

# Good vs. evil: rock and hip hop



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Good vs. Evil: Rock and Hip Hop Written by: Chanel Auguste In 1965, The Rolling Stones early hit, " I Can't Get No Satisfaction", is taken off of many radio station's play lists after they received complaints of the lyrics containing sexually suggestive lyrics. 1980, Pink Floyd's hit single " Another Brick in the Wall (Part II), with its chorus of kids chanting " We Don't Need No Education", is banned by the South African government; Children upset about inferior education, adopt the song as their anthem. The government says the song is " prejudicial to the safety of the state". George Michael's single " I Want Your Sex" is removed from the play lists of radio stations in Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Denver, and New York, because of its explicit sexual content; the BBC also bans it in Britain. Later that year, heavy metal icon Ozzy Osbourne is unsuccessfully sued by the parents of a 19-year-old boy who claimed their son committed suicide after listening to Osbourne's song " Suicide Solution". In one of the most famous cases of music censorship, police in Dade County, Florida set up a sting to arrest three retailers selling copies of a record by 2 Live Crew to children under the age of 18, in 1990. Objections to 2 Live Crew started with the break-thru of their hit " Me So Horny". Similar prosecutions regarding 2 Live Crew record sales happen in Alabama and Tennessee. No prosecutions result in standing convictions. Members of 2 Live Crew were also prosecuted for performing the material live in concert. Soon after, the members of NWA received letter from the F. B. I stating that the agency did not approve of the lyrics to their song " Fuck the Police". (www. classicbands. com) However we as viewers of the media must keep in mind that there are always two sides to a story. On speaking of mobilizing the Hip Hop Generation, writer Jesse Alejandro Cottrell of wiretap states: To anyone who watches MTV all day --

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where P. Diddy, Ja Rule and Nelly dominate the screen flashing fancy cars, gold chains and an entourage of scantily clad women -- political empowerment and hip-hop may seem like conflicting terms. But hip-hop has been political in nature since its birth in the youth subculture of the Bronx during the late 1970s. Unfortunately what started out as a gritty portrayal of what was really happening on the streets has been perverted in less than two decades into a seemingly endless supply of high-paid corporate clowns rapping about little more than the fact that they're rich. Today, mainstream hip-hop is worse than apolitical -- it has become a tool to oppress and distract an entire generation of youth, especially youth of color. (" Mobilizing the Hip Hop Generation", by Jesse Alejandro Cottrell, Wiretap) However, how can we as viewers speak of the affects a culture has on our society and children, when we look to media practitioners to provide us with what is going on in our generation, whether it being the Hip Hop or Rock culture, the media has always taken these two cultures and portrayed them in the light that best suits our society. It either being negative or positive. In the book *Popular Music and Society* author Brian Longhurst discusses the media coverage surrounding the suicide of Kurt Cobain incorporated themes of authenticity and mass culture. Explaining the rapid sale of Cobain's group Nirvana's music and other related goods. As a result then turning him into an icon, when he clearly was a victim of drugs and alcohol with lyrics that were often viewed as having a negative approach on his young audience (Longhurst 110). As a result of the information that that was provided earlier in the essay as to negative lyrics and such things within both the Hip Hop and Rock music culture, and its strong effects on society. This paper intends to display the bias opinion of media, through recordings and television, when

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it comes to music of Hip Hop and Rock. Within it we will work to look at the negativity that surrounds both cultures and the approach the media takes. Throughout the last few years we have witnessed random acts of violence due to the content of rap and rock lyrics, however, Hip Hop music often receives more negative media coverage than that of rock. This paper will illustrate that although both Hip Hop and Rock culture contain harmful and discriminating lyrics and have a negative approach on our society. Music of Hip Hop is typically scrutinized because it is considered rebellious where as Rock music is considered mainstream and " American" music. According to Kurtis Blow, Hip Hop pioneer, book Kurtis Blow Presents: The History of Rap, Vol. 1, he stated: In the early 1970s a musical genre was born in the crime-ridden neighborhoods of the South Bronx. Gifted teenagers with plenty of imagination but little cash began to forge a new style from spare parts. Hip-hop, as it was then known, was a product of pure streetwise ingenuity; extracting rhythms and melodies from existing records and mixing them up with searing poetry chronicling life in the hood, hip-hop spilled out of the ghetto. From the housing projects hip-hop poured onto the streets and subways, taking root in Bronx clubs like the Savoy Manor Ballroom, Ecstasy Garage, Club 371, The Disco Fever, and the T-Connection. From there it spread downtown to the Renaissance Ballroom, Hotel Diplomat, the Roxy, and The Fun House. It migrated to Los Angeles, where a whole West Coast hip-hop scene developed, sporting its own musical idiosyncrasies, its own wild style. Through television shows like B. E. T's Rap City and Yo! MTV Raps and a succession of Hollywood movies, hip-hop gained millions of new fans across America, in places far removed from the genre's Bronx roots. It spread to Europe, Asia, Africa, and nearly every continent on Earth, gaining

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more cultural significance as the years rolled by. Today it is one of the most potent and successful musical forms of the 20th Century (Blow 23). Encarta encyclopedia then goes on to say: During the mid-1980s, rap moved from the fringes to the mainstream of the American music industry as white musicians began to embrace the new style. In 1986 rap reached the top ten on the Billboard pop charts with "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (To Party!)" by the Beastie Boys and "Walk This Way" by Run-DMC and Aerosmith. Known for incorporating rock music into its raps, Run-DMC became one of the first rap groups to be featured regularly on MTV (Music Television). Also during the mid-1980s, the first female rap group of consequence, Salt-N-Pepa, released the singles "The Show Stoppa" (1985) and "Push It" (1987); "Push It" reached the top 20 on Billboard's pop charts. In the late 1980s a large segment of rap became highly politicized, resulting in the most overt social agenda in popular music since the urban folk movement of the 1960s. The groups Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions epitomized this political style of rap. Public Enemy came to prominence with their second album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988), and the theme song "Fight the Power" from the motion picture *Do the Right Thing* (1989), by African American filmmaker Spike Lee. Proclaiming the importance of rap in black American culture, Public Enemy's lead rapper, Chuck D, referred to it as the "black CNN" (Cable News Network). Alongside the rise of political rap came the introduction of gangsta rap, which attempts to depict an outlaw lifestyle of sex, drugs, and gang violence in inner city America. In 1988 the Southern California rap group Niggaz with Attitude (N. W. A) released "Straight Outta Compton", the first major album of gangsta rap. Songs from the album generated an extraordinary amount of controversy for their

violent images 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. N. W. A 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. In the 1990s rap became increasingly eclectic, demonstrating a seemingly limitless capacity to draw samples from any and all musical forms. A number of rap artists have borrowed from jazz, using samples as well as live music. Some of the most influential jazz-rap recordings include *Jazzmatazz* (1993), an album by Boston rapper Guru, and "Cantaloop (Flip Fantasia)" (1993), a single by the British group US3. In the United Kingdom, jazz-rap evolved into a genre known as trip-hop, the most prominent artists and groups being Tricky and Massive Attack. As rap became increasingly part of the American mainstream in the 1990s, political rap became less prominent while gangsta rap, as epitomized by the Geto Boys, Snoop Doggy Dogg, Biggie Smalls (The Notorious B. I. G.), Tupac Shakur, and Puff Daddy (P. Diddy) grew in popularity. In the late 1990s some rappers—such as Master P in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Puff Daddy in New York City—became entrepreneurs as well, starting highly successful record labels as well as myriad spin-off companies. Popular rappers as the 21st century began included Jay-Z, Ja Rule, Eve, Eminem, Outkast, and Mystikal ("Rap," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2005) Many musicologists believe that Chuck Berry invented rock and roll in 1955 and many say that Berry was a black man just playing black music. However, times had changed. According to Piero Scaruffi, a poet, historian and freethinker, he states: White kids were listening to

rhythm and blues throughout the Northeast, and white musicians were playing rhythm and blues side to side with country music. The music industry soon understood that there was a white market for black music and social prejudice, racial barriers, could nothing against the forces of capitalism. Rock and roll was an overnight success. The music industry promoted white idols such as Elvis Presley, but the real heroes were the likes of Chuck Berry, who better symbolize the synergy between the performer and the audience. The black rockers, and a few white rockers, epitomized the youth's rebellious mood, their need for a soundtrack to their dreams of ant conformism. Their impact was long lasting, but their careers were short lived. For one reason or another, they all stopped recording after a brief time. White singers, such as Presley, who often performed songs composed by obscure black musicians, inherited rock and roll. White rockers became gentler and gentler, thereby drowning rock and roll's very reason to exist. Buddy Holly was the foremost white rocker of the late Fifties, while cross-pollination with country music led to the vocal harmonies of the Everly Brothers and to the instrumental rock of Duan Eddy. The deaths of the Doors' Jim Morrison, of Janis Joplin, of Jimi Hendrix and countless others, sort of cooled down the booming phenomenon. After the excesses of the mid Sixties, a more peaceful way to rock Bob Dylan and others had already proposed nirvana when they rediscovered country music. And "country-rock" became one of the fads of the Seventies, yielding successful bands such as the Eagles. Reggae became a mainstream genre thanks to Bob Marley. Funk became even more absurd and experimental with George Clinton's bands. Hard rock begat heavy metal, that soon became a genre of its own (Blue Oyster Cult, Kiss, Aerosmith, AC/DC, Rush, Journey, Van Halen). The Seventies were mostly a quiet age,

devoid of the neurasthenic of the Sixties. At the turn of the decade, the main musical phenomenon was the emergence of a new generation of singer songwriters that were the direct consequence of the previous generation's intellectual ambitions. Leonard Cohen, Tim Buckley, Nico, Lou Reed, Todd Rundgren, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Tom Waits, and the most famous of all, Bruce Springsteen, established a musical persona that unites the classical composer and the folksinger. (" History of Rock Music, Scaruffi) The violence in much of rap music was said to be an outgrowth of two different cultures, one on the West Coast and the other on the East Coast. In the east the birth of gangsta rap was attributed to gang violence between African American, Afro- Caribbean and Latin gangs in New York. Rather than engage in self-destructive violence, rappers began to fight their battles through rap music (Muwakkil, 1998). Still others, such as rapper Kurtis Blow, argue that East coast rap was mild and that more violent gangsta rap rose up directly from the urban ghettos of the west coast: Well, at first rap was fun. It was something that we did as a means of expression in the early days of rap. And then it just progressed. Each time a rapper would come out, he felt he would have to outdo the next one. Any they started getting harder and harder. The lyrics became more street oriented. And it was selling...and you know, you had the West Coast come into the picture, and that's when the lyrics really became really hard and a lot of profanity and they were just kicking lyrics from the ghetto and from a ghetto mentality, and that's where gangsta rap started. (Blow, 1997) However, we cannot begin to understand gangsta rap or violence in Hip Hop music until we take a look at a few lyrics. In the 1994 critically acclaimed album " Ready To Die", late rapper Notorious B. I. G speaks about robbing individuals, slapping children and thoughts of killing



himself. One of the many lyrics that stand out of course is that of his record "Gimme The Loot", in which he plays the role of two robbers plotting to attack several people. With lyrics such as; " Then I'm dipping up the block and I'm robbing bitches too up the herring bones and bamboos I wouldn't give fuck if you're pregnant Give me the baby rings and a #1 MOM pendant" (Notorious B. I. G, 1994) We witness what many would see as a lure to the youth telling them that stealing and robbing individuals is okay to do. However, what many fail to see is that violence in predominantly black urban areas is something that was present before Hip Hop music was born. Another example of degradation and violence in Hip Hop music is that of the controversial West Coast group of N. W. A, better known as " Niggas With Attitude". With lyrics from their controversial 1992 hit, " Fuck Tha Police" many politicians, police officers and citizens were outraged at the fact that individuals were denouncing police departments and officers, especially the corrupt LAPD force. Lyrics such as: " But take off the gun so you can see what's up And we'll go at it punk, and I'ma fuck you up! Make you think I'ma kick your ass but drop your gat, and Ren's gonna blast I'm sneaky as fuck when it comes to crime But I'ma smoke 'em now and not next time Smoke any motherfucker that sweats me or any asshole, that threatens me I'm a sniper with a hell of a scope Takin out a cop or two, they can't cope with me" (N. W. A, 1993) Although many didn't realize that they were just young men speaking of the violence going on throughout their communities, which were initiated by the people that were supposed to be protecting them, police officers. Various politicians interpreted as gang violence and rappers encouraging violence. " What we need to realize is about Hip Hop music is that while it has been accused of celebrating gang violence, it is also

accurate reportage" (Gibb, 2000). Another issue that has haunted Hip Hop music since its inception is the defamation of women frequently evident in Hip Hop lyrics. With artists from the late Tupac Shakur and Notorious B. I. G to that of Snoop Dogg and Too Short, misogynous Hip Hop lyrics typically have spoken of the conquest of women, who are often called " Ho's" and " Bitches" or often referred to as animals or objects. An example of this is would be Atlanta based group D4L, where in there lyrics they tell women to " Shake your Laffy Taffy" and refer to them as candy and other edible objects. Where we have just taken a look at how Hip Hop lyrics contain violence and adult content that have not been suitable to youth and have stirred up controversy. There have been many instances in Rock Music that their artist lyrics have been considered somewhat satanic and have had a negative influence on society. While examining Hip Hop lyrics many believed and saw the music of Hip Hop to contain violence, misogynous lyrics and profanity. Many critics believe that Rock music contains references to Satan and the occult.. According to the book Controversies of the Music Industry, it gave some examples of band names and album titles that had satanic references, such as: • " The Conjuring" by Megadeth • " Highway to Hell" by AC/DC • " Anti-Christ Superstar" by Marilyn Manson • " Sabbath, Bloody Sabbath" by Black Sabbath (Barnett and Burniss, 2001) With Black Metal pioneers, a subgenre of Rock music, such as Black Sabbath, Ozzy Osbourne, Led Zeppelin and Marilyn Manson, many have come to fear it because many feel as though it too closely resembles neo-Nazism's hatred of organized religions. However, one cannot say this without examples of offensive lyrics and what many believe to be the results of them. One of which took place on December 23rd, 1985, Raymond Belknap and his friend, James Vance, shot

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them selves in a suicide pact. Belknap died immediately from the gunshot wounds, but his friend survived. Vance was left horribly disfigured and died three years later from his injuries. Both had been listening to the Judas Priest album *Stained Class* before the incident (Vance v. Judas Priest). Wake the dead, the saints are in Hell Wake the dead, they've come for the bell (Judas Priest, 2001) Another example an act that many believe was committed due to the content of Rock music is that of John Daniel McCollum. On October 26th, 1984, nineteen-year-old McCollum shot himself in the right temple with a . 22 caliber handgun while lying in his bed listening *Speak of the Devil* from Ozzy Osbourne's album, *Diary of a Madman* (McCollum et al. v. CBS, Inc., and John " Ozzy" Osbourne, 1988). With lyrics such as: Screaming at the window Watch me die another day Hopeless situation endless price I have to pay Sanity now it's beyond me there's no choice (*Diary of a Madman*, 1981) Many felt that there was probable cause to charge Osbourne and CBS Records, claiming the music caused the youth's suicide. However, the court noted that the parents did not provide an evidence to show such an effect. " It can not be said that there was a close connection between John's Death and defendants' composition, performance, production and distribution years earlier of recorded artistic musical expressions. Likewise, no moral blame for that tragedy may be laid at defendants' door" (McCollum et al. v. CBS, Inc., and John " Ozzy" Osbourne, 1988, p. 1005) With looking at lyrics from two different genres that have both prompted acts of violence, contained profanity and denigrate women, we must realize that we only understand and react to what the media shows us. So often the media has portrayed these two genres that are alike in many ways in two very different lights. Of course, we have taken a look at different lyrics from both Rock and Hip Hop

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music; however, we must be reminded that there is very much a big line of separation between these unique genres. For as little time that Hip Hop music has existed it has stirred up many controversy from that of being attacked by The National Political Congress of Black Women to rapper's such as 50 Cent being banned in countries like Canada for the controversial lyrics an talks of violence. However, to many it seems as though Rock music, which is, just as violent and has made reference to Satan and suicide, has not been as targeted by the media as Hip Hop music has. According to the book *Controversies of the Music Industry*: It is not uncommon for rap music to sound as if it condones gang welfare, violence directed at police, use of drugs and treatment of women as objects rather than being human beings. It must be noted, however, that anti-social themes such as anger toward police, use of drugs, and treatment of women as sex objects is not unique to rap music. The rock bands Rage Against the Machine and their fans have consistently criticized law enforcement officials. A review of music videos on MTV or VH1, cable channels known for rock and pop rather than rap, frequently portrays women as sex objects (*Controversies of the Music Industry* 159) Also, with the previous examples of suicide and deaths that many believed were as a result to Rock music lyrics, these artists have still gone on to sell millions of records and toured the world, when Hip Hop artists, are being condemned for speaking of the violence and issues within our society. Thus showing that Rock music will always be looked at as "American" music, where as Hip Hop music is the catalyst in which the media and recording companies make there money, by which portraying Hip Hop music in a negative light. The media and record companies, want there audience to buy the tales of Hip Hop music of bitches, blunts, beat downs

and AK-47s.... Once this credibility is established, then white owned companies can market young black men, women and Hip Hop culture in the rebel light, to the voyeuristic suburban white teens that keep the entertainment industry buoyant. Rappers resent it...but the dollars keep flowing (Morris, 2000). In conclusion, it is fair to say that both Rock and Hip Hop music have had strong influences on our culture and society that they have lyrics that demote women and contain violence, and have been portrayed negatively in society. Hip Hop music has been targeted more as a genre within the media. Although Rock music has been looked at as satanic and cult like, it is still put on a pedestal and considered mainstream "American" music. Throughout the last three decades Hip Hop music has played as a major voice for the youth of our inner city communities, but the violence that Hip Hop artist have tried to illustrate to the masses and make us aware of what is going on in the ghettos; has now been looked at as a marketing ploy, therefore portraying in a negative light than that of a positive one. Upon the deaths on both Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B. I. G, the media instead of trying to shed a positive light on these two phenomenal individuals, instead focused it as being East Coast vs. West Coast, and blaming these two rappers deaths on the content of the music. On the other hand, the parents of the young teens who killed themselves while listening to demonic and what many consider cult-like music, by Rock artists, which spoke of suicide as a way out of life or problems when there was nothing else, in a way that made it okay. Thus making it seem as though these teenagers killed themselves because of their own mental issues and no blame can go to the lyrics of Rock music. For good or bad, the thing we know for sure is that Hip Hop music, has made a strong imprint on American

culture, with campaigns such as Vote or Die, which encouraged teens to go out and vote. As well as, The Hip Hop Summit Action Network, ran by Russell Simmons, which is an organization to uplift the Hip Hop community, as well as music. It can be said that Hip Hop music reflects what is going on, whereas, Rock music creates it. Notes Classicbands. com. 2000. 7 November 2005 Mobilizing the Hip Hop Generation. Jesse Alejandro Cottrell. Wiretap. April 2003 Longhurst, Brian. Popular Music and Society. Massachusetts: Blackwell/Polity, 1995 Blow, Kurtis. Presents: The History of Rap: Vol. 1. New York: Rhino/WEA, 1997 " Rap", Microsoft Encarta Inline Encyclopedia. 2005. 27 November 2005 1997-2005 Microsoft Corporation History of Rock Music. Piero Scaruffi. 2005. 19 November 2005 Muwakkil, S. " Rap's Dilemma". In These Times. 1998, March 8 Blow, K. Effect of Gangsta Rap on African American Culture. Equal Time, CNBC. 1997, Mar. 19 Wallace, Christopher. Ready to Die. Bad Boy, 1994 N. W. A. Straight Outta Compton. Priority, 2002 Gibb, E. " Survival of the Phattest". Herald. [Scotland] 8 Mar. 2000: p. 5 Barnet, Richard, and Larry Burriss. Controversies of the Music Industry. Connecticut: Greenwood, 2001 Vance v. Judas Priest. WL130920. Nev. Dist. Ct. 1990 Priest, Judas. Saints in Hell. Sony, 2001 McCollum et al. v. CBS, Inc., and John " Ozzy" Osbourne. 202 Cal. App. ed 989, 249 Cal. Rptr. 1988 Osbourne, Ozzy. Diary of a Madman. Holland, 1981 McCollum et al. v. CBS, Inc., and John " Ozzy" Osbourne, 1988, p. 1005 Barnet, Richard, and Larry Burriss. Controversies of the Music Industry. Connecticut: Greenwood, 2001 Morris, M. " Black Gold: Fifty Something White Hollywood Supremo Micheal Ortiz Has Announced He's Getting Into H