

# The Influence of Hip-Hop on American Culture

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Dvopredmetni prijediplomski sveučilišni studij Engleskoga  
jezika i književnosti i Pedagogije

Vanja Vujković Bukvin

**Utjecaj hip-hopa na američku kulturu**

Završni rad

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2024.

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Associate Professor

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

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## **Abstract**

One of America's greatest cultural treasures has undoubtedly got to be the hip-hop culture. Gaining its roots in the 1970s New York area of Bronx, it is an astonishing identity of the African American community. Hip-hop soon became a special cultural movement in which the marginalized and oppressed communities could freely speak their minds and point out problems of a racial, political, and social nature. This paper displays how important hip-hop culture is to American society by taking a look at the origins of hip-hop, who is considered to be the creator of this popular movement, and how it achieved its status in mainstream media. The main elements of hip-hop culture which are presented in this paper include art, music, fashion, and language. Every single element has its own style which makes up the overall hip-hop culture. Moreover, the paper highlights the power that hip-hop culture has in the African American community as well as popular African-American hip-hop music artists like Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. who helped in shaping the hip-hop culture. A portrayal of hip-hop's linguistic innovations including slang expressions are also presented with the aim of gaining more precise knowledge about hip-hop's influence on American culture.

*Keywords:* hip-hop, culture, rap, African American



## **Introduction**

Many of today's cultural norms and traditions have travelled and reached various parts of the world where they have left a meaningful impact. This thesis explores hip-hop as a new form of cultural and art movement that has had a significant impact on American culture and throughout the world. Hip-hop originated in the 1970s and its founders were members of the African American community. What started as a new form of poetic expression through music and art soon evolved into a much more powerful and therefore impactful cultural phenomenon. This paper aims to examine the various elements of hip-hop culture, in particular how it has left a remarkable footprint on the African American identity and community. In addition, the paper will provide different sources for each cultural element, among them music, art, and language. Furthermore, the thesis highlights many well-known artists who have greatly impacted the hip-hop movement in the form of cultural identity.

In the first section a brief history of the evolution of the hip-hop movement will be presented to gain a better understanding of the main topic of this paper. In the second section, the hip-hop cultural phenomenon shall be examined in different artistic styles of street art such as graffiti. The third section will discuss the hip-hop rap music culture and present some of the most well-known hip-hop musical names such as Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. The fourth section will present the hip-hop fashion culture, and the fifth section will take a closer look at the impact of hip-hop culture on language with a particular focus on various linguistic aspects such as slang words and other expressions. Furthermore, the paper will also reveal how hip-hop culture has given African-Americans a unique voice for themselves and their own people, a voice which is still not entirely heard of and is commonly declined in present day American culture. A recap of all the key points stated in this thesis are to be presented in the conclusion which will therefore provide ground evidence about the significant impact of hip-hop on American culture.

## 1. How Hip-Hop Arose as a Cultural Phenomenon

Hip-hop as a cultural phenomenon gained its roots in the early 1970s in the United States of America. This new way of expressing inner feelings and thoughts was developed by African Americans who sought to speak their own mind freely, without being limited or belittled in doing so. Most commonly, it originated between folks who were living a very difficult life, struggling with poverty, and above all else trying to find a way to escape the struggles of the “ghetto” lifestyle on the streets.

The origins of the first signs of hip-hop culture come from New York, more specifically the Bronx area. According to The Kennedy Center, hip-hop is characterized by elements such as rapping, mixing records on a turntable by DJ’s, breakdancing, portraying street art in the form of graffiti, beatboxing, and writing poems (“Hip-Hop: A Culture”). The first known appearance of hip-hop culture was portrayed by non-other than Clive Campbell, known as DJ Kool Herc, and his sister Cindy Campbell in August of 1973 at a DJ party in the Bronx area of New York (History.com Editors). DJ Kool Herc spun the same record on two turntables which enabled him to use up the most danceable parts of the song to ensure that everybody was on the floor dancing, and grooving to the early musical forms of hip-hop, thus witnessing the birth of hip-hop before their very own eyes (“Hip-Hop: A Culture”).

After the party that DJ Kool Herc and Cindy Campbell held, word of his funky and groovy style got out in the neighborhood and shortly after across the whole city. Many African Americans saw this new cultural movement as a new and profound idea of sharing messages and ideas amongst themselves; messages and ideas that only they could truly understand. Hip-hop soon took off in many different cultural elements not just in the music world, but also gained the attention of writers who took the idea of hip-hop and began expressing the struggles and everyday lives of African Americans through poetry. Art styles of hip-hop arose in the forms of graffiti and street art which also helped young African Americans stir up their inner thoughts and show the world what they truly desire.

In his published article, Martin J. Gladney suggests the following main topics of hip-hop culture: “Hip-hop music and culture have caused volumes of controversy and forged their way into a marginal position alongside that of popular culture. Through rhythm and poetry, hip-hop has endeavored to address racism, education, sexism, drug use, and spiritual uplift” (291). According to Gladney’s claim, hip-hop has impacted many important aspects of American culture.

## 1.1. The Founding Father of Hip-Hop

As mentioned in the previous section, the legitimate birth of the hip-hop culture arose from the New York Bronx apartment party held by the highly praised creator of hip-hop culture—Clive Campbell, otherwise known by his stage name “DJ Kool Herc.” It is therefore necessary to include some background information about this cultural icon.

Clive Campbell was born in 1955 in Kingston, Jamaica, and is considered the founding father of hip-hop culture—primarily in the musical element of hip-hop culture. As mentioned in earlier, Campbell and his sister Cindy threw a “back-to-school” party in their apartment on Sedgwick Avenue 1520 in which Cindy asked her brother Clive to be the deejay of that party (Ostberg). What made this specific party so unique was the technique that DJ Kool implemented during the party which really sparked up the energy amongst their friends. He played the records on the turntable as any other deejay did, but he used the “breaks” of each song to extend the instrumental which created a longer and livelier atmosphere on the dancefloor:

By setting up two turntables and a mixer and playing two copies of the same record, he was able to loop and extend the breaks so that guests could dance to them for longer periods of time. To build his grooves, he favoured breaks from heavy funk songs such as “Give It Up or Turnit a Loose” by James Brown, “Bongo Rock” by the Incredible Bongo Band, “Get into Something” by the Isley Brothers, and “Listen to Me” by Baby Huey and the Babysitters. (Ostberg)

By the mid-1970s other artists such as “Grandmaster Flash” (Joseph Robert Saddler) and “Afrika Bambaataa” (Lance Taylor) were starting to gain immense popularity and success in the musical elements of hip-hop culture in America (Ostberg). These artists were responsible for the innovation of popular rap music, DJing on turntables, and breakdancing on the “breaks” of songs while using various techniques on the turntables such as switching records, disc scratching, and rewinding.

## 2. Hip-Hop Art Culture—The Graffiti Era

Serving as a dynamic expression of identity and resistance, graffiti is the most creative art style portrayed in hip-hop culture. Graffiti became a poetic way of expressing one's intrusive feelings and thoughts, even portraying some kind of rebellion act or simply discontentment with political, social or racial views on marginalized communities, specifically African Americans. Graffiti draws its roots from New York City youngsters that saw this form of art style as a way of marking their territory once they spraypainted a definite area. Graffiti art style did not solely include spray painting one's name in a fancy font whilst adding colorful details to their initials or spraying random gibberish shapes and text with no clear message, but rather implementing various hip-hop elements and transforming them into special and unique art masterpieces.

The graffiti art culture of hip-hop was more significantly practiced in one of the busiest and crowded parts of New York City—the subway. The city's subway metro was turning into a complete art museum filled with all kinds of scribbles, drawings, writings, and signatures on both the inner and outer structures of the subways. However, as these drawings were spreading across the subway like a wildfire, a growing number of New York citizens were starting to show complete disgust and annoyance at these artistic forms, viewing them as pure vandalism. Artists were using paint cans instead of ordinary brushes which resulted in the artists turning the subway cars into their own canvases. Ed Koch who was the previous mayor of New York City claimed that the graffiti art style spread across New York subway lines was nothing other than pure vandalism (Wickman). This only prompted youngsters to leave even more graffiti art around the subway lines of New York City. Despite the fact that most people viewed graffiti as an act of vandalism, graffiti is considered as art, and art cannot be questioned or rejected as it is the nature of people to spread their ideas and messages.

It is clear how impactful hip-hop's cultural elements truly were in the creation of various graffiti paintings. Many of these art pieces had elements of fashion, music, and language which further enriched hip-hop culture in America. Graffiti art style, as well as street art in general have greatly taken inspiration from hip-hop culture, which not only spread across the rest of America but also the rest of the world. Many European, African, and Asian streets can be seen with murals of famous rap artists such as 'Eazy-E', 'The Notorious B.I.G.', and 'Tupac,' which proves how meaningful this form of art is in hip-hop culture.

### 3. Hip-Hop Rap Music Culture

Rap music and the style of rapping is described as “musical style in which rhythmic and/or rhyming speech is chanted (“rapped”) to musical accompaniment” (Britannica). Rap music is an essential part of the hip-hop culture in America which also originated in New York City during the 1970s. It is not possible to discuss the influence of hip-hop on American culture without dedicating a good chunk of this thesis to rap music as it is considered the beating heart of hip-hop culture. Rap music is not strictly considered as just a musical genre, but it is also viewed as a means of expressing certain motifs and messages. The same way that African American communities brought the earliest forms of hip-hop culture to America and later to the rest of the world, rap music also originated in the African American community and culture. Rap music is a cultural identification of the black community through which African Americans are free to express their inner thoughts, dare to question the problems of the point of view that society has on African Americans in racial, political, social, and ethnical themes. According to Blanchard, rap music has gained its roots from African oral storytelling traditions that have used different “rhyming games” that date back to slavery (6). The slaves would often communicate in metaphors which included rhyming so that their white masters could not understand them (Blanchard 2). This allowed the slaves to express their verbal skills, hence it’s frequent usage of delivering messages through rhyming in today’s rap music culture.

Today it is quite common to feel a type of similarity when listening to new songs and newly produced music. When we listen to these new songs, we can sometimes feel like we have already heard the instrumental of that song somewhere, which is where sampling plays the biggest role in rap music creation. Sampling is a method where music artists will take a certain part of a song, remix it by either adding some sound effects, looping one part the original song or by changing the pitch and flow of it (Tracklib). In other words, sampling is considered a type of audio manipulation in which a new beat can be introduced. In the rap world, this is a common method of creating new beats and instrumentals for rappers.

#### 3.1 Earliest Recorded Rap Songs

It is not so easy to determine which song is considered to be the very first and official rap song in hip-hop as rap music was spreading at a very fast rate after the discovery of hip-hop culture. But there are a couple of official titles and artists which did in fact go commercial, hence are

considered the first rap songs which inspired many other people to contribute to rapping and writing their own rap songs.

### 3.1.1 *The Sugarhill Gang—“Rapper’s Delight”*

Regarded as the first produced rap song which went commercial, “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugarhill Gang was released in 1979 and was an immediate success (Ostberg). The hip-hop group which was formed by record producer Sylvia Robinson consisted of 3 members: Wonder Mike (Michael Anthony Wright), Big Bank Hank (Henry Lee Jackson), and Master Gee (Guy O’Brien) (Ostberg). It is important to note that none of these members had any rapping experience before they produced “Rapper’s Delight” (Ostberg). However, some of them did have previous experience in deejaying and contributing to the role of an MC (Master of Ceremonies) at parties and entertainment events. Recorded in only one take, the song is rapped by all three members taking turns at the microphone, exhibiting their verbal skills through rhyming in a fast-paced rhythm. Just how it was mentioned in the first part of this section about rap music, the intro of this song was taken from a disco-funk song by the British group Love De-Luxe called “Here Comes That Sound Again,” while the funky and groovy bass line was extracted from Chic’s hit “Good Times” (“Britannica”). The lyrics are playful and indicate having fun with the intro of the rap song starting out with these lyrics:

*“Now what you hear is not a test, I’m rappin’ to the beat*

*And me, the groove, and my friends are gonna try to move your feet.”*

(The Sugarhill Gang)

The chorus of the song indicates how it follows the rhythm by imitating a drum-like pattern:

*“Said a hip-hop, the hippie to the hippie*

*The hip, hip-a-hop and you don’t stop rockin’*

*To the bang, bang the boogie, say up jump the boogie*

*To the rhythm of the boogie, the beat.”*

(The Sugarhill Gang)

### 3.1.2 *The Fatback Band – “King Tim III (Personality Jock)”*

This famous track which is also considered as one of the founding rap songs of hip-hop culture was released just before “Rappers Delight”; however, it did not manage to maintain the success and popularity like the famous hit by The Sugarhill Gang. As described in his work “To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic” by William Jelani Cobb, the first recorded rap song featured King Tim throwing down his rap under a guitar-funked riff (45).

The song’s lyrics, just like “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugarhill Gang, are centered around having a fun time at the disco floor with King Tim rapping his verses with the groovy beat accompanying his rap skills:

*“You just clap your hands then you stomp your feet  
‘Cause you’re listenin’ to the sound of the sure shot beat I’m the K-I-N-G the T-I-M  
King Tim III, and I am him  
Just me, Fatback, and the crew  
We doin’ it all just for you”*

*“Stomp your feet and you clap your hands  
‘Cause you’re listenin’ to the sound of the Fatback Band  
Ain’t nothin’ new in what I do  
‘Cause I’m doin’ it all just for you.”*

(The Fatback Band)

### 3.1.3 *Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five— “The Message”*

Alongside the mentioned founding father of hip-hop culture—DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash is also considered as a key icon in the assembly of early hip-hop culture. His group “Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five” originated in the Bronx area of New York City in 1978 (“Britannica”). Cobb states how rap music was originally brought to the American music scene and media mainstream in 1979 with The Sugarhill Gang’s hit record “Rapper’s Delight,” but that the real birth of political rap music in hip-hop culture was discovered in the 1982 rap hit “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five (45). While “Rapper’s Delight” was centered around the joyful and carefree party spirit on the dance floor, “The Message” had brought a more serious and political tone which described the decay of the metropolis and the African American

community living within it (Cobb 45). By blending the catchy beat with the raw talent of the lead vocalist of the hip-hop group—Grandmaster Melle Mel’s rapping, “The Message” made a very clear distinction between the overall themes and motifs surrounding rap music. Thanks to this iconic rap hit, many African Americans realized how rap music can play a huge role within their community and how it can carry a completely different meaning situated in its lyrics. This hit greatly influenced how future rap artists shaped their lyrical motifs and themes. Not just being the focus of partying, having fun, and dancing, but also conveying the struggles of the everyday black man in a dominantly populated white culture.

Some of the lyrics of “The Message” convey struggles and challenges that African American communities are faced with in the United States of America, such as poverty. This chorus reflects the frustration and mental struggles which African Americans are faced with:

*“It’s like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.”*

(Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five)

The following lyrics suggest that children trapped in poverty are born into a system that limits their awareness of opportunities or hope for a better future, essentially blinding them from the search of a better life:

*“A child is born with no state of mind*

*Blind to the ways of mankind.”*

(Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five)

### 3.2 The Most Influential Rap Artists

As rap music was gaining bigger and wider attention all across America, African Americans started looking into this cultural idea of self-expression through rhyming and expression of verbal skills. With the appearances of highly-praised artists like Tupac Shakur, Biggie (The Notorious B.I.G), Eazy-E, Ice Cube, Eminem, Dr Dre and more, hip-hop took a pivotal turning point in the rap industry. Hip-hop culture started entering into its so called “golden era.” These artists (and many other rappers) inspired the minds and hearts of many generations who found great relief in the words and meanings that these artists implied in their music. Of course, it is inevitable to talk about the violent nature accompanied with violence, sex, drugs, and alcohol in the most popular rap songs. But as we know, hip-hop music is more than just writing, producing and rapping. It goes beyond the norms of most music genres as it is, which most Americans will agree upon, more than music; it is a way of life. The biggest legends of rap music such as Tupac Shakur, Eazy-E, Jay-Z,



and Biggie used their raw talent to not only address certain racial, social, and political issues, but to also create a larger connection between members of the African American communities. They wanted to gain the attention of their fellow blacks into believing that they [African Americans] can escape the slums and ghettos that most African Americans resided in, escape the gang violence, drug usage, and criminal lifestyle that was too often portrayed by American media.

The following section aims to explore the great significance and importance of the most well-known and the most successful rappers that have left an enormous change in hip-hop culture, as well as American history.

### *3.2.1 Tupac Shakur*

Regarded as the biggest and most important figure in hip-hop music, Tupac Amaru Shakur changed the idea of rap music by openly addressing many sensitive topics. His lyrics often contained issues of racism, poverty, police brutality, and inequality, giving a voice to marginalized communities—the major problems faced by the people that he loved and cared for. Tupac’s unique blend of raw emotion with poetic lyricism aided in combining the political views on hip-hop culture with the gruesome realities of street life, and life in the ghetto. One of the reasons why Tupac was such a powerful figure in hip-hop culture was because he was more than just an ordinary rapper, he was a political activist, a voice for the African American community who has faced (and is still facing today) oppression and discrimination in American society. This leader-like trait that Shakur possessed was taught to him by his own mother, Afeni Shakur who was a member of the Black Panther Party, a political movement which was mainly concerned with the excessive police brutality against blacks, alongside other discriminations that African Americans had to put up with (Freedom Archives). Many rap songs that Tupac produced did follow the “tradition” of including violence, sex, drugs, and alcohol in their lyrics. However, there are numerous songs in which this is not the case. In the song “Dear Mama” Tupac talks about his immeasurable love towards his own mother. In his song “Changes” Tupac raps about how the relationship between white people and African Americans has not changed a bit and he discusses problems about ghetto poverty, police brutality against African Americans, gang violence, and drug abuse. Tupac’s work greatly influenced the hip-hop music industry. Based on the YouTube video uploaded by user Diverse Mentality, a brief explanation of Tupac’s influence on hip-hop music shall be discussed.

The first way Tupac Shakur influenced the future of hip-hop music was by releasing the first hip-hop double disc album. This album being his fourth studio album titled “All Eyez on Me,”

which was released in February of 1996 and was the last album released during Tupac's lifetime ("How 2Pac Forever Changed the Music Industry"). The album also broke record sales by selling over 10 million copies, being only 1 of 7 albums in hip-hop to sell this many copies in the United States ("How 2Pac Forever Changed the Music Industry"). With Tupac being the first hip-hop artist to achieve this success, many other rappers such as Biggie Smalls, Wu-Tang Clan, E-40, and Jay-Z started following in on his style of music, which led to them to release their own double disc albums.

The second way Tupac changed the hip-hop industry was with his overall work ethic. One key characteristic which Tupac possessed was the ability to work hard on his projects every single day, spending multiple hours in his studio recording, editing, and producing new songs for his album. He proved that anything was possible by setting your mindset, priorities, and goals. The reason behind why Tupac recorded many of his songs in a relatively short period was due to the fact that he himself did not know when his last day could be. Tupac knew that his success and fame would spark up even more jealousy and hatred in his haters. With this in mind, he spent days and nights in his studio, working as hard as possible on his albums and polishing his finished songs. The result of his hard work ethic was seen after his death in 1996 as there have been 6 albums in total which were released after his death. These albums contain songs which Tupac had written and recorded before his death, almost as if he knew that his time was swiftly running out. The albums mentioned are: "*Loyal to the Game*," "*R U Still Down? (Remember Me)*," "*Still I Rise*," "*Until the End of Time*," "*Better Dayz*" and "*Pac's Life*." Many people even speculated that Tupac was in fact alive and in hiding somewhere in Cuba, writing and releasing all of these songs which were being released after his death. This being just a conspiracy theory, it is clear as day that Tupac's hard work had left a great footprint on the future of hip-hop music when it comes to putting in hard work for the things you love.

The third and final way that Tupac greatly influenced hip-hop was his passion and love for what he did and spoke of. Not only in his music did he speak about injustices in the world, but he spoke about it in interviews, often being truthful about everything that troubled his mind and the issues that bothered him, as well as his community. Tupac was aware of all of the major world problems occurring at the time, often saying how the rich will only get richer, and the poor will get poorer. One of the lines from his popular track "*Keep Ya Head Up*" perfectly describes how the rich will use their powers for anything, but to help the ones in need:

*"You know, it's funny when it rains it pours  
They got money for wars, but can't feed the poor"*

(Tupac Shakur)

### 3.2.2 *Biggie Smalls—The Notorious B.I.G*

Following the golden era of hip-hop music of the 90s, it is necessary to include another major representative of gangster rap music, Christopher Wallace, otherwise known as Biggie Smalls. Biggie Smalls was a popular rapper who represented the East Coast as he himself grew up in New York. Biggie Smalls started his career out by going out on the New York city streets and rapping in front of a live audience by embracing the popular rap style known as freestyle, where the rapper comes up with the lyrics and rhymes on the spot. After recording a demo under his stage name “Biggie Smalls,” it soon came to the attention of record label producer, Sean “Diddy” Combs. The pair first worked together at “Uptown Records,” and later Diddy signed Wallace to the famous record label “Bad Boy Entertainment” (“Britannica”). What made Biggie’s rap style so special was the raw talent for creating continuous flows and playing with words to produce nitty and quirky rhymes. When Biggie was rapping, everything that came out of his mouth sounded natural, resulting in his rap style being a perfect tool of storytelling within his lyrics.

Biggie Smalls helped in putting the record labels of the East Coast back into the rap industry, as record labels were mainly being dominated by West Coast rivalry rappers, including Tupac Shakur. What really made Biggie Smalls stand out in the East Coast rap industry is how he truly loved where he came from, his people, and showed great support to young African Americans who wanted to take up rapping. He won many awards in his lifetime, including Billboard Music Awards, and even a Grammy nomination. After his unfortunate death, his name was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2020 which shows just how important his work was in hip-hop music. His persona and display of the world around us inspired many generations to continue representing the East Coast and hip-hop in general.

#### 4. Hip-Hop Fashion Culture

With hip-hop culture dominating across America in music, art, and literature, it also left an effect in the fashion industry. As hip-hop culture grew tremendously in popular American culture, hip-hop fashion brands started emerging in the 1990s. Managers of record labels were getting involved into cooperating with big brand names like Gucci, Versace, but also some artists launched their own clothing brands onto the market. By releasing their own clothing brands, artists would gain an even larger popularity, increasing their entire net worth, and promoting their music works.

According to Tasha Lewis and Natalie Gray, the special fashion taste and aesthetic of hip-hop culture clothing originated in New York City amongst African American and Latino youth culture which quickly began expanding beyond its urban roots and by the mid-1990s, hip-hop fashion brands reached the shelves of many department stores across the USA (230). However, it is important to know what hip-hop fashion is and what it includes. To answer this question, Lewis and Gray define it as a popularization of styles based on a subculture group's aesthetic preferences (231). This fashion style lists the trends found among hip-hop's "b-boys" and "b-girls" in the 1980s into 1990s and include items such as: "leather jackets with fake Gucci and other designer insignia," ... "tracksuits," ... "Puma 'Gazelles' sneakers," ... "oversized T-shirts," ... "combat boots," ... "hunter's vests," ... and "ice-hockey shirts" (Lewis VanDyk, qtd. in Lewis and Gray 3).

One of the ways the hip-hop culture left its mark in the fashion world can be seen by explaining two fashion theories: the trickle-down and trickle-up. The trickle-down theory, or the upper-class theory proposes that "new styles are adopted or started by groups in higher social classes and these styles are later adopted by those in the lower social classes" (Simmel, qtd. in Lewis and Gray). This theory suggests that consumers would buy products that were not directly marketed towards them, but that the lower-class would attempt to imitate these fashion brands by creating fake copies of it. This also means that the higher-class (in this case, the rappers and their record label managers) is in power in the fashion world while also importing elements of hip-hop culture into their clothing brands.

The other theory which captures the importance of hip-hop culture in the fashion world is viewed through the trickle-up theory. Popular fashion brand designers realized how the elements of hip-hop culture could play a huge role in marketing and that they could attempt to add hip-hop elements and motifs into their own clothing brands to further popularize their products (Lewis and Gray). The trickle-up theory otherwise known as the bottom-up perspective, "views fashion innovation as starting with the youth and/or lower social classes and then up to older and higher social classes. This theory is the basis of subcultural leadership, in which a smaller group within a

culture influences fashion change” (Kaiser, qtd. in Lewis and Gray. This theory suggests that big fashion designers and brands take their inspiration from the lower social classes and use the trends which are consumed by anyone on the streets. Styles offered by the brands reflected the on-going trends in hip-hop at the time. Therefore, clothing like baggy pants and jeans, oversized shirts, chains, caps, watches, tank tops, vests, hoodies, and Timberland boots were a common sight on the streets of America (Lewis and Gray).

## 5. The Impact of Hip-Hop Culture on Language

When discussing how hip-hop influenced many aspects of American culture it is required to speak about how it changed language, not just the language spoken on the streets, in households or other non-formal areas, but also the way hip-hop implemented change in vocabulary and the dictionary of the English language. Hip-Hop language (HLL) can roughly be described as a variation of English language spoken by African Americans which is used, borrowed and transformed by African Americans and non-African Americans in and outside of the United States of America (Cutler 520). One example of Hip-Hop language effects on African American English is the use of habitual *be*. Hip-hop lyrics provide cases of habitual *be* before noun phrases (e.g., “Dr. Dre *be* the name”) (Alim, qtd. in Cutler). Habitual *be* is therefore characterized as an action that is repetitive or part of a habit that a person owns (e.g. “Kesha *be* trippin”) suggesting that Kesha is not “trippin” just now, but rather that her state of “trippin” is practically always present as part of her habit (Cutler 521). However, habitual *be* changes its meaning when followed by a noun phrase in which case it is then understood as a marker of identity (e.g. “She *be* the teacher”), often used by young African-Americans (Morgan, qtd. in Cutler). This habitual *be* is often used in the African American Language and is a result of the effect of Hip-Hop language.

Another interesting fact about Hip-Hop language is that whenever a new word or phrase appears in hip-hop music, it becomes available for anyone to use and to adapt their style. These new words and expressions basically “cross-over” into the white media and culture. Two examples are the words “dope” which means that something or someone is considered to be “cool,” and “wack” which means that something is seen as “bad” or “stupid” (Cutler 524). White partakers of hip-hop tend to follow in on Hip-Hop language which is used by African Americans. According to Cutler, by doing so, white participants are often criticized of merely copying the black hip-hop culture and trying to obtain a certain “Blackness” in the terms of linguistic features (qtd. in Cutler). However, this is not entirely true as White members of hip-hop assert various alignments towards African Americans, the hip-hop culture, and White culture, whether it be positive or negative (Cutler 527).

This shows how hip-hop has not only influenced the African American English dialect, but the White culture of America. Even more, the hip-hop language has spread all around the world. For example, someone who is from Europe or Asia might somewhat be familiar with popular hip-hop vocabulary terms (this includes swear words or other types of derogatory terms often heard in rap songs).

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show the power that hip-hop culture has brought upon American culture and civilization. Hip-hop has profoundly shaped American culture by influencing the various elements that make up the term “culture” such as: music, fashion, language, politics, and social movements. What began as a form of expression for the marginalized communities in the Bronx who saw hip-hop as a way of life has evolved into a global cultural strength, addressing issues of identity, inequality, and empowerment. Hip-hop has helped many oppressed and marginalized communities speak their own minds. Through this cultural treasure, African Americans have been given a voice that can finally be listened to and appreciated. With the aid of the most impactful hip-hop artists like Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G, Ice Cube, Eazy-E, Jay-Z, Snoop Dogg, and Dr Dre, hip-hop has gained cultural significance. These artists are not only known for the hit records and albums that they produced in their careers but are also acknowledged for their ability to give a voice to their communities, giving back to their communities and for always having an open mind and fearless expression of their ideas. Every cultural element of hip-hop (music, art, fashion, and language) is highly present in today’s modern-day American society. Graffiti enthusiasts are still painting up blocks and neighborhoods with their cultural expressions containing various elements of hip-hop culture. There are countless amounts of rappers who strongly represent the identity of hip-hop through rap music, whether these rappers are the new generations of hip-hop artists trying to make a name for themselves and stand out in their community or are representatives of the “old school” hip-hop artists such as Snoop Dogg or Eminem. As time changes, so does culture. Maybe there are not that many people in the African American or Latino community today who rock the fashion trends set in the 90s like the baggy and oversized clothes. However, even today’s big faces of hip-hop still influence the fashion world and play a large role in marketing campaigns (e.g. Kanye West who is partnered with Adidas sells his own shoe brand which is still considered a trend to wear— “yeezy” shoes).

And lastly, hip-hop culture has not only enriched the American culture, but also the worldwide cultures. Rap music would never have been a real music genre if it was not for its Black American roots. Today, rap music exists in every part of the world. The African American community has every right to be proud of the culture that they brought into America, the culture that they carefully practiced, and the culture that makes American society unique.

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