

**THE INFLUENCE OF HIP-HOP CULTURE ON THE COMMUNICATION  
SKILLS OF STUDENTS AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS AT  
SELECTED HIGH SCHOOLS IN HOUSTON, TEXAS**

A Dissertation

by

EDMOND RON KELLEY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2006

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Stephen L. Stark
Committee Members,	Walter F. Stenning
	Virginia Collier
	Alvin Larke, Jr.
Head of Department,	Jim Scheurich

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**ABSTRACT**

The Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills of Students as  
Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools  
in Houston, Texas. (August 2006)

Edmond Ron Kelley, B.A., The University of Texas at Austin;  
M.A., Texas State University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Stephen L. Stark

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at three high schools in Houston, Texas. Hip-hop culture consists of: rap music, breakdancing, graffiti art, and deejaying. Hip-hop is currently one of the most popular forms of music and represents the dominant culture of today's inner-city youth. The researcher issued written surveys to 30 teachers in Houston, Texas. The high schools selected for this study were: Yates High School (Houston Independent School District), Wheatley High School (Houston Independent School District), and Eisenhower High School (Aldine Independent School District). Two teachers were also interviewed for the study. The final part of the study was the production of an educational hip-hop CD by the researcher. The literature review focuses on the history and practices of hip-hop in regard to language.

Once the surveys were received and the interviews were completed, the researcher compiled statistics regarding the background information of the participants

and the level of influence that each teacher felt that hip-hop culture has on students. The major findings of the study were:

1. Hip-hop culture heavily influences the oral language and written communication of students based upon the opinions of teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas.
2. Hip-hop can be used as a tool to supplement the teaching of various academic concepts as evidenced by the practices of teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends:

1. Teachers should acknowledge hip-hop culture and allow students to express their interest in hip-hop culture in the classroom.
2. Teachers should find ways to incorporate hip-hop culture into the curriculum to arouse students' interest in learning. For instance, allow students to learn from listening to educational rap songs.
3. Teachers should find ways to use hip-hop culture in the classroom to improve the acquisition and retention of academic concepts. Examples could include allowing students to write rap songs about academic concepts.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Edmond C. Kelley, Jr. and Margaret Kelley; my deceased grandparents, Edmond C. Kelley, Sr. and Beatrice Kelley; my sister, Sheila Kelley-Long; and my wife, Phyllis Kelley. Thanks to all of you for supporting me and being there for me throughout the years.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most important developments in American youth culture during the last 20 years has been rap music and hip-hop culture (Adjaye, 1997). This phenomenon has reached today's students, particularly those who are members of a community of oppressed people (Adjaye, 1997). In these communities, hip-hop music is the instrument with which the residents speak of their common social, political, and economic challenges (Adjaye, 1997). Hip-hop culture is a highly accessible, quickly incorporative cultural form that presents information through various forms of media (Rose, 1994). Because of its widespread popularity, hip-hop culture has had a significant impact upon the language that is used by today's students (Rose, 1994).

After integration, African American culture became largely focused upon using language that imitated White culture (Adjaye, 1997). Due to the evolution of today's African American urban communities, the language that is used by these communities has changed significantly (Wood, 1999). Cultural forms such as hip-hop culture have become the outlet of expression for many of today's minority students (Dyson, 1993). Because of its roots in the inner city, some hip-hop music is considered explicit and "angry" (Dyson, 1993). Many critics believe that hip-hop would be more acceptable if it were not as "angry," but this would mean the "sanitizing" of rap's expression of urban realities (Dyson, 1993). The complex language of hip-hop derives from the dialect of English which many Blacks speak that is substantially similar in structure to the African

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The style of this dissertation follows that of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

languages of their ancestors (Kochman, 1972). The language and issues that hip-hop addresses represent an honest portrayal of inner-city life in America (Baker, 1993). Hip-hop was once seen as a passing fad, but even prominent African American political leaders such as Jesse Jackson have been recently quoted stating that hip-hop is here to stay (Baker, 1993). Hip-hop went relatively unnoticed by the mainstream music and popular culture industries until the late 1970's (Rose, 1994). Once hip-hop rose in popularity, it quickly became seen as an internal threat to dominant American culture and social order (Rose, 1994). The hip-hop vernacular that today's students use is largely based upon African American traditions of encoding language (Gates, 1988). This encoding represents various roots within African culture, but has a distinct difference in context and meaning (Gates, 1988). Many scholars admire hip-hop's rebellious spirit and rhythmic intensity, but are at odds with some of its values and how those values are expressed (George, 1998).

In 1999, Benjamin E. Demps, Jr. was appointed as Superintendent of the Kansas City, Missouri School District (Edwards, 2000). Kansas City was a struggling school district whose students happened to be heavily influenced by hip-hop culture (Edwards, 2000). Academically, the district was on the verge of being stripped of its accreditation by the state board (Edwards, 2000). Being an ex-military sergeant, Demps' conservative views immediately conflicted with the district's students who were heavily involved in the hip-hop generation. This led to Demps being criticized for not establishing a presence at the district's schools and not interacting with the students. He believed that being present at schools is not a role of the superintendent (Edwards, 2000). This

example shows how today's students do not usually mix well with traditional authority figures. Many of Demps' critics felt that it was crucial for him to connect with the students. As a result of this criticism, it was believed by many that the district needed a "new jack" superintendent to turn the district around. The term "new jack" is a hip-hop term for someone who is "innovative" and connected with hip-hop culture (Edwards, 2000). Despite heavy public criticism, Syracuse, New York's superintendent, Stephen C. Jones, held a hip-hop summit to better reach his students. The district had a previous reputation of simply not connecting with its students. The innovative summit was held as a part of the regular school day. At the summit, students had a chance to ask popular rap artists about hip-hop's role in schools and how it can be used to learn. In preparation for the summit, the district's teachers even used rap music as a part of their curriculum for the month. Despite its successes, some administrators, teachers, and parents in the district strongly opposed the summit and felt it was a distraction for the students. This is clear evidence of the strong resistance that many adults still have to hip-hop culture.

Although hip-hop culture's language is very unique, the profanity and violence that exist in some of its lyrics disturb many adults (Dyson, 1993). The violent lyrics of some hip-hop music even disturb those who grew up among the violence of America's inner cities. One unfortunate aspect of the culture is that many times "life imitates art" in regard to hip-hop lyrics. Hip-hop music that speaks of violence sometime ends up negatively influencing the actions of those who listen to it. In addition, the dialect of hip-hop puts today's students at an interesting crossroad because the professional world that they must enter requires a completely different form of speaking (Baugh, 1983.)

### **Statement of the Problem**

Hip-hop culture has become one of the dominant cultures of today's high school students (Edwards, 2000). The presence of hip-hop is seen in the students' clothing and also heard in their language. Because students are heavily influenced by this culture, it is now necessary for educators to fully understand hip-hop. Those who do understand the culture, have found effective ways to integrate hip-hop into education and are better able to relate to their students. The use of hip-hop language is a major part of the culture. Inner-city students use the vernacular of hip-hop almost every time they speak because of the popularity that this language has in their community (Dyson, 1993). Students also use this vernacular in written work on a regular basis. A full understanding of hip-hop and its influence on communication can provide a valuable tool for better ways to educate today's students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of high school students. The study assessed the effect of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of students at selected high schools in Houston, Texas. This study also determined the degree to which hip-hop culture has an effect upon the language that is used by high school students. The essential elements of hip-hop language were analyzed to determine their effect on students' language and communication as a whole.

### **Research Questions**

The study addressed the following questions:

1. How does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?
2. Can the influence of hip-hop culture on communication be used as an educational tool for students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?

### **Operational Definitions**

*Ability to Learn:* the receptiveness of a student in an educational setting.

*Behavior:* the conduct and demeanor of a student.

*Communication:* the exchange of information between individuals and groups through the use of speech, writing, and gestures.

*Educational Tool:* something that assists the process of learning.

*Hip-Hop Culture:* an American music subculture that originated in New York, New York, in the late 1970's that includes "rap" music, "breakdancing," "deejaying," and graffiti art.

*Houston, Texas:* one of the largest cities in the United States. Houston has a population of over 2 million residents.

*Influence:* the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2004).

*Language:* the words and pronunciation that is used by groups of individuals to communicate both orally and in writing.

*Selected High School:* a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade public school in Houston, Texas, with a high minority population. The specific schools that were a part of the study were: Yates High School, Eisenhower High School, and Wheatley High School.

*Students:* males or females who were enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Yates High School, Eisenhower High School, or Wheatley High School in Houston, Texas, during the 2005-2006 school year.

*Teachers:* current faculty members who instructed 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> graders at Yates High School, Eisenhower High School, or Wheatley High School in Houston, Texas.

### **Assumptions**

1. The respondents surveyed understood the scope of the study, the language of the instrument, were competent in self-reporting, and responded objectively and honestly.
2. Interpretation of the data collected accurately reflected the intent of the respondent.
3. The methodology proposed and described here offers a logical and appropriate design for this particular research project.

### **Limitations**

1. The study was limited to selected high schools in Houston, Texas.
2. This study was limited to the information acquired from the literature review and survey instruments.
3. Findings may be generalized only to selected high schools in Houston, Texas.

### **Significance of the Study**

The way that hip-hop is used to communicate is a topic that has significant relevance in regards to communication and education (Adjaye, 1997). Judging from the amount of hip-hop words that have entered the mainstream, hip-hop's effect upon language is clearly very powerful (Kochman, 1972). The language of hip-hop has spread to all media forms and is now popular on almost every continent. The power of this language gives those who invent and maintain it a high degree of commercial status. Some major hip-hop artists are now estimated at net worth values of over \$300 million dollars. This language has produced urban "poets" that represent the world's generation of young adults. Hip-hop culture was not expected to last very long, yet it continues to thrive after over 20 years of existence (Adjaye, 1997). Hip-hop is well on its way to becoming the undisputed dominant musical culture of the new millennium. This status will further increase the effect that hip-hop culture has upon students and the way that they communicate on a daily basis.

### **Contents of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I includes an introduction, a statement of the problem, a need for the study, specific objectives, limitations and assumptions, and a definition of terms. The framework of the study is discussed in Chapter II as a Review of Literature related to hip-hop culture and communication. The review is divided between the history of hip-hop culture and an analysis of the culture's language.



Chapter III details the methodology and procedures that were used in the study, including sampling, instrumentation, and analysis of data. The selection of the participants for the questionnaire and oral interviews is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter IV analyzes the documentation of the results of the questionnaire that was issued to the participants and compares the data that were collected in the study.

The final chapter, Chapter V, provides a summary of what the researcher found as a result of the study and the researcher's conclusions. Recommendations for future study of this topic are also presented in this chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Hip-hop culture, which consists of rap music, deejaying, breakdancing, and graffiti, has developed into one of the most influential social cultures in society today (Adjaye, 1997). Hip-hop recording artists sell millions of albums each year. Hip-hop has inspired films, books, advertising, and fashion (Adjaye, 1997). It has also had a strong impact on communication skills. This work derives from and expands upon my 2001 master's thesis, *The Bronx Renaissance: An Analysis of the Language of Hip-Hop Culture*. This work will continue to explore hip-hop's unique language and how it has been a major influence on the communication skills of today's students (Kelley, 2001).

Hip-hop emerged in New York in the late 1970's. Hip-hop was founded in the Bronx borough of New York City. The introduction of hip-hop during this era became a turning point for African American culture as a whole (Adjaye, 1997). According to Adjaye, hip-hop consists of four elements: (a) rap music, (b) deejaying, (c) breakdancing, and (d) graffiti art. The emergence of "rap music" was a turning point for music as a whole. "Rap music" consists of rhyming song lyrics accompanied by music. "Deejaying" is also an important part of hip-hop. Deejaying involves playing two vinyl records along with the use of a sound mixer to mix the sounds of both records. Breakdancing is a form of dance that consists of complex floor spins and acrobatics (Adjaye, 1997). Hip-hop graffiti art consists of elaborate letter designs and murals that

reflect the various aspects of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop has an extensive range of words that are associated with all of the elements of the culture.

### **Regional Vernacular**

Hip-hop's vocabulary immediately became popular among students. Words like "flow" and "freestylin" are examples of this instant popularity of unique words. "Flow" is used to characterize the creative energy that rap artists experience when performing (Adjaye, 1997). The term "freestyle" is also an important word in hip-hop culture. "Freestyling" means performing an improvisational rap song that has not been previously written down. The rapper either raps about his immediate environment or says whatever catchy phrases come to mind (Kelley, 2001). Freestyling has differences from a regional perspective. It is very significant on the East Coast and in the Southern part of the United States. The West Coast does have a small subculture of its hip-hop community that embraces this practice, but the East and South are the most dominant when it comes to freestyling. On the East Coast, some rappers define a "freestyle" as a written rap that has never been recorded (Kelley, 2001). In the South, freestyling, also called "wreckin" has become so popular that complete "freestyle" CD's are released. Freestyling is yet another indication of the high levels of creativity and skill that exist within hip-hop culture. Freestyling plays a role in today's schools because students can frequently be found in school hallways practicing this art form. Many "freestyles" are based upon clever metaphors and wordplay. The creativity is emphasized over the use of negative lyrics. When some adults categorize all rap music as negative, this shows

students that these adults are not fully listening to rap music (Kunjufu, 1993). Not all rap music has explicit lyrics or negative images (Kunjufu, 1993).

The roots of hip-hop practices are varied and widespread. Because the majority of hip-hop enthusiasts are African American, African American linguistic practices have a strong influence on the language of hip-hop. Anthropologists have done extensive studies on the linguistic practices among African Americans involving the use of rhymes and metaphors (Adjaye, 1997). The language of the urban Black community is the direct root of hip-hop linguistic practices. Influences such as ministers, radio disc jockeys, and celebrities have contributed greatly to this language that has influenced students. African American church ministers have a great influence upon dialect. This influence reaches many African Americans because of the cultural significance of the church in the African American community (Kelley, 2001). Traditional African American ministers are animated speakers who use metaphor and rhyme with the utmost precision. Civil rights leader Reverend Jesse Jackson is a prime example of this tradition. He is known for his rhyming slogans such as “Down with dope, up with hope.” These same practices are ever-present in the language of hip-hop. Legendary boxer, Muhammad Ali, is also a good example of a linguistic influence because of his extensive use of rhyme and sense of braggadocio (Kelley, 2001). His famous line, “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee,” can be easily compared to the way today’s rappers use various similes to describe themselves and their ability. Studies have shown that 97% of African American youth follow and appreciate rap music (Kunjufu, 1993). With a following of this magnitude, the language of hip-hop has established a stronghold in today’s schools.

### **Artist Interview Analysis**

The best source for an analysis of hip-hop language is an actual hip-hop artist. Texas hip-hop artist “Mikel” addressed the language of hip-hop in a 2001 interview. One of the questions asked the meaning of his rap name. In response to this question, he stated that his name is a creative rearranging of his first name “Michael” (Kelley, 2001). He feels that the name “Michael” sounds common, so he changed it to “Mikel” when he chose his artistic name (Kelley, 2001). He was also asked, “What makes a word ‘old?’” He remarked that a word becomes “old” when a new word comes along to replace it. Mikel also said that a word becomes “old” when it is no longer mentioned in the latest hip-hop songs. The next interview question asked, “Where do you hear the new words first?” He commented that he hears new words on hip-hop songs by popular artists (Kelley, 2001). Students introduce these new words to their classmates as they hear them used on songs. It is a fact that in most parts of the world, students enter school using a language that is different from the exact language being taught at the school (Ramirez, 2005). This language varies greatly from region to region in the United States.

When Mikel was asked which region contributes the most words to the hip-hop community, he stated that the East Coast rappers are admired by many hip-hop fans because of their use of unique words, analogies, and word play. Hip-hop group, Wu-Tang Clan, is a prime example of this usage because of their use of abstract words and concepts that many avid hip-hop listeners do not even understand. This is exemplified in lyrics like “Duel of the iron mic, it’s the 52 ways you strike” (Genius, 1995). This line of the song is an obscure reference to various themes from a 1970’s Chinese kung-fu film.

Mikel discussed Southern hip-hop vernacular in detail. In regard to the South, the hip-hop words that are used are extensive. The presence of these words in Southern schools is clearly evident. In a school's attempt to teach Standard English, many students who use hip-hop vernacular are made to feel inferior because of their use of these words (Ramirez, 2005).

When Mikel was asked which region did he identify with, he said that he identifies with the South because he was born and raised in Killeen, Texas. However, he also identifies with the East Coast because he is attracted to the messages in their material. The next question asked, "Do you use words that are associated with other regions?" He stated that he uses words from all of the regions, rather than showing "loyalty" to one area. The artist was then asked if he felt that any hip-hop words originate from outside of hip-hop culture. He stated that some words derive from older music forms and vernacular. He could not think of any examples of passed down words. Many hip-hop words derive from traditional African American words. These traditional words have been used as a "code" that African Americans have used to discuss various subjects in a way that non-African American listeners do not understand (Ramirez, 2005).

Mikel believes that the hip-hop generation should receive all of the credit for its own creativity, yet acknowledge the "pioneers" who paved the way for the development of hip-hop culture. He was also asked, "Do you hear hip-hop words being used by those outside of the culture?" He said that he frequently hears hip-hop words being used by those who are not a part of the culture. He remarked that he hears these words on

commercials, television shows, and in movies (Kelley, 2001). An example of this is the famous Budweiser commercial that features characters saying “whazzup” to each other. This practice of stretching the phrase “what’s up?” is rooted in hip-hop dialect practices. He also hears these words being used by those who listen to other music genres such as country, rock, and jazz. Speakers who primarily listen to other music genres often make errors in pronunciation or vocal inflection when using hip-hop words (Kelley, 2001). For example, a person who is not familiar with hip-hop language may pronounce a hip-hop word according to Standard English pronunciation. An example of this would be using the word “chillin” by saying “chilling” (Kelley, 2001). Adding the “g” to words such as this is an obvious way to identify someone who is not familiar with the culture. Mikel does feel that he can identify someone who is an avid hip-hop fan because he or she uses the latest words and even uses words that he or she may have developed independently (Kelley, 2001). Also, he noted that these speakers are very comfortable when using hip-hop language. He measures their amount of comfort with the language by the speed at which they talk (Kelley, 2001).

When asked if he would use hip-hop words in a job interview, he commented that he would only use hip-hop words in a job interview that was for a job in the music industry or a hip-hop-related field. He would not use hip-hop words in a traditional work environment because he feels that he would be perceived as less intelligent. He stated that he would be seen as less intelligent because those in a conservative environment do not understand the culture. This shows a desire on his part to succeed in the business world. However, in the world of hip-hop and urban America, street credibility means

more than success (Reese, 2004). Vernacular language does carry a stigma that is linked with intellectual incompetence.

Some scholars view hip-hop artists as “organic intellectuals” (Adjaye, 1997). This is because they believe that these artists are members of a community of oppressed people whose music is the instrument with which they use to express their common social, political, and economic persecution (Adjaye, 1997). To analyze that statement, the community issue must be addressed. The majority of hip-hop artists are members of oppressed communities because they have lived in poverty-stricken inner-city neighborhoods. Hip-hop group, Wu-Tang Clan, hails from the dangerous Park Hill housing projects in Staten Island, New York. Platinum-selling rap star DMX, hails from the crime-ridden housing projects of Yonkers, New York. These artists’ music is their instrument of change because hip-hop is the dominant form of self-expression for inner-city youth today. Hip-hop is one of the only ways that their ideas will ever reach outside of their community. The voices of young African Americans have previously been silenced due to economic and social factors (Kitwana, 2002). Due to the emergence of hip-hop, these youth now have a voice that has mainstream appeal (Kitwana, 2002). Rappers speak of social persecution in songs such as those released by New Orleans’ Cash Money Records that constantly speak of life in the “projects” of inner-city New Orleans.

### **Review of Song Lyrics**

Hip-hop lyrics can also cover current events in songs like Willie D’s (1990) “Rodney King.” In this song, the rapper criticizes Los Angeles police brutality victim



Rodney King after he called for peace after citizens rioted in Los Angeles in response to his beating by LAPD officers (Kelley, 2001). Rapper Willie D felt that King was wrong to discourage the violence with his “can’t we all just get along” statement. Willie D felt that responding with violence would send a stronger message to the Los Angeles Police Department. Hip-hop also addresses economic issues in songs like B.G.’s “Get Your Shine On,” which encourages the listeners to grab as much wealth as possible. These songs allow these true “organic intellectuals” to tell their story to the world.

Rap music presents information of various sorts to the urban and suburban community (Adjaye, 1997). The lyrics of hip-hop have informed urban communities about many issues that later became significant on a national level. Kool Moe Dee raised public awareness about sexually transmitted disease in “Go See the Doctor.” West Coast rapper Ras Kass called attention to virtually unknown world history facts in “Nature of the Threat.” This far-reaching voice that hip-hop possesses also spreads its language to the world. African American language forms had previously valued duplicating White language (Smitherman, 1997). Hip-hop is a prime example of one of the facets of African American culture and language that is completely original in many ways. It is in no form an attempt to merge with traditional American culture. Hip-hop is a form of rebellion against the norm that has spawned its own cultural basis.

Mainstream America’s views of hip-hop vary greatly. Former Vice President Al Gore’s wife, Tipper Gore, stated that hip-hop appeals to angry, disillusioned, unloved kids (Dyson, 1993). She also stated that hip-hop says that it is “okay to beat people up” (Dyson, 1993). To address her first comment, yes hip-hop does appeal to “angry kids.” It

is the voice that speaks out against the struggles that these “kids” face everyday. The “disillusioned” statement is false because those who listen to hip-hop are well aware of everything that is going on around them. The “unloved” statement is also false. Parental love has nothing to do with the type of music that is attractive to a child. Hip-hop is a part of the everyday lives of youth from every type of social background and family situation. Her comments show that she has no knowledge of what the culture is all about. She is basing her comments on a few lyrics taken out of context. This view of hip-hop is common among those who want to discredit hip-hop and do not even take the time to research the culture.

Dyson (1993) addresses the division in hip-hop between the “hardcore” and the “commercial.” This division has always been an issue of great importance in hip-hop. Since language is the focus of this study, this issue can be analyzed from a linguistic point of view. “Hardcore” hip-hop stresses lyrical content, musical creativity, and preserving the culture. This type of rap music appeals to many of today’s students because it is a direct reflection of their environment. Today’s hip-hop generation of students have inferior schools, limited job opportunities, and limited access to many of the positives that America has to offer (Kitwana, 2002). “Commercial” hip-hop features are characterized by catchy choruses, dance beats, and appealing to as many people as possible. Creating “hardcore” hip-hop is known as “keeping it real” or “real hip-hop.” Performing “commercial” hip-hop, known as “rap,” is viewed as “sellin’ out” or “goin’ pop” by hardcore enthusiasts. The hip-hop/rap dilemma exists, with “hardcore” being “hip-hop” and “commercial” being “rap.” Commercial rap lacks the rebellious nature of

most hip-hop songs and is geared toward being non-offensive (Dyson, 1993). To summarize the concept, “rap” used in this context, is the exploitation of pure “hip-hop.” It is very interesting how a music form that has been attacked so much from the outside has also been attacked from the inside by its own.

### **Various Hip-Hop Literature**

Literature is also a good source of evidence of hip-hop’s influence. The emergence of the hip-hop biography and autobiography has become a significant milestone for hip-hop culture (Kelley, 2001). Little or no literary research has been done on this growing trend. As a result of hip-hop’s phenomenal expansion, biographies of musicians involved in hip-hop have attracted a wide readership. Several biographies and autobiographies of hip-hop artists deserve to be studied as literary texts. An analysis of these works is an excellent way to study the culture and its language.

Hip-hop biographies are important for several reasons. Considering the widespread popularity of hip-hop’s superstars, there should be even more literature available discussing them (Kelley, 2001). These artists have sold millions of albums and serve as role models for youth of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. The late Tupac Shakur was a hip-hop artist who became a national figure. He is considered the greatest hip-hop artist of all time to most students. Most students admire his “thug life” motto and rebellious spirit (Kelley, 2001). Several biographies about his life are available, but *Tupac Shakur* by Quincy Jones (1999) is the most comprehensive. This work is credited to all of the editors of this magazine. This work chronicles his life from early childhood to his untimely death in 1996. The structure of this work adheres to the standards that

most well-written biographies follow (Kelley, 2001). The work details Shakur's childhood through personal interviews.

Tupac Shakur was born June 16, 1971, to Afeni Shakur, a former member of the Black Panther Party. Shakur's move from New York to California was a major transition in his life. Tupac represented a sense of self-confidence that appealed to many African American men and established him as a role model (Kitwana, 2002). Tupac's coastal affiliation became very important in his rap career. This was due to a conflict that emerged between East and West Coast hip-hop artists. Shakur defended the West Coast artists even though he was a native of New York (Kelley, 2001). The biography then focuses on his first recording contract and first acting role. His popularity began to grow rapidly due to a role he played in the film *Juice*. This film is about Shakur's character who becomes obsessed with the *power* that a gun brings him. The name of this film, *Juice*, is a hip-hop word that means *power* (Kelley, 2001). The biography then moves on to Shakur's conflicts with law enforcement that became another major factor throughout his short life. Right before the height of his career, Tupac served a prison term for sexual assault. Overall, this work provides a complete analysis of a rap superstar's life.

Multi-platinum hip-hop artist and actor, L.L. Cool J, has also emerged as a superstar by way of hip-hop music. His autobiography, *I Make My Own Rules*, is a work that provides an in-depth look at the music industry as a whole. His autobiography was written with the assistance of Karen Hunter. L.L. Cool J, whose real name is James Todd Smith, tells the story of his rise from "Hollis to Hollywood." This statement represents his emergence as a young music star in Hollis Queens, New York, to a millionaire actor

in Hollywood (Kelley, 2001). He details the intricacies of the music business in a way that gives a clear picture of his entire world. He also describes receiving royalty checks for \$50,000 and the trail of lawyers, accountants, and managers that come along with the money (L.L. Cool J, 1997). This autobiography mainly focuses on the details of the lifestyle that a hip-hop superstar lives.

*The Ice Opinion* by another multi-platinum hip-hop artist, Ice T, provides a unique perspective on this topic. His work is an autobiography combined with in-depth analysis of life in general. He intertwines the story of his life with frank analysis of topics ranging from police brutality to sex. His commentary covers everything from politics to his statements about Christ's famous portrait being a picture of Michelangelo's brother (Ice T, 1994). He describes how this painting influenced the way that people view Jesus. The political nature of this work gives insight on the views and opinions of a hip-hop superstar.

Another work that gives an interesting twist to the concept of the hip-hop autobiography is *Got Your Back* by Frank Alexander. This work provides yet another look into the world of the music industry, but from a bodyguard's perspective. This is unique because a bodyguard is both involved and removed from the industry at the same time (Kelley, 2001). The work discusses how the bodyguard sees the lifestyle of the hip-hop industry firsthand. Alexander was Tupac Shakur's main bodyguard and was on duty the night that Shakur was murdered. Alexander discusses everything from details about murder attempts on his clients to the financial side of his career. He states how most

bodyguards at that level make \$500 a day (Alexander, 1998). His view of the industry provides a clear analysis of some of the negative factors involved in the entire business.

These autobiographies and biographies are unique because they allow the reader to experience the actual lifestyles of these artists. The use of the actual words of the artists in these works gives them a sense of authenticity and legitimacy (Kelley, 2001). The reader is able to understand L.L. Cool J (1997) as a person in *I Make My Own Rules*. His story is told in a way that gives the reader an inside track to the true person behind his success. Ice T (1994) expresses his honest views on many issues in *The Ice Opinion*. His work tells of the struggles of a young Black man in America. He struggled with drugs, gangs, and later with the pitfalls of success (Kelley, 2001). Through Ice T's world of hip-hop, the reader is able to see the bigger picture that involves poverty, injustice, and many other social issues. The language of hip-hop provides the perfect canvas for these street messengers to paint a picture of the world where they live.

Hip-hop magazines provide a key contrast to the hip-hop biography and autobiography. These magazines have emerged as a major source of information about the lives of the artists (Kelley, 2001). The detailed articles that are written about the artists are both political and promotional. They are political because they allow the artists to express their true feelings on society and government. They are promotional because most of the articles glamorize the artists' lives and music. They are also usually written about a particular artist when he or she is about to release a new album or recently released an album (Kelley, 2001). *Vibe* magazine is thorough in detailing the lives of hip-hop artists. An article in the May 1999 issue focuses upon the troubles of

platinum artist Russell Jones. Jones, known as “ODB,” is a member of the Wu-Tang Clan who has had numerous encounters with the police. He is also known for his appearance on an MTV special where he was shown going to cash his welfare check in a limousine. The article gives insight into the relationship between young, African American musicians and the police (Kelley, 2001). While discussing a recent incident with New York police, Jones stated that entertainers do not need to pull guns on cops and cops should not pull guns on entertainers (Alexander, 1998). His statement reflects a desire for mutual respect between these two groups who serve the public. Issues such as racism and police brutality continually arise in articles that analyze the lives of these artists.

Another magazine that gives quality insight on the lives of hip-hop artists is *The Source*. This magazine focuses on the culture and politics that accompany the music. Hip-hop magazine articles are an excellent supplement to the actual hip-hop biographies that have been written.

A work that contains the same type of analysis as hip-hop magazines is *Fight the Power* by Chuck D (1997). Chuck D’s views on this billion dollar industry provide valuable insight. Chuck D, known as hip-hop’s premier political spokesperson, represents a different side of the culture (Kelley, 2001). Chuck D is an alternative role model for hip-hop fans in a culture that embraces the “thug” lifestyle. This glorification of the “thug” inspires students to want to be this way (Reese, 2004). Chuck D’s lyrics have always focused on political and social issues, while most rap lyrics focus on materialism, women, and other non-political issues. This reputation as a “hip-hop

intellectual” has gained Chuck D respect in the music industry, the media, and in the political arena.

Hip-hop culture has become a part of the daily lives of millions of Americans. The creativity of hip-hop has proven to be an attractive outlet for the majority of young Americans. This culture produces over one billion dollars in sales each year. Any culture with an influence that spans this wide is definitely worthy of serious study and analysis.

The language of early hip-hop culture established a tradition that serves as the foundation of the culture. Because hip-hop originated in Bronx, New York, the East Coast established itself as the catalyst for hip-hop language (Kelley, 2001). The East Coast has since remained the leading innovator when it comes to vocabulary. Its early words established a precedent that continues to produce new vocabulary today.

The vocabulary of hip-hop is important in regard to minority students because it is almost synonymous with the communication skills that these students use today (Ginwright, 2004). “M.C.,” which represents its traditional meaning of “master of ceremonies,” is the title given to one who engages in “rapping.” These musicians are also called “rappers.” In recent years, there has emerged a difference in the two terms. An “M.C.” is skilled in rapping and remains true to the culture at all times. “Rapper,” denotes one who is not skilled in the art and does not respect the culture (Kelley, 2001). Those who appear to perform rap for financial gain only or those who focus on appealing to a commercial audience are sometimes referred to as “rappers” and not “M.C.’s.”



Several words were established as the dominant vocabulary of the early days of hip-hop. One of the words that gained instant popularity is “fresh.” Something “fresh” is “good.” A “fresh” M.C. is one who is good at rapping. “Dope” eventually became the word that replaced “fresh” and possessed the same meaning. Hip-hop words traditionally have a short lifespan. These words have significance because of their widespread influence. Music sales charts repeatedly show that rap music is America’s most popular music form (Reese, 2004). Another example of hip-hop vocabulary is the word “skeezer.” During this period in hip-hop, a promiscuous woman was referred to as a “skeezer.” The term “wack” also began a major part of early hip-hop vocabulary. “Wack” means “not good” or unacceptable. “Chillin” describes the act of “relaxing.” Someone who is relaxed or does not have any activity to engage in is said to be “chillin.”

The practice of adding the phrase, “you know what I’m sayin’” to the end of sentences also became established as a language trend in hip-hop (Kelley, 2001). “Word” is also an emphatic way to follow a statement. After a statement is made that is agreed upon, saying “word” is a verbal confirmation of the truth in his or her statement. “Scratching” became the term that denotes the movement of vinyl records that creates a “scratching” sound. Deejays began to implement this technique as a sound effect. The turntables used for scratching, usually Technics 1200 turntables, are referred to as the “wheels of steel.” The terms “old school” and “new school” are terms that are still actively used today. The phrase “old school,” identifies the early days of rap (Kelley, 2001). “New school” identifies a young hip-hop artist or a new trend. These words are used to categorize the two periods of hip-hop culture.

*Fresh: Hip-Hop Don't Stop* by Nelson George, Sally Banes, Susan Flinker, and Patty Romanowski is a text which highlights many of the cornerstones of early hip-hop culture. Rap emerged as early hip-hop DJ's would recite short "raps" to let the crowd know who they were (George, 1985). These raps were merely "tags" that distinguished one DJ from another. This period of rap involved strictly oral tradition; these raps were not written down. These "raps" that the DJ's performed were eventually exclusively used by the "rappers." The roots of rap are explored thoroughly in this text. One of hip-hop's early powerhouse groups, The Soul Sonic Force, had a music style that can be traced to the Last Poets, a Black nationalist trio of the early 70's (George, 1985). This work also highlights graffiti as one of the four elements of hip-hop. A graffiti artist with the right connections is seen as a hip-hop celebrity (George, 1985). The graffiti artists have always been a very respected group within hip-hop culture. The authors discuss how graffiti became popular through exposure on the New York subway system. The word "tag" became a part of hip-hop vocabulary due to graffiti. A "tag" is a graffiti artist's name or title. These tags resulted in such names as "Ghost," "Wild Kid," and "Fame." The early days of hip-hop laid the foundation for a culture that is now rather complex.

The word "b-boy" denotes the essence of "old school" hip-hop. "B-boy" is the definitive term for someone who is an active participant in hip-hop culture. Breakdancing, which is most often associated with the "b-boy" persona, has provided a visual representation of hip-hop that inspired hip-hop's emergence in film. The "b-boy" lifestyle inspired films such as *Wild Style*, *Breakin'*, *Beat Street*, and the PBS

documentary, *Style Wars*. A group of b-boys is identified as a “crew” (Kelley, 2001). This is the definitive term for a b-boy and his group of friends. This word faded from the hip-hop scene and was replaced by “posse.” This is yet another instance where the short lifespan of hip-hop words is clearly evident.

In Thomas Kochman’s (1972) *Rappin’ and Stylin’ Out*, articles that address Black culture are used to explain some of Black America’s culture. This source provides a useful background to explore the roots of hip-hop language. The roots of hip-hop’s language have obvious ties to traditional African languages (Kochman, 1972). This relation between African languages and African American vernacular English emphasizes that the language used by some African Americans derives from other languages. This language is not merely incorrect usage of Standard English. In Kochman’s work, Benjamin G. Cooke discusses how vernacular words can change meaning. This work focuses heavily on African American culture in the 1970’s. In the 1970’s, “rapping” had a slang meaning of “a man talking to a woman” (Kochman 1972). This term apparently lost its usage as “rapping” began to represent “engaging in rap music.” All of the aspects that form the background of hip-hop culture and language revolve around rhythm. African American language has always been centered around rhythm (Kochman, 1972). This is a statement that applies directly to the major presence that rhythm has in hip-hop culture. The language embodies a rhythm that is seldom duplicated outside of the hip-hop community.

The language of hip-hop culture is an extension of what is traditionally defined as “soul” language. This vernacular form is dominant among African Americans and is

directly reflected in hip-hop, an African American dominated culture. This “soul” is an accurate reflection of the language of Black America (Kochman, 1972). These words generally have a longer lifespan than words that originate within hip-hop culture. One example of a word with a longer lifespan than a typical hip-hop word is “cop.” African Americans began to use this word in the 1950’s, and it has survived long enough to reach the hip-hop generation. This word has maintained the meaning of “to get.” In hip-hop culture, one would say, “Are you gonna cop the new Jay-Z CD?” instead of the traditional “Are you going to get the new Jay-Z CD?” This is a word that was not used in the early days of hip-hop. It began to emerge recently among East Coast hip-hop artists and fans. Teachers must consider cultural ways of learning such as that which is involved with this word when teaching English (Ramirez, 2005).

Another term that is of interest is the term, “the Man” (Kelley, 2001). This term’s traditional meaning within Black vernacular English has been “The White Man.” African Americans use this term to refer to the White race. Within hip-hop, “the man” would be used as “when it comes to basketball, Michael Jordan is da man!” The term possesses an entirely different meaning. It identifies someone who is good at what he or she does. The use of “da” instead of “the” is also an interesting practice that exists within hip-hop. The word is spelled as it would sound being spoken with a “hip-hop accent.” This spelling is also a victim of a hip-hop word’s short lifespan. “Da” has been replaced by the word “tha.” This is apparently due to the popularity of “da.” As a word or spelling becomes over-popularized within hip-hop and spreads to the mainstream, it becomes

null and void. The intricacies of hip-hop language become increasingly evident through further analysis of the culture as a whole.

In *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*, Houston A. Baker (1993) discusses many of the issues that hip-hop has brought to the forefront of American popular culture. One of the issues that he addresses that relates directly to the language of hip-hop is the urban authenticity factor. Hip-hop is considered a truly authentic form of urban expression in the African American community (Baker, 1993). Street credibility is an important social element in hip-hop. Someone who cannot relate to the urban environment is seen as an outsider. The hip-hop word that describes this concept is “down.” This word means “accepted.” To show that someone is one of your friends, you would state, “He is down.” This means that he or she can be trusted. The phrase “down by law” became popular in late 1980’s-early 1990’s hip-hop. This phrase denotes the highest form of acceptance or being “down” to the fullest extent. The ever-changing nature of these words does not reflect the overall state of hip-hop. Political leader, Jesse Jackson, has been quoted stating that rap is here to stay and scholars like Baker (1993) also agree. The culture may change from year-to-year, but its overall impact upon society is only growing stronger.

The early hip-hop language forms established the East Coast as the leader in hip-hop language trends. This is apparently because the culture originated from these areas. As the culture began to spread, other regions began to develop comparable systems of language. The foundation that early hip-hop language established has sparked an intricate vernacular form that is identified as the East Coast “flava.” “Flava” is a hip-hop

word that means “style.” In *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Tricia Rose (1994) states how rap music went virtually unnoticed by the mainstream until independent record labels began to release rap records. Rose (1994) believes that rap is complex from a symbolic and technological perspective. The complexity of rap is largely due to its intricate vocabulary.

The way that hip-hop culture enthusiasts refer to each other is an important element in the language of hip-hop. Each region has different ways to refer to one’s friends. Early New York hip-hop established the term “homeboy.” A “homeboy” or “homegirl” is a “good friend.” Some of the East Coast variations of this word are “son,” “yo,” “b,” “kid,” and “god.” Any of these words can be used to address someone. These words are seen as strictly “East Coast” words. Someone who uses these words who is not from the East Coast is usually a staunch supporter of the East Coast style of rap. Students who desire to succeed become fluent in both Standard English and the language of hip-hop (Ramirez, 2005). These students realize that the use of Standard English is vital for success in corporate America.

The word “god” became popular in hip-hop culture due to the strong influence of the Five Percent Nation of Islam. This religious sect originated in New York as a splinter group of the Nation of Islam. This group had an immediate impact upon hip-hop because of its strong focus on Black pride and knowledge of Black history. This focus appealed to young African Americans in urban New York and has had a lasting impact upon rap music. The Five Percenters believe that the Black man is the “god” of his own actions. They refer to each other as “god.” This reference has become popular in the music of

East Coast rap superstars such as Wu-Tang Clan, DMX, and Nas. Rakim, who is regarded by many as the greatest hip-hop lyricist of all time, is a member of the Five Percent Nation. He has used the Five Percenters' imagery as the basis of his lyrics throughout his career (George, 1999). One example of this practice is evident in the song "My Melody" where Rakim (1986) states, "I bless the mic for the gods." The lingo of East Coast hip-hop ranges from simple references such as this to elaborate systems of regional vocabulary.

The Wu-Tang Clan, a multi-platinum selling hip-hop group, has established a reputation for being trendsetters in regard to rap's vocabulary. Their popular hit "Protect Your Neck" is full of clever word play and social commentary. One line, which comments on music executives who do not understand rap, states, "And he don't understand the meaning of dope, when he's looking for a suit and tie rap that's cleaner than a bar of a soap..." (Wu-Tang Clan, 1994b). This line uses the word "dope," which means "good." This type of commentary highlights the lack of music executives who are from the same backgrounds as most rap artists. This is evident due to the fact that there are only three Black-owned record labels that can compete with major labels. However, 50% of the ownership of these independent labels is still controlled by major record labels. One of these companies is Bad Boy Entertainment. Bad Boy is a successful Black-owned independent label, but industry giant Arista Records owns a significant portion of the company. There is a strong feeling among rappers that the industry does not understand them and is merely using them for financial gain. This feeling has resulted in the emergence of hundreds of independent record labels owned and operated

by young hip-hop enthusiasts. Independence has become a dominant theme in today's hip-hop music.

### **Analysis of Current Vernacular**

Hip-hop's vocabulary continues to expand each year. Platinum rap artist Nas is known for his clever use of hip-hop vocabulary. In "New York State of Mind," a descriptive account of New York life, he states, "Yall' know my steelo, with or without the airplay" (Nas, 1994). He uses the word "steelo," meaning "style," and states how listeners know how talented he is regardless of whether radio supports him. Hip-hop that steers away from formulaic success patterns and remains "raw" is seen as "underground." Underground hip-hop is rarely supported by radio. This has created resentment toward commercial radio stations among these "underground" artists. Listeners see material that is in heavy radio rotation as "commercial." Artists like Wu-Tang Clan and Nas command respect within the hip-hop community because of their high level of skill, originality, and focus on underground hip-hop.

Some of the most important innovations in the African American community during the last 20 years have been rap music and hip-hop culture (Adjaye, 1997). Although hip-hop culture is linked to Black culture, it is seen by many as a threat to dominant American culture (Rose, 1994). The world of hip-hop has always been seen as merely a form of rebellion among disadvantaged young African Americans. The lines reflect the danger that African Americans face in today's urban areas. The term "niggaz" in the line identifies "Black people" in a fraternal sense. Language such as this, reflects a sort of "code" that has always existed in Black culture. Since slavery, vernacular



language has been used by African Americans in an almost ritualistic way that encodes various messages (Gates, 1988). Hip-hop America uses its vernacular to practice its own unique cultural rituals.

The hip-hop word “phat” is a prime example of a word that has gained acceptance in mainstream America. “Phat” means “good” or “outstanding.” The spelling of the word is a key component of its visual effect. The word that is meant is “fat.” The change in the spelling of the word is used to give the word hip-hop “flava.” The orthographical nature of words is an important factor in hip-hop vocabulary. The word “flava” is used by many people who do not even listen to hip-hop music. Many hip-hop words also change the spelling of Standard English words in the same way that “phat” is changed. The foundation of these practices lies in the richness of the African tradition. Many scholars believe that modern day African American culture, including hip-hop culture, is merely African culture with distinct differences (Gates, 1988). Just as African culture has influenced American music and dance, these are language practices that most likely arrived with the first African slaves.

The verbal game of “signifyin” is an African American tradition that is evident in rap music. The verbal “battling” known as “signifyin” appears in rap through “battle raps.” This form of rap focuses upon degrading one’s opponent and displaying the extent of one’s own abilities. In this genre, the rapper uses numerous similes and metaphors to highlight his or her own rapping ability. The word “dis” became popular because of “battle rap.” To “dis” someone is to disrespect them. The word is merely a shortened form of the word “disrespect.” Rappers “dis” rappers in “battles” to show how lyrically

clever they are. An example of a “dis” is the controversial song “Hit Em’ Up” by Tupac Shakur. In this song, Shakur verbally attacks rival rapper Notorious B-I-G by claiming to have slept with his wife and “dissing” his friends. This song played a large part in the escalation of the feud between East and West Coast rappers. It has also been linked to the deaths of both of these artists. Many scholars who support hip-hop feel at odds with the culture at times due to the fact that they disagree with some of the values that it expresses (George, 1998). There are a large number of hip-hop fans who also share this same view. Many fans love the sound of hip-hop rhythms but are disturbed by some of its lyrics. When N.W.A. boasted of carrying AK-47 rifles and engaging in “drive-by” shootings, many hip-hop fans felt as though the group was promoting ignorance. Many are intrigued by the rebellious nature of the lyrics but do not quite agree with their direct meaning.

Just as hip-hop lyrics are innovative and revolutionary, its music also has these same qualities. The sampling of music is a large part of the hip-hop arsenal of musical tools. “Sampling” involves using portions of another musical composition to create an entirely different musical composition (Kelley, 2001). This is done by recording the original sound through a digital sampler or keyboard and then looping the sound to create a different rhythm. One example of this is M.C. Hammer’s multi-platinum hit “Can’t Touch This.” This song samples the entire melody from R&B singer Rick James’ hit song “Super Freak” (Kelley, 2001). Several lawsuits have occurred as a result of sampling’s early uses. In the beginning of this trend, many hip-hop artists used samples without permission from the original artist. These lawsuits led to today’s system in

which record labels obtain the legal right to use samples and pay the original artist. This is a controversial practice because many believe that this process shows a lack of originality among hip-hop music producers (Kelley, 2001).

Verbal sampling also exists within the lyrics of hip-hop culture. Rappers use portions of literature, quotes from films, and many other sources to compose their lyrics. One prime example of this is the song “Scarface” by rap artist Scarface. In this song, Scarface uses many quotes from the movie *Scarface* such as “say goodbye to the bad guy” (Scarface, 1988). This quote comes from a statement that actor Al Pacino makes in the film. Due to musical and verbal sampling, hip-hop has become a direct representation of American society’s past and present. Sampling allows hip-hop to not only set standards for a new generation, but it allows the culture to highlight previous cultural trends (George, 1998). Sampling has extended hip-hop culture into other music forms and intertwined other forms into hip-hop.

While hip-hop is steadily extending, it is also steadily changing. As mentioned earlier, the words change rapidly. Attractive women were referred to as “fly” and great songs were “da joint,” but words such as these have now faded into the past (George, 1998). This is clear evidence how hip-hop changes drastically from one year to the next. The East Coast’s labels for attractive women are always at the forefront of hip-hop vocabulary. Early labels were “honeydip,” “hottie,” and “fly girl.” Current terms include “dimepiece,” “shorty,” and “star.” The term “dimepiece” is an example of verbal sampling because it borrows its concept from “ten.” A “perfect ten” is a phrase that identifies a “beautiful woman.” The hip-hop term “dimepiece” uses the word “dime” to

represent the number “10” and create the desired meaning. The way that hip-hop enthusiasts label the world around them is one of the most interesting aspects of the culture.

Hip-hop artists are also known for their unique names. The names that are used vary from one region to another. The first hip-hop names were simple in nature and progressively became more complex. Early names included names such as “Kool Moe Dee,” “Grandmaster Flash,” and “Melle Mel.” The names used in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s were either variations of the artists’ birth name or extravagant titles that represented the artist’s “greatness.” The Five Percent Nation also had a tremendous impact upon hip-hop names, inspiring names such as “Rakim,” “Wise Intelligent,” and “King Sun.” Five Percenters adopt names that show power and reflect the teachings of their religion. Hip-hop artists began to adopt names associated with the Five Percent Nation such as “Justice,” “Rakeem,” and “Supreme.”

The Five Percent Nation is associated with the political expression of young African Americans in New York. Although voter turnout among young African Americans is historically very low, this group of voters is beginning to test their political power at increasing levels (Kitwana, 2002). Current names of East Coast rappers include “Shyne,” “Noreaga,” and “Masta Killa.” The first name, Shyne, the title of an artist on successful rap label, Bad Boy Entertainment, reflects two dimensions. The first dimension of this name is its reference to the hip-hop word “shine.” To “shine” is to show your abilities and receive respect that is due to you. In this instance, the word “shine” becomes the title “Shyne.” The use of various unique names is merely a form of

expression from a generation that gets few chances to be heard. Research shows that students get very few chances to speak in today's teacher-dominated classrooms (Ramirez, 2005). The name "Noreaga," another title of a current East Coast rapper, highlights yet another dimension of sampling in hip-hop. Artists will name themselves after famous world leaders, organized crime figures, and superheroes. These references are used to highlight the artist's ability and power. "Noreaga" is a variation of "Noriega," the name of South American military leader Manuel Noriega. This artist uses this name because of this leader's ruthless reputation. The name "Masta Killa," referring to one of the members of platinum hip-hop group, Wu-Tang Clan, highlights yet another variation of verbal sampling. Wu-Tang Clan established its image based upon characters from Chinese kung-fu films. Names like "Masta Killa" and "Golden Arms" originate from characters in these films. The group's name, Wu-Tang Clan, derives from a notorious group that is depicted in numerous films. Hip-hop names are a direct reflection of what hip-hop artists are interested in at that time.

Just as hip-hop names vary, the themes in hip-hop lyrics also vary greatly. However, some themes are constant within this culture. Money has always been a central theme of hip-hop. Many rap artists have referred to money and material items throughout hip-hop history. Because this is the dominant theme in hip-hop, the term for "money" has changed frequently. Some of these terms include "loot," "cheese," "cheddar," "benjamins," "paper," and "cream." The term "cream" originates from the song "C.R.E.A.M." by Wu-Tang Clan (Kelley, 2001). In this song, rapper Method Man states, "Cash rules everything around me/cream, get the money/dollar, dollar bill ya'll"

(Wu-Tang Clan, 1994a). C.R.E.A.M. is the acronym for the slogan “cash rules everything around me.” This acronym eventually became the word “cream,” which is an East Coast term for “money.” The term for “money” also has a distinct regional difference that will be discussed in later chapters that focus on other dominant regions. East Coast hip-hop is currently engrossed in a trend that emphasizes materialism. The term “ice” is a term that appears in the majority of today’s rap songs. The extensive use of “ice,” the hip-hop term for “diamonds,” displays the high value that is placed on expensive jewelry in the world of hip-hop (Kelley, 2001). Expensive cars are also a large part of East Coast hip-hop and its materialistic world. Rappers boast of \$100,000 Mercedes-Benz 600’s, \$300,000 Lamborghini Diablo’s, and \$400,000 Bentley’s in their rhymes. Rap videos are filled with images of these cars, million dollar mansions, and Cristal champagne. The word “whip” identifies a “car” (Kelley, 2001). Someone with a “tight whip” has a “nice car.” In hip-hop’s vernacular, cars by Mercedes-Benz are referred to by the first number of their particular model. Lexus vehicles are referred to as “Lex.” A Lincoln Navigator truck is referred to as a “gator.” Two hundred dollar Cristal champagne is referred to as “Cris” and Moet champagne is “Mo.”

Someone who has many of these material items is known as a “big willie.” One interesting aspect of this term is the fact that it faded out of hip-hop shortly after the release of Will Smith’s “Big Willie Style.” Will Smith, although respected in the movie industry, is not respected in the purist hip-hop world. This is due to the “mainstream” focus of his music. Hip-hop loyalty strays quickly from anything associated with the “mainstream” (Kelley, 2001). When Will Smith used this term, it lost its street

credibility because he is considered a “commercial” artist. This is one of the ironic points of this culture that focuses so heavily on success. Once an artist gains widespread fame, the culture usually brands him or her as a “sellout.” The same parallel exists in the classroom because many successful students must mix their communication with Standard English and hip-hop vernacular to be socially accepted by many of their friends. This ties into the debate over the words “hip-hop” and “rap” that was mentioned earlier (Kelley, 2001). This has been an issue in hip-hop culture since the mid-1990’s. “Hip-hop” is seen as the purest form of the culture, the elements which it was founded upon. “Rap” is seen as the “mainstream” version of the culture that is focused strictly on financial gain. Credibility and materialism are two concepts that have always been the focus of many aspects of the culture.

The East Coast is the foundation of the language of hip-hop. It is responsible for the framework that all other forms of hip-hop language merely build upon. The rich culture of New York City is heavily responsible for the creativity that sparked this cultural invention (Kelley, 2001). The creative energy that the East Coast has contributed to the language of hip-hop will forever secure its place as the Mecca of hip-hop.

The East Coast remained the dominant central area for hip-hop throughout its early years. The late 1980’s marked the beginning of the emergence of another hip-hop region. Because Los Angeles is a major venue for the entertainment industry, it was only natural for the city to become the next major center for hip-hop (Kelley, 2001). The pioneers of West Coast hip-hop were artists such as “Uncle Jamm’s Army” and Ice-T.

However, the first group to truly establish the West Coast sound was N.W.A. Their name is an acronym for “Niggaz With Attitude.” This multi-platinum selling group established what the industry identifies as “gangsta” rap and laid the foundation for the West Coast sound. Many people who were actually raised in the environment that this music describes are offended by its content (Dyson, 1996). This is a statement that truly shows the power of gangsta rap because Dyson is a staunch supporter of hip-hop. The powerful effect of gangsta rap’s explicit lyrics and raw street tales has had a tremendous effect upon the way many Americans view hip-hop. The term “gangsta” is a hip-hop spelling of the word “gangster.” A “gangsta” in West Coast hip-hop terms, is someone who participates in the street gang lifestyle. This life involves drug dealing, gun toting, and gang membership. This lifestyle is a reality in areas of Compton, Watts, and other Los Angeles-area neighborhoods.

The gang problem of Los Angeles is directly reflected in the music of West Coast rappers. In the song “The Next Episode,” West Coast rapper Snoop Dogg states, “Crip walk if you’re down with the set” (Dr. Dre, 2000). “Crip walk” identifies a dance that is performed by members of L.A.’s Crip gang. A “set” is a neighborhood’s particular division of a gang. In many ways, “gangsta rap” possesses a “life imitates art” mentality (Dyson, 1996). This is clearly evident because many rap artists have been involved in criminal acts throughout their careers as “gangsta” rappers. Snoop Dogg was involved in a murder trial that led to strong anticipation for the release of his solo album. Snoop Dogg’s violent lyrics played a large part in the trial. Snoop is known for lyrics such as “187 on a undercover cop,” (Dr. Dre, 1991), which means “murdering an



undercover cop.” The term “187” is the Los Angeles Police Department’s code for homicide, which is a term used in West Coast hip-hop. This pattern of criminal trouble has existed throughout West Coast hip-hop history.

The vocabulary of West Coast hip-hop has many variations. The short form of “gangsta” is “g.” West Coast artists began to refer to themselves as “g’s.” Another word that is shortened is the word “d’s.” This word means “Daytons.” Dayton wheels are custom wheels that are commonly placed on classic automobiles. Derogatory references to women also began to appear frequently in West Coast hip-hop lyrics. The use of the words “bitch” and “ho” in West Coast hip-hop became so influential that this practice has become a dominant feature in the language of hip-hop listeners. On Dr. Dre’s (1992b) multi-platinum album *The Chronic*, Snoop Dogg states, “Bi----s ain’t shit but hoes and tricks” (Dr. Dre, 1992a). The word “trick” has the same meaning as “b---h” and “hoe.” This line became a popular phrase on the West Coast. Through the course of a normal conversation, some young American males refer to women as “b-----s” and hoes” in a casual manner. Hip-hop music’s frequent use of the word “hoe” is merely an abbreviated pronunciation of the word “whore” (Smitherman, 1997).

These derogatory words have become so common in hip-hop that they have almost completely lost their shock value. Use of these profane words is very prevalent in today’s schools and leads to discipline referrals from teachers because of their use by students. One popular female rapper, Trina, identifies herself as the “Baddest B---h.” Rapper Lil’ Kim identifies herself as the “Queen B---h.” These terms now appear to be labels for women that denote power, confidence, or arrogance. Vowel sounds also play

important role effects in the use of hip-hop words. Patterns emerge such as saying “thang” instead of “thing.” This is evident in the classic hip-hop song “Nuthin but a ‘G’ Thang” (Smitherman, 1997).

The labels that East Coast hip-hop placed on everyday items began to appear in a new form as West Coast hip-hop expanded. Cars began to be referred to by West Coast artists as “hoopties.” Words from California’s gang culture began to spread to other parts of the nation through hip-hop. Words such as “set trippin,” which means “expressing your gang affiliation,” became familiar to those who had never experienced this culture. The West Coast also introduced the “c-walk,” which was mentioned earlier as a gang activity. This dance, originally intended to express affiliation with the “Crip” gang, is now a popular hip-hop dance (Kelley, 2001). The entire fascination with “thug life” is a large part of West Coast hip-hop. This concept is a way of life that means, “be true to yourself” and “fear no man.”

One language practice that originated on the West Coast is truly unique. California artists began to add common sounds to different words, such as saying “fa-shizzel” to denote “for sure” and “go to the hizzel” to denote “going home.” The “izzel” sound is placed with all words to produce a common sound throughout the person’s speech (Kelley, 2001).

The word “saggin” became popular on the West Coast to signify pants that are worn hanging from the waist. The term “flag” identifies a bandana, which is usually worn to indicate gang affiliation. West Coast artists are also known for coining phrases such as “you don’t hear me doe” and “ please believe it.” “You don’t hear me doe,” a

form of “you don’t hear me though” is used to emphasize what someone is saying.

“Please believe it,” a newer West Coast term, is also a way to emphasize a statement that has been made. The popular movie, *Boyz in the Hood*, exposed West Coast hip-hop culture to mainstream America in many ways (Kelley, 2001). This movie presented the language, clothing, and lifestyle of the West Coast to mainstream America.

California’s Bay Area has long been a strong contributor to hip-hop vocabulary. Oakland and its surrounding areas have established themselves as a breeding ground for the latest rap slang. The uniqueness of the language of this area has become the defining factor of this area’s hip-hop culture. Rap artist, E-40, has become known as the central figure behind this area’s slang. The Bay Area is known as the “Yay Area.” The term “yay” identifies “drugs.” Due to this area’s high drug trafficking, it is referred to as the “Yay Area” to denote the strong presence of drug dealing in the area. One of the purposes of urban education is to train students to communicate both orally and in writing, in a manner in which others can understand it (Ramirez, 2005).

The hip-hop language of the Bay Area is rarely understood by those outside of this region. One Bay Area slogan, “pop ya collar,” which means “show off” or “be yourself,” has become popular nationwide. This phrase accompanies the actual physical gesture of grabbing one’s own collar. This act is even done by pro football players after scoring touchdowns. Another popular Bay Area term is “what’s crackin?” This term, a shortened form of “what’s crackulatin?” means, “what’s going on?” It derives from the saying “what’s poppin?” This term has the same meaning as “what’s poppin?” except it uses another sound, “crackin,” to give new life to an older word. The many

conversational terms that are used for money in the Bay Area are one of the most interesting aspects of the language of this area (Kelley, 2001). Some of these terms are “scrilla” and “fetti.” Terms like “sprinkle me,” which means “tell me,” became the title of E-40’s hit song “Sprinkle Me.” Vallejo, California is referred to as “Valley Joe” which is an interesting form of slang. This variation takes the Spanish root of this word and translates it into a two-word English nickname.

One Bay Area phrase that has spread all over the United States is “player hater.” This term represents someone who is jealous of a successful person. “Player” is the definitive term in hip-hop language for a successful person. The “hater” portion of “player hater” has become its own term. “Hatin” is the term that identifies the process of being jealous. A “hater” is the shortened form of “player hater.” This word has expanded into many forms such as “Haterade” and “player hation.” The use of words such as these give the hip-hop listener a whole new vocabulary (Kelley, 2001).

The interesting factor about the majority of hip-hop slang is that many of its users speak in a bi-dialectal manner. Although hip-hop language is the ideal way for hip-hop fans to relate to their peers, mainstream America requires an entirely different dialect. Even though a student may grow up in an environment that values nonstandard dialect, they must eventually enter a professional society in which a completely different form of speaking is demanded (Baugh, 1983). Issues such as dialect leveling also become a factor when analyzing the language of hip-hop culture. This process occurs when two individuals who speak different dialects come together and adjust their speech to better understand one another (Baugh, 1983). When West Coast hip-hop listeners talk

with East Coast hip-hop listeners, there tends to be a focus away from the area-specific terminology. The conversation will use universal hip-hop terms like “tight,” “the bomb,” and “playa.” One East and West Coast term is “bail.” “Bail” means to “leave.” The East Coast uses terms like “bounce” and “Audi 5000” to express that one is “leaving.” “Audi 5000” is an interesting term that is used because its first syllable sounds like “outta here.” “Audi” becomes a short form of “outta here.” The “5000” part is the model number of a car manufactured by Audi and is used with this word to simply add style.

Many of the harshest critics of street speech and hip-hop language come from within the African American community (Baugh, 1983). Since the majority of those who invent and use the language of hip-hop culture are Black, the criticism has been heavily directed toward them. Black members of Congress, religious leaders, and other notable African American figures have repeatedly spoken out against hip-hop culture. Religious leader Reverend Calvin Butts and Congresswoman C. Delores Tucker are two of the most noted African Americans who have spoken out against hip-hop. Reverend Butts has organized several events where hip-hop CD’s were destroyed publicly. C. Delores Tucker, a respected African American leader, has openly denounced hip-hop music many times. The language of hip-hop is a central focus of her opposition to the culture. The mastery of this language places the user in various categories in hip-hop. Just as some people perform better in sports than others, some are able to master vernacular language better than others (Baugh, 1983). This applies directly to hip-hop because its language sounds awkward when used by someone outside of the culture. Hip-hop has a sort of fraternal culture that is not easily accessible to outsiders. Most of hip-hop culture

assumes the participant has certain prior knowledge. This makes it difficult for an outsider to understand certain hip-hop concepts.

Hip-hop has truly influenced the English of young Americans in many ways. The interesting fact about this influence is that it includes White Americans. At one time, for Whites in America, comparing one's communication to African American language was a bitter insult (Dillard, 1972). This would apply to hip-hop culture since it is a predominately African American culture. American history generally only slightly acknowledges the influence that African Americans have had upon American culture as a whole. This is an interesting concept when applied to hip-hop, because White teenagers purchase more rap music than any other group. The many cultural lines that this culture has crossed are further testaments of its true power and international scope.

The West Coast played a large role in developing hip-hop's power and scope. The West Coast provided reinforcement to hip-hop at a time when its future was uncertain. The enormous record sales and influence that N.W.A. had upon America established hip-hop as a true powerhouse in the music industry. The anger that the West Coast rappers expressed through rhyme highlighted the struggle that exists in Black America (Kelley, 2001). Despite this social resistance, the negative messages that appeared in this music overshadowed the cultural issues. The promotion of drugs, alcohol, and violence in West Coast hip-hop overshadowed the message that America needed to hear. Songs such as Snoop Doggy Dogg's "Gin & Juice" glorified drug use to millions of listeners. The chorus of the song states, "Rollin' down the street, smoking endo, sippin' on gin & juice" (Snoop Doggy Dogg, 1993). "Endo" is a West Coast term

for marijuana. This song, featured on his multi-platinum selling album, stirred up the interests of hip-hop listeners in regard to marijuana and “gin & juice.” The same effect occurred when N.W.A. released its hit song “F--k the Police.” This song, written in response to rampant police brutality in Los Angeles, was seen by mainstream America as a call for violence. This song states, “not the other color, so police think they have the authority to kill a minority” (N.W.A., 1988). African Americans in Los Angeles have dealt with negative issues such as the Rodney King incident that heavily influenced this song. The media presented this song as a hate campaign against the police. This hatred toward “one time,” which is a West Coast term for “police,” is a direct result of the environment from which these West Coast artists are products.

West Coast hip-hop has played a large role in the growth and development of hip-hop. The rawness of the West Coast brought worldwide attention to hip-hop culture as a whole. Its message highlights problems and issues that America must eventually address in some form (Kelley, 2001). By taking the torch that was passed on by the founders on the East Coast, the West Coast established its own place in music history.

Southern hip-hop has emerged as a major force in the recording industry. For many years, the East and West Coast dominated hip-hop, while the South was a small, unnoticed voice. With the rise of independent record labels, artists from the South got a taste of hip-hop glitz and glamour (Kelley, 2001). With all of its recent success, the strength of Southern hip-hop still lies in its “down-to-earth” flavor.

Hip-hop in the South became firmly established with the emergence of the Geto Boys, a group from Houston, Texas. Their style, which was similar to the West Coast’s

gangster image, reflected their environment. Growing up in Fifth Ward, one of the more violent areas of Houston, they were witnesses to an environment filled with drugs and violence (Kelley, 2001). Their music, filled with terms that hip-hop had never heard before, established the South as one of the centers of creativity within the culture. The term “dirty South,” coined by Atlanta rapper Cool Breeze, denotes Southern hip-hop. This name identifies the South’s gritty “underground” image. Houston has brought language to hip-hop that has spread to all of its regions. One of the most popular words in this area is “balla.” This term, like “playa,” identifies a “successful person.” In the song “Wanna be a Balla’, the chorus states, “Wanna be a balla shot calla twenty inch blades on an Impala” (Lil Troy, 1999). The “balla” is associated with material items, such as “blades,” which are custom chrome wheels. Another popular term that originated in Houston is “crunk,” which means “exciting.” When Southern rappers say, “get it crunk,” they mean, “get the party going.” The conversational word that is used in the South to affirm something that has been said is “already.” If a statement is agreed upon, the proper response is “already.”

Just as the East and West Coast have their own terms to replace Standard English words, so does the South. Cars are referred to as “slabs” and “hoo-doo’s.” Custom wheels are referred to as “swangaz” and “choppers.” Southern rap speaks constantly of “wood” and “screens.” “Wood” identifies the woodgrain that is found on the interior of many luxury cars. “Screens” are mobile video/television systems that are installed in cars (Kelley, 2001). It is popular in the South to get as many as six or more television screens installed in a car as a sign of prosperity. One Houston term that is rather



interesting is “sternin wheel.” This term for “steering wheel” is merely a variation of the original term to give it a “Southern” feel. Another term that is a variation of the original term is “twankies.” This term identifies “twenties,” which are 20-inch custom wheels. The word “twenty” is altered to give the word style and originality. “Candy” is a term that identifies custom paint jobs popular in the Houston area. In Houston, Cadillacs are referred to as “Boss Hoggs,” a reference to a character who drives a Cadillac in the 1980’s television show *The Dukes of Hazzard*. “Pop trunk” describes a trend in which neon lights are placed in car trunks for display. Cars play a large part in the culture of Southern hip-hop and are seen as the central representation of wealth and success.

Just as terms for marijuana are popular on the East Coast, West Coast, and in American society as a whole, they are also popular in Southern hip-hop. Marijuana is referred to as “dank,” “swishas,” “fry,” and “killa.” The term “swisha” derives from the Swisher Sweet cigar brand (Kelley, 2001). The popularity of this term is evident by the presence of it in the name “Swisha House,” which is the name of a popular Houston rap group. “Fry” identifies a dangerous practice in the South where marijuana is mixed with embalming fluid. Sayings such as “blow some kill,” which means “smoke some marijuana” have become popular in the Texas area. The use of “kill” is a short form of the word “killa.” “Yak” is the shortened form of “cognac,” which is the alcohol of choice among Southern “ballers.” Another popular drug term in the South is “syrup” or “lean.” In a popular Houston rap song, artist R.P. Cola states, “Man, hold up, I got too much lean in my cup” (R.P. Cola, 1999). “Syrup” or “lean” is a drink that consists of codeine syrup mixed with soft drinks. In his song “Mann,” Houston rap artist Big Moe

states, “got a potent a-- purple Sprite” (Big Moe, 2000). This identifies “syrup,” which is a purple color when mixed with the Sprite soft drink. Drugs and alcohol have always been a part of American culture that is linked with various vernacular terms.

These words are not only popular among those who are a part of hip-hop culture. These words have spread to every race and social class in America. The words of Southern Blacks have historically spread very rapidly to the northern parts of the U.S. (Dillard, 1972). This statement identifies how the dialect of Southern Blacks spread throughout the U.S. after slavery. Just as this Black Southern dialect spread throughout the country, Southern hip-hop dialect has also had the same effect.

Renaming cities has also become a popular practice in the South. Every city that is a major part of hip-hop in the South has at least one or two alternate names. Houston is referred to as ‘H-Town,’ Atlanta is “Tha A.T.L.,” and New Orleans is “Tha 504” because of its 504 area code (Kelley, 2001). Certain phrases have become exclusively associated with the Houston area. Phrases such as “I’mma come through,” “Break them boyz off,” and “what it do?” can be frequently heard in the music of Houston artists. Houston rap group, the Botany Boyz (1999) state, “I’mma come thru with tha grill and grain/ I’mma come thru with 50 rocks on my ring.” In this song, every line of this verse begins with “I’mma come thru.” These phrases are sometimes repeated at the beginning of a line of rap to give the song a sense of repetitiveness. “Throwed” is a Houston term that is now used throughout the South. Something “throwed” is something “messed up” or “shocking.” “Plex” is another Houston hip-hop term. This means to “start trouble.” This dialect even categorizes people based upon skin color (Kelley, 2001). In the South,

a light-skinned African American is referred to as a “yellowbone” or “red.” These are terms that were already a part of Black dialect. Houston is also known for inventing its own form of rap known as “screw.” This style, popularized by an artist from the south side of Houston, D. J. Screw, has grown to enormous proportions since its beginnings. This style has spread through the distribution of underground tapes known as “screw tapes” which take popular rap songs and slow down the pitch of the songs. This is called “screwing” the sound. This results in a slow sound that has spread all over the nation. Many “screw” fans state that the music sounds better when combined with marijuana use.

Clothing names have also felt the effect of Southern hip-hop. Versace sunglasses are seen as a status symbol in Houston. These shades are referred to as “Saces,” yet another instance where the original word is abbreviated. Platinum and gold necklaces with diamonds and other elaborate designs are also a part of this fashion. This type of necklace is referred to as a “piece & chain” (Kelley, 2001). Gold and platinum teeth are also a popular style among Southern hip-hoppers. These teeth are usually referred to as “golds,” “grills,” or being “grilled out.” Terms for certain types of women also exist within this language style. In Houston’s hip-hop lyrics, a woman who is a “gold digger” is referred to as a “bopper.” This derives from the word “teeny bopper” and is yet another use of hip-hop word shortening. An attractive woman is referred to as a “star.”

Social events also receive alternate names in the Southern hip-hop culture (Kelley, 2001). One popular college event is an annual beach party that is held in Galveston, Texas. This event is known in Southern hip-hop as “The Kappa.” This name

is a short form of “Kappa Beach Party,” the name of the event when it was associated with Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity. Even though the event is no longer affiliated with this organization, the event is still referred to as “The Kappa.” The influence of the dialect of Southern hip-hop is truly evident throughout the South.

Due to the widespread success of its hip-hop artists, New Orleans has also contributed greatly to the language of Southern hip-hop. Artists such as Master P and Juvenile have popularized the local slang of the New Orleans area. “Whodi” has become a popular term that means “friend.” A popular song by the New Orleans group, The 504 Boyz, states “where you at whodi, I’m right here whodi” (504 Boyz, 2000). The repetitive nature of this chorus resulted in this regional word being spread to many other regions. Other examples of words that have the same meaning in this area are “lil’ daddy,” “lil’ mama,” and “playboy.” The term “big body,” which identifies a large luxury car, is a phrase that New Orleans rappers have popularized. Changing the sound of certain words is a large part of the Black dialect in Louisiana. The most common examples of this is saying “yurn” instead of “yours” and saying “scurred” as opposed to “scared.” In his platinum-selling single “Shake It Fast,” New Orleans rapper Mystikal states, “don’t be scurred...” (Mystikal, 2000). The use of this sound added to the commercial appeal of this song by making it verbally unique. A song by New Orleans artist B.G. popularized the term “bling bling.” This means “to shine.” This term is now used in other hip-hop regions to denote “shining” or “bright.” New Orleans also originated the term “stun’n.” This means “showing off.” This derives from “stunt.” A

stunt is usually a spectacular act, so this identifies someone who possesses spectacular cars, jewelry, clothes, etc.

Florida plays two roles in the hip-hop community. Florida is on the East Coast of the U.S. and it is a part of the Southern U.S. This has resulted in the development of a unique identity. The most popular phrase that has emerged from this area is “hoochie mama.” This word represents a woman with no dignity, similar to “bopper” (Texas) and “skeezer” (New York). In their song “Hoochie Mama,” controversial Miami Group 2 Live Crew state, “you ain’t nothin’ but a hoochie mama/ hoodrat, hoodrat hoochie mama” (2 Live Crew, 1995). The word “hoodrat” is a West Coast term that also has the same meaning. The style of music that is popular in this area is known as “Miami Bass.” This name identifies the heavy bass tones in the music of this area. This name has led to this style simply being called “bass” music. This style of hip-hop is also popular in the Atlanta area. Due to many hit songs, Miami has established its own identity in hip-hop culture.

The names of Southern rap artists are also interesting. Houston rap artists use names such as Scarface, Yungstar, and Slim Thug. Scarface, one of the most popular Southern rappers, takes his name from the film *Scarface*. The main character in this movie, Tony Montana, is frequently idolized by hip-hop fans because of what he represents in this film. His rise to riches from being a poor Cuban immigrant is hip-hop’s shining example of what one can achieve. The name Yungstar is a variation of “Youngster” (Kelley, 2001). The variation of this name adds the word “star” to now give the meaning “young star.” Slim Thug shows the influence of West Coast rapper 2Pac

(1995). The central theme of 2Pac's records was "thug life," highlighting the life of a "thug." His strong influence has resulted in the appearance of the word "thug" in names such as "Slim Thug."

Everyday language in Southern hip-hop is almost a language of its own. Many areas use different words to express the same meanings. Whereas "stun'n" means "showing off" in New Orleans, "actin' bad" means the same in Houston. Differences in pronunciation also determine the region in which a rap artist lives. For example, on the East Coast, "shorty" is a term used to refer to a female. However, in Atlanta, the word has the same meaning, but is pronounced "shawtee." The presence of the Southern dialect is the difference between the words from a regional perspective (Kelley, 2001). Differences such as this enable one to determine where the rapper is from when it comes to the language of hip-hop.

The language practices of Southern hip-hop involve some of the most unique words in the entire hip-hop vernacular. The fact that the South has emerged as a true powerhouse in the music industry is a testament of the perseverance of these artists. For many years, Southern hip-hop was seen as "country" and "simplistic" (Kelley, 2001). Now it is recognized as one of the pillars of the hip-hop community.

*The Source* is recognized as one of the premier sources of information regarding hip-hop culture. It is one of the top-selling hip-hop magazines. This magazine focuses on all aspects of hip-hop culture. Due to its enormous influence, the magazine receives mixed reviews from the hip-hop community. This is especially evident in regard to the magazine's album ratings. Each month, the magazine rates all of the hip-hop album

releases (Kelley, 2001). This has become a process that is greeted by fan resistance when an artist receives a low rating. Some rap artists and fans feel that the magazine has become too powerful and gives biased opinions. There are also those who feel that it is truly “The Source” for hip-hop. The magazine has recently experienced a loss in popularity due to the controversial viewpoints of its owners.

One popular feature of this magazine is its “Hip-hop Quotable” column. This column showcases the best song lyrics of each month. Many times, rap lyrics are difficult to understand with music. Also, few hip-hop artists print their lyrics with the CD. This column gives the reader a chance to truly analyze the lyrics. This process is important because hip-hop lyrics are a direct reflection of what young America really feels. The study of popular culture has gone from being neglected academically to becoming a legitimate field worthy of serious research (Adjaye, 1997). The legitimacy of hip-hop culture has become clearly evident through the fact that it grosses over one billion dollars each year. In the April 2001 issue of *The Source*, lyrics from “Benefits” by Kam were featured. Kam is a West Coast artist who is known for his social and political commentary. The portion of this song that was selected as April 2001’s “Hip-hop Quotable” states,

*Pistol grippin’/  
Trick flippin’/  
Click trippin’/  
Sounds bumpin’/  
Get your body jumpin’/  
Like Scottie Pippen/  
Dippin’ and ridin’/  
West Coast eastsiders/  
Where the blue and red flames/  
Like cigarette lighters/*

*We street fighters/  
 Like the video game/  
 No pity, no shame/  
 An' we just tell the police/  
 Any ol' thang and remain silent/  
 Never nonviolent/  
 Once you aggress/  
 God bless Dr. King but nigga/  
 We gon' make a mess/  
 An' you see stress/  
 Success is the best revenge/  
 I don't get into shit/  
 Unless it offends friends/  
 To be or not to be?/  
 Took me a minute to see/  
 That ain't the question/  
 The question is/  
 What's in it for me?/  
 Ain't nuthin' free/  
 You got to make it worth my while/  
 I never trust a smilin' face/  
 'Cause they just refiled my case/  
 To go to trial/  
 The words cut like a knife/  
 I'm out for money, luxury/  
 Good homes and friendships/  
 In all walks of life*

(Kam, 2001)

The most obvious aspect of the language used in these lyrics is the dropping of the “g” at the end of words. This surface variation has been common in hip-hop language since its beginning. The use of “grippin” instead of “gripping” adds the hip-hop sound to the words. Dropping the “g” from these words gives them a “street feel” as opposed to the Standard English sounds. In the third line, Kam uses the word “click.” In hip-hop, this word means “your group of friends.” This word possesses the same meaning as the word “clique.” In this line, “trippin” means “causing trouble.” When he



states, “Click trippin,’” he is expressing that he is not getting along with his “click.” The word “bumpin’” in the fourth line means “playing music loud” (Kelley, 2001). When you are playing loud music, you are “bumpin’” your music. The simile “Get your body jumpin’ like Scottie Pippen” is an example of how rap uses similes. Kam chooses to use basketball star Scottie Pippen in this line because of his jumping ability. Rappers use similes like “rich as Bill Gates” and “dope like heroin” to enhance the appeal of their rhymes. The use of these similes is seen as a way of showing how skilled you are as a lyricist (Kelley, 2001). The more creative and obscure these similes are, the more respect you receive as a lyricist. “Dippin’ and ridin’” from the seventh line simply alludes to “cruising in your car.” When he states, “blue and red flames,” he is referring to the Los Angeles gangs, the Crips and Bloods. This reference is present in the rhyme to reinforce the West Coast’s identity. The gang problem in Los Angeles has always been a factor that has affected West Coast’s hip-hop identity. The rhyme continues on with more similes that match Kam’s “hardcore” delivery. The lyrics in this song give a clear example of how hip-hop uses language to establish its sense of style and culture.

Another lyrical example of hip-hop language is the March 2001 “hip-hop quotable.” This example is a portion of “What If” by Fredro Starr. Fredro Starr is a New York rapper/actor who is a part of the cast of the popular African American television show *Moesha*. This passage states,

*What if Notorious was here?  
 What if he was around?  
 Would all these ni\*\*as claim to be king?  
 Who would wear the crown?  
 Yo, what if Pac was still thuggin?  
 What if he was alive?  
 Would all these ni\*\*as be screamin' out ride or die?  
 What if Milli Vanilli's record never skipped onstage?  
 They'd be the illest con ni\*\*as in the game today  
 Yo, what if Jordan never had Scottie?  
 What if Sammy never ratted Gotti?  
 What if New York without Giuliani?  
 What if Mike Tyson fought Ali in his prime?  
 What if Will Smith got gangsta and start cursing in rhymes?  
 What if Erick never met Parrish?  
 Think they'd be makin dollars? ...  
 What if Eminem was Black?  
 Would he have sold five mil?  
 Or would he be one out of five million rappers  
 With no deal? ...*

(Fredro Starr, 2001)

The lines of this song use hip-hop expressiveness and language to convey numerous messages. The reference to “Notorious” identifies the name of deceased rap legend, Notorious B-I-G. The reference to “Pac” identifies another deceased rap legend, Tupac Shakur. This line points out how many rappers have imitated Tupac’s style and language since his death. The next lines refer to Tupac Shakur’s slogan, “Ride or Die.” This slogan meaning “go all out,” began to be used in conversational form after Shakur’s death (Kelley, 2001). The rhyme continues on with references to recording artists, athletes, and Mafia figures. By using the names of popular media figures, Starr creates a song from which a wide range of listeners can relate. The creative touch that Fredro Starr adds to this song is based around the repeated use of “what if.” This is one of the first times that this technique has been used in hip-hop.

The communication styles of hip-hop culture are very complex and unique. This form of communication has a tremendous influence upon today's students. The more that hip-hop's communication is studied, the better we can understand today's students. A true understanding of how students communicate will lead to better teaching practices (Kelley, 2001). Since hip-hop culture is the dominant culture of today's students, educators must acknowledge its presence and make a genuine attempt to understand it and embrace its positive characteristics.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of high school students. The type of research methodology that was used was exploratory research. The study assessed the effect of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of students at selected high schools in Houston, Texas. This study also determined the degree to which the four basic elements of hip-hop culture have an effect upon the language that is used by high school students. Teachers were surveyed to determine the amount of influence that this culture has upon students that they teach.

The information for this study was obtained through a survey developed by the author. The data-collection guidelines were used to obtain information from subjects in a given population (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). This chapter will analyze the data obtained from the survey. Through Likert-type rating scales for 14 questions, teachers responded to questions about the influence of hip-culture on their students. Information was also provided from two qualitative teacher interviews. The teachers were chosen to participate in the survey by an administrator at their school.

#### **Population**

The population of this study was composed of teachers at three high schools in Houston, Texas. The schools were chosen based upon the presence of hip-hop culture at these schools. Wheatley High School was chosen because it is located in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward

section of Houston. This area is known as the birthplace of Houston's most predominant hip-hop group, The Geto Boys. The Geto Boys mention 5<sup>th</sup> Ward in numerous songs, which established this neighborhood as a well-known area in hip-hop culture. Yates High School was chosen for this study because it is located in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward section of Houston. Popular Houston hip-hop artist Big Moe mentioned Yates High School in one of his major hit songs. This area is also known for the heavy presence of hip-hop culture. The demographics of ethnicity in this study represent a dominant inner-city school culture.

Eisenhower High School was chosen because it is frequently mentioned in various rap songs and is the former school of various rap artists. Eisenhower High School, referred to as "The Ike," is mentioned numerous times by several artists on Swisha House CD's. Swisha House is one of the premier independent record labels in Houston and several of its artists attended Eisenhower. Platinum-selling Houston rap artist Mike Jones, who is signed to the Swisha House label, frequently visits schools in the Houston area. He is very popular among students in the Houston area because of his catchy songs and image that appeal to students. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below represent the racial demographics of the students and teachers at the schools in this study.

Table 3.1. Racial Demographics of Students at Yates High School, Wheatley High School, and Eisenhower High School Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

School	Number of Students	Percent of African Americans (Black)/Hispanics
Yates High School	1379	91 Black/8 Hispanic
Wheatley High School	836	50 Black/49 Hispanic
Eisenhower High School	2468	51 Black/39 Hispanic

Table 3.2. Racial Demographics of Teachers at Yates High School, Wheatley High School, and Eisenhower High School Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

School	Number of Teachers	Percent of African Americans (Black)/Other
Yates High School	84	81 Black/19 Other
Wheatley High School	54	80 Black/20 Other
Eisenhower High School	139	43 Black/57 Other

The population for this study was 30 teachers total, 10 from each high school. A total of two teachers were interviewed orally. The teachers who participated in the survey were chosen by each school's administrators. The response rate of this study was

97%. Out of the 30 surveys that were submitted, 29 were completed and returned. Table 3.3 represents the number of surveys completed and returned.

Table 3.3. Comparison of the Number of Surveys Completed and Returned and the Number of Surveys Not Returned Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

School	Number of Surveys Returned	Not Returned
Yates High School	10	0
Wheatley High School	9	1
Eisenhower High School	10	0

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher designed the information sheet (Appendix A) to provide information to the participants about the survey. The researcher also designed the information sheet (Appendix B) to provide information to the participants about the interview. The survey (Appendix C) was developed by the researcher using procedures from Gall et al. (2003). The survey measured the influence of hip-hop culture on the students who the teachers who were surveyed come in contact. The researcher's review of literature provides the necessary background to support the questions included in the survey.

Another important part of this study was the development of an educational hip-hop CD. The researcher has a background in music production and songwriting. Because

of this experience, the decision to create an educational CD that uses hip-hop was conceived to provide a real-world application of this study.

The researcher first produced the music for each of the 10 songs on the CD. The music was produced using professional electronic keyboards and digital recording equipment. The researcher used the Ensoniq ASR-10 electronic keyboard and the E-Mu MoPhatt Sound Module to produce the music for the CD. The vocals were recorded using a MXL microphone and Roland VS1680 multi-track digital recorder. The researcher then wrote the lyrics to each song based upon the general Texas curriculum for each subject area. The CD contains a song for the following subjects: reading, writing, math, science, social studies, spelling, test-taking skills, perfect attendance, class rules, and an anti-drug message. See Appendix E for the lyrics to the songs. Upon completion of the production portion of the CD, the researcher had a photographer and graphic designer put together the cover for the CD. The researcher then had the CD manufactured along with flyers and posters advertising the CD. The CD was then presented at conferences and since sold hundreds of copies. Teachers and administrators are using the CD to help prepare students for standardized tests.

The song “I Can Read More Than You” prepares students for reading tests. The song states:

*Now you're gonna have to take reading tests,  
So here's some tips so you can do your best,  
The main idea will get you an A,  
It's what every paragraph is trying to say,  
Compare and contrast, the name of the game,  
Check what is different and what is the same,*

(E. Ron, 2006)



This song presents all of the concepts and strategies for taking standardized tests in reading. Teachers focus on the strategies that are needed to help students pass standardized tests. This song presents those strategies in a musical format that makes them easy to memorize for students. The song “Choppin’ Up Math” prepares students for math tests using rap. It states:

*Now you know I always want you to do your best,  
So here’s a few tips when you take a math test,  
Know which number is greater than the other number,  
Practice reading graphs, so you won’t have to wonder,*

(E. Ron, 2006)

This song presents math concepts and methods to help students answer questions on math tests. Math has been previously presented using rap by other educational products, but these products did not have a focus on preparing students for standardized tests.

Science is an important area for schools because standardized test scores in this area have been traditionally low. “The Science Chant” addresses many of the science concepts that are covered on state science tests. The song states:

*“Carnivore, meat eater, herbivore, plant eater,  
Gotta know about millimeters and milliliters,  
Gotta know the planets, so let’s get with ‘em,  
First we’re gonna talk about the inner solar system,  
Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars,  
These are closest to the Sun, we don’t wanna be far,”*

(E. Ron, 2006)

This verse of the song defines several key terms for science. Through rhyme, students can learn important concepts in a format that is simple for them to remember.

The song continues on to define more terms and address each component of the science exam. Many students do not perform well on the science test due to the vocabulary. This song presents many of the vocabulary words and defines them in a way that is appealing to a student who listens to rap music. Test-taking skills are also very important in today's schools. The song "Tests Don't Scare Me" addresses many of the tips that help students perform well on tests. The song states:

*Who's scared of tests, I'm not scared of tests,  
Tests are a chance for you to show you're the best,  
First things first, get a good night's sleep,  
This will definitely help you keep,  
Focused, when you take your test,  
Eat a good breakfast, I must confess,  
This is one of the most important tips,  
Avoid sweet things, they pump you up then you dip,*

(E. Ron, 2006)

The main purpose of the song is to show students that they should not be afraid of tests. The lyrics address such concepts as getting enough sleep, eating a good breakfast, and general tips about following test directions.

In regard to the structure of the survey, the first part of the survey asks for background information. The final part of the survey analyzes the amount of influence that hip-hop has on students. The Likert-type scale that was used allowed participants to answer questions by responding: VI-very influential, I-influential, SI-somewhat influential, NI-not influential, N/A-not applicable. The interview asked 10 questions pertaining to the influence of hip-hop (Appendix D). The results from each item were determined using descriptive statistics. The sample was restricted to teachers from the three high schools in this study.

### **Procedures**

The research began with the distribution of the survey at Yates High School, Wheatley High School, and Eisenhower High School. The survey was distributed to 10 teachers at each of the schools. Although the studies were anonymous, the returned surveys were collected as a group from each campus and placed in separate folders to distinguish between each campus. The survey was conducted in December 2005. Surveys for two campuses were distributed and collected from the researcher on the same day. Surveys from a third campus were returned within three days. The interviews were conducted with two teachers. These two teachers also completed a survey. The two teachers who were interviewed were selected by their campus administrator. The interview answers were placed in separate folders for each of the schools. This qualitative follow-up was completed to allow teachers to fully express their opinions on the impact of hip-hop culture.

### **Data Analysis**

This section reviews the data analysis procedures used to determine the results of the study. The answers of the survey (VI-very influential, I-influential, SI-somewhat influential, NI-not influential, N/A-not applicable) were coded as 1-very influential, 2-influential, 3-somewhat influential, 4-not influential, 5-not applicable to correspond with the Likert scale. The results of the responses were entered into the SPSS 13.0 program for results in regard to frequency and descriptive procedures. An analysis of this data provides the reader with an idea of the amount of influence that hip-hop has at these schools.

The interviews provided answers to the questions that were asked of two teachers. The teachers were asked questions that covered the following areas: which subject and grade level they teach, their personal definition and practice of hip-hop culture, evidence of the influence of hip-hop in the oral language of the students that they teach, use of hip-hop vocabulary in their students' writing, positive or negative factors concerning hip-hop in the classroom, using hip-hop as an educational tool, appropriateness for students to use hip-hop words in the classroom, and the projected lifespan of hip-hop culture in the future.

These answers are analyzed in Chapter IV. These answers were qualitatively compared and contrasted between the two interviews. Before the population was surveyed, the survey instrument was tested on a selected group. The survey was piloted using a group of educators and music industry employees. This group was selected to provide a balance between the validity of the educational portion and the hip-hop culture portion of the survey. The questions were read to the participants and each question was discussed. The educators analyzed the relevance of the questions to the presence of hip-hop culture in the classroom. The music industry employees analyzed the accuracy of the representation of hip-hop culture in the questions. This group provided a thorough analysis of the quality of each survey question.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of students. This was examined in a written survey that was distributed to teachers at three high schools in Houston, Texas. This was also examined in interviews of two of these teachers.

This chapter analyzes the results of the written surveys and interviews. These results derive from a Likert-scale survey and two qualitative interviews. The survey asked for background information on each teacher and then asked questions regarding the influence of hip-hop culture on students. The background information asks for: gender, age, years of teaching experience, and grade level taught. Table 4.1 below analyzes the gender of the teachers in the study.

Table 4.1. Frequencies and Percentages of Male and Female Teachers Surveyed at Yates High School, Wheatley High School, and Eisenhower High School Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

Gender of Teachers	Frequency	Percent
Female	21	72.4
Male	8	27.5

This table shows that the majority of teachers that were surveyed were female. This statistic is a reflection of the fact that the majority of teachers at these schools are female. Table 4.2 below analyzes the age ranges of the teachers in the study.

Table 4.2. Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Information Regarding Age of Teachers Surveyed at Yates High School, Wheatley High School, and Eisenhower High School Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

Age of Teachers	Frequency	Percent
22-28	4	13.7
29-35	5	17.2
36-42	7	24.1
43-49	2	6.8
50+	11	37.9

The group that is 50 years old or older has the most members. This is due to the fact that these schools have a large number of staff members who are veteran teachers. This is usually common at high schools that have a strong tradition in the community such as these schools. The 22-28 year old group is an interesting group because they are the group that grew up in an environment totally dominated by hip-hop. The 29-35 and 36-42 year old group witnessed the development of hip-hop in their lifetimes. Age is a key factor in this study because older people tend to have more resistance to hip-hop. Table 4.3 analyzes the grade levels that the teachers in the study teach.

Table 4.3. Frequencies and Percentages of Grade Levels Taught Among Teachers Surveyed at Yates High School, Wheatley High School, and Eisenhower High School Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

Grade Level Taught	Frequency	Percent
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	3	13.7
10th Grade	5	17.2
11th Grade	3	13.7
12th Grade	1	3.4
Multiple Grades	17	58.6

The majority of the teachers who were surveyed teach multiple grade levels. This is due to the fact that the majority of high school teachers teach more than one specific grade level. The teachers who teach more than one grade level were valuable in this study because they have an overview of the trends of the entire school. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade group is also important because these students are the youngest students who tend to be more impressionable as a result of music and the media.

The second part of the questionnaire is based on a Likert scale with responses ranging from: very influential, influential, somewhat influential, not influential, and not applicable. The results of these answers are designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?
2. How can the influence of hip-hop culture on communication be used as an educational tool for students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?

The results of the answers to the questionnaire will be used to answer the two research questions. Table 4.4 below represents the teachers' answers to the research statements.

Table 4.4. Survey Participant Answers for Each Research Statement Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

Research Statement #	Very Influential	Influential	Somewhat Influential	Not Influential	N/A
1	25	4	0	0	0
2	12	13	1	1	1
3	20	7	1	1	0
4	20	8	1	0	0
5	9	13	4	1	1
6	6	10	7	1	3
7	24	1	2	1	0
8	24	3	2	0	0
9	12	7	8	2	0
10	25	2	1	0	0



### **Research Question #1**

How does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?

*Research Statement #1: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding oral language?*

Twenty-five of the participants answered that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ oral language. Four participants responded that that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding students’ oral language. None of the participants answered “somewhat influential,” “not influential,” or “not applicable.”

*Research Statement #2: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding writing skills?*

Twelve of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ writing skills. Thirteen participants responded that that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding students’ writing skills. One of the participants answered “somewhat influential,” 1 answered “not influential,” and 1 answered “not applicable.”

*Research Statement #3: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of the same gender?*

Twenty of the participants answered that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of the same gender. Seven participants responded that that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding students’ interaction with

those of the same gender. One of the participants answered “somewhat influential.” One of the participants answered “not applicable.” None of the participants answered “not influential.”

*Research Statement #4: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of the opposite gender?*

Twenty of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of the opposite gender. Eight participants responded that that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of the opposite gender. One of the participants answered “somewhat influential.” None of the participants answered “not influential” or “not applicable.”

*Research Statement #5: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding communication with teachers?*

Nine of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ communication with teachers. Thirteen participants responded that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding communication with teachers. Four of the participants answered “somewhat influential,” 1 answered “not influential,” 1 answered “not applicable,” and 1 did not respond.

*Research Statement #6: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding communication with their parents?*

Six of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ communication with their parents. Ten participants responded that

hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding communication with parents. Seven of the participants answered “somewhat influential,” 1 answered “not influential,” 3 answered “not applicable,” and 2 did not respond.

*Research Statement #7: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding their musical expression (the type of music that students choose to perform)?*

Twenty-four of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ musical expression. One participant responded that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding musical expression. Two of the participants answered “somewhat influential,” 1 answered “not applicable,” and 1 did not respond. None of the participants answered “not influential.”

*Research Statement #8: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of the same race?*

Twenty-four of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of the same race. Three participants responded that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding interaction with those of the same race. Two of the participants answered “somewhat influential.” None of the participants answered “not influential” or “not applicable.”

*Research Statement #9: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of another race?*

Twelve of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of another race. Seven participants responded

that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding interaction with those of another race. Eight of the participants answered “somewhat influential.” Two of the participants answered “not influential.” None of the participants responded with “not applicable.”

*Research Statement #10: To explore to what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding their use of profanity?*

Twenty-five of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ use of profanity. Two participants responded that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding the use of profanity. One of the participants answered “somewhat influential.” One of the participants did not respond. Table 4.5 analyzes the teachers’ written comments on the surveys.

Table 4.5. Written Comments on Surveys Concerning the Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas

Participant #	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Subject
1	1	0	Writing skills
2	0	4	Overuse of slang
3	0	1	Negative influence
4	0	1	Gender issues
5	0	2	Race issues

No open-ended questions were provided; however, some participants did put written comments in the open space at the end of the questionnaire. These were the responses that were provided:

I think rap/hip-hop music has had a positive influence on the written communication in my classes because it has made it easier to define language registers – my students may speak to one another with a vocabulary of a popular song, but when it comes to writing an essay, they make clear logical choices that reflect the formal nature of the assignments. When they slip, it is easy for them to revise when I ask, “Are you singing this to me or are you writing this to me?” Sometimes I even have them deconstruct a formal essay into their hip-hop vernacular to illustrate the effect of imagery, sound devices, and word choices.

Oral language filled with nuances derived from hip-hop/rap.

Writing skills suffer. Negative influence is present; students demonstrate a limited academic vocabulary and overuse of slang.

Interaction with same gender, definite influence. A “brotherhood” mentality is predominant. Unfortunately, that brotherhood has its roots in sex, violence, fast money from drugs, skewed views of family and marriage, and general disrespect for anyone outside of that brotherhood.

Opposite gender – males view females as toys, play things for their personal pleasure. Sadly, females appear to have openly embraced these roles.

Communication with adults in general often negative. Any correction of misconduct is taken as “in my face.” Students adopt attitudes of disrespect bordering on outright intolerance of adults.

Interracial interaction negatively impacted. Students reflect bigotry and racial hatred similar to what was seen in Whites during 1950’s.

Two teachers from the study were selected to be orally interviewed. They will be hereafter referred to as Teacher A and Teacher B. The questions that were analyzed were addressed through the oral interviews.

1. Which subject and grade level do you teach?

Teacher A: A 12<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher.

Teacher B: A 10<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher.

2. What is your definition of hip-hop culture?

Teacher A: Hip-hop culture is a “way of life” and an “attitude.”

Teacher B: An art that expresses what one is going through.

3. What evidence of the influence of hip-hop exists in the oral language of the students that you teach?

Teacher A: Rapping in class, talking about rappers and their lyrics.

Teacher B: Use of profanity and slang.

4. Do your students use hip-hop vocabulary in their writing?

Teacher A: Yes, words like “breezy” and “dimepiece.”

Teacher B: Yes, in free writing and journal writing.

5. Do you feel that this influence is a positive or negative factor for these students?

Teacher A: Both, positive – gets them to communicate, an outlet for them; negative – negative messages in songs, an illusion of what life is like.

Teacher B: Negative, they take it out of context, no respect for adults, they live by the songs.

6. Do you feel that hip-hop can be used as an educational tool?

Teacher A: Yes, for language and vocabulary, creative writing exercises.

Teacher B: Only if presented right, students can write raps to remember things.

7. Do you listen to hip-hop music?

Teacher A: Yes, on the radio.

Teacher B: Yes, for entertainment.

8. When do you feel that it is appropriate for students to use hip-hop words?

Teacher A: When it is relevant to the lesson.

Teacher B: When speaking with peers, “on their own time.”

9. Do you use hip-hop words in your oral language?

Teacher A: Older hip-hop terms, pick up on students’ terms.

Teacher B: With some students to help them understand.

10. Do you feel that hip-hop culture will continue to exist in the future?

Teacher A: Yes.

Teacher B: Yes, as long as it makes money.

### **Research Question #2**

How can the influence of hip-hop culture on communication be used as an educational tool for students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?

The answer to this research question involved the production of a hip-hop CD. The researcher is a hip-hop music producer and former rap artist. As a part of the study, the researcher produced an educational hip-hop CD that contains rap songs for students that address all of the major subject areas. This CD is also designed to help students with test-taking skills. The production of the CD involved: writing 10 rap songs, composing 10 hip-hop music tracks, designing the packaging of the CD, manufacturing the CD for distribution, distributing the CD for sale at teacher supply stores and education conferences, and promotion of the CD. The lyrics of the CD were written in a way to use hip-hop as an educational tool. The CD is entitled: *Edu-Rap, Volume I*. The CD pertains to the study by serving as a practical application of hip-hop as an instructional tool. The CD was presented to various members of the research study. All of the participants that

listened to the CD agreed that it was an innovative tool that will definitely motivate students to learn. The participants were very excited about the CD and were anxious to get a copy to play in their classrooms.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter contains a summary of the literature associated with this study, the research process involved in this study, and the findings of the research. As a result of these findings, the researcher will make recommendations at the end of the chapter for further research on hip-hop and how it affects today's students.

#### **Summary and Conclusions**

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the influence that hip-hop culture has on students at selected high schools in Houston, Texas, from the perspective of their teachers. To accomplish this, questionnaires were distributed at three high schools in Houston, Texas, and teacher interviews were also conducted. Two research questions were posed for this study:

1. How does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?
2. How can the influence of hip-hop culture on communication be used as an educational tool for students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?

#### **Summary of Findings**

The findings as a result of the questionnaires provide valuable information on the current state of the influence of hip-hop in today's schools. The participants felt that hip-hop culture is very influential in regard to students' oral language. Twenty-five out of 29 participants selected "very influential" in regard to oral language. The majority of

participants felt that hip-hop is “influential” in regard to writing skills. Twenty out of the 29 teachers surveyed believe that hip-hop is very influential for students when interacting with those of the same gender. The same number of participants also felt that hip-hop is very influential with those of the opposite gender. Thirteen of the 29 teachers surveyed believe that hip-hop is “influential” in the way that students communicate with teachers.

The same number of teachers also agreed that hip-hop is influential in regard to students’ communication with their parents. Twenty-four out of 29 participants believe that hip-hop is very influential regarding students’ musical expression. The same number of participants also agree that hip-hop is very influential in regard to students’ interaction with those of the same race. The majority of participants agree that hip-hop is very influential in regard to students’ interaction with those of another race. Twenty-five out of 29 participants selected “very influential” in regard to whether hip-hop influences students’ use of profanity.

There were no open-ended questions on the questionnaire that allowed teachers to respond in their own words. However, two teachers did write their own comments in the open space on the survey. One teacher felt that hip-hop music has had a positive influence on students’ writing. This teacher also stated that he/she uses hip-hop to help teach writing skills. The other teacher who responded felt that hip-hop has had a negative effect on students’ writing skills. He/she also feels that hip-hop results in students having a limited academic vocabulary and overuse of slang. He/she feels that hip-hop culture encourages pre-marital sex, promotes violence and drug use, produces

skewed views of family and marriage, and promotes general disrespect for others. He/she also feels that hip-hop promotes disrespect for women. He/she believes that hip-hop also promotes bigotry and racial intolerance.

The oral interviews that I conducted resulted in data on a variety of topics in regard to how students are influenced by hip-hop. The teachers who were interviewed defined hip-hop culture as a “way of life,” an “attitude,” and an “art that expresses what one is going through.” They notice the presence of hip-hop in their classrooms as a result of students rapping in class, students talking about rappers and their lyrics, use of hip-hop words in writing assignments, and use of profanity from rap songs. One teacher feels that hip-hop is a positive outlet for students. The other teacher felt that the negative messages in hip-hop are prevalent. However, both teachers felt that hip-hop can be used as an educational tool for language and writing exercises. Both teachers said that they do listen to hip-hop themselves and use various hip-hop words. These interviews provided additional information to support the major findings of the questionnaires.

### **Research Question #1**

How does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?

The majority of the participants surveyed answered that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ oral language. I can confirm that this is very evident in today’s schools. Having recently worked as a school Principal, the students’ language was filled with vocabulary from hip-hop culture. When asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding writing skills?” the

majority of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ writing skills. Due to my experience reviewing students’ writing as a former English teacher, it is also clearly evident that hip-hop has a heavy influence on students’ writing. The unique spelling of various words and frequent use of hip-hop vocabulary is highly visible in student essays.

When asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of the same gender?” the majority of the participants answered that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of the same gender. I have personally witnessed how hip-hop culture is a “fraternity” for today’s young men and women. Students take pride in sharing their knowledge of hip-hop culture with students of their same gender.

When the participants were asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of the opposite gender?” the majority of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of the opposite gender. I have found that this interaction is very important for male students. Their use of hip-hop vocabulary and knowledge of hip-hop culture gives them a sense of credibility with female students. Students who are not deeply involved with this culture are sometimes perceived as not as “cool” as those who are heavily into hip-hop culture.

When asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding communication with teachers?” the majority of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding communication

with teachers. This was one of the first questions that “very influential” did not have the majority of the responses. This is due to the fact that many students adjust their communication slightly when talking to figures of authority.

When asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding communication with their parents?” the majority of participants responded that hip-hop culture is “influential” regarding communication with parents. I found that this answer was very similar to the answer regarding students’ interaction with parents. The parent and teacher interaction is indeed very similar because most students adjust their vocabulary slightly when talking to their parents.

When the participants were asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding their musical expression?” the majority of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ musical expression. This was an answer that I predicted would be exactly as it appeared in the research. It is obvious that hip-hop is the dominant music form of today’s high school students. This is evident through their vocabulary, style of dress, and frequent references to hip-hop musicians.

In response to the question of, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of the same race?” the majority of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of the same race. This answer is very similar to the answer that dealt with communication with those of the same gender. Students of the same race use hip-hop culture as a “fraternity” that unites them.

When asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding interaction with those of another race?” the majority of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ interaction with those of another race. This question shows how various racial groups have learned to co-exist at the schools in this study. These inner-city schools are examples of schools where hip-hop culture is so dominant that it extends beyond all racial lines.

When asked, “To what extent does hip-hop culture influence the communication skills of students regarding their use of profanity?” the majority of the participants responded that hip-hop culture is “very influential” regarding students’ use of profanity. This is due to the heavy use of profanity in rap songs. This heavy use of profanity is frequently imitated by students. Many students will not even buy a rap CD if it does not have an “explicit lyrics” sticker on the packaging.

#### *Implications for Practice*

The following implications can be made from these findings. Hip-hop culture is very influential in regard to students’ oral language and writing skills. The language that hip-hop artists use is very attractive to students and is their preferred use of vocabulary. Hip-hop is very influential in regard to students’ interaction with their peers of the same gender. Male and female students use hip-hop vernacular as a primary form of communication with those who they define as their close same-gender friends. Hip-hop is also very influential in regard to communication with those of the opposite gender.

Male and female students believe that it is more appealing to the opposite sex if you display a mastery of hip-hop vernacular. Hip-hop is influential in regard to students' communication with teachers and parents. Students use the same language that they use with their peers and usually do not adjust their language when speaking to a teacher or parent. Hip-hop is very influential in regard to the way students express themselves through music. It is clear that hip-hop is the dominant music form at these three high schools.

Hip-hop is also very influential in how students communicate with other students of their same race. Hip-hop is used a code that racial groups, primarily African Americans and Hispanics, use to create a bond with each other. Hip-hop is also very influential in regard to the way that students communicate with those of another race. Students do not adjust their communication skills when communicating with someone of another race. It is assumed that hip-hop language is universal. The study clearly shows that hip-hop is very influential in regard to students' use of profanity. The profanity that is predominant in hip-hop songs results in imitation of this language use by students.

### **Research Question #2**

How can the influence of hip-hop culture on communication be used as an educational tool for students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas?

The following findings are evident as a result of this study in regard to hip-hop being used as an educational tool. Students are willing to express their interest in hip-hop in the classroom. Students and teachers agree that hip-hop is a form of expression.

Students are willing to express their feelings through hip-hop. Hip-hop is effective in teaching writing and language skills. As a result of the researchers' production of the hip-hop CD, additional findings are clearly evident.

Hip-hop can be used as a way to teach various concepts. The CD teaches reading skills, writing, social studies concepts, math skills, science, and spelling. Other songs on the CD teach facts about test-taking skills, behavior management, attendance, and drug prevention. Being that students are attracted to rap music, teaching these concepts through rap would get the attention of students who would normally not be interested in these concepts. The rhyming patterns of the songs and choruses present the material in a way that is easy to memorize for later recall on tests and quizzes.

#### *Implications for Practice*

Teachers can effectively use hip-hop to teach various concepts in the classroom. Materials such as educational rap CD's can be used to supplement classroom instruction. Students feel comfortable expressing themselves through hip-hop in the classroom. This comfort level can be used to help reluctant students become more enthusiastic about learning. Hip-hop encourages students to willingly express themselves both orally and in writing.

#### **Literature Research Conclusions**

The emergence of hip-hop culture in the last 30 years has been a significant development in American culture (Adjaye, 1997). The fact that this culture impacts high school students in such a tremendous way, truly adds to the overall significance of the impact of the culture. Hip-hop culture has a strong sense of credibility with students



because of its rebellious nature. Although hip-hop culture involves breakdancing, graffiti art, and deejaying, the primary focus of students' interest in hip-hop culture is rap music. The presence of raw lyrics, dangerous street tales, and innovative concepts in rap songs has a higher value to students than the commercial success or popularity of a rap artist (Reese, 2004). Because hip-hop music is mostly created by individuals who are living in poverty or have lived in poverty, the messages in rap songs reflect this environment. Many of the students who are deeply involved in the culture also live in similar situations (Kitwana, 2002). The environmental conditions that hip-hop culture thrives in play a key role in the message of hip-hop and the type of listeners who become heavily involved in the culture.

Because of its international impact, the study of hip-hop culture is now a relevant area of study in the academic world (Adjaye, 1997). College campuses now have classes based on hip-hop culture, and many courses include the study of hip-hop in their content. The language of hip-hop is an area that is worthy of extensive academic study. The creativity that hip-hop's language has brought to American English is practically unmatched by any other music form. Many of today's students use the language of hip-hop as the central focus of their everyday speech. Because of this strong presence of hip-hop in the language of students, educators must be familiar with the basic concepts of hip-hop culture.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of this study, several key conclusions are evident. Hip-hop culture has a definite influence on the communication skills of high school students at

the selected schools in this study. As a result of this study, it is also evident that many teachers are aware of the influence of hip-hop culture in regard to the way that students communicate. Because of the strong interest that students have in regard to hip-hop, hip-hop culture can be used to teach various curriculum concepts. It was also determined that teachers who understand and accept various facets of hip-hop culture can use this appreciation of the culture to reach difficult students. As a result of the production of an educational CD with this study and the belief of teachers in the study that hip-hop should be used as an educational tool, it is also clear that educational rap music is an effective way to teach academic concepts and test-taking skills.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas. As a result of the review of literature, research findings, and conclusions, the following recommendations have been provided as a result of this study:

#### *Recommendations Based on the Research Study*

1. Hip-hop culture heavily influences the oral language and written communication of students. This is evident through students' everyday speech at school and their use of hip-hop vernacular in writing assignments.
2. Hip-hop can be used as a tool to supplement the teaching of various academic concepts. Because students are very interested in hip-hop, they will pay closer attention to a lesson that uses elements of hip-hop culture to teach

an academic concept. Also, since hip-hop is very “catchy” due to its use of rhyme, it is a valuable tool that can be used to help students remember various concepts through rhyme.

#### *Recommendations for Further Study*

This study examined the influence of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of students as perceived by teachers at selected high schools in Houston, Texas.

Further study could be initiated in the following areas:

1. An examination of the differences between the communication skills of students in hip-hop culture’s major cities, which include: New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta.
2. An examination of how hip-hop music can be used to teach basic academic concepts to elementary school students.
3. A study of which hip-hop artists are the most influential in regard to students’ communication skills.
4. A study of the effectiveness of hip-hop lyrics that convey positive messages- such as anti-drug, safe sex, and anti-violence lyrics.
5. A study of the effects of hip-hop culture’s negative messages, such as: lyrics that contain references to illegal drugs, violent messages, and derogatory comments regarding women.
6. A study of the effectiveness of a school that offers hip-hop-related elective courses.

7. A study of the differences of hip-hop culture's effect upon various ethnicities and cultures.
8. A study of hip-hop culture's effects upon the attitudes of teachers.
9. A study of the effectiveness of Christian rap and Christian hip-hop culture.

The study of hip-hop and its influence on students and the way that they communicate has provided valuable information in regard to students' experiences in school. The application of the findings in this study can lead to more innovative teaching methods and more favorable learning conditions for today's students.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INFORMATION SHEET – WRITTEN SURVEYS**

### **INFORMATION SHEET- Written Survey**

“The Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills of Students as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas”

You have been asked to participate in a research study about the influence of hip-hop culture on the communication skills of high school students. I received approval to contact you and ask for your participation from one of your school’s administrators. Whether you participate or not will have no impact on your job or school status. A total of 30 people have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence that hip-hop culture has on students.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer questions on a written survey. This study will only take ten minutes. There are no risks associated with this study. There are no benefits in participating in this study. You will receive no monetary compensation.

This study is anonymous. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only E. Ron Kelley will have access to these records. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Texas A&M University. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without your relations with the University, job, benefits, etc., being affected. You can contact E. Ron Kelley at 210-710-5542 or Dr. Stephen Stark at 979-845-2656 with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board- Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects’ rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelia M. Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067, araines@vprmail.tamu.edu.

**APPENDIX B**  
**INFORMATION SHEET- ORAL INTERVIEWS**

### **INFORMATION SHEET- Interview**

“The Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills of Students as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas”

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**APPENDIX C**  
**SURVEY INSTRUMENT**



- \_\_\_ 4. Interaction with those of the opposite gender
- \_\_\_ 5. Communication with teachers
- \_\_\_ 6. Communication with parents
- \_\_\_ 7. Musical expression
- \_\_\_ 8. Interaction with those of the same race
- \_\_\_ 9. Interaction with those of another race
- \_\_\_ 10. Use of profanity

**APPENDIX D**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**



## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*E. Ron Kelley*

**“The Influence of Hip-Hop Culture on the Communication Skills of Students as Perceived by Teachers at Selected High Schools in Houston, Texas”**

1. Which subject and grade level do you teach?
2. What is your definition of hip-hop culture?
3. What evidence of the influence of hip-hop exists in the oral language of the students that you teach?
4. Do your students use hip-hop vocabulary in their writing?
5. Do you feel that this influence is a positive or negative factor for these students?
6. Do you feel that hip-hop can be used as an educational tool?
7. Do you listen to hip-hop music?
8. When do you feel that it is appropriate for students to use hip-hop words?
9. Do you use hip-hop words in your oral language?
10. Do you feel that hip-hop culture will continue to exist in the future?

**APPENDIX E**  
***EDU-RAP CD LYRICS***

## **I Can Read More Than You**

*It's time to talk about the most important skill,  
 This is the skill, that pays the bills,  
 The one you need, every minute of the day,  
 Without this skill, hey yo, there is no way,  
 To do anything, anything at all,  
 You need it winter, summer, autumn, spring, and fall,  
 I'm talking about reading, the #1 thing,  
 You have to read to rap, and read to sing,  
 You have to read the plays in football or hoops,  
 You have to read if you're a part of the military troops,  
 So get in the habit, read everyday,  
 The more you read, the more you pay,  
 Your mind, it's like money in the bank,  
 Every time you read, you fill up your think tank,  
 Read aloud, read outside,  
 Read to Mom, read with pride,  
 Get your read on, the E. Ron way,  
 Look at your friends, and I want you to say,*

*Chorus- Yo, I can read more than you,  
 I can read more than you,  
 I can read more than you, you, you, and you*

*Read anything you want, live in the library,  
 Everywhere you go, a book you should carry,  
 Now you're gonna have to take reading tests,  
 So here's some tips, so you can do your best,  
 The main idea will get you an A,  
 It's what every paragraph is trying to say,  
 Compare and contrast, the name of the game,  
 Check what is different and what is the same,  
 Who are the characters? What is the title?  
 What's the story about? this is vital,  
 That means important, know your vocabulary,  
 Going a day without reading, now that's scary,  
 January, February, March, April, May,  
 Every single month, we read, look at your friends and say*

(repeat chorus)

## Choppin' Up Math

*M-A-T-H,*

*Something some students love, something some students hate,  
 But after this song, you're gonna all love math,  
 Remember it's a skill that you have to have,  
 We're choppin' up these math skills, in this rap,  
 Chop'em like a karate master, give em a smack,  
 Cause they're easy to beat, chop em, and give em a kick,  
 Is everybody ready? Let's practice a bit,  
 1x1 is 1, 2x2 is 4, 3x3 is 9 and you know that's all the time,  
 4x4, 16, 9x2, 18, 5x5, 25,  
 now you got em memorized,  
 Math is something you're going to need everyday,  
 You need math to buy a car, and for sports you play,  
 You need math so much it's not even funny,  
 Most importantly, you need math to count money,  
 If I have 10 dimes, 4 quarters, 6 pennies,  
 How many coins do I have, yeah that's right 20,  
 Now how much money does that add up to be,  
 Remember, 10 dimes, 4 quarters, 6 pennies,*

### *Chorus- Choppin' Up Math Chant*

*Did you get it? That's right two dollars and six cents,  
 Yall are math experts, now I'm totally convinced,*

*Now you know I always want you to do your best,  
 So here's a few tips when you take a math test,  
 Know which number is greater than the other number,  
 Practice reading graphs, so you won't have to wonder,  
 How to read those, practice counting coins a lot,  
 Know about centimeters, why not?  
 Read word problems carefully, show your work,  
 If you get stuck, do the easy ones first,  
 If you have charts, use em, break em down, solve em,  
 Put on your black belt, let's chop up math problems.*

## Social Studies Stomp

*Chorus- Stomp, Stomp, Stomp, Stomp, for social studies  
It's what I need to know*

*You've just stomped into the social studies section  
First things first you have to know the directions,  
North is up, South is down  
West is to the left, East is to the right, in your town,  
And my town, and every town,  
In a few minutes, we will stomp the ground,  
And show what we know cause we are the best,  
Washington D.C., capital of the U.S.,  
What are the continents, Africa, Asia,  
Antarctica, Europe, it should amaze ya,  
Australia, North and South America,  
That's seven continents yall, we are preparing ya,  
For any social studies test,  
70% of the earth is oceans, what is the rest?  
Land, so we are mostly ocean,  
You're about to learn the ocean potion,  
Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic,  
These are the oceans, this time you start it,  
Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic,  
Those are the oceans yall,*

*Now you know the oceans, give yourself a hand,  
Now it's time to learn about foreign lands,  
Rome is in Italy, London in England,  
Paris is in France, Let's start mixin & minglin,  
Ask your partner, where is Tokyo?  
Tell him Japan, now I know you know,  
Egypt is known for the Pyramids,  
They are amazing and real big,  
Back to America, what's our song?  
The Star-Spangled Banner, don't get that wrong,  
That's our National Anthem, O' Say Can You See,  
You know the words, we're a democracy,  
That means you can vote your way,  
Hope you learned some social studies today*

### The Science Chant

*It's time for some science yall,  
 If you listen close, you'll be able to do it all,  
 In the lab, the first rule is safety,  
 This is important, so you can make the,  
 Lab, safe for you, lab safe for me,  
 Can't run in the lab, cause we're accident free,  
 Now you know safety, the #1 rule,  
 Now let's get to know a few lab tools,  
 A thermometer does what, finds temperature,  
 If you learn the lab, one day, you might find the cure,  
 For diseases, discover new things for helping,  
 When a solid turns to liquid, that's melting,  
 Carnivore, meat eater, herbivore, plant eater,  
 Gotta know about milliliters and millimeters,  
 Gotta know the planets, so let's get with them,  
 First we're gonna talk about the inner solar system,  
 Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars,  
 These are closest to the Sun, we don't wanna be far,  
 The Sun provides the heat and light we need,  
 Now here's the outer solar system, yes indeed,  
 Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto,  
 Now let's go back and see what all you know,  
 If you know the planets, say em after me,  
 Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars,  
 Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, that's far,  
 Neptune and Pluto complete the deal,  
 Now you know the planets, tell me how you feel,*

*Smart, tell your friends, don't hate,  
 When water disappears, it evaporates,  
 Sunlight and water go into a plant,  
 And oxygen comes back out of the plant,  
 Sound is cause by vibrations,  
 Science is done in all nations,  
 Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit  
 Water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit,  
 When water boils, a liquid becomes a gas,  
 Gravity makes rain drop down fast,  
 Now you know science, so don't ever say I can't,  
 Now it's time to say the Science Chant,*

*Chorus- Science is something I gotta have,  
Teacher, Teacher, Teacher, let's go to the lab,  
Science is you,  
Science is me,  
S-C-I-E-N-C-E,  
Is so cool,  
Is so tight,  
Give me a science test, I'll get em all right*

## S-P-E-L-L With Me

*S-P-E-L-L-I-N-G,*  
*This is what I need you to do with me,*  
*Spelling helps you read, spelling helps you write,*  
*Come spell some words with me, "aiight,"*  
*You are a C-H-A-M-P-I-O-N,*  
*That's champion, Someone who wins,*  
*If you like sports, you are A-T-H-L-E-T-I-C,*  
*Athletic, get it,*  
*If you like to cook, You're a C-H-E-F,*  
*Wave to the R-I-G-H-T, then left,*  
*Wave right, wave left,*  
*If you're the leader, you're the C-H-I-E-F,*  
*At a restaurant, you read a M-E-N-U,*  
*That's a menu, let's get into,*  
*More words, more words, more words,*

*Race cars have S-P-E-E-D,*  
*That's speed, so speed it up with me,*  
*Bead, B-E-A-D, Deed, D-E-E-D, Greed, G-R-E-E-D,*  
*Read, R-E-A-D, Need, N-E-E-D, Feed, F-E-E-D, Plead, P-L-E-A-D,*  
*You can do it if you T-R-Y,*  
*Missouri, M-I-S-S-O-U-R-I,*  
*Texas, T-E-X-A-S,*  
*You're the spelling bee champ,*  
*cause you are the best,*  
*Alaska, A-L-A-S-K-A*  
*Alabama, A-L-A-B-A-M-A,*  
*Hawaii, H-A-W-A-I-I,*  
*Then M-I-, crooked letter, crooked letter,*  
*I, crooked letter, crooked letter, I-P-P-I,*  
*Those are a few states, that you can spell,*  
*You L-E-A-R-N, so well,*  
*My name is E-R-O-N, what's your name?*

*Couldn't hear you, can you spell it again?*

*We love S-C-H-O-O-L,*  
*The way you're spelling, I can T-E-L-L,*  
*That you have pride, P-R-I-D-E,*  
*Let me see you S-M-I L E,*  
*Let's do it now in Slow M-O-T-I-O-N,*  
*That's slow motion, ready to begin,*



*T-U-R-T-L-E, slow,  
S-N-A-I-L, real slow,  
C-R-A-W-L, slow,  
Want to speed it up now, alright, let's go,  
Q-U-I-C-K, F-A-S-T, R-A-C-E, F-L-Y, on snow S-K-I,  
S-Q-U-I-R-R-E-L, C-H-E-E-T-A-H, J-E-T, R-U-N-N-E-R,  
You can go real far,  
If you can spell, so keep working on it, cool,  
Now you're the best speller in the school.*

## Write Tight

*(call and response)*

*Have a good introduction, (That's tight),  
 Listen to the prompt,  
 Re-read the prompt,  
 Brainstorm for what you want to write,  
 Organize your paragraphs,  
 Read over what you write as you go,  
 Fix any mistakes you see,  
 Always get your thoughts together,  
 Use your vocabulary words,  
 Make sure you spell your words right,  
 Grab their attention at the start,  
 Tells us when and where it takes place,  
 In the end, sum it all up,  
 Capitalize the right words,  
 Use proper punctuation,  
 Make sure each sentence helps the reader understand,  
 Use a lot of detail,  
 Narrative writing tells a story,  
 Keeping a journal helps you write,  
 Keep your writing focused,  
 Make sure its complete,  
 Make it flow, from sentence to sentence,  
 Make it original,  
 Don't jump from idea to idea,  
 Don't leave it unfinished,  
 Don't be too wordy,  
 Don't repeat yourself,*

*(rap)*

*The W in writing is for tell us where and when,  
 The R is for re-read it over again,  
 The I is for indent each new paragraph,  
 The T is for tell, tell us a story, make us laugh,  
 The other I is for interesting, draw the reader in,  
 The N is for never leave it incomplete, then,  
 The G is for "go for it," write as much as you can,  
 Writing is all about making a plan,  
 Then writing it down, and checking it over good,  
 You can write tight now, I knew you could*

*(Chorus)*

*The more you write, the better you write,  
I write everyday, that's why I write tight,  
Writing is something I love to do,  
I write tight, how about you.*

### Tests Don't Scare Me

*Who's scared of tests, I'm not scared of tests,  
 Tests are a chance for you to show you're the best,  
 First things first, get a good night's sleep,  
 This will definitely help you keep,  
 Focused, when you take your test,  
 Eat a good breakfast, I must confess,  
 This is one of the most important tips,  
 Avoid sweet things, they pump you up and then you dip,  
 And you don't need to lose any steam,  
 So eat right before you test, even though it seems,  
 That you can make it without breakfast, no,  
 So get some food fuel and let's go,  
 When you take your test, don't rush, slow down,  
 There's no award for the fastest kid in town,  
 Don't take too long on the hard questions,  
 Do the easy ones first, the one's you're the best in,  
 Don't ever leave one blank, guess smart if you must,  
 Be confident, you're rollin' with us,  
 Watch out for tricks, so read the question closely,  
 Read the directions, cause tests are mostly,  
 About following directions and reading carefully,  
 Relax, take a deep breath with me,  
 Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out,  
 Being relaxed is what tests are all about,*

#### Chorus- Tests Don't Scare Me

*Take breaks, close your eyes for a minute,  
 Rest a while, then you can begin it,  
 Again, this will charge you up,  
 Remember what your teacher taught you, and that's enough,  
 To pass, to make 100,  
 I know you're gonna pass, cause I know you want it,  
 Bad, you want to be number one,  
 After this song, taking tests will be fun,  
 Be at school on time on the day of the test,  
 Being late, just causes more stress,  
 Your first answer is usually right,  
 So don't change your answer unless you're sure, "aiight,"  
 Don't let it bother you, if others finish early,  
 You can work at your own pace, no need to hurry,  
 I hope you know now, I hope you can see,  
 Let me hear you, say it, Tests Don't Scare Me.*

**These are the Class Rules**

*We're about to go over the class rules,  
These are important every day of school,  
Get ready to listen to this hip-hop flow,  
Cause, we're gonna learn the rules, get set, let's go,  
Keep your hands and feet to yourself,  
Cause you don't want to accidentally hurt someone else,  
Follow the teacher's directions,  
This is for you own protection,  
Watch the language that you use,  
Watch the words that you choose,  
Stay in your seat, unless you have permission,  
To move around, if not, sit down,*

*Be polite to all of your classmates,  
If you need something, raise your hand and wait,  
For the teacher, to call on you,  
Following directions is easy to do,  
Raise your hand before you speak,  
Come ready to learn every single week,  
Bring supplies and assignments every single day,  
Being prepared is the only way,  
Work quietly, don't bother others,  
Treat your classmates like sisters and brothers,  
It's a family in our class,  
Man, you caught on to the class rules real fast.*

### **All Day Everyday (Perfect Attendance)**

*First off, let's set the rule for learning,  
 You gotta be there to get the knowledge you're earning,  
 If you're not in school, how are you gonna learn,  
 You need perfect attendance, to not miss your turn,  
 When your teacher calls, on you to shine,  
 You need to be there ready and on time,  
 Perfect attendance, nothing less,  
 Starting today, let's see who's the best,  
 At coming to school, on time and motivated,  
 I know its hard to wake up, man, I really hate it,  
 But you gotta get up and face the day,  
 While you're in bed someone's working away,  
 Getting ahead, getting ahead of you,  
 And that's something you can't let them do,  
 When it comes to school we don't play,  
 We're gonna be here, all day everyday,*

*You gotta stay healthy, getting sick will slow you down,  
 So wash your hands a lot, and on the playground,  
 Be careful, you don't need any broken arms,  
 Then you won't be there to put that charm,  
 On your teacher and show her that you're on it,  
 That perfect attendance, you know you want it,  
 For every school day you miss, you're losin' time,  
 Losin' time to charge your mind,  
 It's like a battery, gotta keep it full,  
 So let's charge the school doors like a raging bull,  
 Be there bright and early, never late,  
 On time always, we owe it to our classmates,  
 If they can be there, you can be there,  
 Don't worry if you don't have new clothes to wear,  
 Just make it happen, the perfect attendance way,  
 We're gonna be there all day everyday.*

### **Drugs Get Away From Me**

*Drugs get away from me, I don't need you,  
 There is absolutely nothing you can do,  
 For me, cause drugs kill your brain,  
 All they do is cause a whole lot of pain,  
 Drugs are not cool, people who do drugs are fools,  
 We don't allow drugs in our school,  
 If anyone has drugs, tell your teacher,  
 Tell your principal and your Mom when you see her,  
 You hear people talk about weed,  
 But weed is wack cause weed can only lead,  
 To frying your brain and then you can't think,  
 As far as alcohol, you might see people drink,  
 But drinking alcohol, destroys your body,  
 On TV you see people drinking at a party,  
 And then they try to drive and end up in jail,  
 So stay away from drugs if you don't want to fail,  
 Cause you can't drink and drive and live to tell,*

#### *Chorus- Drugs Get Away From Me*

*A lot of people who use drugs end up dead,  
 So stay away from drugs and use your head,  
 If you see someone using drugs, run away,  
 And tell someone, that very same day,  
 Drugs are illegal, you go to jail if you have em,  
 Drugs are stupid and you're stupid if you have em,  
 And you're smart, so you would never do drugs, right?  
 Cigarettes are bad too, every time someone lights,  
 A cigarette, they're killing their lungs,  
 Smoking cigarettes, I'm not the one,  
 Are you? no way Jose,  
 When you hear the chorus, tell those drugs get away,  
 Drugs come in many shapes and many colors,  
 Sometimes you can't tell one drug from another,  
 Pills, powder, liquid, in needles,  
 Anyway they come, drugs are straight up evil*

## VITA

EDMOND RON KELLEY  
4226 TAMU  
College Station, Texas 77843-4226

### EDUCATION

2006	Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Administration Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
2001	Master of Arts, Literature Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas
1996	Bachelor of Arts, English The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas

### WORK EXPERIENCE

2004-2005	Principal Benavidez Elementary School South San Antonio Independent School District San Antonio, Texas
2006-present	Adjunct Instructor Houston Community College
2000-present	President/CEO Konfident Enterprises San Antonio, Texas

### MEMBERSHIPS

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.  
Prince Hall Masonry – Master Mason, Royal Arch Mason,  
Knight Templar, 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree Mason, Shriner  
100 Black Men of America, Inc.

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