

# The Evolution of Modern Rap Music

By: Claire Xiao

Sex, Drugs, and Money. Desirable, right? The appeal of lyrical rap music (not so appealing to all), can historically be credited to these components. These respective aspects of Rap music have been the overwhelming foundation for the stylistic, lyrical manipulation that has been present in the industry since the rise of the genre. The common perception of rap as a genre is highly stereotyped and misinformed, making its evolution minimally remarked. Historically, iconic rappers have risen to fame by exploiting the insight of the life of a famous music artist and glorifying morally debatable actions. However, in the past decade various artists have begun to gain recognition for their divergent use of lyrics to depict and reveal social stigmas, racial tensions, and hardships that minorities continue to face in modern society today. [This evolved form](#) of a traditional and celebrated form of artistic expression now has become fused with politics and social opinions to become a platform of influence. Modern rap music has progressed from praising the lavish, unrealistic, and immorally idealistic behaviors of those who have rose to fame from impressing the industry, to using artistic and stylistic components in exposing social injustices, hardships of racial minorities, and political views that are integrated in clever, lyrical manipulation.



In recent years, influential and critically acclaimed rap artists have become highly recognized and respected by not only fans of traditional Rap music, but music fans of all genres. Artists such as Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole have risen to fame by releasing inventive and unique stylistic music that appeals to listeners by combining traditional rhythmic elements with modern lyrical elements. The Grammy award winning album released by Kendrick Lamar, [To Pimp a](#)

[\*Butterfly\*](#), is a precise example of modern rap that exemplifies all the components that have become respected and recognized. Lamar discusses his adolescence and rise into fame in a manner that exposes the negative aspects and hardships that he faced as an African-American rap artist, however he establishes himself as a unique and different artist by rooting his music in his ancestry and history and incorporating his modern lifestyle to his origins in the “hood”. Although Kendrick Lamar is seen as a mainstream Rap artist who exploits the common struggle of the minority population by many, these critics are fueled by the idea that Lamar solely uses these components in his music for personal benefit and to gain recognition. This question of authenticity in his progression of lyrics has been debated, however Lamar’s music can be seen as a source of social reformation. [\*By calling attention\*](#) to social and political injustices that run rampant in American society, he brings awareness that would likely be unachievable without the medium used.

Although Kendrick Lamar is arguably the most influential artist of the modern era, other artists such as J. Cole provide evidence of the substantial change in the connotation behind the lyrical elements of Rap Music. Cole is a leading artist in the music industry that differs from Lamar in that he has simultaneously evolved with the changing cultures and social standards of society. His individual music is evident of societal standards, and can be recorded and seen by his various albums. His initial albums that can be credited to his rise of fame were much more dependent on rhythmic regularities rather than clever and artistically unique lyrical components. However, with the release of his new album, [\*4 Your Eyez only\*](#), elements of modern rap that Cole has instituted prevail in the lyrics present. Cole goes from rapping that is parallel with traditional rappers and elements, to present day parallelism with the idea that music artists can use their voice and influential reach to establish a platform for social and political revolution. Critics of

modern rap music claim that lyrics have gotten more and more vulgar while becoming less meaningful and artistic. However, this can be discussed by evaluating the new found divide in rap music in modern society.

Critics make the fateful mistake of failing to broaden their respective views of the genre as a whole, and the opinions and claims made regarding the meaningless and inherently bad nature of the lyrical elements fail to accommodate for the gaping divide between the two schools of modern thought. The first type of rap music, the point of major contention over the change in rap, continues to remain consistent with traditional elements and parallels the lyrical elements. This genre has evolved to become known as [trap music](#), originating in Atlanta. The crucial principle in this, however, is that although lyrical elements are remaining stagnant in trap music, the rhythmic elements continue to advance. Trap music is the source of [scrutiny](#) that modern rap music faces in society, as the songs consist of glorifying illegal actions and blatant sexism. With reason, these critics have reasonable confusion groundwork for the claim that trap music has remained the same, however these individuals severely lack understanding and appreciation for the genre and cultural value of the music that respective artists produce. Even though certain fundamentals correspond, the overwhelming amplitude of the effect and impact of the music have inarguably faced change. Rhythm and beat are profoundly emphasized in the creation of all genres of music, not solely rap. Historically, artists such as Nas and The Notorious B.I.G created monotonous beats that were made to complement the lyrics and rhythm created by the pronunciation and timing of those respective words. However, under the influence of other developing genres such as pop and electronic music, beats and rhythms have begun to evolve to incorporate increased focus on aspects of treble and bass that immerse the listeners into the full experience of the song. The second type is the focus of the evolutionary nature of modern rap

music discussed previously, where lyrical elements are highly emphasized with variability in the stylistic elements. Words have changed from destructive influences to political and social platforms that aim to concurrently change with the current issues in the world today. Rappers have become icons that represent adversity and resilience by exposing the hardships and struggle of their upcoming to fame, and this allows for societal and political partition (such as race, socioeconomic classes, etc.) to become a major focus.

Music, like all things, evolves to accommodate for the changing values and structures that influence its effect and outreach. The rise in political and social outreach of modern society with increasing technology have allowed for rap artists to use artistic and creative ways to use their lyrical elements to influence and reach out to society. Traditional features of the widespread, creative genre focus on extravagant and wasteful behavior that was evidence of the moral degradation that many felt riddled the artists who released their music. However, powerful artists such as Kendrick Lamar have broken through social stigmas of lyricism and defined a new era of Rap music that would be characterized by influential stylistic components in addition to contemporary and urban lyrical components. Rap music has officially changed for the better, in today's society there is a crucial function that it plays in exploring the outreach and exposing the political and social faults that severely need to be acted upon. Words call for action, and action calls for change. Just how influential can modern rappers become?

Claire Xiao

Mentor Texts

The author, Vikas Bajaj, is an editorialist who frequently submits pieces to the *New York Times*, and discusses a variety of topics such as American politics and ideologies as well as social and environmental issues that the modern world faces. “[The Deadly Problem of Air Pollution](#)” is an article in which the international issue of air quality in cities is criticized and qualified to analyze the source and potential solutions of air pollution in major cities. Throughout the duration of the article, Bajaj makes a simple, concise claim that he then qualifies and evaluates further in his article. The analysis of his claims all lead to strong elements that influence the reader to believe in all of the information presented, and overall leads to a thoroughly more effective article. Throughout my editorial, I utilized Bajaj’s component of claim and evidence to present ideas in an orderly, distinct format that would effectively influence the reader’s perspective on the topic of the editorial. I presented a modern rap artist, and described and analyzed how his music and lyrics reveal social inequality and political unrest in the minority population of the United States. In another article written by Bajaj, “[Donald Trump in Bollywood](#)”, he presents the opposing viewpoint in a manner where he discredits the contrasting opinions with strong evidence and analysis that increases the effective nature of his argument. The importance of presenting the alternate viewpoint is crucial also because it allows for the author to have an increased visage of confidence and credibility that is established with the readers of the editorial. In my editorial, I consistently presented the alternate, negative view on modern rap music and discredited the claims with direct evidence of the evolution present in the world of music today.