

A guide to hip-hop subgenres essay sample

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Although still a relatively new genre, hip-hop has an incredibly storied past, one that cannot be studied without noticing the impact women have had on its shaping. However, the importance of women in hip hop cannot be discussed without diving first into the birth of the genre itself. By the late 70's, much of the public had lost interest in disco music, the most popular genre of music at the time. Many accused it of becoming watered-down and Europeanized, and sought to creatively distance themselves from disco when it came to making music.

Around this time, sampling equipment and drum machines became widely available and much more affordable, creating an influx of aspiring DJs. This access to new technologies, coupled with a newfound disdain towards disco, led DJs to depart from the rich, melody-centric form of music that had dominated the past decade and usher in a new era; the age of rhythm. In the heart of New York City, specifically the Bronx, some ambitious DJs found that if two of the same records are played on a turntable, specific sections of songs could be looped for as long as the DJ wanted.

A section would start on one record, and right as it was about to end, the DJ would switch over to the other turntable and restart the same section from the beginning using the other record. The sections these DJ's focused on occurred when all other instruments dropped out of a song and only the rhythmic instruments were featured; called 'breaks'. Dancing became the first method of expression to hip-hop music. DJs would perform these breaks for small groups of people in widely unknown venues, where the term 'breakdancing' was first coined.

Hip-hop also influenced a subculture of graffiti writing throughout urban settings, but neither dancing nor graffiti became the ultimate partner to hip-hop. At these parties, the DJ would often add a few rhymes to his beat as an additional source of entertainment, but these were lackluster as the DJ would have to focus on maintaining the endless beat. Instead, they began offering the microphone to the crowd, challenging anyone who thought they could rhyme well and in time with the beat to get up on stage and try.

And so, the role of a rapper was born. The first rappers paved the road for all others to come, and unfortunately for women this spelled trouble. Those rappers, who were almost entirely male, painted a picture of machismo; greatly influencing the perception that rapping was a man's form of self-expression. They brought women into the world of mainstream hip-hop, but only as sexual or material objects. Producers and labels became wary of signing female rappers, worrying that women could never play the role of the confident, swaggering emcee.

It wasn't until the late 80's and early 90's that women rappers started to gain momentum, utilizing a variety of techniques to sway misconceived public views. MC Lyte, the artist behind the first track on this mixtape, "Paper Thin", was one of the first women to challenge the preconception that rapping should be left to the men. Born in Brooklyn, not too far from the birthplace of hip-hop, she began rapping when she was 12. She quickly gained in skill and confidence and began outshining much of the competition, men and women alike.

She released her first album *Lyte as a Rock* when she was 18 years old, becoming the first ever solo female rapper to release a studio album. Her song “ Paper Thin” from this debut album serves to prove her skills on the mic and could not be left from this mixtape as it represents the first breakthrough of women in rap. Listen for the classic “ boom-bap”, head-nodding New York style hip hop beat that backs her up on this track. This style is representative of most rap from New York at the time, and puts her on an even playing field with other local artists.

She can then dominate that playing field with her witty lyrics and well timed delivery. “ So I treat all of you like I treat all of them/ What you say to me is still paper thin” ...she rhymes, using this song to respond to all the men that have lied to her and warn future men of doing the same. Lyte not only broke records, she did it on her own terms, disproving what men have promoted about women through knowledge of the genre and sheer lyrical talent. The second artist on this mixtape achieved the same through similar means.

Born in South-Central Los Angeles, Yo-Yo began rapping at age 12, just like Lyte, and grew to outshine most rappers in the area, regardless of gender. She went on to meet Ice Cube, of N. W. A. fame, and he was so impressed with her that he helped write and produce her first album. “ You Can’t Play with my Yo-Yo” is featured on that album, as well as this mixtape. Listen for the sped-up funk samples on the beat, indicative of LA’s early transitions from ‘ Gangster Rap’ to ‘ G-Funk’.

Listen also for Yo-Yo’s use of hard-hitting, gangster style lyrics to prove her point that she deserves to be treated respectfully... “ At home, he’s gotta

listen to ya holler But he'll slap you, and sock ya, so why bother?! But if you come knocking at my door (ay yo) I'll smoke you" She ingeniously uses the popular style of lyricism in LA to gain respect as a rapper, while also using it to drive home positive messages in her songs. Coming up third on this mixtape is Queen Latifah and her track "Ladies First". Queen Latifah was certainly not the first female rapper, not even the first to gain fame.

She was, however, the first true superstar of women in rap. Born in Newark, New Jersey, she first began rapping and beatboxing in high school. In college, she teamed up with the 'Native Tongues' collective, a group that hoped to bring a more positive and African-American-aware message to hip-hop; this is where her musical career began. Armed with her boundless charisma, sharp wit, and no-nonsense attitude, she paved the way for all future female rappers with the release of her first studio album *All Hail the Queen*.

She would go on to release six more albums of various genres, star in numerous films and television shows, and win countless awards, inspiring many to stand up for what they believe in along the way. "Ladies First" (featuring Monie Love, another talented female emcee) comes from that first groundbreaking album. To the groove of an R&B/Funk influenced Hip-Hop track, the Queen lays down bar after bar of rhymes oozing with feminist pride, the likes of which had never been heard in hip-hop before. Listen for her sly wordplay as she fearlessly confronts stereotypes about women and addresses issues in the hip-hop genre.

Even though she left hip-hop behind in pursuit of multi-media superstardom, few female rappers were as influential or as iconic as Queen Latifah was during her reign. Arguably, the fourth featured artist on this mixtape, Lauryn Hill, may be one of them. Born in South Orange, New Jersey, Hill found early success as an actress, eventually launching her musical career in high school with the formation of her band The Fugees. With the release of their Grammy-award-winning second album *The Score*, it became clear that Lauryn Hill was an all-time great.

She blended her African and Caribbean influences into both versatile rapping and enchanting singing, all while promoting themes of God, feminism, and racial equality in her lyrics. Hill continued to spread love and awareness even after The Fugees broke up, recording her solo record *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. Regarded by many as one of the greatest Hip-Hop albums of all time, Hill became the first woman to be nominated for ten Grammys in a single year, and broke another record by winning five of them. Hill's song on this mixtape is "To Zion", from *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*.

Many of the tracks on the album touch on social, racial, or civil themes intelligently and powerfully, which makes choosing just one song to represent her unbridled talent near impossible. However, "To Zion" manages to give a clear sense of Hill's character as a musician. Listening to the song, it is obvious the emphasis is on the vocals. The beat is a simple drum loop that repeats throughout the track, with a haunting guitar melody that drops in and out opposite her voice; making sure Hill is always the focus while she sings; and sing she does.

Hill pours her heart and soul into her words, bringing to life the incredibly personal and masterfully poetic lyrics she wrote for her unborn son, Zion. Hill provides a unique and moving perspective on her pregnancy, using strong imagery to convey just how deep her love for her son is. At the same time, she addresses how naysayers have tried to dissuade her from giving birth...

“ Look at your career they said Lauryn, baby use your head But instead I chose to use my heart” ...and illuminates how much pressure can be placed on women to conform to a set of ideals.

She instead demonstrates strength in the face of adversity and exercises her right to choose what to do with her own body, a strong message to women everywhere. While she doesn't rap on this song, “ To Zion” is imbued with the same raw emotion she injects into all her songs, painting a vibrant picture of the kind of artist she is by showcasing her impressive writing skills and singing voice. Lauryn Hill is truly one of the greatest women rappers of all time. Not all female rappers countered rampant misogyny through positive messages and intellectual lyrics, however.

Lil Kim, whose track “ Queen Bitch” is the final song featured on this mixtape, broke new ground in her own way. Born in Brooklyn, Kim ended up living on the streets during some of her childhood where she learned to freestyle rap (gaining inspiration from MC Lyte). Her career was launched after performing a freestyle for rapper The Notorious B. I. G. , and soon it became evident she was a star. Her first three albums went platinum, tying the record for female platinum rapping records, and she followed Lauryn Hill's footsteps in becoming the second female rapper to reach No.

1 on the Billboard Hot 100. What separated Lil Kim from many other female rappers, however, is that she embraced the caricature men had drawn of women and bent it to her liking. She became hip-hop's first sex symbol. Blending the structure and content of gangster rap with her reclamation of sex as power, Kim bent the rules to her liking. Her song "Queen Bitch" demonstrates this perfectly. The lyrics contain strong themes of sex and violence, as is typical of gangster rap, but at the same time promote womanhood as no other gangster rap had before.

She even goes so far as to describe herself as a 'bitch', and in doing so removes much of the derogatory meaning behind the word. She paints herself as a female in charge, pursuing any pleasure she desires and eliminating anyone standing between her and superstardom. Few women approached rap this way, and few women are as uniquely talented as Lil Kim is as a rapper. For such a new genre of music, hip-hop has an incredibly rich history. It's also come very far from its roots in an underground Brooklyn party.

Women rappers have also come very far since that unforgiving beginning and have had an incredible impact on the tapestry that is hip-hop and have helped shape it into what it's become today. MC Lyte and Yo-Yo used popular local styles to gain traction among and were some of the first to break preconceptions regarding women as emcees. Queen Latifah took the role of a woman rapper to superstardom for the first time ever, breaking new ground and spreading positive messages along the way.

Lauryn Hill followed closely, becoming a five-time Grammy winner, charming the hearts of millions with the emotion she pours into each of her songs. Lil Kim broke records too with her 3 platinum albums, though she did it differently by taking back the word “ bitch” and bending her sexuality to her advantage in the public eye, becoming rap’s first sex symbol. There were many other women who’ve made huge impacts on hip-hop, but these were some of the best, and I hope you’ve enjoyed listening with me.