with other men in prison and then have sex with their wives and girlfriends when they return home may be contributing to increases in HIV and AIDS rates among Black women. In *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (Verso, 1999), Christian Parcnli details the ways that sex—both forced and consensual—is part of prison life, with transsexual, straight, and gay men forced into submissive sexual roles by stronger men, as well as the degree to which rape is condoned by the prison administration: "A conservative estimate is that roughly 200,000 male inmates in America are raped every year, and many are raped daily. The group Stop Prisoner Rape estimates the real figure to be closer to 290,000, noting that most investigations into the scope of sexual terror in prisons and jails do not count inmates who have sex after pairing off for protection, and usually ignores the much higher rates of rape at juvenile facilities." Race War S3 7. Decline of Black Political Power come out of prison changed for the better. In most cases there is some psychological wounding." 6. Criminalized Image of Young Blacks In a society that has long associated Blacks with criminal behavior, high imprisonment rates reinforce this association in the collective public mind. "Given their high incarceration rates, they must commit the most crimes," the thinking goes. In the 1980s and 1990s, this association in the public mind intensified, particularly as it was advanced in the media, and helped to justify the high incarceration rates. According to a 2001 joint study by Berkeley Media Studies and the Justice Policy Institute titled "Off Balance: Youth, Race, and Crime in the News," as homicides decreased 32.9 percent between 1990 and 1998, homicide coverage on network news increased 473 percent. The study also found that Blacks were too often portrayed as perpetrators and disproportionately as victims, whereas Latinos were nearly invisible in the news media except in crime reports. "People rely on the news media for accurate information," Lori Dorfman, one of the authors of the study, told the Associated Press (April 10, 2001). "When it comes to crime, youth, and people of color, they're getting confusion rather than clarity—part of the story, not the whole story." Unfortunately, young Blacks in popular culture also often link criminality with Blackness. Between pop culture and news media reports, misconceptions continue to define "reality" for an uncritical public. What will the future hold when racial disparities like pay gaps, difficulty in obtaining mortgages, SAT scores and the like become explainable via incarceration? 84 The Hip Hop Generation As many as one-third of al] Black men spend time in the criminal justice system. Upon re-entering society, many discover that, among other things, imprisonment has robbed them of their voting rights. Only 4 states (New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont) allow inmates to vote. In fourteen states, a felony conviction equals lifetime disenfranchisement. Most of these states have a process by which voting rights can be restored upon release, but it often involves long waiting periods and is a costly procedure, especially for those who have been out of work for years while serving their sentences. According to a 1999 joint study by Human Rights Watch and The Sentencing Project, 1.4 million or 13 percent of Black men are ineligible to vote because of felony convictions. Although participation in the mainstream political process by eligible voters is at an all-time low, young Blacks partly due to their increased visibility and individual wealth through the sports and entertainment industries) are increasingly testing their potential political power. Groups like A Movement for CHANGE, AGENDA, and Rock the Vote's Hip-Hop Coalition conduct voter registration drives targeted at young Blacks. However, high rates of incarceration have haunted these groups' efforts as they seek to organize young Black voters into a viable force in American politics.

At the very least, imprisoned young Blacks become more familiar with both political and spiritual ideas while inside America's prisons. Most end up more politicized in prison than they were before entering. The political consciousness that prison life nurtures is educating a whole generation about social inequalities and is adding fuel to a potential powder keg created by continued racial oppression. At the same time, given the mental and physical strain demanded by prison's survival-at-all-costs culture, most also seek some type of spiritual/religious belief, either mainstream or alternative, such as Islam or Five Percenters, as a means of rationalizing their existence. (These groups, like gangs, provide protection, hence the prison system's tendency to classify some groups of Five Percenters as gangs.) Often in this context, the spiritual and political are connected. As inmates ponder the political implications of the mostly poor, Black, and Latino prison population, religious organizations that help make sense of the Black condition serve a dual purpose. That young people's involvement in the Black church and other religious groups remained on the decline during much of the 1990s as prison rates increased suggests that prison conversions are confined to prison. Whether they return to religious institutions later in life and what impact this may have on this generation and the Black community overall remains to be seen. Finally, social engineers who endorsed imprisonment as a solution to nonviolent drug crime neglected to consider what would happen when those terms of imprisonment ended. Within ten to twenty years, many of these 1 million prisoners will re-enter society. Some will be in middle age, many will be dysfunctional, and most will be trying to recapture lost years. Some will try to rekindle old relationships. Many will be even more obsolete as workers in America's mainstream economy

than they were when imprisoned. What jobs will exist for them? How will they provide for their families? Where will they find housing? How will society accommodate them? Will psychiatrists be deployed to help these individuals and communities, traumatized by race war, heal?

If history is any indication, the onus will fall on existing and already stretched thin Black community institutions. Are we preparing those communities for the task? Long before phrases like "ethnic cleansing" became popularized by the news media, the idea of race war had been prevalent in American culture. Hostilities between American Blacks and whites, rooted in European imperialism and chattel slavery, have only been tempered by the civil rights era. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, both liberal Blacks and the white Left described the relationship of whites to Blacks in America as one of colonizer to colonized. At that time, some activists referred to those imprisoned as prisoners of war. The idea of America maintaining prisoners of war still persists in activist circles; activists protesting America's sentencing laws and the state of its prisons often use this terminology. The high Black imprisonment rates and the ways those convictions have been secured in the 1980s and 1990s (from legislation to law enforcement and prosecution) reveal the degree to which the war on drugs has terrorized Black communities. Even if the intention of the drug war were not racist, it has taken on overtones of a race war that has pitted the white majority against the Black minority, especially the Black poor. In the final analysis, the war on drugs has materialized into a wave of racial attacks on Black communities and long-term detentions unmatched in the modern era. Those in the eye of the hurricane are young and Black. The Patterson family are but fourteen casualties in a war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of hip-hop generationers. Unfortunately, such a fate has become business as usual for young Blacks at the turn of the century. Prison culture in the 1980s and 1990s has affected not only the manner in which this generation is perceived but Race War 87 the manner in which many within it perceive themselves.. Both perceptions have incalculable implications. Nowhere is this more chilling than in its contribution to the growing rift between young Black men and women.

Kitwana, Bikari. *The Hip Hop Generation*. New York: Basic Civitas. 2002. pgs 80-86.

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8.2: Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

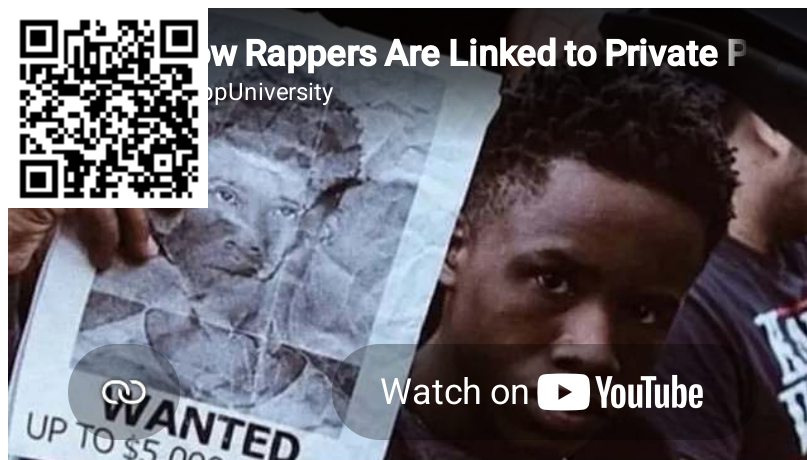
Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

This module's focus is on mass incarceration and hip hop. Have your class watch these two short videos on the topic and answer the following questions.

1. In your opinion, how impactful is mass incarceration on hip hop culture?
2. Do you believe the hip hop industry is intentionally steering youth toward criminal behavior and ultimately prison? Why or why not?



REVOLT. "Bar for Bar: A Prison Hip Hop Story." YouTube video, 2:32. July 17, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxJYOepqT18>.



TrappUniversity. "How Rappers are Linked to Private Prisons." YouTube video, 8:03. April 21, 2026. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSUerq6ib1g>.

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8.3: Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Assignment

Prison, Mass Incarceration, and Hip Hop - Assignment

Please read the articles under "[Incarceration Rates and Black Communities](#)" and discuss your thoughts with your classmates. After reading, make two discussion posts: 1) a response to the reading (minimum of 250 words) and 2) you will respond to a classmate's post (minimum 75 words). Discussion board rubric attached.

Behnken, Brian D. "How Do the High Incarceration Rates of African American Men and Youth Impact the Political, Social, and Economic Structure of African American Communities?" In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2026. Accessed May 11, 2026. <https://africanamerican2-abc--clio-c...isplay/1736642>.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Hip Hop and the Crack Era

This module will discuss the relationship between crack-cocaine and hip hop culture. While cocaine has been popular in the western world for centuries, crack-cocaine (a derivative of cocaine) rose to popularity in the mid 1980s. Primarily, much like hip hop culture, crack-cocaine became most impactful and concentrated in urban Black communities during this time period. Crack-cocaine influenced politics, media, music, societal perception, and community economics in substantial ways. Each of these influential realities directly impacted hip hop generations and hip hop culture overall during its most formative years. These impacts are still being felt today in the hip hop and larger community.

This module will:

- Examine the relationship between crack-cocaine, politics, the legal system, and hip hop culture
- Highlight examples of crack-cocaine's influence on hip hop culture

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify the connection between the crack-cocaine epidemic and hip hop culture overall
- Identify the relationship between crack-cocaine and the United States justice system
- Recall how hip hop artists describe their personal interactions with crack-cocaine

[9.1: Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Readings and Media](#)

[9.2: Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Classroom Activity](#)

[9.3: Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Assignment](#)

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9.1: Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about the relationship between crack-cocaine and hip hop culture.

Readings and Videos

The Crack Epidemic and the Transformation of Hip Hop

The Crack Epidemic had a profound impact on inner city communities throughout the country. It vastly increased levels of community violence, created profound generational tensions as young people with guns became the wealthiest people in economically depressed communities, shattered families, and led to overwhelming pressures for an expanded police presence, resulting in mass incarceration on a level never before seen in the 20th Century, with over 2 million people in jail and prison in the year 2000, as compared to 330,000 in 1980.

Jay Z provides a vivid portrait of this transformation in the first part of his book "Decoded," but many of his songs, along with those of other great artists of this era (Wu Tang Clan, Biggie, Nas, Tupac, Gang Starr Cypress Hill, Ghetto Boys, NWA, Ice Cube) tell this story just as well in sometimes heart rending, sometimes defiant fashion. There are also movies from the era which tell this story such as "Boyz in the Hood," and "Juice," but I want to give you a statistic which highlights just how traumatic this era--roughly lasting from 1985-1995, actually was. In 2020, which was considered a bad year by current standards there were 477 murders in New York City. In 1992, there were 2,225!

In terms of Hip Hop, the onset of crack inspired two very different types of musical messages, each of them fiercely anti-authoritarian and anti-government. The first was a message of Black Unity and Afrocentrism pioneered by a group called Public Enemy. They tried to call upon the legacy of leaders like Malcolm X to get Black people to rise up against growing police violence as well as the violence of local drug dealers. Their songs, using beats that often drew upon heavy metal, had great commercial success in the late 80's and were featured in Spike Lee's epic Movie "Do the Right Thing" Other politically conscious groups warned of the dangers of complete immersion in the underground economy as did Gan Starr in their legendary track "Just to Get A Rep".

But as it turned out, another response to crack era violence and the rapidly growing police response came in the form of a musical message which made the street hustler and people in the underground economy the major reference point of resistance rather than the political activist. The artists who pioneered this approach came from the West Coast and the South, and they would permanently change the language, and imagery of hip hop. Of these groups, the most important was N.W.A -Niggas With Attitude- coming out of Compton, A collection of brilliant beat makers and lyricists, spearheaded by Dr Dre and Ice Cube, they issued tracks that created public outrage in both the Black community and mainstream white society, but were commercially incredibly successful, epitomized by their much protested and played song "Fuck Tha Police." Soon, a group from Houston, the Geto Boys, started producing equally powerful tracks showing what the world looked like to young men in the underground economies that crack had suddenly made prominent in inner city communities throughout the nation.

Unfortunately, one of the byproducts of a Hip Hop ethos that made the street hustler both hero and antihero-- but always the major character- was the promotion of a bitter image of women as dangerous and, untrustworthy that was to sweep through much of male hip hop. Whereas hip hop artists of the past had boasted of their sexual prowess, but with some level of affection, crack era artists threw out any vestige of admiration or romance and treated women as objects to be consumed and discarded with little emotion, or enemies trying separate men from their money.

Two examples of this, from the East Coast, were Slick Rick's "Treat her Like A Prostitute" and Big Daddy Kane's "'Pimping Ain't Easy" But the single most damaging track came from the brilliant beat maker, Dr Dre, who helped launch NWA, entitled "Bitches Ain't Shit".

As the most talented and most commercially successful male artists started promoting this cynical and insulting view of women, it quickly wove itself into the fabric of male hip hop discourse. By the early 90's the "B word" had become the chosen vehicle for describing women in scores of hip hop tracks, some of them issued by artists with real talent. No better example of this is a track where the brilliant beat maker Dr Dre introduces a soon to be legendary rapper who called himself "Snoop Dogg" whose flow was

hypnotic, backed by Dre's carefully crafted studio made sounds, in a song called "Nothing by a G Thang". Casual misogyny pervades the video as well as the lyrics.

Women artists in hip hop, who were just starting to achieve traction, developed several different strategies to deal with this toxic atmosphere, which many felt promoted violence against women and undermined community solidarity. The first of these was pioneered by Queen Latifah, who tried to build on the Afrocentric traditions of late 80's hip hop to denounce those using the B word as undermining Black unity and destroying families and communities. In 1993, she came out with this legendary track to challenge the emerging male ethos--U.N.I.T.Y.

But though Queen Latifah remained a revered figure, a Brooklyn based artist, Lil Kim closely linked to P Diddy and Biggie Smalls, created an entirely different persona, one in which women appropriated and claimed the hustler ethos, with all its cynicism, took the label "Bitch" as a mark of pride and urged women to exploit and discard men the way men did women. No better example of this is the song "Queen Bitch" from Kim's debut album. In this, she unleashed the immortal line "I've got buffoons, eating my p...y while I watch cartoons" In song after song, epitomized by "Not Tonight," Kim creates a new image of women's power resting in the quest of sexual satisfaction and material wealth at the expense of men. Another artist who took this appropriation of "Bitch" as a mark of woman's power and agency to great commercial success was Foxy Brown, doing so with a Brooklyn/Jamaican flair in songs like "Oh Yeah."

However, there was a third approach, unveiled in the mid-90s by a brilliant lyricist and singer named Lauryn Hill who made her debut as part of a rap trio called "The Fugees". Hill refused to even dignify misogynist discourse with a response and instead created a persona of a woman who was so far above the debate as to render it irrelevant. No one had ever heard anything like the lyrics she unleashed in the Fugees Track "Ready or Not" which invoked African American music history in creating one of the most powerful dis tracks of all time, including the line "While you be imitating Al Capone, I'll be Nina Simone and defecating on your microphone."

Ever since, right up to today, Hip Hop is contending with the same linguistic challenges and fighting the same battles.

Naison, Mark, "The Crack Epidemic and the Transformation of Hip Hop: A Bronx Tale" (2021). Occasional Essays. 14. https://research.library.fordham.edu/baahp_essays/14.

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9.2: Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Classroom Activity

Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Classroom Activity

Students will read the article "[Iran-Contra, Crack-Cocaine, and the Transformation of Hip Hop](#)" in class and answer the questions below.

- What role did the U.S. government play in the crack epidemic?
- How did the presence of crack-cocaine in the 1980s and 90s impact hip hop culture?

In August of 1985, the United States government under the administration of President Ronald Reagan secretly and illegally began selling weapons to Iran, which was engaged in what would be a bloody, eight-year long war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The proceeds from these arms transactions, which ran into the tens of millions of dollars, were then secretly funneled to right-wing contra-rebel guerrillas in Nicaragua fighting to bring down that country's leftist Sandinista regime. American support to the Nicaraguan Contras was in violation of the Boland Amendment passed by the U.S. congress and signed by Reagan in 1982. Nonetheless, officials working with the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency had direct knowledge of these activities. The affair was exposed in 1986 and became the focus of extended congressional hearings in 1987 that resulted in the convictions of fourteen high-ranking officials in the Reagan administration, including Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger and National Security Agency chief John Poindexter.

A related consequence of these events resulted in what became an immensely important footnote to the long and winding history of hip-hop music in the United States, one that remains controversial and relatively unexplored in popular culture studies. Investigations by the U.S. Congress and the Department of Justice have concluded that private airplanes used to ferry supplies to the Nicaraguan rebels were also being used to ship cocaine back into the United States, raising millions more in illegal funds for the resistance movement. These drug shipments were distributed to black inner-city drug lords on both coasts, establishing a link between these clandestine U.S. operations, the conflict in Nicaragua, Colombia drug cartels, and inner-city street gangs, all of which contributed to the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s.

This epidemic of cheap crack cocaine had a devastating effect on black communities across the country. Drug related gang violence and gun-related homicides among inner city black males rose dramatically. Hip-hop, barely a decade old, began to transform as the tone of the streets darkened, making the music and the culture surrounding it more malevolent. Street gangs, hustling and hip-hop converged in this moment and became critical to the formation of hardcore gangsta rap, which flourished into a new and popular musical genre. Most of the critical records and artists that defined this music appeared between the years 1985 and 1989, during the height of the epidemic and in the aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair, when representations of urban black males in recorded music, graphic art, magazine ads, music videos, feature films, and video games began to reformulate around notions of hardness. The different ways in which hardness manifested itself as a critical metaphor throughout this history—“as attitude, as masculinity, as language, as ghetto narrative, as sound, and as imagery”—suggests how the convergence of drugs and gangs altered the tone of hip-hop music and urban street culture.

The apotheosis of the contemporary hardcore “crack rap” performer is unquestionably the Brooklyn-born lyrical genius **Jay-Z**, a former New York City drug figure turned multimillionaire entertainment mogul whose repertoire is filled with songs and lyrics that boast of his rise from “bricks to billboards” and “grams to Grammys,” and who built his Roc Nation empire from slinging crack in the ‘hood one rock at a time. **Jay-Z** was not the first rapper to insert drug references into his songs; he is only one of a number of hardcore performers who, beginning with the autobiographical styles of **Schoolly D** and **Ice-T** in the 1980s and **Tupac Shakur** and the **Notorious B.I.G.** in the 1990s, inserted themselves into larger than life ‘hood tales that drew from their own experiences as street hustlers and gang affiliates. Jay-Z happens to have been the most successful and articulate hardcore rap artist of his generation, a transformational figure who single-handedly reframed the ghetto fabulous street thug as the penthouse glamorous Mafioso impresario.

White, Miles. "Iran-Contra, Crack Cocaine, and the Transformation of Hip Hop." *University of Illinois Press Blog*. October 17, 2011. <https://www.press.uillinois.edu/word...y-miles-white/>.

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9.3: Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Assignment

Hip Hop and the Crack Era - Assignment

The film, "[Planet Rock: The Story of Hip Hop and the Crack Generation](#)" explores the affect and popularization of crack in hip hop. Narrated by hip-hop notable, Ice-T, the documentary includes first hand accounts from various hip-hop artists such as Cypress Hill's B-Real, Raekwon, RZA, and Snoop Dogg among others (billboard). After viewing the documentary, students will write a 500 word response paper. In the response, students will discuss the impact crack cocaine had on hip hop and Black culture overall. The paper must be 12 point Times New Roman font and double spaced.

Grading Rubric for Short Papers is attached.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Relationships in the Hip Hop Era

This module we discuss the interpersonal relationships, i.e., dating, marriages, sex, love, and gender identity, of hip hop generationers. We will focus on the unique perspectives held by hip hop by generationers on these topics compared to previous generations. Informed largely by societal revolutions such as the feminist and women's rights movements, combined with the increased popularity and visibility of hip hop's largely misogynistic and male dominated content, individuals of this generation have arguably redefined how men and women view and interact with one another.

This module will:

- Examine relationships among hip hop generationers
- Explore how general societal changes during the late 20th century impacted hip hop generationer's views of femininity and masculinity

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Discuss how hip hop generationers interpersonal relationships between men and women have been influenced by hip hop culture
- Discuss how hip hop generationers intersexual relationships differ from previous generations
- Discuss the ramifications of the hip hop generations' approach to interpersonal/intersexual relationships

[10.1: Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Readings and Media](#)

[10.2: Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Classroom Activity](#)

[10.3: Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Assignment](#)

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10.1: Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about relationships in the hip hop era.

Readings and Videos

Masculinity in Hip Hop

In 2017, with new projects like Tyler, the Creator's "Flower Boy," Brockhampton's "Saturation II," and countless others, music has grown as a communication of identity. Artists have stopped adhering to the classic masculine mold of the traditional hip hop artist and have introduced more feminine and emotional features into their music, telling the whole story of who they are. In addition, many artists have come out in the past year, pioneering a safer space in the genre, making 2017 a radical year for music.

This was a year when Jay-Z told himself he "gotta get softer", Tyler the Creator told listeners "you don't have to hide", and Frank Ocean fell in love with a guy "pretty like a girl." Young Thug wore a dress on his album cover, and Lil Uzi Vert wore a woman's shirt because it was "cute". Instead of suffocating under rigid ideas of what it means to be a man, the rap world today is subverting such stratifications, and empowering all to do the same.

In hip-hop, subversions like these are revolutionary. Back in hip-hop's golden age, the Beastie Boys attempted to title their 1986 debut album *Don't Be a F*ggot*, and mainstream artists routinely described hurting homosexuals. Though revolutionary in its political expression, artists of the era rarely dared to express themselves emotionally, and those who did, like MC Lyte, Lauryn Hill, Lil Kim and Nas, were truly out of the ordinary. The shift from such emotional concealment to today's expression may appear sudden, but this revolution has been almost a decade in the making.

"Hip Hop is a tool that artists use to address the system of white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, disability, oppression, and capitalism," said Third Andresen, hip hop archivist at the University of Washington. This political resistance incorporated aspects of Black male masculinity that gave men power that they lacked in a white dominated

society. For this reason, Black male masculinity was characterized by style, power, and social and sexual confidence.

Throughout the 90's and into the 2000's the mold of the stoic rapper tightened into a business model, as corporate America sought to capitalize on the image and music of old school rap. Kids growing up at the time were sold the exciting image of tough and intimidating rappers like 50 Cent, and bought it up in record numbers, making rap one of the world's biggest genres.

Though still an important part of hip hop, voices like 50 Cent's often displayed their confidence at the cost of demonizing self expression. "I don't display emotions. I have every feeling that everyone else has but I've developed ways to suppress them. Anger is one of my most comfortable feelings," said 50 Cent.

Although rap and hip hop culture has been heavily criticized for expressing chauvinism, this behavior was a way for Black males to assert their masculinity in a society that had emasculated them. "The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and believing that are glorified in hip-hop and rap are a rejection of the prevailing values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy," says Bell Hooks in "Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity on the American Stage," by Annette Saddik.

If rappers and hip hop artists expressed anything that could be considered feminine or homosexual, their identity as a hip hop artist was questioned. Despite the importance of confidence and power in cultivating pride, this suppression of emotion. It's not up to music alone to cultivate an open culture, but the backlash that artists face when they express anything that could be perceived as femininity can make pioneering emotional expression an impossible task.

"If you're under 25, I truly believe Kid Cudi saved your life", says comedian Pete Davidson. Statistically speaking, the statement is an obvious overstatement, but Davidson, who says he would have taken his own life if not for Cudi's music, is one of many who think that rapper Kid Cudi's emotional honesty has changed rap forever.

It was Cudi who Kanye credits as the primary influence for his groundbreaking 2008 effort "808's and Heartbreak," in which he laid bare his grief following his mother's death. Even more impactful was Cudi's own breakout album, "Man on the Moon," in which Cudi addressed his struggles with depression and anxiety track after track. The album drastically outsold expectations, proving that vulnerability did not prevent stardom.

“Man on the Moon,” pioneered the changes made to traditional hip hop and was the voice that many young rappers like Drake called on for inspiration. “I know that showin’ emotion don’t ever mean I’m a pussy,” he raps on “Lord Knows.”

Drake is constantly criticized for his neediness and objectification of women, but nevertheless challenges what it means to be a rapper in this day and age. “Masculinity is a large part of our society and a music genre like Hip Hop is a reflection of it,” says Andresen. “It’s a bad thing if it’s privileging men at the expense of the women. It’s a good thing if it’s tearing down the system of White male patriarchy that marginalizes women.”

Other artists like Tyler, the Creator, challenge rap standards in a very different way. “I’m a f***ing walking paradox” rapped Tyler on Yonkers, the first single

off his first album. The line was his opening to the rap world, and as far as introductions go, few have ended up more accurate.

Since bursting onto the scene with his rap collective Odd Future in 2011, Tyler’s revolted against every standard set in rap, most standards set by society, and many of the standards he set for himself.

With bright out ts, fantastical but expressive lyrics, and an overwhelm- ing sense of weirdness, Tyler shocked the rap establishment while attract- ing its audience. Their openness with oddity and insecurity made many fans feel that they finally had a place in hip-hop, but Tyler’s use of the word f*ggot and his controversial statements may have pushed just as many away. Despite this, anarchical and expressive, Tyler, the Creator revolutionized the old rap regime with lyrics like “F**k your traditions... They’re not mine/ See, we can be ourselves.”

Tyler’s friend and fellow member of Odd Future, Frank Ocean, released an open letter in 2012 revealing that

his first love was a man. Despite this, Ocean rejects the label as a queer artist, or even as bisexual. “I’ll respectfully say that life is dynamic and comes along with dynamic experiences, and the same sentiment that I have towards genres of music, I have towards a lot of labels and boxes and sh*t,” he said in response to questions about his sexuality in an interview with GQ. “I’m in this business to be

creative.”

Tyler, the Creator himself openly referenced his sexuality in his 2017 re- lease of “Flower Boy,” despite having hinted at his orientation in the years prior. Audiences noticed lyrics like, “Truth is, since a youth kid, thought it was a phase,” from “Garden Shed,” and “Next line will have em like whoa/I been kissin white boys since 2004” from “I Aint Got Time.”

Other artists have spoken more openly about their sexuality with- in the music industry. Both rapper Young M.A. and musician and member of The Internet, Syd Tha Kyd have come out saying that they aren’t straight, but reject labels foisted on their sexuality. “Do I look straight to you? Shit, you got your answer,” says Syd tha Kyd in an interview with LA Weekly.

Other musicians have openly described themselves as gay and in- corporate queer dialogue into their music frequently. Kevin Abstract, a member of the rap collective and

self named “boy band,” Brockhampton, opens up about his sexuality and queerness within the music industry on 2017 album Saturation II. “Why you always rap about being gay? Cuz not enough n****s rap and be gay,” raps

Abstract on “Junky.”

Despite the in flux of queer rappers and hip hop artists, coming out within the music industry is still im-ossibly difficult. “How many young women and LGBTQ identified people actually feel respected by them and feel safe when they participate in practices that diminish them?,” says South Seattle musician Teddy Avestruz. “Be real just for a second. How many young men experience and suffer anxiety and depression everyday because they do not want to express their emotions around their “masculine” friends?”

As we move forward, hip hop will continue to change. “It will continue to evolve just as the other genre,” says Andresen. “My hope is that it will continue to resist being co-opted by the system of White Supremacy unlike other music genre created by Africans and African Americans.”

Issues like misogyny and homophobia, which used to be more or less swept aside, are now being confronted head on by the newest generation of artists. Some of these new artists are young enough to be in high school, like 17 year old Teddy Avestruz also known as alias Theomatic. Theomatic represents a generation of rappers who are speaking up like never before. “There are many artists rising up like myself, not only showing up with actual skill but having a strong message, I see a bright future.” But he concedes that

it takes more than just a message to create the kind of change he's seeking. "We need to have those difficult and uncomfortable conversations, educate others, and take action."

today artists at all levels of the music industry are working to combat rigid masculinity and white supremacy; vulnerably expressing a sense of self and emotion in their music. Those already in the mainstream, like Jay-Z, Tyler, the Creator, and Frank Ocean, have made a point to challenge listeners more now that they're in the spotlight, while numerous lesser known artists, like Princess Nokia and Brockhampton, have built platform on combating misogyny within the music industry.

"To change what it means to be a man, and be manly and masculine. That's why I said it's OK to get your feelings hurt, it's okay to admit that, and it's okay to cry because men can do that too," says Kevin Abstract of Brockhampton. This is a lofty goal, but with statements like these, artists are laying the groundwork for a much more open and inclusive future.

Davidson, Susana and Walsh, Patrick. "Masculinity in Hip-Hop: Taking the Mask Off." *The Garfield Messenger*. October 25, 2017. <https://www.garfieldmessenger.org/41...-the-mask-off/>.

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10.2: Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Classroom Activity

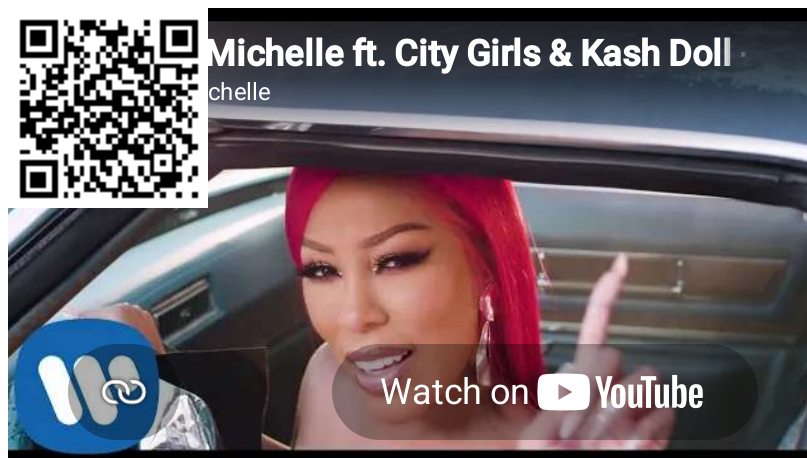
Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Classroom Activity

Have your students watch the following videos and give their thoughts. Guide their responses by asking the following questions:

- 1) How is masculinity and femininity being portrayed in these songs/videos?
- 2) How do the masculine and feminine portrayals align or differ from your personal views or perceptions of masculinity and femininity?
- 3) How impactful do you believe portrayals such as these are on real life relationships?



Destiny's Child. "Destiny's Child-Soldier ft. T.T., Lil' Wayne." YouTube video, 4:04. October 25, 2009.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFJ3VKnmJw>.



Kmichelle. "K. Michelle ft. City Girls & Kash Doll - SUPAHOOD." YouTube video, 3:39. October 15, 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PE7mvhuc5R0>.



Asian Doll. "Asian Doll - Lame Niggaz Part 2." YouTube video, 2:13. May 16, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XD8OBRNrDA>.

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10.3: Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Assignment

Relationships in the Hip Hop Era - Assignment

Read "[The One Role Gen Z Women Still Want Men to Play](#)" and write a 500 word paper comparing and contrasting the information discussed with the perceived norms and realities of hip hop generationers with regards to dating and relationships. Your paper should be 12 point Times New Roman font and double spaced.

Grading rubric for short papers is attached.

Wang, Wendy. "The One Role Gen Z Women Still Want Men to Play." *Institute for Family Studies*." February 6, 2026. <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-one-r...nt-men-to-play>.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

11: Hip Hop Street Culture on Film

In this module, you will learn about the significance of "gangster films" to hip hop culture. As stated by hip hop scholar Bikari Kitwana, "Aside from rap artists, films released between 1991 and 2001 that depicted gun-toting, ruthless, violent, predatory Black killing other Blacks (dubbed 'hood films by industry insiders) have been the most effective medium for defining and disseminating the new Black youth culture." Did these films accurately depict Black inner-city life during this time period? Were these films merely artistic expressions of reality or something far more sinister? These are some of the questions that this module will address.

This module will:

- Explore the influence of film on hip hop culture
- Discuss key figures in "gangster films" and what they represent

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify some of the most influential films in hip hop culture during the 1990s
- Recall some of the main characters in "hood films" and their significance to hip hop's image and culture

[11.1: Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Readings and Media](#)

[11.2: Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Classroom Activity](#)

[11.3: Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Assignment](#)

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11.1: Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about hip hop street culture on film.

Readings and Videos

The laundry list of issues plaguing the African American community societally, economically, psychologically, educationally, and behaviorally prohibits some of the luxury of lackadaisicalness in even the most recreational of venues—including music, sport, and motion pictures. Contrary to the famous 1993 rant of Charles Barkley, “I am not a role model,” professional athletes are indeed role models for American youth, similar to celebrities in other genres. In 1998, only 26 percent of African American children under the age of 18 lived with both parents. Of the 74 percent who lived in single-parent households, 70 percent lived with his or her mother. Given the disproportionate rates of fatherlessness in Black households around the nation, visible male figures of status have an inherent responsibility to acknowledge the impact of their public actions on impressionable youth. Additionally, as a community, African Americans must use caution when propelling certain individuals—whether celebrities, fictional film characters, or infamous crime figures—into positions of iconography or notoriety. These individuals can easily and unwittingly begin to serve as the role models so many young African American youth are yearning for.

Crack cocaine has submerged itself in African American culture in various ways. In addition to its pharmacological impact on the human body, crack has influenced law and, perhaps more importantly, culture. Beyond crack’s obvious impression on rap music during hip hop’s formative years, the drug infiltrated the world of urban film. Through this cinematic penetration, crack cocaine found an effective and visual recreational medium to further spread its destructive propensities. Using this platform, the culture surrounding crack cocaine use and distribution—or “hustling”—graduated from individual inner-city neighborhoods to becoming visible to countless millions from the comfort of their couches or local movie theater seats. As a result of this enormous platform, crack used the same charisma it employed to seduce “the streets” to partner with the already seductive powers of movie-star celebrity status to create “crack icons.”

An icon, as defined by authors David Scott and Keyan G. Tomaselli, “encodes the person or object so identified as personifying the exemplar of a particular generation, a stylistic epoch, and a feeling about a particular set of social experiences. Although the icon or cult object so identified is something with which we can all identify, it is at the same time a construction, a product deriving from the media, entertainment, or public relations industries. Although its origin is in the real, the operations to which it is submitted in the iconization process transform it into a simulacrum.” A more operational Black Studies definition of an icon is similar to that of Scott and Tomaselli but must make accommodations for the uniqueness of the African American experience and hip hop culture. In this circumstance, an icon is the personification of the generation and culture of its admirer. An icon is an individual or object that has influence over one’s actions, attitudes, perceptions, and formulation of racial, sexual, and overall self-identity. While indeed a social construct iconized by the media and entertainment industries, an icon, through the public’s manifestation of his or her influence, embodies the space of an actual being.

The collectivity of African American plight, the popularization of crack cocaine, and the motion picture industry created the “crack icon.” These crack icons would prove to serve not only as the role models that many Black fathers failed to become—and that Mr. Barkley so vehemently refused to be—but also as almost deified figures to much of Black America, none more omnipotent than fictional film character Nino Brown.

This chapter examines the crack icon, particularly Nino Brown, and the continued perpetuation of his philosophies through hip hop culture. This continuance has proven detrimental to hip hop culture and another valuable avenue for crack to intrude upon urban Black America. Further, the film *New Jack City*, for which Nino Brown is the main character, is analyzed and critiqued, as it too has achieved iconic status within hip hop culture. Like its predecessor and obvious inspiration, *Scarface*—whose lead character, Tony Montana, achieved arguably even greater iconic status among hip hoppers, despite being Cuban and selling powder cocaine rather than crack—*New Jack City* inspired future generations to aspire to lives of drug dealing. I argue that the harmful “dope boy” persona adopted by far too many contemporary members of the hip hop generation and rap artists—many of whom were crack dealers themselves—is a product of *New Jack City* and Nino Brown’s tremendous influence on Black urban America.

As stated in a featured article in *Complex* magazine celebrating the 20th anniversary of the release of *New Jack City*:

“New Jack remains one of the most influential hip-hop films ever. Directed by Mario Van Peebles, starring Wesley Snipes (as drug kingpin Nino Brown), Ice-T (as Officer Scotty Appleton), and Chris Rock (as a crackhead named Pookie), the film has gotten much love from the hip-hop community over the years. Whether it was admiration for Nino Brown’s don status, sorrow for Pookie’s addictive tendencies, or just being in awe of The Carter, rappers have basically referenced every single famous scene from the film.”

The Influence of Television and Film

Similar to other influential elements common in individuals’ lives—such as parenting, peer groups, schooling, personal exploration, and church—various forms of media impact the ways individuals view and participate in the world. As noted by psychologists Lisa Butler, Cheryl Koopman, and Philip Zimbardo, “the mass media, particularly television, increases the public’s awareness and knowledge about everything.” They go on to state that “information can be conveyed even in dramatic programming not specifically designed to educate.”

Similar to music, television and film are easily digested by the public; therefore, messages can be conveyed to audiences with relative ease and convenience. Perhaps there is no better indicator of the belief in media’s psychological and social influence on individuals than the hundreds of millions of dollars politicians spend on television advertisements during their campaigns. If there were not a sincere belief in the ability of messages and imagery in television commercials to influence individuals’ perspectives, this money would be better spent elsewhere. As stated by researcher Ted Brader, “Observers have long recognized that politicians appeal to the emotions of citizens, and these appeals are a hallmark of the television advertising that dominates contemporary elections.” This media effect is certainly not lost on African American moviegoers.

The influence of television, specifically film, on young African Americans of the hip hop generation is arguably more potent than any other form of media—including rap music—a fact argued by several rap artists themselves. In defense of rap music’s often violent, sexually oriented, and crime-riddled content, rap artist Cam’ron and hip hop mogul Damon Dash argued that, by comparison, movies have more of an impact on the psyches and behaviors of audiences. Harlem emcee Cam’ron stated that, as a hip hop artist, he “has an influence...but so do movies...a lot of influence I think goes to movies, a lot of people look at the movies and then they react.” In the same interview, on the nightly news program *The O’Reilly Factor*, Dash added, while arguing the impact of films, that “if there’s an unsupervised child, how is he to know whether it’s real or not, how is he to determine what’s real or not real? Who is to supervise him?” He went on to argue that movies’ impact is more significant because “there is a visual.” These sentiments are shared by another hip hop artist, Jay-Z, who once stated that “*Scarface* the movie did more than *Scarface* the rapper to me, so that ain’t to blame for all the shit that happened to me.”

The impact of film, or at least its potential impact, on Black America was eloquently articulated by author James Snead in *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*. Here he states that “Even in the infancy of motion pictures, it was obvious that film, as a new way of perceiving reality, opened up entirely new perceptual possibilities, giving the eye an augmented sense of visual mastery over its surroundings, preserving events in motion for a seemingly unlimited number of future replays, performing a wide variety of functions: educational; propagandistic; recreational; aesthetic.” Each of these proposed functions, if absorbed, is cogent to the psyche of audience members. If audience members are in fact learning through education, being exposed to dishonest and biased information through propaganda, willingly and excitedly viewing movies for recreation, and processing the imagery and portrayals on display aesthetically, then the content of films is certainly influencing viewers’ cognition and is therefore a necessary subject for detailed investigation.

Davis, Daniel. "The Charisma of Crack Cocaine: The Impact of Crack on Black American, 1984-2010." PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2012.

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11.2: Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Classroom Activity

Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Classroom Activity - "A Film's Impact on You"

This module focuses on how hip hop culture, combined with street culture, is depicted in film and its impact on the hip hop community. As discussed, along with music, hip hop generationers have been heavily influenced by the genre's films. In class, please have your students pair off (groups of two) and interview each other about how films and movies have impacted their lives. These can be any films (not just "hip hop films") and any impact is relevant. After they interview each other, have students share out to the class whatever information they got from their partner. Some possible questions to help students with their interviews:

- What is your favorite film ever and why?
- What film most resonates with you personally?
- If any film told your life story what would it be?
- Has any particular film or film character influenced how you view the world?
- Do you have a favorite quote from a film?

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11.3: Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Assignment

Hip Hop Street Culture on Film - Assignment

After viewing the two videos below, discuss the relationship between hip hop and film. These videos address this relationship in different ways. The first video highlights the impact traditional "gangster movies" have had on hip hop culture. Classic mob movies like *Scarface* and others laid the groundwork for hip hop gangster films that would follow. The second video discusses arguably the first and most influential hip hop influenced gangster movie of all time, *New Jack City*.

Your initial discussion post must be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 350 words.

You must also respond to one other student's post in 75-100 words. Remember to use evidence directly from the video (feel free to time stamp your video reference)

Grading rubric for discussion posts is attached.



Genius. "The Best Gangster Movie Lyrics - Genius News." YouTube video, 6:43. July 12, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eD_PO1VIVWo.



Henry Cooper. "New Jack City - A Hip Hop Classic." YouTube video, 20:18. January 7, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJSluRm7l08>.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

12: Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop

In this module, we focus on two topics that are separate, but directly connected and major areas of importance to hip hop: culture-misogyny and commercialization. Misogyny is defined as "dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice toward women." Many argue that hip hop culture is misogynistic in much of its music, film, art, and overall cultural norms. Commercialization, defined as "the process of managing or running something principally for financial gain" is viewed by many as a harmful reality to the purity and identity of hip hop. Factually, most of hip hop's "power brokers" are not part of the hip hop community. More specifically, the economic leaders of hip hop in the form of record label owners/executives, lawyers, venue owners, etc...are elderly White men. These two topics, misogyny and commercialization combine under the age old adage that "sex sells." The popular argument is that hip hop's outsider power brokers are selling demeaning, over-sexualized images of Black women to the public for financial gain. Additionally, the argument is that hip hop's primary practitioners of note, men of color, are allowing and even encouraging this approach to "selling the culture" at the expense of cultural uplift and progression. Hip hop scholar, Dr. Jeffrey Ogbar speaks on both of these topics and gives great insight into these issues in a video you'll view this week. Also, you will view the music video "I Used to Love Her" by hip hop legend and Chicago native Common.

This module will:

- Explore the concept of misogyny in hip hop culture
- Examine the commercialization of hip hop culture

Upon Completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Discuss how misogyny presents itself in popular hip hop culture
- Discuss how commercialization has impacted hip hop culture and its reputation

[12.1: Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Readings and Media](#)

[12.2: Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Classroom Activity](#)

[12.3: Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Assignment](#)

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12.1: Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will explore misogyny and the commercialization of hip hop.

Readings and Videos

Black Women, Hip Hop, and Misogyny

I knew little about the music industry before becoming editor in chief of *Honey*, a young magazine for urban women, right after the somewhat anticlimactic shift from the 20th to the 21st century. Within a week of offering me the job, my new boss invited me to Sean Combs' notorious White Party in the Hamptons.

It seemed as if every major urban entertainment heavy hitter were milling around the conspicuously luxurious modern house and vast grounds. These were the elites who decided what sound was hot and which artists would get radio play; which designers were in and what styles were next; and which restaurants, nightclubs, luxury cars, vacation destinations, and liquor brands were considered the coolest.

It was immediately and abundantly clear that hip hop was primarily a male preserve in which men discussed how they were going to handle other men they considered allies or adversaries—and what they were going to do to women they considered props or property.

It was nearly impossible to tell which fabulous woman was a model and which was an executive.

The hierarchy was a clearly defined caste system, with the most powerful male ballers surrounded by a crew of slightly less formidable men who were rewarded for their hype-man-like loyalty with riches and access. Save for a very few female music, style, or media executives, the party was largely populated by naïve women not more than a decade removed from puberty, whose goal seemed to be getting as close as possible to the primary baller.

I had never been around a crowd so universally beautiful and dressed to the nines; it was nearly impossible to tell which fabulous woman was a model and which was an executive. Though my boss introduced me as the new editor in chief of *Honey*, almost every man I spoke with openly ogled me, asked if I had ever considered modeling, or offered to put me in his next video. I was grateful when rain cut the party short.

My eagerness to leave was tempered by the fact that my boss had consumed too many martinis to drive. While I was able to navigate his sports car back to the city, it was obvious that I did not yet possess the skills to navigate the complex power dynamics of hip hop culture. Consequently, my boss introduced me to the late Andre Harrell, founder of Uptown Records and the kingmaker who gave Diddy his first break, to help me learn how to survive in an industry that both welcomed and disrespected me.

Andre was immediately generous with his time and insight. The ultimate music-industry insider, Andre was a marketer at heart. So when he said, "Look, Amy, you are a brand that hasn't been built yet. Everything you do in the next six months will determine what that brand is and how people in the industry will treat you," I believed him. He also told me the industry was filled with "men who never had anything, so the minute that they have a taste of something, they want everything. And they talk. Everyone will be watching you to see what choice you make, so make good choices while you can."

Andre's wise words stayed with me as I puzzled over how to command respect within a culture that valued physical attractiveness and style over my master's degree and my position running a key source of relevant journalism for a critical demographic. I understood what Andre meant: much of the male bravado in hip hop masked anger, frustration, and deep insecurity stemming from poverty, trauma, and emotional voids. I also came to understand that the misogyny within hip hop culture ran as deeply among the mostly male executives as it did within the music itself.

After its explosive growth from a regional subculture into a multimillion-dollar international industry, hip hop was at its zenith. Hip hop and mainstream culture had become virtually indistinguishable; models walked high-fashion runways in dookie chains and durags, while hip hop music executives and artists dominated a key part of New York's social scene. I had watched hip hop's decisive takeover during the 1980s from the front stoop of my family home in Harlem. Kurtis Blow, Run-D.M.C., LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, and Will Smith released party songs that still fill dance floors today. Though the music began changing in the late 1980s, the predominant vibe into the early 1990s remained funky, fresh fun.

However, the increasing violence of inner cities altered by drug use and poverty fueled the rise of gangsta rap, which came to dominate the genre by the mid-1990s. At first, record labels refused to sign music containing misogynistic overtones. Yet as gangsta rap's glorified depictions of violence gained acceptance within lyrics and urban iconography, sexually explicit themes—and ultimately widespread misogyny—became normalized as well. Women were derided with vulgar nicknames and portrayed as deserving of violence.

Sociologist Ronald Weitzer and criminologist Charis E. Kubrin described five major misogynistic themes in rap music: derogatory naming and shaming of women, sexual objectification of women, distrust of women, legitimization of violence against women, and celebration of prostitution and pimping.

When labels recognized the commercial traction violent and misogynistic music was gaining, they shifted their approach to distributing gangsta rap records. As music chronicling murderous street life and sexist violence received increased radio play, labels eventually relented and began signing gangsta rap artists. Interscope Records' groundbreaking partnership with Dr. Dre, Suge Knight, and Death Row Records opened the floodgates and led to the proliferation of controversial hip hop.

The culture surrounding the music shifted as well, emboldening artists and executives to enact the misogynistic themes present in the music within their everyday lives. Violence toward women became aspirational for some men. Because hip hop culture had become synonymous with mainstream culture, the effects extended beyond music into fashion, sports, film, and entertainment broadly. It became acceptable for a platinum-selling rapper to grab my body in a club, for a well-known label executive to lock the doors of a limousine and refuse to let me out until I kissed him, for my pager to fill with lewd propositions from entertainment and sports power brokers, and for men to casually refer to me as a “bitch” or “ho” when rejected. I heeded Andre's advice while watching women without the benefit of his wisdom make one too many missteps with the wrong baller and suffer consequences far worse.

I tried to cultivate a personal brand that limited harassment, but I learned that my success often depended on powerful music-industry men finding me attractive and maintaining the illusion that I might someday belong to them. As one anonymous female music executive stated, “Music industry ballers had a God complex. They had to feel like every woman desired them and that they could have any woman they wanted. And they acted like kids in a candy shop, choosing from a selection of women and drugs.”

The world I entered as editor in chief of *Honey* was an intoxicating and dangerous mixture of glamour and excess. Hip hop generated enormous wealth and influence alongside a social scene saturated with indulgence and debauchery. The culture demanded that women dress as if attending a party every single day: low-slung jeans with cropped tops, miniskirts with knee-high boots, catsuits with stilettos. As at Diddy's White Party, one often could not distinguish female executives from video dancers—and in that work-hard/play-harder environment, everyone socialized together at nearly nightly parties.

The scene was a minefield through which some of us maneuvered carefully, balancing strategic sexiness with firm boundaries. Yet it was littered with cautionary tales: women struggling with addiction, women raising children fathered by various ballers, women burned out emotionally and professionally, women whose reputations became irreparably damaged, and women who did not survive at all, succumbing to suicide or overdose. The darker hip hop became, the less safe it became for women—especially Black women, whose image was disproportionately shaped by degrading and objectifying lyrics.

And we knew it. Women in and around the industry discussed these realities constantly over brunches, dinners, and group phone conversations. Yet few spoke publicly. The tyranny of fear that often discourages Black women from taking risks for fear of losing the tenuous status they have attained affected our willingness to challenge a small industry where everyone knew everyone else.

Perhaps we had also internalized hip hop's “no snitching” code—a misguided form of self-governance that protected communities from external punishment within racist systems while simultaneously allowing injustice to persist unchecked. There was also the unspoken cultural oath many Black women felt to protect Black men. Because systemic racism disproportionately targets Black men, many Black women remain reluctant to add to those burdens, even when confronted with deeply misogynistic behavior and even when doing so requires minimizing their own trauma.

Over a decade later, during the rise of the Me Too movement in Hollywood, group chats among women in music and entertainment media once again filled with stories of sexual harassment and assault. We shared our experiences and lamented the persistence of casual degradation and hypersexualization. Yet although many of us carried stories as painful as those emerging from Hollywood, most still remained silent publicly.

For years, I struggled to understand why the trauma experienced by women in the music industry seemed less clearly acknowledged. I now believe the distinction lies in a fundamental difference between Hollywood and music: Hollywood reflects culture, whereas music drives it. Since hip hop has long shaped popular culture, its emerging Me Too reckoning cannot be reduced to a handful of problematic individuals within a powerful industry. The rampant misogyny emerging from gangsta rap and related subgenres has affected not only women working within music but generations of people across the United States and around the world through the behaviors and values it normalized.

Because misogyny had become such a ubiquitous part of a culture we loved, many of us simply accepted it as inevitable. That is why lawsuits and allegations brought forward by women such as Drew Dixon and Cassie Ventura against prominent industry figures became such seismic cultural moments.

Barnett, Amy. "For Black women, the world of hip-hop has always been a minefield of misogyny." *Voices*. March 27, 2024. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainmen...dy-allegations>.

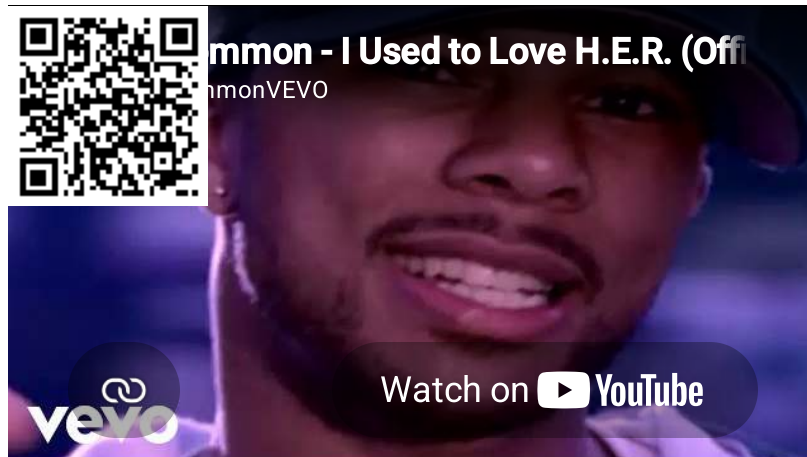
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12.2: Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Classroom Activity - "I Used to Love Her"

Have your students watch the following video "I Used to Love Her" by legendary hip hop artist, from Chicago, Common. This song is heralded as one of the greatest songs in hip hop history because of the message it presents. After viewing this video have your students answer the following questions:

- 1) What was the meaning of this song?
- 2) Did the artist do a good job making his point?
- 3) Do you agree with the message of the video or do you see it differently?
- 4) What are the consequences of the message delivered in this video?



Common. "Common - I Used to Love H.E.R." YouTube video, 4:29. January 29, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrUERC2Zk64>.

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12.3: Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Assignment

Misogyny and the Commercialization of Hip Hop - Assignment

Please discuss the videos "[Dr. Jeffrey Ogbar: Hip Hop Misogyny and Commercialization](#)" and Common's "I Used to Love Her." In your discussion, think about how the terms misogyny and commercialization intersect. What are the consequences of this intersection? Who is benefiting from misogyny and commercialization in hip hop?

Your initial post must be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 350 words.

You must also respond to one other student's post in 75 to 100 words. Remember to use evidence directly from the video (feel free to time stamp your video reference).



imsoeducated. "Dr. Jeffrey Ogbar drops knowledge on Misogyny & The Commercialization of Hip-Hop." YouTube video, 12:22. October 28, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2R2EGyvd4j0>.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13: Capitalism and Hip Hop



(Live Nation Entertainment Executive Leadership and Board of Directors)

[Photo Credit](#)

This module's focus is on how capitalism impacts hip hop culture. Capitalism, defined as "an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state." As you'll see in the video titled "How Capitalism Ruins Hip Hop." Specifically, the argument here is that hip hop has become "watered down" to appeal to mainstream society for financial gain. In the process, many would say that hip hop has "lost its soul" and "sold out" to corporate interests. Therefore, individuals that aren't part of the culture are the main beneficiaries of its popularity.

This module will:

- Discuss how capitalism and hip hop intersect
- Discuss the impact capitalism has on hip hop culture and its future

Upon completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify the actors responsible for the commercialization of hip hop culture
- Identify the impact commercialization has had on hip hop culture

[13.1: Capitalism and Hip Hop - Readings and Media](#)

[13.2: Capitalism and Hip Hop - Classroom Activity](#)

[13.3: Capitalism and Hip Hop - Assignment](#)

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13.1: Capitalism and Hip Hop - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will discuss capitalism and hip hop.

Readings and Videos

The ownership and leadership class of the recording industry is overwhelmingly dominated by white people. More specifically, it is dominated by white men. Conversely, most of hip hop's artists and celebrities are African American. Additionally, aside from race, these two groups differ in their respective backgrounds with regards to the neighborhoods they grew up in, their educational histories, and often times their criminal histories. Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, these two groups differ in the culture's they represent: hip hop/street culture and corporate American culture. As a result, we see a situation where artists have to grapple with putting out art that is true to themselves versus pleasing their record label executives, whose main purpose is making money. Moreover, this tension is complicated by the fact that money making content and pure art often conflict with one another.

Hip Hop existing within a white non-hip hop power structure causes many issues. How do artists fight off pressure to create stereotypical and often degrading music and videos? Why isn't there more African American representation in the corporate class of the music industry? These are a couple of the questions the article and video below will address.

The Music Industry: It's Still a White Boys' Club...

Paul Resnikoff

January 20, 2014



(Live Nation Entertainment Executive Leadership and Board of Directors, 2014.)

Blues was invented in America, and so was Rap. Blues led to Rock n' Roll; Rap transformed the entire landscape of modern pop music. Simply stated, without the African-American influence, American music **would probably suck**.

So why, if the influence of Black artists on music is so massive, are there hardly any powerful Black executives in the modern music industry?

Why are companies like Pandora, Live Nation, Apple, Spotify, AEG, Warner Music Group, SXSW, Clear Channel Communications, and Universal Music Group dominated by white executives, often from privileged backgrounds and educations?

Why do executives like Troy Carter and Chuck D always feel like 'token Black guys' at major music industry events?

Sure, you can rattle off the names of hyper-successful African-American music industry executives like Jay Z, [will.i.am](https://www.will.i.am), and Carter, but those are exceptions that prove the rule. Because after meeting with hundreds of music industry companies and probably thousands of executives, attorneys, technologists, and investors while running Digital Music News, I can safely say that bumping into a successful Black music industry executive is a rare event.

And it's way worse on the technology and live concert side, i.e., the biggest growth areas of this industry.

Let me take it a step further: off the top of my head, I can't name **one** Black executive from Pandora, Live Nation, Apple, Spotify, AEG, or SXSW, just to pluck from the above list. That doesn't mean they don't exist, but for the most part, they are not in prominent, influential positions at these companies. And, sadly, there's a distinct possibility there **aren't any** influential Black executives on the payrolls at many of these enterprises.

But Spotify is Swedish, right? That's the country of origin, yes, but the US is their biggest and most important market. **And we have Black people here** (but, not [here](#)).

Thank God this isn't my father's music industry, when the greatest, most creative Black artists toiled in poverty (while being mercilessly copied and exploited by white artists). When famous African-American musicians battled a tricky maze of racism and violent threats while touring America. When there were two types of radio stations, Black and white.

When someone like Jay Z couldn't have possibly existed.

[But comparing this industry to the industry of the 50s and 60s doesn't really accomplish much. We're out of the dark ages, sure, but there isn't a dark face in the boardroom to prove it.](#)

And if only the most extremely talented, insanely intelligent, and amazingly lucky Black executives are making it, then there's still a big problem. In the music industry, in music technology, and America at large.

Written while listening to The Black Album by Jay Z.

Live Nation top executive team and board members. Top row (l to r): Michael Rapino (President, Chief Executive Officer and Director); John Reid (President, Live Nation Europe-Concerts); Alan Ridgeway (President, International and Emerging Markets); Ron Bension (President, HOB Entertainment); Jared Smith (President, Ticketmaster North America); Arthur Fogel (Chairman, Global Music and President, Global Touring); Simon Lewis (President, Live Nation Europe—Sponsorship and Concerts); Gregory B. Maffei (Chairman of the Board).

2nd row (l to r): Mark Yovich (President, Ticketmaster International); Joe Berchtold (Chief Operating Officer); Russell Wallach (President, Media & Sponsorship); James S. Kahan (Board of Directors); Eric Garland (General Manager, Live Nation Digital); Mark Campana (Co-President, North America Concerts); Bob Roux (Co-President, North America Concerts); John Hopmans (Executive Vice President – Mergers and Acquisitions and Strategic Finance).

3rd row (l to r): Michael Rowles (General Counsel and Secretary); Mark Carleton (Board of Directors); Peggy Johnson (Board of Directors); Jonathan L. Dolgen (Board of Directors); Ariel Emanuel (Board of Directors); Robert Ted Enloe, III (Board of Directors); Kathy Willard (Chief Financial Officer); Mark Shapiro (Board of Directors).

Resnikoff, Paul. "The Music Industry: It's Still a White Boy's Club..." *Digital Music News*. January 20, 2014. <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/201...whiteboysclub/>.



Black History Files. "How Has Commercialization Impacted Hip Hop's Artistic Integrity? - Black History Files." YouTube video, 3:14. November 3, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0Lo4k0Yti0>.

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13.2: Capitalism and Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

Capitalism and Hip Hop - Classroom Activity

Discuss the previous reading and video with your students about how commercialization has impacted hip hop culture. Specifically, discuss the possible consequences of individuals outside of a culture determining the direction of said culture. Mention the possibility of artist exploitation, misdirection, and the possible harm of this dynamic. After your discussion, have your class watch these two videos. Ask the following questions:

- 1- What points are being made in the respective videos?
- 2- From what you know about hip hop and music overall, are their points accurate?
- 3- What are the potential consequences of the message these artists have presented?



TheColi.com. "Jay Z - Tidal B-Sides Concert Freestyle." YouTube video, 2:06. May 16, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L84VEVDmzwo>.



Atlantic Records. "Lupe Fiasco - Dumb It Down." YouTube video, 4:08. October 26, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjQqONuVJbQ>.

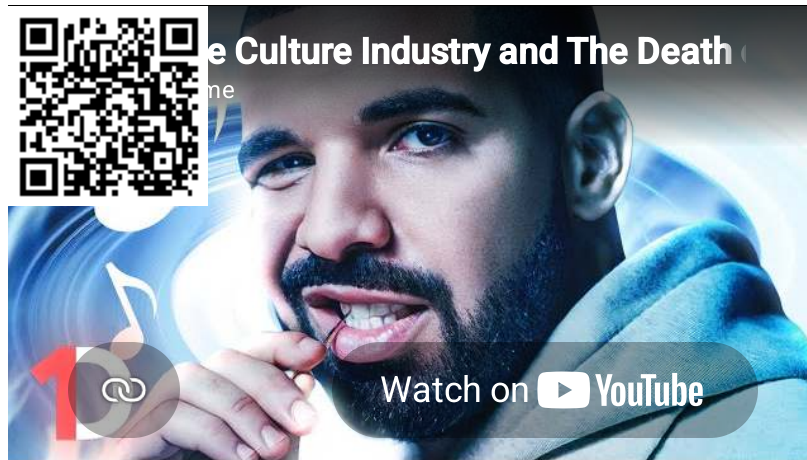
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13.3: Capitalism and Hip Hop - Assignment

Capitalism and Hip Hop - Assignment

The video documentary, "[The Culture Industry and the Death of Hip Hop](#)," explores the relationship between corporate interests and the cultural art form of hip hop. As has been discussed this module, hip hop artists' integrity is consistently compromised by corporate pressures. Some argue that this pressure has destroyed the culture and altered its purity and purpose. After viewing the video, students will write a 500 word response paper. In the response, students will discuss the relationship between corporate American and hip hop. The paper must be 12 point Times New Roman font and double spaced.

Grading rubric for short papers is attached.



1Dime. "The Culture Industry and The Death of Hip Hop." YouTube video, 39:43. September 11, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvOGeaEP_c0&t=1s.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

14: Trap Music

This module discusses *Trap Music*. Its creator, hip hop legend TI, says trap music is music that "outlines and details the life of a drug dealer or former drug dealer." The *trap* defined as the place that drug dealers sell drugs, also metaphorically defines an environment where individuals live with few productive and positive options. Therefore, they are "trapped" in a situation where the only way to attempt to escape is through criminality, namely drug dealing. Centered in the southern United States, and evolving from the hustler and gangsta rap era of the 1990s, trap music became the dominant form of hip hop music in the early 2000s, and has maintained relevance, though diminishing, to present day. This music and aligned cultural norms, mores, and style, are a direct result of the 1980s and 1990s crack epidemic that overwhelmed predominately Black low-income communities around the country.

This module will:

- Define trap music and its origins
- Discuss the influence trap music has had on hip hop culture overall

Upon completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify key figures in trap music
- Explain the impact trap music has had on hip hop culture

[14.1: Trap Music - Readings and Media](#)

[14.2: Trap Music - Classroom Activity](#)

[14.3: Trap Music - Assignment](#)

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14.1: Trap Music - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will inform students about trap music.

Readings and Videos

What is Trap Music?

Trap music is a subgenre of rap music characterized by heavy bass, complex drum patterns featuring rapid hi-hats and rhythmic snare hits, and booming sub-bass lines known as “808s,” named after the Roland TR-808 drum machine. Emerging from the Southern hip hop scene, trap incorporates elements of electronic dance music (EDM). The genre frequently employs triplet rhythms—three notes to one beat—and performers often utilize triplet flows within their verses. Lyrically, trap music commonly centers on themes of drugs, sex, violence, and the pursuit of wealth through street life.

Origins in Atlanta

Trap music originated during the 1990s in Atlanta as an offshoot of gangsta rap, a subgenre known for lyrics recounting violence and gang-related activities. The term “trap” derives from “trap houses,” locations where illegal drugs such as crack cocaine are manufactured and sold, while also symbolizing the feeling of being trapped beyond the margins of society.

One of the earliest rappers to use the term *trap* in a lyric was Khujo of the Atlanta hip hop group Goodie Mob. In the 1995 song “Thought Process” from the album *soul food* he raps:

All my folks that hang with me
When I was out in the trap or when I was goin’
Through one of our episodes, only God knows
What I go through, so I get down on my knees

Although Khujo credited André 3000 of Outkast as the first rapper to use the term in a song, the track he referenced, “Player’s Ball” (1993), does not actually contain the word. André 3000, however, appears as a guest artist on “Thought Process,” and his verse includes a variation of the term.

Trap’s signature sound was developed by producer Shawty Redd (Demetrius Stewart) during the late 1990s. While collaborating with Alabama-born rapper Drama on the 2000 album *Causin’ Drama*, Shawty Redd introduced what he called “booty-shake” hi-hats, helping to shape the rhythmic foundation of trap music. He later explained that he “just wanted something that would make me bounce.” Shawty Redd also became known for his work with Snoop Dogg, Lil Jon, Yo Gotti, Young Jeezy, and Gucci Mane—the latter two often regarded as part of the “holy trinity of trap.”

T.I.—the third member of trap’s so-called holy trinity—helped bring the subgenre into the mainstream with his second album, *Trap Muzik* (2003), produced in collaboration with DJ Toomp. The album debuted at number four on the *Billboard* 200 chart and number two on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart. Featuring production from Kanye West and David Banner, the album combined fatalistic lyrics about hustling and survival with innovative production, effectively establishing trap music within the hip hop canon.

Evolution and Rising Popularity

Around 2009, producer Lex Luger introduced more aggressive trap beats inspired by Shawty Redd and DJ Toomp to rapper Waka Flocka Flame. Originally from New York City, Waka Flocka Flame relocated to the Atlanta suburbs at age nine and later became affiliated with Gucci Mane. He adopted Luger’s dramatic production style for his debut album *Flockaveli* (2010). Songs such as “Hard in Da Paint” became major hits and helped further popularize the trap sound through aggressive energy and lyrics emphasizing street loyalty.

The 2010s witnessed the rise of Atlanta trap artists such as Future, Young Thug, and 2 Chainz. The latter released the critically acclaimed *Pretty Girls Like Trap Music* (2017), while Future emerged as one of the genre’s most commercially successful artists, earning Grammy Awards and multiple multiplatinum albums. Future’s blending of melodic singing with rap, combined with

production from hitmaker Metro Boomin, elevated trap's mainstream appeal. Their 2017 collaboration "Mask Off" became a global success, accumulating billions of streams.

Trap music also became associated with highly publicized rap feuds. Kendrick Lamar's guest verse on Future and Metro Boomin's collaborative album *We Don't Trust You* (2024) intensified a widely discussed conflict with Canadian rapper Drake. Other notable disputes involved Waka Flocka Flame and Gucci Mane, as well as Nicki Minaj and Cardi B.

By 2017, trap music dominated popular music charts and helped propel R&B/hip hop into the position of the number-one music genre in the United States, according to *Billboard*. Its sound was adopted by established artists such as Drake and Nicki Minaj, along with younger streaming-era artists including Juice WRLD and Lil Uzi Vert, who first gained attention through SoundCloud. Commercially successful albums such as *Culture* and *ASTROWORLD* demonstrated the enormous mainstream appetite for trap music.

No longer confined to the American South, trap expanded nationally and globally. Artists and producers associated with regional trap scenes included Flosstradamus from Chicago, Baauer from Brooklyn, Fetty Wap from New Jersey, and Bronx rappers Ice Spice and Cardi B. Internationally, trap scenes emerged in Canada, Latin America, Europe, and Asia. Artists such as Bad Bunny and Rosalía incorporated trap into Latin and flamenco-inspired music, while Japanese artists blended trap with anime-inspired cultural references.

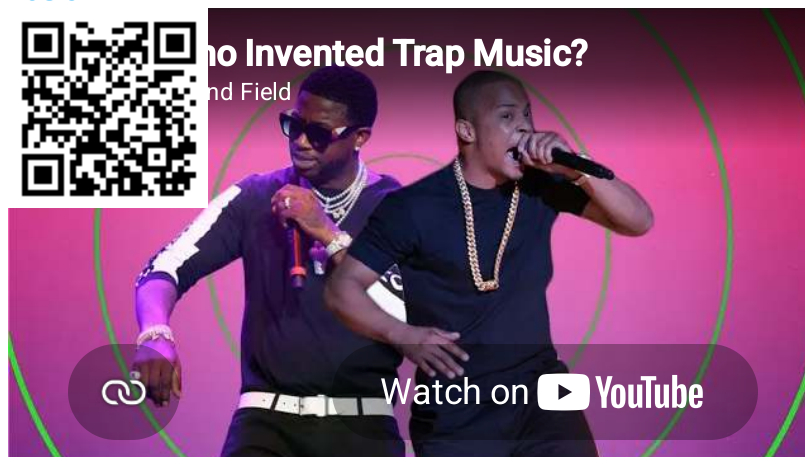
EDM Trap and Other Offshoots

Meanwhile, Scottish EDM artists Hudson Mohawke and Rustie, along with Canadian producer Lunice, began incorporating trap-inspired beats into electronic dance music, contributing to the emergence of EDM trap.

Additional trap offshoots soon developed, including Latin trap, K-pop trap, tropical trap, and trap soul. Even country music incorporated trap influences, with artists such as Post Malone and Jelly Roll blending trap production with country aesthetics. One of the most commercially successful examples was *Old Town Road* by Lil Nas X featuring Billy Ray Cyrus, which spent a record-breaking 19 weeks at number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart.

Payne, L., Shulman, D. "trap music." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 9, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/art/trap-music..>

Who Invented Trap Music?



Sound Field. "Who Invented Trap Music?" YouTube video, 9:45. February 28, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKicD86F7KA>.

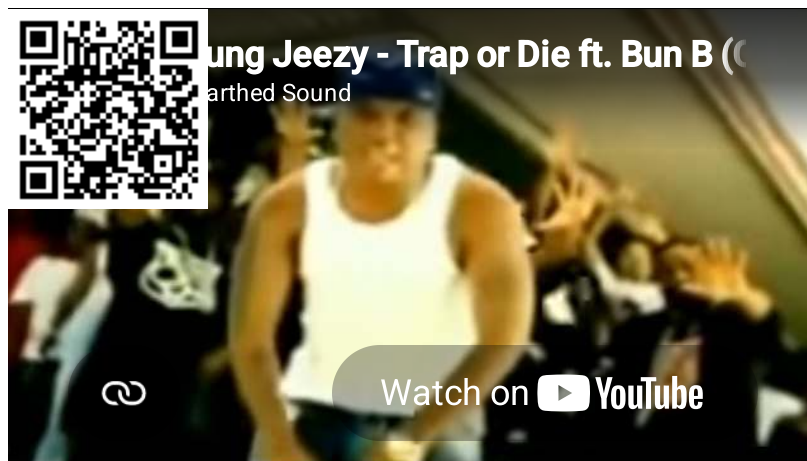
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14.2: Trap Music - Classroom Activity

Trap Music - Classroom Activity

After your students watch the two videos below, have your students answer the following questions:

- 1) What are these songs/videos about?
- 2) What image are the artist trying to portray?
- 3) Does the content of these songs match your understanding of the term "trap music?" Why or why not?
- 4) Which word would you say best describes either or both of these songs/videos?
 - Sad
 - Triumphant
 - Cool
 - Motivational
 - Tragic



Unearthed Sound. "Young Jeezy - Trap or Die ft. Bun B (Official Video)." YouTube video, 4:02. May 16, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYvH9wb0QnU>.



T.I. "Doin' My Job." YouTube video, 4:13. April 7, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYvH9wb0QnU>.

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14.3: Trap Music - Assignment

Trap Music - Assignment - The Trap Museum

After the reading and videos of this module, you should have an understanding of the origin, meaning, and art of "trap music." In celebration and recognition of "the trap" and "trap music" its founder T.I. established the Trap Music Museum. This museum was created to document the history of trap music and celebrate those that "survived" the trap and all the consequences that come from dwelling in that environment.

Please discuss the videos below with your classmates via three discussion posts. 1) your initial post which must be a response to the videos (minimum 250 words) 2) ask a question about the videos 3) respond to a classmate's post (minimum 75 words). Some questions to help guide your responses are: 1) Is the trap music museum a good idea? Why or why not? 2) Should behaviors like "trapping" be celebrated in any way? 3) Should the trap museum be viewed as celebratory or looked at like a war museum that documents the struggles and tough circumstances of those from this background?

Grading rubric for discussion posts is attached.



Elex Michaelson. "T.I. Tours the Trap Music Museum." YouTube video, 3:06. February 1, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIHwY9bs1Hk>.



Nellie life. "The Trap Music Museum - Atlanta, GA." YouTube video, 15:57. May 29, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iibx41vZ0CI>.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

15: Drill Music

This module will focus Drill Music, a recent sub-genre of hip hop that has dominated the culture for over a decade. Drill music is defined as the theme music to murder, and despite this genre spreading around the world, Chicago is its birthplace. Unfortunately, Chicago is one of the most violent cities in the United States, and drill music not only tells the stories of these "beefs" it often inflames the tension between rivals. Drill music and its propensity to inflame street violence, has spread far beyond Chicago. Cities around the country and even abroad have been witnessing large numbers of drill artists and shootings, stabbings, and murders associated with the music.

This module will:

- Define drill music
- Discuss drill music's history and impact on hip hop culture overall

Upon completion of this module, students should be able to:

- Recall the history of Chicago Drill Music.
- Identify the connection between Chicago Drill Music and hip hop overall.

[15.1: Drill Music - Readings and Media](#)

[15.2: Drill Music - Classroom Activity](#)

[15.3: Drill Music - Assignment](#)

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15.1: Drill Music - Readings and Media

The selected readings, images, and videos of this module will explore drill music.

Readings and Media

What Is Drill Music?

Drill music is a subgenre of hip hop that originated on the South Side of Chicago during the early 2010s. The subgenre is heavily influenced by trap music, which emerged from Atlanta, and shares trap's dark, slow atmospheres and lyrical focus on crime, violence, and street life.

The drill scene evolved from underground mixtapes into mainstream popularity during the mid-2010s, propelled largely by Chief Keef's 2012 single "I Don't Like." The song's popularity increased significantly after a remix by Kanye West. Drill's sound was soon adopted by major artists such as Drake and expanded into other American cities, particularly New York, where it contributed to the emergence of Brooklyn drill. Drill music later developed thriving international scenes in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Australia.

The term *drill* refers to slang for shooting someone with an automatic weapon. Musically, drill is a subgenre of hip hop characterized by dark, ominous production and lyrics focused on violence, street life, and survival. Drill beats are generally slow to mid-tempo, typically around 60 to 70 beats per minute, and the lyrical delivery is often deadpan and stripped of the metaphors and punchlines associated with more traditional forms of hip hop.

The violence depicted within drill music reflects broader social realities experienced in many urban communities. The genre's rise coincided with increased public discussions surrounding police brutality, poverty, systemic inequality, and violence in marginalized neighborhoods. Like many earlier forms of hip hop, drill channels frustration, rage, and lived experience into music.

A Brief History of Drill Music

Beginnings

Drill music was heavily influenced by trap artists such as Waka Flocka Flame and Gucci Mane. However, drill's identity was shaped most significantly by the realities of violence and poverty in certain South Side Chicago neighborhoods, particularly an area within the Woodlawn community known as "Dro City." The music reflected the environment in which it emerged, especially the experiences of young people navigating violence and instability.

The Origin of the Term "Drill"

Dro City rapper Pac Man is widely credited as the first artist to reference "drill"—a slang term for a shooting—in his 2010 single "It's a Drill." His career was tragically cut short by gun violence later that same year, but the song established a blueprint for future drill artists.

Chief Keef later helped bring drill music to national prominence through "I Don't Like," whose success led to a major-label deal with Interscope Records. Keef subsequently appeared alongside fellow Chicago drill artist King Louie on Kanye West's 2013 album *Yeezus*.

Other influential Chicago drill artists included Lil Durk, Lil Reese, G Herbo, and Fredo Santana. Although Chicago drill's mainstream prominence briefly declined after Chief Keef was dropped from Interscope in 2014, the scene remained influential and continued evolving both domestically and internationally.

Drill music emerged from the South Side of Chicago, particularly neighborhoods surrounding the Woodlawn area known as "Dro City." The subgenre drew heavily from the realities of violence, gang activity, and economic hardship experienced by many young people in these communities.

One of drill music's most important figures is Chief Keef (Keith Farrelle Cozart), who gained popularity among Chicago youth during the early 2010s while still a teenager. Following a jail stint and a period of house arrest, Chief Keef began recording prolifically and quickly developed a major following through songs such as "Bang" and "I Don't Like." His music became widely associated with Chicago drill culture and helped bring the genre national attention.

Chief Keef's neighborhood, commonly referred to as "O-Block," is located near 64th Street and King Drive on Chicago's South Side. The neighborhood became nationally recognized through both media coverage and drill music references.

Another foundational drill artist is Lil Durk. Raised on Chicago's South Side, Lil Durk became involved in street culture at a young age, later collaborating with artists such as French Montana and Meek Mill before launching his own record label and collective.

International Drill

In the United Kingdom, drill fused Chicago influences with electronic genres such as grime and the realities of neighborhoods in South London, including Brixton. UK drill became commercially successful beginning around 2015 and later influenced drill scenes in Ireland and Australia.

UK drill also heavily influenced Brooklyn drill in New York City. The Brooklyn scene introduced artists such as Pop Smoke and Sheff G. Collaborations between American drill rappers and British producers became increasingly common, particularly through producer 808Melo, who produced Pop Smoke's breakout 2019 hit "Welcome to the Party."

Characteristics of Drill Music

1. Flow

Chicago drill artists frequently deliver lyrics in a deadpan or monotone style that reflects the emotionally exhausting conditions of their environments. Like trap music, drill often uses Auto-Tune to create a cold and emotionally detached sound. UK and Brooklyn drill artists, however, generally avoid heavy Auto-Tune usage and favor more expressive deliveries.

2. Lyrics

Early Chicago drill became known for violent subject matter and direct, minimalist language. Rather than emphasizing metaphor or lyrical complexity, artists often adopted a style resembling blunt reportage or recollection. More recent drill artists have expanded the genre's lyrical scope, while UK and Brooklyn drill have traditionally embraced broader themes and more stylistic variation.

3. Production

Chicago drill producers such as Young Chop helped define the genre's sonic template. Drill production typically features:

- Heavy 808 drum patterns
- Slow tempos (often 60–70 BPM)
- Minimalist instrumentation
- Dark, ominous melodies

UK drill production generally uses faster tempos and more melodic elements, while Brooklyn drill is distinguished by booming bass and warmer production textures.

Important Drill Artists

Chief Keef

Often considered the first superstar of Chicago drill, Chief Keef's 2012 hit "I Don't Like" helped establish the genre nationally. His relaxed delivery, repetitive hooks, and bleak lyrical themes heavily influenced subsequent generations of drill artists.

King Louie

One of drill's earliest innovators, King Louie released influential tracks prior to drill's mainstream breakthrough. His career was interrupted after surviving a gunshot wound in 2015, though he later returned to recording.

Lil Bibby

Lil Bibby gained national attention after his 2013 mixtape and later shifted focus toward the music business, founding Grade A Records, whose breakout artist was Juice WRLD.

Pop Smoke

A leading figure in Brooklyn drill, Pop Smoke became known for his deep vocal delivery and songs such as "Welcome to the Party." Following his death in 2020, his debut album *Shoot for the Stars, Aim for the Moon* debuted at number one on the *Billboard* 200 chart.

Does Drill Music Cause Violence?

Drill music has generated significant public debate concerning the relationship between music and violence. Critics, including politicians and media commentators, have sometimes argued that drill music contributes to violent behavior. For example, Eric Adams publicly criticized drill music and called for limitations on drill-related content on social media platforms.

Supporters and many artists, however, argue that drill music reflects violence rather than causes it. From this perspective, drill artists document the realities already occurring within their communities, including shootings, poverty, trauma, and gang conflict. The music is therefore viewed less as a catalyst and more as a reflection of existing social conditions.

Some observers note that social media has amplified conflicts associated with drill culture. Rivalries and “beefs” that once remained localized can now spread rapidly online through livestreams, videos, and public taunting between groups. Critics argue that this visibility can intensify tensions, while others maintain that the underlying causes of violence stem from broader structural issues rather than music itself.

The deaths of several young drill artists intensified these debates. Pop Smoke was killed during a home invasion in Los Angeles in 2020 at the age of 20. Brooklyn drill artist Chii Wvttz was also killed in 2022 outside a recording studio in Brooklyn.

Journalist and cultural critic Cheo Hodari Coker argued that rap music inevitably reflects the realities from which it emerges. As he explained, hip hop consistently speaks to the experiences, tensions, and struggles occurring within Black communities in America. Drill music, from this perspective, represents another chapter in hip hop’s long tradition of documenting social realities through music.

MasterClass. "Guide to Drill Music: History and Characteristics of Drill Music." *MasterClass*. June 7, 2021. <https://www.masterclass.com/articles...ll-music-guide>.

The Music Origins Project. "What is Drill Music and is it from Chicago?" Accessed May 2, 2026. <https://musicorigins.org/item/what-is-drill-music/>.

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15.2: Drill Music - Classroom Activity

Drill Music - Classroom Activity

The following video, "[Welcome to Chiraq](#)," is a short documentary about the drill music scene in Chicago, Illinois. It features perhaps drill music's most famous pioneer, Chief Keef. At the time of this interview, Chief Keef was only 17 years old. While the documentary's primary focus is on the music, it also mentions the environment these artists grew up in and its possible impact on the music they produce.

After viewing this video, have your students break into groups of four to discuss and answer the following questions:

- 1) How do you think these drill artists were impacted by their environment?
- 2) Do you listen to drill music? Why or why not?
- 3) How does drill music differ from other musical genres?
- 4) Why do you think drill music became so popular?



Noisey. "Welcome to Chiraq - Chiraq Ep 1." YouTube video, 17:54. January 22, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TybFtK6VTVo>.

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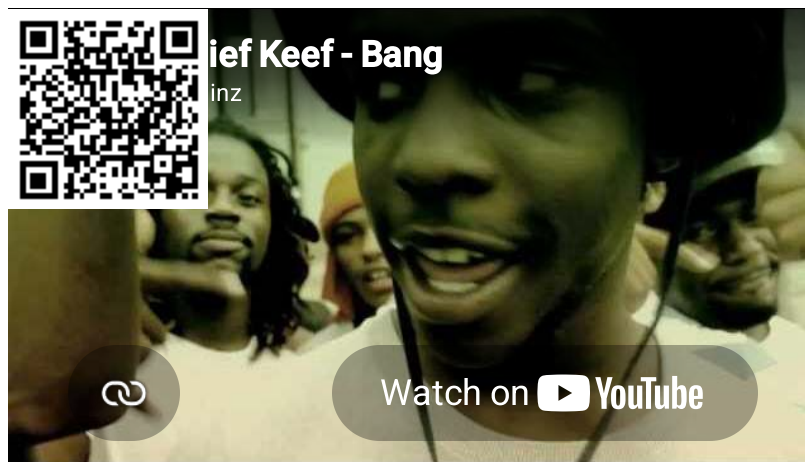
15.3: Drill Music - Assignment

Drill Music - Assignment

While Cheif Keef isn't the originator of the term "drill" or even "drill music," he undoubtedly is credited with making the subgenre popular and a global sensation. What was so engaging about Chief Keef and other early drill artists, was not only the authenticity of their music and videos (drill content was often really happening in the streets), it was the fact that these artists were so young. At the time of Cheif Keef's "Bang" one of the earliest popular drill songs, he was only 16 years old. Other early drill pioneers were also around this young age. The traumatic, violent, and extreme imagery of their videos and content of their lyrics was raw and shocking.

After viewing the two videos below, answer the following questions:

- 1) What are your initial thoughts after viewing these videos?
- 2) Do you believe these videos/songs are life imitating art or art imitating life?
- 3) Do you see these young men as perpetrators or victims?



DGainz. "Chief Keef - Bang." YouTube video, 3:37. August 5, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEoDSTBY_Y4.



Fbg Duck. "Fbg Duck x Rooga Explsng Me Remix (Official Music Video) Shot by BillyKauck." YouTube video, 3:23. February 4, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR1vGzEiv90>.

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Glossary

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