

The Magic of Music: Hip Hop Opens Up New World for White Youth

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Hip hop music has helped define pop culture in America. White youths have assisted in furthering the success of hip hop music because of the fascination of rappers' lives, which are much unlike their own. The genre has broken down racial barriers and opened up lines of communication among people of all races and classes.

In my research, I found that music does more than entertain. It has the powerful ability to influence cultures and define social identities. The literature I read covered broad subjects pertaining to youth and music and looked at interesting angles concerning the influences music has had on society. It was universally agreed that music brings communities together, whether it's in the form of activism, social expression, or pure entertainment. One point examined is that youth use music as a template for fashion trends and a way to fit in among peers. The hip hop music genre in particular has made a unique and specific impact on today's white American youth.

In an article written by Cyril "Josh" Barker, he interprets Bakari Kitwana's book called "Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wangstas, Wiggers, Wannabees, and the New Reality of Race in America," which explains that hip hop has become a social phenomena in the white teen subculture. Barker explains that Kitwana's research showed that the rise of white American youth who listen to hip hop is rapidly growing. It has become the norm for white communities to listen to hip hop and often adopting similar vernacular and styles of dress.

Barker explains, "... hip-hop's new fan base is growing because of hip-hop becoming the new primary sound for the world, the changing pop music scene and hip-hop outlets, such as concerts, being marketed to whites." (2005:1) Pop culture greatly revolves around hip hop music and its lifestyle. It's not uncommon to hear a hip hop song playing on a television advertisement

or to hear a young white kid reciting the lyrics of a rap song. Hip hop is deeply ingrained into our social make up. Although one might wonder how white suburban youth can relate to certain subjects in hip hop music, it's as if the form of expression gives them insight into a world not typically understood by their elders.

Hip hop music is not merely an interest or an outlet for children, but it can also be seen as a tool for acceptance and tolerance in an often racist society. Barker expresses, "...the genre is beginning to break down racial barriers in America." (2005:2) Children who listen to hip hop seem to be more accepting of cultures and races other than their own. White suburbia has become exposed to the lives of blacks. It's as if hip hop music is the telescope used to look into the lives of poor, urban communities across the nation. Common topics in hip hop music, such as gang violence, drug dealing, and economic hardships allow the typical white privileged teen to understand the realities occurring in other neighborhoods.

It's no mystery that white youths are drawn to such images as rappers in baggy clothes, extravagant jewelry, and provocative song lyrics, however; even if they cannot directly identify with these types of expression, they allow an escape from reality. Music has always been used as a form of rebellion and a way for children to separate themselves from their elders' ideals. Forty-five years ago it was rock and roll, thirty years ago it was punk, and now it is in the disguise of hip hop. Nevertheless, hip hop, as well as all genres of music, is an alluring force that helps bring people of all cultures and classes together allowing them to understand and accept their differences.

REFERENCE

Barker, Cyril "Josh." "Author explains the popularity of hip-hop among white youth." *New York Amsterdam News*, June 2005, Vol. 96 Issue 26, p29-2, 1/4p; (AN 17440256)