

Pushing the boundaries for artistic expression has always been a part of rap music, which is why it is so attractive to young people. This hasn't changed since the days when soul rebels such as David Ruffin shocked the world with the melodious sounds of his voice all the way down to his defiant persona and conspicuous swagger. Rap music has always had the power to influence and attract. In the music industry today, however, it's often the drive for profits that is pushing the envelope of what is acceptable. Vulgarity has become a strong focal point in today's most popular music. Explicit content in today's music has become a negative influence due to its unsuitable references.

During the mid-1980s, rap moved from the fringes of hip-hop culture to the mainstream of the American music industry as more and more musicians began to embrace the new style. Alongside the rise of political rap came the introduction of gangsta rap, which attempts to depict an outlaw lifestyle of sex, drugs, and violence in inner-city America. In 1988, the first major album of gangsta rap was released: *Straight Outta Compton* by the rap group NWA (Niggaz With Attitude). Songs from the album generated an extraordinary amount of controversy for their violent attitudes and inspired protests from a number of organizations, including the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation). However, attempts to censor gangsta rap only served to publicize the music and make it more attractive to both black and white youths. NWA became a platform for launching the solo careers of some of the most influential rappers and rap producers in the gangsta style, including Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, and Eazy-E.

As rap became increasingly part of the American mainstream in the 1990s, political rap became less prominent while gangsta rap grew in popularity. The content of music became more graphic with offensive references to drugs, sex, and violence. Hate aimed at women, minorities, gays and lesbians also became a major factor in society's inappropriate music content. The fringes, profanity- and hate-filled rap music had become the cash cow of the music industry. This new genre of rap music placed critics and parents in an uproar due to its negative influential content on children. Because of this ongoing battle, in 1990, the U.S. recording industry introduced Parental Advisory labels to identify music containing explicit lyrics, including depictions of violence and sex.

As a result of this growing nationwide problem, the level of teenage violence has increased by more than 15%. Gang wars became more and more numerous in inner city areas, project housing areas, and other areas of poverty. The verbal expression violent, racist, homophobic or sexist lyrics in much of rap music are the cause of a strong impact on impressionable young people who are just developing a sense of identity and self-worth. Numerous studies indicate that a preference for rap music may be a significant marker for alienation, substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, suicide risk, sex-role stereotyping or risk-taking behaviors during adolescence. (Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, 1999)

In addition to the verbal content itself, rap music videos also contribute to the negative influence of this genre. Music videos are a powerful medium because they combine the energy of music with the power of visual images. While children often pay little attention to the lyrics of their favorite songs, the visual images that accompany the same music on TV have a much greater impact because it is impossible to ignore. The visual depiction of rap music is detrimental to youth because children act through visual example.

According to a study by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), up to 75 per cent of music videos contain sexually suggestive material. Misogynistic are often portrayed in music videos. Women are usually in the sexist manner, and alcohol and tobacco use is frequently glamorized. More than 50 per cent contain violence, which often includes acts committed against women. The AAP concluded that sexist and violent portrayals in music videos could "distort adolescents' expectations about conflict resolution, race and male-female relationships."

It is imperative that this negative influence is rendered obsolete because adolescents mimic much of what they see. Studies show that more than 80% of children are products of exactly what they are exposed to before the age of 10. The effects of the wrong music can result in changes in the child's behavior, academic progress, and peers. Many teenagers bring the music that they listen to life by acting out what is said in today's lyrics. Some teenagers have become potentially violent due to the pessimism of the music. Isolated, angry or depressed youth may be attracted to music that feeds their feelings of despair and hostility.

While censorship is dangerous to a free society, some of the concerned citizens who are in favor of censorship may have valid points when they object that children should not be exposed to verbal and visual vulgarity. Indeed, often there is too much exposure to premature ears. Perhaps the answer is for all parents to ban this type of music in their homes. If the networks were more responsible and tried to avoid material that is in poor taste, governmental officials, religious groups, and concerned parents might not feel the need to be involved in their decisions at all.

For children with a healthy self-image and varied interests, music probably has little or no influence on their values and lifestyle choices. However, parents should be aware that violence and drug abuse in today's music could have a strong impact on intellectual young people who are in the process of self-discovery. Music preferences can be a warning sign of a distressed teen.

To censor or not to censor? This is the question parents face when their kids bring home music they find offensive. Should freedom of expression override house rules based on what parents feel are appropriate values for their kids? Not at all. Freedom of speech is an amenity in this country but anything detrimental or potentially hazardous to young ears should be censored. Negative music should not just be censored. It should be exiled from the youth of America.

Music is a great love that everyone shares. Whether its jazz and classical or heavy rock and gangster rap. Each genre is important but music as a whole is something enjoyed by everyone. It has a great impact on everyone so it is important to take safety precautions when it comes to what's heard through youth. Gangster rap music depicts a culture mostly from areas with high crime levels and poverty. Because youth portray these negative images, rap music has taken over the lives of a lot of productive youth. Rap music should be censored at all times. The future of the earth relies upon the children of today. Therefore it is imperative to protect them from any images of negativity.