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| Rap, Negatively Positive |
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**RAP : Negatively Positive**

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Chapter one :

Definition and Origin :

Rap is a musical style that uses rhythmic talk. It started when DJs started mixing different types of records at house parties and community centres. Rap is sometimes referred to as ‘hip hop’ although the latter is culturally broader and includes deejaying (the art of playing records and picking songs at dance parties), rap, break dance, and graffiti paintings.

It originated in the African American communities of New York and came to light with the Sugar Hill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight’ in 1979. In 1973, Jamaican-born DJ Kool Herc used an innovative technique at a Halloween party: he scratched a song’s drum break by playing the break portion of two identical records. Extended breaks led to the name ‘break dancing’. The party was thrown in a deprived area that was isolated from the rest of New York. The surrounding area looked like rubble (fragments of broken buildings). Coloured people who came to the party tuned the surroundings into a beautiful artistic place by painting graffiti. They danced on cardboards they put on the ground. At that time, rap was a positive alternative to gang violence. It created a positive atmosphere among those party-goers. Kool Herc was later named the father of hip hop.

Rappers back then were descendants of griots, respected African historians and praise singers, who disseminated knowledge to members of tribal villages through the spoken word. Similarly, US rappers spread news of their daily lives, dreams and frustrations through their performing. Rappers were therefore considered ‘the voice of the poor’.

The Evolution of Rap Music :

In the 1980s, the hip hop became widely popular in the US. Wendy Clark was one of the famous women rappers then. During this decade, albums were released by Kurtis, Grandmaster Flash, and Public Enemy, among others. At the end of the eighties, hip hop started getting some negative press as it became commercialised. Commercialisation destroyed the African-American radio traditions of the 70s, according to which African-American owners of radio stations, programmers and DJs highlighted the needs of their listeners: the African-American working class. Radio stations owned by upper-class white ‘money-minded businesspeople’ replaced those of African Americans, and the latter lost their power to maintain the narrative tradition they long cherished as a result.

In the 1990s, gangsta rap, a kind of rap that portray life in inner-city neighbourhoods, attracted a lot of youth. Inner-city neighbourhood refers to the central part of a city that is usually associated with social problems such as crime and joblessness. Gangsta rap was criticised for being full of anger, rebellion and apathy (emotional emptiness). At the end of the 1998, this genre (style) has become so popular that eight out of the fifteen albums in the pop chart were rap. Similarly, three of the top selling albums were rap.

Language :

Because the audience of rap are multinational, the first languages of rappers are different. However, they are all able to understand the slang of hip hop. The word ‘nigga’ for example is one of the most popular words of hip hoppers, but unlike the traditional offensive association, the term is one of endearment. When a White, Asian, or Latino hip hopper says ‘Jay is my nigga’, he/she means ‘Jay is my buddy’. Although rap came from black culture, 75% of its audience today is non-black.

Chapter two :

Women in Rap Music :

Initially rap producers did not want women to sing rap. Actually, women were the target of lyrics and they were not described in a favourable light. In addition, they feared that introducing women to this musical industry would challenge the image and success of the macho (masculine) rappers. Another reason for their reluctance was thinking that women’s voices were not loud enough or harsh enough while these two features were important in rap performance. However, this attitude changed after New York Female Rappers Salt’n’Peppa sold over a million copies of their album Hot, Cool and Vicious. Some female rappers portrayed women in their lyrics as positive and strong , contrary to the traditional macho lyrics. Others, however, went further to discuss issues of male ego and police brutality.

Core Values :

Rap’s original philosophy promotes self-expression and the search for love, hope, peace, empowerment, creativity and unity. Looking at the roots of rap, we have a vibrant example of creativity: a group of poor kids making the most out of poor resources. In this original version, rap cuts across ethic boundaries through its popularity all over the world. One kid in one country is able to relate to a kid from a different country. It has the power to get rid of racism and mend ethnic relations. The music, language, behaviour and clothing of rappers are the same in New York, Los Angeles, Zurich, Milan, Paris, and Tokyo, among other countries. Early rap symbolised resistance through mode of dress, language and graffiti.

Some people , however, think of rap as a ‘fad left to fade away’. That is, as a short-lived temporary fashion rather than a great form of art. Recently, some industries, TV channels and websites are seen to distort the original values of rap by encouraging negative behaviour. They are criticised for promoting violence, drugs and harsh language. In other words, more modern rap (starting from the late eighties rap) is believed to glamorise violence and the use of harsh language and is seen to affect some impressionable youth in dangerous ways. Contrarily, some people argue that violence in rap does not aim to make ‘violence’ acceptable but rather to challenge black youth’s life difficulties, including gang violence. That is, focussing on violence is not a way to promote it, but to highlight the issue and reject it.

Jay-Z, one of the most successful American hip hoppers refers to this link between crime and rap as a forced link:

Rappers, as a class, are not engaged in anything criminal. They're musicians. Some rappers and friends of rappers commit crimes. Some bus drivers commit crimes. Some accountants commit crimes... .The difference is obvious, of course: Rappers are young black men telling stories that the police, among others, don't want to hear. Rappers tend to come from places where police are accustomed to treating everybody like a suspect. The general style of rappers is offensive to a lot of people. But being offensive is not a crime, at least not one that's on the books. The fact that law enforcement treats rap like organized crime tells you a lot about just how deeply rap offends some people--they'd love for rap itself to be a crime, but until they get that law passed, they come after us however they can.

Chapter three :

Rappers nowadays :

Nowadays you can see lots of rappers each going after something he wants, you see some of them going after positive goals for real, such as expressing their daily pain, their job, their family, their friends or about social problems held by their neighbourhoods.

But on the other hand you find rappers with their main subjects as money, drugs and fame.

If we take a look at their daily lives we will find rich millionaires barely having something worth to be cared for by anyone except for their colleagues, their songs are all about them not knowing where to throw their next party at, what to spend their cash on some more cars, watches, houses...etc, how they get high out of doing drugs until they could hardly move.

The bad thing about it is that this kind of rap is more popular than the positive one, and that’s because the stuff mentioned in these songs are dreams of many ordinary people so they find them like a place to live their dreams for a short while.

Positive rappers with important subjects are mostly not given their chance to be heard for many reasons like being poor or being rejected by music producers aiming for more money, unlike the previous era when rappers like 2pac and B.I.G existed, when rap was to be judged by its words describing the daily problems which people needed them to be placed under the spotlight.

Self-opinion :

In my personal view of rap I believe that a rapper is successful when his songs are about something he believes in, something he lives every day, something that might either be hurting him or making him better, so it should be something he wants to write about.

I believe that these days real rap songs are fading away slowly being replaced with some weak songs with stupid and childish subjects or useless with no subject they are just written for some music producer to get some quick cash because people are no longer caring for the subject they are all about the singer and his looks, if he was a handsome good looking one is all that matters.

To me the name rapper could only be given to those who pour their hearts and souls on their rap sheets making these white paper come to life whenever someone reads them because inside you’ll see these rappers’ lives with all the painful or happy times they had all the struggle they faced, you’ll be able to relive every bitter or sweet second these rappers had.

Once you could feel that reading or listening to a rap song be sure you’re listening to a real rapper.

In conclusion, although rap has become increasingly associated with negative themes and messages, it just mirrors them not creates them. In fact, historically, rap symbolises resistance to injustice and social problems in an inventive artistic extraordinary way.

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