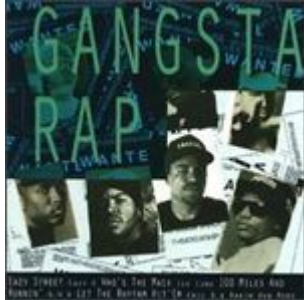


# Verbal Graffiti

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*All tables & figures have been removed!*



More people have been hurt by words than by guns. – Anonymous

The performers of Gangsta Rap lived up to the misogynistic, violence-laden lyrics during 1993, with continuing arrests for murder (Snoop Doggy Dogg), assault misdemeanor (Dr Dre), sodomy (Tupac Shakur), and other shooting incidents (Dogg, Flavor Flav). Incidents of violence are increasingly being reported at local Gangsta Rap "wanna-be" concerts. The lethal lyrics of Gangsta Rap are definitely contagious. The December 11, 1993, Detroit Free Press reports, "Hard-line Rappers Might Be Detroit Cops." "Diary of a Killer Cop," a gangsta-style rap album by Out Cold Cops---purportedly 10 Detroit Police Officers---calls for unlimited head-busting to clean up the streets. Out Cold Cop's lyrics are rough and laced with profanity, racial epithets and violent threats. The group's producer---using the alias "Jerry Flynn" and burying his face behind a blue bandanna, dark glasses and blue baseball cap---insisted that OCC are real officers who must shield their identities to protect their jobs. "They've got badges and guns," the producer said. "If they're harsh, it's because they are not out there patrolling Sesame Street. They are enforcing the law by any means necessary." All members of the group are black and the message of OCC is one of frustration with lawless streets and junior badmen. Gangsta Rap, created in Los Angeles' Compton neighborhood, defines and glorifies the "gangsta" lifestyle, with an unapologetically violent and sexist edge. Hype aside, the lyrics deal with killers and drug dealers (IceT and Ice Cube), political issues (Public Enemy and KRSOne), and stories of black life. Rap has developed into a significant musical and fashion force for white and black listeners and dance remains a big part of the show. Defenders of Gangsta Rap claim the lyrics are protected by the First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of speech and that the intense interest in Gangsta Rap provides the clearest example of talented young artists grappling to rise above the violent inner-city lifestyle depicted in this music. In December 1993, black womens' groups urged a national crusade to persuade the music industry to clean up violent Gangsta Rap lyrics that they say demean and threaten women. In nearly two hours of testimony in a Senate hearing room, they called for picket lines around stores selling violent rap but stopped short of asking for a formal boycott of the records and the radio and TV stations that air them. Delores Tucker, head of the National Political Congress of Black Women, said these groups will put pressure on producers and distributors of rap music to "stop the wholesale marketing of this kind of music across America." Jesse Jackson also has launched a major drive indicting the denigrating influence of Gangsta Rap. Jackson views Gangsta Rap as center stage in the marked increase of violence and black on black crime, a crisis that Jackson calls "the primary civil rights issue of our time." Many black churches and civic groups are joining the anti-Gangsta Rap campaign. In the Chicago Sun Times , columnist Ben Johnson cites the holiday celebration of Kwanzaa as welcomed spiritual strength in facing denigrating forces such as Gangsta Rap. "Adhering to the true spirit of our African roots," he says, "would remove us from the divisive actions that threaten to ruin our community, the dispiriting lyrics of gangsta rap, the burgeoning growth of gangs and violence and disdain by many black youths for education because it somehow means `acting white'" ( Chicago Sun Times 1/1/94). Samuel Tropez, incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary and writing in the award winning prison news magazine, The Angolite , decries the extensive use of the word "Nigga" by and among black inmates: "We are calling each other "nigger," and by doing so we continue to associate ourselves with the part of our heritage that symbolizes degradation, death and oppression." Tropez continues, "Why do we use the word `nigga'? It truly is an ignorant person that lets someone else

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define who they are, what they will be....What about the rap group N.W.A. (Niggas With Attitudes)? This implies that not only are blacks ignorant but they are angry over being ignorant. The group has a point. Many black people are angry for being kept ignorant by an institutionalized racist system. But the point is defeated by using the word "Nigga" (The Angolite, Sept/Oct 1993). Ferlinghetti's Coney Island of the Mind (1958) and Ginsberg's Howl (1956), both long poems attacking the American values of the 1950's, come to mind. These were the first poems to spell America with a hard "KKK." Considered extreme (and revolutionary) in that time, this poetry ran the circuit of coffee houses and student unions. Lacking the televised, blasting stanzas and throbbing mid-tempo beats and graphic copulation-dancing framing Gangsta Rap, these poems now seem tame in their flower-child frame of the late fifties and sixties. Neither nostalgia nor justification can excuse or refute the message of hate, racism, despair and death embodied in the Gangsta Rap game. Nowhere is the temptation to talk nonsense parading as profundity as great as in the poisonous lyrics of Gangsta Rap. Increasingly repugnant to the moral sense of blacks and whites, Gangsta Rap continues to bombard its own with denigration and defeat. Oblivious to the adage that more people have been hurt by words than guns, America's Gangsta Rappers could use another lesson from the 1950's: "Man does not live by words alone, despite the fact that sometimes he has to eat them".\* At the current rate of violence, we may well see the adage above reversed, and the lyrics of Gangsta Rap must take some of the responsibility.

Editor's Update:

Operation PUSH is calling for a 40-day "gangsta rap fast," asking music fans and radio stations to stop buying or playing rap recordings that PUSH says use profanity or promote violence. PUSH Executive Director Janette C. Wilson asked for the temporary moratorium while appearing on a local radio station. PUSH also is planning a seminar billed as a rap summit on February 4 and 5 at its headquarters in Chicago. The call has drawn criticism from fans of hip-hop music, which ranges from the alternative rap of Arrested Development to the gangsta rap of Ice Cube and Snoop Doggy Dogg. \*Democratic Presidential nominee Adlai E. Stevenson, Denver, September 5, 1952

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