

Rap/ Hip Hop Culture---GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Definition. The best definition of Hip Hop is the *culture of urban ghettos*. It is the life style of the young people living in the street, promoting self-expression through **music (rappers/scratchers), dance (breakers), graphic arts (tag/ burners) and fashion wear** -- kids originally wear large baggy pants so they can grow up without having to buy new ones. It is also a social attitude where the "posse" is a gang or a family where everyone is interdependent and each member has got his own role. Rap is definitely the *verbal expression of the street people*. It does not need any musical education nor expensive instruments, just a voice and eventually a soundmachine or a turntable. The origins of rap are various, all coming from oral traditions: **the DOZENS, the African griots, the "talk over" or "spoken words" of the Jamaican culture** and the blues and gospel as artistic and verbal ways for the Black people to denounce their condition, but also from any **form of street speech** where people lecture others, for a spiritual or commercial purpose. The break beats were first natural vocal rhythms, what we now call "**human beat box**". Original rap is the speech of DJ's in the club scene, presenting the music they play on turntables and encouraging the public to liberate and dance. The music came to accompany the voice, as a musical and rhythmic background and patchwork of sounds. It now only needs a **sampler to copy**, cut and put sounds together. Lots of pure musicians think it is a robbery and no music ... Compared to traditional record, a rap record can be made quickly at home, with cheap equipment. Although, more and more rap bands realize that acoustic sounds and live musicians on stage give many more feelings and a better show. Then DJ's started to compete with each other and the *social comment* became also a *personal speech for self valorization*. This is where the aggressive attitude comes from in the whole hip hop culture: **be it rapper against rapper, or break(er) dancing against another breaker, every participant has to test his skills and impose himself**. Rap comes from the necessity for a certain social and age group to express its reality and get recognized in the society.

2 History. Hip Hop and rap music were born in the **Black American urban ghettos in the early 80's** and first exported to England, as it was the first natural market for American musical products. When it reached the shores of the rest of Europe in the early 1980's, Africa Bambaata had given more strength to the whole hip hop movement structured around the Zulu Nation, with its rules, its hierarchy and a non violent spirit: it grew up *as a big and strong family*. When Africa Bambaata himself came to Europe, notably in France in the early 1980's, he was impressed by the importance of Black culture, coming from both Africa and the Caribbean. The movement encouraged the youth to gather and express themselves. **In Europe, break dance was the first thing appearing on the public scene as it was probably less violent than the rap itself, which comes from the US most violent ghetto's with its angry lyrics**. Several small underground organizations started organizing rap concerts and US rappers were regularly performing in the clubs of big European cities. European teens started to copy Americans in organizing parties and rapping in English. It was so much fun that they started rapping in their own language. In Europe the movement developed in differentiating from American rap, according to the different social and immigration contexts and the local dominating musical scene. **In England**, the rap wave has rapidly been absorbed by the strong **club scene and has become pop or trip-hop**. There was no urgent need to use it as a strong means of political or social expression, as immigrant communities were already well structured and represented and public and artistic forms of opposition or oppression were already strongly expressed by local personalities or events for instance with the "dub poetry" of Caribbean artists such as Linton Kwesi Johnson. On the other hand teenagers had other ways of expression and opposition with punk and then grunge movements. **In France, the urban youth is not living in the same radical conditions as in the US and they are not politically organized as in the UK. Their suburbs are not real ghetto's and kids are not racially separated** -- Blacks, Arabs and Whites living together in a social systems where they were all going to school and also to university with more equal chances -- and therefore more integrated into society. They did not need to be so violent but still had a lot to say and desperately needed to find their own identity. Rap in French flowed spontaneously, sounded good and was much more explicit than in English. The competition pushed the kids to improve their personal style and to get organized. MC Solaar rapidly emerged probably because of his very open and positive attitude, his strong literary talents and humour. He became the spokesman of a whole generation - not only of the immigrant communities but also of the White middle class teens -- who could not find itself neither in romantic stories nor in pure aggressiveness.