

What is Hip Hop?

EW's new hip hop writer says hello.

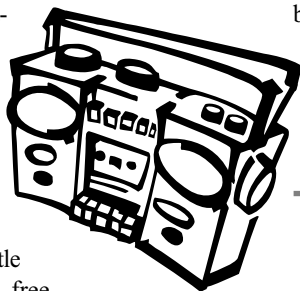
I was 5 years old when the movie *Colors* came out. I didn't really understand the plot of the film, but I remember digging on the soundtrack — particularly the title song by Ice-T. My big brother also liked it, so it *had* to be cool. Listening to that song made me want to become a rapper myself, so I decided to write my first rhyme, called "Crayons." It had the same rhyme scheme as "Colors," but instead of rapping about gang warfare and cops, I just talked about the many colors of crayons. Little did I know that this would be the genesis of my hip hop obsession.

Many things have changed in hip hop culture since then. Ice-T started a heavy-metal rock group, Ice Cube is making hit movies, and a guy named Robert Van Winkle became Vanilla Ice. These Ices have one thing in common: They've all had their albums publicly run over by politicians driving bulldozers. (Well, not Vanilla's, but let's hope that happens *real* soon!) The destruction of this material was to prove the point that rap music is dangerous, tasteless, and just all-around bad. A lot of folks throughout the country agreed with the gesture, as it reinforced their preconceived notions about the culture itself. This ignorance still runs rampant with the help of the constant bombardment of media-induced misinterpretations of hip hop's ideals and values, grouping it all together instead of recognizing its diversity and expressive potential. That's unfair.

It's like saying, "I hate the saxophone!" when the only artist you've been exposed to is Kenny G. I mean, hip hop doesn't just talk about Bentleys and Hennessy. Innovation is infinite in this particular culture's tendencies. Its influence in society is great. People are realizing that hip hop is more than planes, chains, and asses that shake. Hip hop is digging in record crates, using old beats and breaks to become the soundscape for an entire generation. Hip hop is holding a big-ass boom box to your face and blasting the new hotness. Hip hop is walking through high school friendless, with broken earphones bigger than your head and a few old mix tapes as your only accomplices. Hip hop is honesty and promises

to stay on the ruff path, no matter how long it is. True Americana, hip hop is standing in a circle with a bunch of friends making fun of each others' mamas.

Good hip hop is original, and for a lot of people it makes this harsh planet a little more digable. Hip hop is free-styling off the top with no rehearsal. It's "Chappelle's Show," "In Living Color," and that new McDonald's commercial. Hip hop is



becoming a Leader of the New School, with new language that isn't just cool — it's def, dope, fresh, and bangin'! Hip hop is political frustration; anyone can see that if they have enough patience. It's late nights in the basement writing a declaration of your own independence, making a prolific statement with one sentence.

Hip hop is finally in the hall o' fame of rock and roll, soul,

funk, and jazz. Hip hop is blues because it has to be. Sometimes, hip hop is the best way to truly express how you feel after a tragedy. Hip hop is loyalty; samples making obscure oldies artists rich off of royalties. Hip hop is a New York subway car in the 1980s. Hip hop does not believe the hype. Hip hop is black, though some of the most popular artists lately are white. Hip hop is *Colors*, *Breakin'*, *Beat Street*, and *Wild Style*. I'm a hip hopper for life because it inspires my inner child. **EW**

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