

Hip Hop and Rap Music

Rising Up From the Bronx

Rap, as we know it today, has changed considerably from when it first originated in the 1970s. What first started out as a subgenre being performed by MCs on the ghetto streets of the Bronx has evolved into a very popular music genre that most people can enjoy to this day. DJ Kool Herc is generally accepted as the man who started it all. It was with his help, and quite a few others, that caused rap and hip hop to grow and develop in its early years.

From *Rap and Hip Hop Music*, I learned almost everything I needed to know about rap. I learned more about the people who originated the genre, how rapping and hip hop eventually grew throughout the 1970s to the early 2000s, and genres that influenced rap. DJ Kool Herc, the man who started it all, was born in Jamaica in 1955 and later moved to the Bronx in 1967 where he began performing as a DJ in block parties that were hosted throughout the community (Rap). Nearly everybody in these block parties grew to love the percussive breaks found in soul, funk, and disco music, so DJ Kool Herc and other DJs began to use them (Rap). However, the percussive breaks in these songs were rather short, so DJs would extend them by using turntables (Rap). Extending the percussive breaks became more and more popular as consumer friendly turntables, drum machines, and samplers were made and more people could afford them. To make the beats and breaks more interesting, DJs would scratch, beat mix, and beat juggle using the turntables to give hip hop a more unique sound (Rap). In the early 1970s, rapping, or emceeing, was added along with hip hop music. Rap was performed with a rhythmical theme, with brief rhymes, often times being sexual, using call and response chants, and incorporating the dozens (“the dozens” is a term used to describe rap battles which involves insulting the other rapper until they essentially give up) (Rap).

I continued to learn more about the various groups that emerged during the early years of rap during the 1970s up until the early 1990s through *Rap and Hip Hop Music*. Rap artists appeared during different eras of rap that came to be known as old school, new school, the golden age, and the development of gangsta rap (Rap).

The old school period of rap appeared during the early years of hip hop development in the 1970s (Rap). Music during this time was still largely influenced by musical genres such as disco, funk, and jazz (Rap). DJs and MCs such as Grandmaster Flash, The Furious Five, DJ Hollywood, Kurtis Blow, Spoonie Gee, and Funky Four Plus One were very popular and widely recognized during the old school period (Rap). Common themes and characteristics of old school hip hop are simple rhymes with minimal lyrics and they were often subjected around partying and having a good time (Rap).

After old school had died down a bit, the new school era of rap emerged somewhere between the years 1983-84 (Rap). New school rap differed from old school because it was characterized by its more aggressive and assertive style, many more taunts were used, raps were often boastful, and topics that were considered socio-political were being used much more (Rap). There were also influences from rock and metal music in the sound of rap which reflected the much more unfortunate circumstances of the ghettos in which most listeners of rap music grew up in (Rap). Artists that led the forefront of this era of rap include Run-D.M.C., LL Cool J, and the Beastie Boys were very popular during this time, and the Beastie Boys actually helped hip hop become commercially successful with their *Licensed to Ill* album which became the first rap album to reach the number one spot on the Billboard charts (Rap).

During the age of new school, a period of rap occurred between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s which became known as the golden age (Rap). The golden age is a period of new school

in which “it seemed that every new single reinvented the genre” according to a Rolling Stones article (Rap). The music was known for having a large amount of diversity, quality, innovation, and influence (Rap). Jazz and rock n’ roll music played a huge influence on the sound of the golden age, and topics of the golden age focused more on black nationalism, urban poverty, drugs, and alcoholism (Rap). Artists and groups that emerged during this time were Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions, Eric B, Rakim, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, and many more.

During the mid-1980s, a subgenre of rap emerged, along with new school rap, known as gangsta rap (Rap). Gangsta rap was known for being much more violent, confrontational, used plenty of profanity, and was also the subgenre that used the word nigger the most, and the music often featured rock-guitar driven beats to help give the genre a much more hard and edgy feel (Rap). Artists and groups that emerged during this time were Schoolly D, Ice T, the N.W.A., and even Boogie Down Productions (Rap).

In *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, by Adam Krims, I learned a bit more about the musical instruments used throughout the age of hip hop. Hip hop music in the very beginning was largely known because of its drums, turntables, and samplers which gave the music a funky, jazz-like, and disco sound with a very upbeat vibe (Krims). Later on, other instruments like rock guitars, keyboards, and synthesizers began to be of use as technology in music progressed and the genre became influenced by other genres such as rock n’ roll and metal (Krims). More advanced drums and samplers were made as well which allowed for different types of layering and more complicated beats to be created (Krims).

A Genre Transformed

Rap has come a long way from when it was first being played on the streets of the Bronx. It's become a genre one can find almost any person listening to (I mean look at myself; I'm white and middle class). Newer technology and more chances to branch out and diversify have let rap grow into a sound much different from what it was before.

Eminem is the first rap artist, and one of my favorites, that have shown how rap has changed. The techniques he uses in his rap artistry like fitting many rhymes in a single line, using clear enunciation, rapping out of sync with the beat, bending words so they'll rhyme with each other and carrying concepts over a series of albums (Eminem). I think Eminem's technique alone gives rap such a unique and creative sound. He can leave a person guessing how exactly he's going to make his lines work together with unusual rhymes, and he'll keep a person interested in his music often by offering a story like with his song "Stan" and its sequel featured in his newest album "Bad Guy." In "Stan", Eminem tells the story of a crazed fan, Stan, who eventually ended up killing himself, his girlfriend, and their unborn child due to Eminem ignoring his fans' affection for him. In the sequel "Bad Guy", Stan's younger brother has come to hate Eminem because of his brother's death and has come to take revenge on Eminem. When I first heard the song "Stan", I was nearly left speechless by the story. The song offered so much emotional depth to it. A listener could feel increasing empathy toward Stan as he grew crazier and more desperate for his idols' attention until the point of Stan's death.

J Cole is another rap and hip hop artist I've come to enjoy in this genre. J Cole's music uses samplers and keyboards make a smooth, upbeat mash between jazz and hip hop. A few songs I enjoy most from J Cole include "Crooked Smile", "She Knows", and "Nobody's Perfect". I think these songs are easier to relate to than most other rap songs since they talk about topics like keeping positive knowing you can't be perfect, getting caught in the act of cheating,

and two people, despite not having the best relationship, working out for each other. Overall, I think J Cole is a good artist to listen to if a person wants to get a taste of what hip hop is like today.

Another hip hop artist that's differentiated himself from others is Drake. Drake essentially chose to make his music unique by singing and rapping, which most rap artists refuse to do in their music (Drake). This has given Drake a different sound, and what I consider to be an advantage, against most other rap artists. It gives him the chance to have soft, warm, reflective lyrics or gives him the chance to be cold, playful, and stuck up with his lyrics. The difference between his songs can be seen with songs like "Marvins Room" which involves a lot of singing talks about drunk dialing an old ex-girlfriend, while another song "The Motto" involves more rapping and talks about living life to the fullest and taking chances you normally wouldn't.

It's Not Just Noise

I believe everyone could come to enjoy rap and hip hop music if they gave it an opportunity. I see a lot of people dissing rap music as soon as a rap song will start playing without even bothering to listen to it. Before you change the station as soon as that next rap song comes on, you should give it a shot and actually hear what it has to say.

For starters, some of the topics artists will rap about can have a much deeper and emotional meaning to them than you would expect. In Eminem's "Headlights" and 2Pac's "Dear Mama", they both sing and rap to show their appreciation for their mother's and everything they did for them despite the early difficulties they went through with their parents. In Lupe Fiasco's "Battle Scars" he sings about the emotional hurt from past relationships and confronting those, moving on, and becoming stronger. Rap can be about a lot more than booty shaking, strippers, drugs, and alcohol if a person takes the time to find the right songs and artists.

Another reason I think people should listen to rap and hip hop is because it's a culture as much as it is a music genre. The whole genre developed because people in unfortunate situations could gather with each other and have a good time together. For me, the whole development of rap music and what it started out as is just amazing. I've become friends with people I never would've expected because we share the same taste in music. Music has the capabilities of bringing together people you wouldn't expect and can always be something people can relate to. Whether it is the hardships of suffering through your day to day job, struggling to even obtain a job, facing the issues of drug addiction, or even going through heartbreak, everyone is facing their own difficulties and rap and hip hop are all about overcoming them and enjoying life together.

By listening to rap and hip hop music, I believe you'll gain a new perspective on life. That music that you thought was just "noise" will inspire you to overcome obstacles in your life you once thought you couldn't before. It will give you the motivation you need to push through and enjoy life to its fullest potential. It will be the music you need when you're going through overwhelming sadness in your life, it will be the music you need when you're ready to go out and have an amazing time with your friends, and it will be the music that gives you the energy to go out and be the awesome person that you are. Crank up that noise.

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