

Hip-Hop • Raps and rhymes • changing times

Students recognize the importance of social change as musicians speak against institutional issues

Mazzy Warren
Editor-in-Chief

It starts with a simple beat. A rhythmic tap-tap-tap, coupled with an audio clip of a man delivering a powerful speech. Soon more instruments flood in, and senior Abigail Paz can't help but tap her foot to the music pouring from her headphones.

She sees a body moving in her mind's eye, a dancer creating combinations to match the powerful song playing around her. As a dancer and musician, Paz loves to listen to music, scout out its beats and rhythms, and create a visual representation of the music and its message. That's what she loves most about dance: using her mind and body to express, uplift, and explore the music around her.

"Music has impacted and affected me, a lot," Paz said. "One of my favorite styles is hip-hop, that genre really got me into the dance world, and I love the way I can dance with it. Listening to it, dancing to it, and following the hip-hop style, has definitely shaped me into the person and dancer I am today."

Alongside its impact on individuals, hip-hop culture has influenced music, fashion, entertainment, language, politics, media, and more. Audio engineer Will Grantham feels that hip-hop is one of the most important art forms in modern music. Grantham works for the Electric Deluxe recording studio in Austin, where he produces music for Adrian Quesada, producer and guitar player for the Austin-based band, the Black Pumas. With his involvement in the Austin music scene, he has fostered a deep understanding and passion for creating and listening to music.

"Hip-hop is fascinating to me because, at its core, it is created from sampling, from pulling elements of other songs and reworking it to make it your own," Grantham said. "What I love about it, and what I find important, is the accessibility to creativity. To make a great hip-hop song, all you really need is a laptop and a bit of software; that ease of use and accessibility has led to rapid growth and change; people will say that old school hip-hop is dead, but that's just because the younger generations have moved on to other cool things that they can make with the genre. There's always a way to push a boundary, and hip-hop is all about pushing boundaries."

HIP-HOP HISTORY

According to Britannica, hip-hop is a cultural movement that provides the background for the rap music genre. The art originated in the late 1970s, in the economically depressed Bronx section of New York City, predominantly inhabited by African-American families affected by poverty, drug abuse, and gang violence; hip-hop is recognized as a product of these struggles.

"Hip-hop started as an outlet for expression, created by the people in urban areas," Grantham said. "When you start writing, you're going to start writing about what's important to you, and if all you really know is struggling, fighting, and poverty, that's what you're going to express. This really sets the genre apart from others, because it's allowed to focus on the negative aspects of society. Other genres don't always get quite as real as hip-hop, because the art is based on the authentic experiences of the people making it."

This marginalization formed the platform on which black youths created the foundations of hip hop, to express their struggles against institutional disadvantages. According to Icon Collective, hip-hop culture consists of four elements: DJ'ing/turntablism; MC'ing/rapping; graffiti; and break-dancing/B-boying, which encompasses hip-hop dance, style, and attitude. Occasionally, a fifth element is added to this list. "Knowledge of self" or "consciousness," refers to the knowledge someone needs to truly understand their community, a mix of spiritual and political consciousness designed to

acknowledge members of oppressed groups. "There's never one origin point for a genre," Grantham said. "Instead, it's like a tree with roots that span a wide area, and a lot of those roots touch on the community aspect of bringing people together with music. But there's also a degree of introspection that's allowed, when you really sit down with something and make it your own, and it took a little while for hip-hop to develop the social consciousness it's known for. When people started taking the art form seriously, it forced us to listen to it in a different way and appreciate both what it took to make it, and what they're making it for."

Senior Adrian Ferretiz feels that these elements have historically encouraged hip-hop artists to put on a "mask" that denies expressions of weakness or emotion. He believes this has changed over time, and modern hip-hop is now more accessible for people from all different areas of life, experiencing and expressing their own personal struggles. He feels that this gives every era its own unique set of strengths and weaknesses, which express the changes among the genre and the society it reflects.

"In the 90s, you had Tupac, Snoop Dogg, Biggie and Ice Cube, people who often put on an inflated persona, which expressed that the world hates them," Ferretiz said. "But they put on this gangster mask, and try to show what art forms in modern music. Grantham works for the Electric Deluxe recording studio in Austin, where he produces music for Adrian Quesada, producer and guitar player for the Austin-based band, the Black Pumas. With his involvement in the Austin music scene, he has fostered a deep understanding and passion for creating and listening to music."

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"Rappers usually talk a lot about cultural issues and societal problems," Paz said. "They use their art and skills to speak out against the problems affecting their communities; it's a great method for getting a message out into the world."

CHANGING COMMUNITIES

In this golden era, many rappers used their platforms to bring attention to the problems that impact poor and working-class black communities, issues like police brutality, drug addiction, state-sanctioned violence, and misogyny. According to AAIIHS, rappers were seen as organic black intellectuals, speaking out against the government, educational, and media systems that failed them. Senior Josh Harwood believes this commentary continues to flourish in modern hip-hop. "One of my favorite songs is called Love Yourz by J. Cole," Harwood said. "In it, he sings about how you won't have the best things in the world, but that's okay, because if you can appreciate what you have, then you have everything you really need. It's a strong message, and I really love that song because of it."

According to the Columbia School of Social Work (MSW), hip-hop has made a profound impact on society by empowering underrepresented communities, advocating for social justice, and providing opportunities for self-expression and connection. Songs like "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy and "Changes" by Tupac Shakur directly address racism, police brutality, and inequality, and thereby imbue their music with purpose: to educate and to encourage action.

"Hip-hop's a great factor of social change, because the lyrics often put an explicit message in the song," Ferretiz said. "The people that are seen as the kings or queens of that genre have been pioneers of social justice, and they are always discussing the things that should be talked about. Rapping calls for people's attention, and it is always gonna get the word out in terms of music."

Civil movements like the Million Man March, Vote or Die, and Black Lives Matter all encourage support for African-American communities. Alongside hip-hop artists, social workers, political activists, and community leaders embrace these messages, with a common goal to drive social change and push for justice in their communities.

"Music is important because it's something we've been doing for forever. Knowing people around me, and the artists that I aspire to, music has had a huge impact on me and on everyone around me," Ferretiz said. "Seeing the way people express themselves, and hearing them express their views on certain issues, influences us to look into new events and issues in our world, and I have learned things that were very valuable for me and my identity. We just have a natural affinity to the messages in music, it's a universal language."

YOUNG LISTENERS

Harwood has been playing percussion since sixth grade, and he enjoys the expression that music facilitates. According to Medium, the hip-hop genre provides a platform for marginalized youth to express their identities, as it relates to their experiences, challenges, and aspirations. Harwood agrees that this expression is crucial to helping create a sense of belonging and validation among teens.

"Music has been a big part of my life for a long time, and I have always loved playing and listening to it," Harwood said. "There are so many songs that have such strong meanings, so it's a good way to express yourself and cope with your problems. It helps you connect with other people, which is super important for our community."

By placing social commentary in their lyrics, artists have the ability to raise awareness among youth who may be uninterested in other forms of media. Paz believes discussions of inequality and racism encourage youth to become more socially aware, and allows rappers to be engaged as citizens.

"These artists continue to do their profession because they have a passion for it," Paz said. "They have a passion and a strong opinion on the things they're writing about, and that is what really inspires them to make these kinds of songs. Their music is a reflection of themselves, but they also observe their community and uplift those perspectives, which gives their community an outlet of expression."

According to MSW, music fosters a sense of unity within a community, by providing teens with a sense of identity and belonging. Among communities marked by economic hardship, racial discrimination, and limited opportunities, hip-hop has flourished as a means to express and bond over shared experiences. Alongside junior Julian Sullivan, senior Otto Wu, and senior Diego Dominguez, Ferretiz performs in a local alternative rock band called "No Tuition." Ferretiz feels his band has immersed him in a unique community, and he loves the way music allows him to connect with others.

"It's really fun working as a group, because it's easier to get things done when everybody is pushing towards a goal," Ferretiz said. "With a band, it's less exhausting and it's always a lot more fun to work with everybody, than doing it alone. It's really cool to get to create with them, it's a community where I can always take my mind off things and just have fun."

TODAY'S STAGE

According to Ferretiz, rap music is on a decline; Grantham disagrees, as he feels the genre isn't weakening, but transforming. Statistics from Billboard do show that the genre's growth is slowing, with 27.6% of the overall 2022 market share, a decline from the previous year's 28.4%. Despite this, it still remains the most listened-to genre of music in America.

"Throughout musical history, no matter where you are, there's someone saying that it's not as good as

it used to be. Whether it's country blues, jazz, rock, hip-hop, rap, the younger generation is always going to do something new," Grantham said. "There's always this urge to push a boundary, and with hip-hop, it's easier to push those boundaries because it's such a fresh genre. It's not that the genre is dying, but simply transforming into new things, as we have new people pushing new boundaries, making music authentic to the younger generation."

Although some feel the genre's future feels precarious, Grantham believes hip-hop will continue to transform lives and generate change. Ferretiz believes hip-hop has become more than just a genre of music; it has become a movement for social change and empowerment, with its affinity to expression and healing, and empower marginalized communities. Grantham believes, as artists continue to follow this path, hip-hop will continue to grow and change to reflect younger generations' love and concern for their communities.

"The future of this genre is going to be interesting," Grantham said. "It's starting to circle back, and we're seeing it get pushed into new genres, which really inspires us to take a step back and look at the older music we enjoyed, and see how we can enjoy it alongside newer art forms. There's always going to be something new pushing the genre forward, but there's also always going to be a reflection of what made it great in the first place."

SNOOP DOGG : Known affectionately as "Snoop," this artist's influence extends far beyond his music and contributions to hip-hop culture. He has become a cultural icon, transcending typical generational and genre boundaries. His music has made many contributions to West Coast culture, and it developed the gangsta-funk sub-genre. He has raised funds for youth sports organizations, cancer research, and affordable housing efforts. *INFO Look to the Stars*

TYLER, THE CREATOR : One of the most renowned modern rappers, this artist has impacted not only the modern hip-hop music scene, but has also made contributions to the world of hip-hop fashion. His work is respected for its experimental style, and for the social commentary weaved within its narratives. His presence as a cultural figure has encouraged teens to express themselves, whether that be through music, fashion, or by redefining established boundaries. *INFO Culted*

DRAKE : This hip-hop artist is respected for his role as one of the first rappers to combine traditional R&B elements with hip-hop beats, influencing popular culture with his new music style. His work has not only enhanced the music scene, but his charitable donations have also impacted the communities he's involved in. With his 2018 video for "God's Plan," he gave away one million dollars to students, a women's shelter, youth centers, and more. *INFO Medium*

BLOG ERA: 2006-2014

CONSCIOUS RESURGENCE: 2004-PRESENT

LAURYN HILL : Hill is known as one of the queens of hip-hop. Many feel her influence stems from her empathy, her work ethic, and her skill; her music worked to educate the world on the love, power, and beauty of hip-hop and its impact. She also established the Refugee Project, an organization designed to help underprivileged youth. *INFO Harvard Hip-hop Archive*

DR. DRE : Labeled as a trailblazer for transforming rap, music, and popular culture in the 80s and 90s. Having created his own influential music, he also worked as a producer for other artists, like Eminem, 2Pac, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, and more. Outside of his contributions to the hip-hop genre, Dr. Dre has also donated millions of dollars to schools to support art and education for youth in California. *INFO Britannica*

NICKI MINAJ : Minaj grew up in Queens, New York, where she began her career. She is now one of the most well-known female artists, for her music, her style, and her messages. She is respected for using her music to fight against the restrictive stereotypes placed on women, to redefine typical beauty standards, and to empower women to embrace their sexuality and assert their power in a male-dominated society. *INFO Medium*

BAD BUNNY : This Puerto Rican artist uses his platform to celebrate his Latino culture, proudly featuring Puerto Rican slang, food, and the diversity of its people. In addition to his cultural passion, Bad Bunny has pioneered social justice with his music, as well; he has used his platform to speak against police brutality, gender inequality, LGBTQ discrimination, and cultural misrepresentation. His activism has not only inspired and influenced many Latino youths, but has also reached out to listeners in the United States, calling for individuals to get involved in their communities and fight for change. *INFO LATV*

INFOGRAPHIC BY
Mazzy Warren
ART BY
Asher Hagan

THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G. : Widely considered one of the greatest hip-hop artists of all time, he is revered for his impact on '90s East Coast rap. Also known as "Biggie," he was willing to use his music to address the vulnerability and harshness of life in the hood. *INFO Biography.com*

TUPAC SHAKUR : One of the most well-known artists in history, with over 75 million records sold worldwide. On top of his reputation as a legendary rapper, he is known to be a poet, activist, and revolutionary for his socially conscious music. His work not only exposed oppressive systems, but examined the ways those systems worked in black communities. His music continues to inspire and encourage the minority groups it was designed to represent. *INFO Rock the Bells*

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SPEAKERBOXX / THE LOVE BELOW OUTKAST

With hits like "Hey Ya!" and "The Way You Move," this album is recognized as the best-selling hip-hop album of all time. It has sold over 13 million copies since its release in 2003.

ART BY Asher Hagan INFO ROCK THE BELLS

BAD BUNNY

was the 2nd most streamed Spotify artist globally in 2023, with over 66 million monthly listeners

INFO Spotify: For the Record

Hip-hop accounted for 25.5% of all music streams in the U.S. in 2023.

INFO AP News

Most played Spotify rappers

1. Drake
2. Eminem
3. Kanye
4. Juice WRLD
5. Travis Scott

INFO Boardroom

INFO Glitx

39% U.S. GEN Z IDENTIFY AS FANS OF HIP-HOP

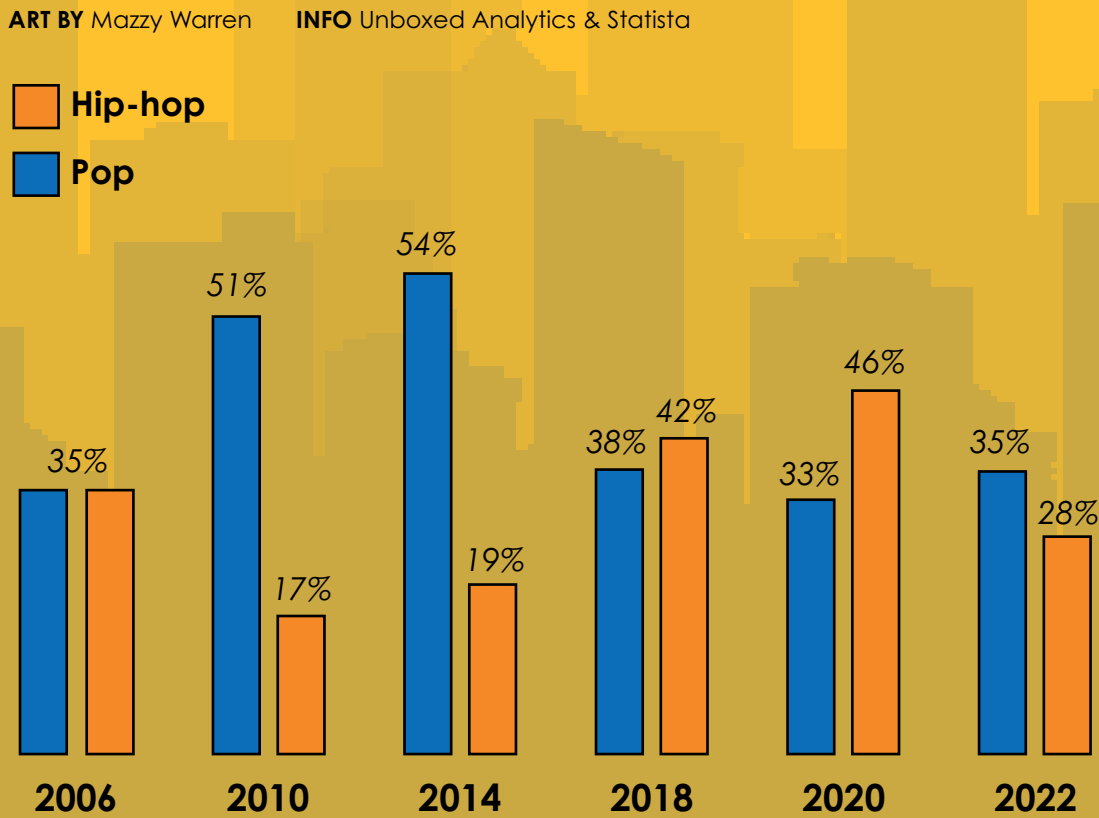
INFO Headphones Addict

54% US HIP-HOP LISTENERS ARE AGED 20-24

INFO Headphones Addict

TREND IN GENRE POPULARITY

Measured by % Billboard Hot 100 Artists in each genre



EXPLORE THE ERAS:

ART BY Mazzy Warren
INFO Discogs

OLD SCHOOL: 1979-1983

GOLDEN AGE: 1983-1997

CONSCIOUS WAVE: 1983-2000

EAST VS WEST: 1991-1997

RISE OF SOUTHERN RAP: 1990-2005

BLING ERA: 1997-2006

CONSCIOUS RESURGENCE: 2004-PRESENT

BLOG ERA: 2006-2014

ALTERNATIVE REVIVAL: 2006-PRESENT

RISE OF TRAP: 2014-PRESENT