

AFRICAN AMERICAN RAP CULTURE AS
A METAMORPHOSIS OF ORALITY
IN BLACK LITERATURE

BY

AMINU SEGUN
013101007

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**AFRICAN AMERICAN RAP CULTURE AS A
METAMORPHOSIS OF ORALITY IN
BLACK LITERATURE**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES,
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OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
(M. A. LITERATURE IN ENGLISH)**

BY


AMINU SEGUN

049101007

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this study was carried out by Aminu, Segun of the Department of English Studies, Faculty of Arts, Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba-Akoko.



Dr Sola Owonibi

03-12-14

Date

External Examiner

Date

DECLARATION

I formerly declare this thesis to be the outcome of my research work carried out on some lyrics of Rap music by some rap icons in the United States such as: Grandmaster Flash and Furious Five, Amiri Baraka, Naz, 2-Pac and 2 Live Crew.

I also declare that I made use of other people's materials either in form of direct quotations or general reference. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are acknowledged by means of reference.



Dr Sola Owonibi

Supervisor

02-12-14

Aminu Segun

Student

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the glory of God Almighty, and also to my wife, Abiola Olabisi Aminu, a woman in a million.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give thanks and glory to God Almighty who has seen me through this journey. I thank my Dad, Mr Isaac Olaniran Aminu and my Mum, Late Mrs Margaret Aminu for laying a solid academic foundation for me in life. I am heavily indebted to Dr Shola Owonibi, my supervisor, for not only guiding me through this study but also scolding me even when I was being lazy. I will never forget the Late Professor Tayo Olafioye, for arousing my interest in African-American Literature, which subsequently spurred me to undertake this study. My thanks also go to Dr Z. A. Adejumo, Professor Jolayemi, Dr (Mrs) Oloruntoba Oju, Dr Ojo, Dr Busuyi Mekusi, Dr Okunrinmeta, Late Dr Mike Aliu, Dr Ilori, Dr Olumuyiwa, all my teachers, who will continue to remain dear to my heart.

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ABSTRACT

Rap music is a derivative of the oral forms of literature, which is man's original medium of self-expression and artistic creativity. Rap music (Rhythm and Blues) is a highly prolific component of a popular culture, which has served as a means of expressing the plight of the black man in a predominantly prejudicial white society. Prior to the advent of written culture, orality was to a very large extent, the main mode of transmitting information and passing down history and legends from one generation to another. This work takes a critical look at the rap music of some black artists and their exploitation of the medium of orality in the United States. A critical look at the works of some rap icons such as Grandmaster Flash and Furious Five's "The message" Amiri Baraka's "Dope", NAZ's "I can", 2-Pac's "Trapped", 2 live crew's "In the Dust" and others, show that they are more of a chronicles of the various happenings in recent times without any recourse to their glorious source, which is oral literature. This no doubt has adverse effect on the quality and richness of the music. This study therefore traced Rap music back to oral literature with a view to reposition it by linking it to its root.

The data for this study were extracted from the lyrics of songs of selected rap artistes in the United States which were subjected to critical analysis.

The study discovered that although rap still remains a medium of expression by these artistes in fighting oppression, segregation and prejudice, it has moved away from its sources as it no longer reflects the oral literary forms, which used to be the poetic foundation that gave it its rich rhythm and force.

In conclusion, whichever way it is viewed, rap has advanced the course of blacks, not only in America but all over the world. This potent means of expression however is no longer reflecting orality in black literature from which it originated. This may definitely have adverse effect on this traditional form of black literature. The study concludes that rap artistes should make recourse to oral literary origin of the music as they draw inspiration from social realities around them.

Keywords: Orality, Music, Rap, Creativity, Rhythm

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RAP CULTURE

African American rap culture is a very significant and important aspect of the life and literature of the African-Americans. This is because rap came as a result of the elongated measure of exposure to slavery, segregation and prejudice. According to Brion Davids, the literature of a people is unarguably the vehicle for projecting the experiences and feelings of the people concerned. African American literature has always been regarded as the literature of slavery, protest and the undying quest for equality. Brion Davids (2003:42) in the book, *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery further asserts that:*

The connections before America Anti Slavery movement and the idea of colonization were extraordinary complex and have seldom been explained with sufficient clarity by historians

It is apposite to note here that the African American rap culture which will be discussed in this work revolves round the virtual usage of the oral medium of communication to express the feelings and perceptions of the African-Americans. The societies in which they find themselves also tend to have a kind of influence on them. The oral medium of the African Americans include Blues, Jazz and Rap. There are

also ballads, work songs/spade songs, gospel and the spirituals. These help to define the nature of orality in African American culture. A glance into the history of African-Americans reveals that they are a people that have their roots in Africa. This is to say that they are descendants of those that were taken away as slaves to the new world by white slavers. Prior to their being taken away, the oral mode of communication remained the dominant mode and the major means of relaying messages in their native African societies. Even in these present times, we still find out that the oral mode of communication and literature is still much cherished in African societies. African history, medicine, science and philosophy has been taught and handed down to generations through the word of mouth, which also includes myths, folktales and legends. The rap culture, as an oral mode of expression, reveals that orality as a mode of literature cannot be taken away from the African-Americans. According to Cheryl L. Keyes in his book *Rap Music, and Street Consciousness* (2004:22).

Poetic speech remains paramount to African American to African peoples in the new world, circumscribing the everyday experience. Essentially, the communicative System that evolved among the African (in Americans) stemmed from their creativity and their will to survive

Oral literature defines the true African-Americans. It is the means through which various shades and style of African American life is explored. Rap culture in this sense, tries to tell us of the recurrent nature of orality in the life and experience of the African-Americans.

1.1 **A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE**

African-Americans are the descendants of former slaves in the United States of America whose ancestors had been transported from Africa to the new world. The nature of the sufferings that they pass through, has in no small measure escalated the acute level of a rapid quest for equality and freedom. African American literature from the colonial period to the present day represents the journey of determination and unrelenting quest for a brighter day that brings about a desired future. In fact it is a journey from slavery to freedom. African American literature reflect every aspect of the life of the African American; social, political, historical and more importantly cultural events tend to constantly shape their literature. The poets, story writers, novelists and orators tend to try utilizing the oral and written medium to express themselves in every facet of life.

Initially the African-Americans had little or no education since their primary duty was to work for their masters. The importance of education was not in any way ascribed to them. The literatures we find

written by them during the slave period were those that were undertaken by great icons like Paul Laurence Dunbar, Phillis Wheatly, and Luay Terry. These and some others were those African Americans that made conscious efforts to study and change the African-Americans status in the united state. The theme of slavery versus freedom tends to be an issue of the interplay of life and death as some of them had to be wasted on various occasions in their fight for emancipation.

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

African American Literature is an outcome of the history of the black people's presence on the American continent today. The literature of African-Americans cannot be fully separated from the experience of slavery and racism which characterised their lives as a community of people whose social, economic and political privileges were tied up with the evil of race and colour. Towards the last stage of the eighteenth century, most black slaves started developing interest in written literature but before this time, they were more interested in the struggle for survival than to spare the time for literary creativity.

Towards 1920's, African American artistic activity, centered in the black community of Harlem, began to spring up. This particular period or decade is known as the Harlem Era. The Harlem Era, according to Carry D. Wintz, (1988:96) was referred to as "primarily a literary and intellectual movement" It could also be referred to as the period of

literary consciousness among the black race in the Harlem. It was known and first called the "New Negro Movement". According to Alian Locke, this refers to a spiritual coming of age. As such, he feels that the Harlem Renaissance transform the social disillusionment to the pride of a whole race.

The Harlem Era showed that Blacks in America now freed from the bondage of slavery, were now able to firmly practice their culture (a way of life) and a collective direction for themselves. It was a time when African-Americans had the opportunity of attending colleges and universities and for the first time, a substantial intellectual class was created.

In his study of Black college graduates, Charles S. Johnson (1938) gives valuable information with respect to the rapid growth of the black intelligentsia in America. He noted that from, all available history between 1826 - 1936, there were 43,821 Blacks graduates of colleges and professional schools in America. The number of black graduates did not rise up until about 1885 and increased rapidly after 1920.

The Harlem Renaissance was believed to have spanned between 1919 till the mid-1930s. The zenith of this "flowering of Negro Literature", according to James Weldon Johnson, came up in 1924. The coming of Harlem Renaissance was between World War I and the Great Depression when almost 750,000 blacks left the south of United States

for urban areas in the north to take up the chance and opportunity of going to school.

The first clear signal of the emergence of the literary flowering of African – Americans emerged in 1921. It was a poem by a ghetto boy, appearing in the Dewitt Clinton High school literary magazine’According to Arna Bontemps (1972:2) “it was noticed that the poem began to see the light of the day among the people mostly during the emergence of a brown boy from the depths of black Harlem with a clear answer to the sad melancholy acceptance of death by a disenfranchised American expatriate fighting in a French regiment”. The poem gained prominence in black school. Six months later, another poem “The Negro Speaks of River” by Langston Hughes (another black youth) was published in “The Crisis” which was a well known organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). The poems, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “I have a Rendezvous With Life” by Langston Hughes and Countee Cullens brought a great steer from the blacks and the white intelligentsias.

The Harlem Renaissance was one of the primarily African-American involvement in the struggle for emancipation. It was basically growing due to the 'support system gained from the black patrons, black owned businesses and publications. Through this mediums, black magazines and newspapers began to be in the

limelight. Examples of such are Charles Johnson's 'Opportunity' magazine and W.E.B. Du Bois's 'The Crisis' Journal Writing of Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen were not left out.

According to Arna Bontemps: "the advent of music in Harlem Renaissance became an overt racial pride that came to be represented in idea of the New Negro, who through knowledge and production of literature, art and music could challenge the pervading racism and stereotypes to promote persuasive or socialist politics, and racial and social integration the creation of art and literature would serve to "uplift" the black race at the particular time when Cullen and Hughes were making their initial bows came an all black musical comedy". Shuffle Along which balance a smash on Broadway.

Arna Bontemps (1972:5) further states that

A happier conjunction could scarcely
Have been made imagined, and the
Impact of this production, the wide
Popularity of its songs, the dazzling
Talents of its performers almost lifted
The boy poets of their feet. Both began
Composing lyrics such as "shake
your Brown feets Liza/shake 'em Liza Chile,"

..... both became stage struck and this

Tenderly impressionable time, and neither
ever completely recovered.

They met and made friends of actors

And dancers in the company.

Songs like “Love Will Find a Way”, I’m Just Wild About Harry”, is always remembered when one thinks about the American cities torn by race riots during the Post-World War I, years in which these songs were produced. Arna Bontemps (1972:5) still talking on the “Shuffle Along” music states that:

Shuffle Along was an announcement,
An overture to an era of hope. It was running
triumphantly near Columbus circle when Marcus Garvey
in a completely different mood, called an international
convention of his Universal Negro Improvement
association to meet in Harlem in August 1921
American cultural history.

The Harlem Renaissance redefined and changed the opinion of how America and the world, viewed African-Americans. Arna Bontemps opines that: the Harlem Era was the evil that changed the image of the African-Americans from rural, undereducated peasants to urban, and enlightened people. Their new identity signified a greater

social consciousness, and African-Americans were well represented in the world stage, expanding their intellectual and social capabilities worldwide.

The development of different songs and poems in Harlem made available a venue for African-Americans of different backgrounds to acknowledge the uniqueness of Black life and culture. With this development the Harlem Renaissance encouraged the new appreciation of folk roots and culture. The folk materials and spirituals provided a rich source for the artistic and intellectual imagination, which freed Blacks from the establishment of past condition. It is as a result of these cultural experiences, a consciousness spring forth in the form of a united racial identity.

1.2 **ON BALLADS, SPIRITUALS, GOSPELS, WORK SONGS AND SPADE SONGS**

Ballads, Spirituals, Gospels, Work Songs and Spade Songs, all these are the major precursors to African American Rap culture. In fact, African American oral culture centers on various happenings during the period of intense slavery. Various modes of orature were churned out to express the feelings, attitude and perceptions of the African-Americans about their terrible experiences.

Ajimuda (2005:10) defines ballads as “a simple poem, that tells a story. It is sometimes in the form of a song”. Ballads are essential aspect

of the oral cultures of African Americans. They are song narratives which tell a story of heroic exploits, or a common place event expressing human emotions. According to Philip Badarin (ed) in *the Norton Anthology of African American literature (1997:276)*: writes that “slave narrators reported mock prayers, mock sermons, and other parodies of various forms of ballads celebrated in the church”. Spirituals are also another aspect of African American oral culture. They are sometimes referred to as Negro spirituals. According to Philip Badarin (ed) in *the Norton Anthology of African American literature (1997:276)*.

Negro spirituals are the religious songs sung
By African American since the earliest days of
Slavery and first gathered in a boo in 1801
By the black church leader Richard Allen.
As scholars have observed this term (276)

Different types of spirituals abound in African American oral tradition. These include songs like “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord”, “City Called Heaven”, “Walk Together Children”, “I Know Moon – Rise and Didn’t My Lord Delwer Daniel”. The Negro spirituals, during the period of slavery served as a form of metaphysical escape to a place of freedom and happiness. The songs were sang not just in spiritual worship but throughout the day. They were meant to serve as powerful shields against the values of the slave holders and their bestial

acts towards blacks who were not regarded as having human status. "This world is not my home" was a steady theme in the earliest spirituals of African-Americans. Gospels as an African American oral medium has a very striking resemblance to spirituals. In another sense gospels can be regarded as having only a slight difference from spirituals. They are both sacred black spiritual songs and constitute a variety of forms within African American orature. According to Geneva Smith (1975) "the origins of African American vernacular tradition and sacred style are "rural and southern". According to Philip Badarin in the *Norton Anthology of African American literature* defines gospel as "Styles of singing and playing instruments that exact a powerful impact on the way church musicians conceive their task. (255)" Examples of gospels in African American oral traditions include "take my Hand Precious Lord", "I Am Going to Live the life I Sing about in My Song" and "an Old Ship of Zion". Very notable icons in African American gospels include Sterling A. Brown, Dorsey and Tindley.

Work songs or spade songs are songs sang and recited on Sterling plantations. They serve as sweat occupations that define the sub human life of a slave. Work songs fall in what is regarded as vernacular traditions of the African American. These songs and the rhythms were often expressed by virtuoso singers and wordsmiths whose underground talents unseen by a broader society are celebrated in the world which they

reign as men of words. Work songs help to synchronize work pace and to reflect on the scene the workers witnessed. The different types of work songs include "Pick a Bake of Corn", "Go Down Old Hannah", "and Can't You Line it".

1.3 **BLUES, JAZZ AND RAP**

Blues is another form of African American orality which began during the late nineteenth century and extended to the early twentieth century. Scholars of African American orature assert that this music utilises harmonic means, structural devices, and vocal techniques from work songs and spirituals. According to Lahamisha Patricia Brown (1942:63).

The debt African American poetry owes to African American Music, including, songs from the blues and Spirituals through jazz, has been discussed by main critics. African American poetry, like much of African American cultural expression exists of dualities and syncretism.

As a form and style, blues most likely first appeared in the 1890s, a quarter century after the Civil War (1861 – 1865) officially ended slavery in the United States. It came to be known through compelling rhythmical sound that relies on patterns of call response form. Various types of blues include "Good morning Blues", "It's a Low Dirty Shame", and "Sunny Land".

the same vein, African American oral culture, also explores the concept of Jazz. Jazz, as a form of orature, makes extensive use of wind instruments like the saxophone. It is believed that Jazz as a type of music was first developed by African Americans around the first decade of the 20th century that has an identifiable history and distinct stylistic evolution. Jazz then grew up alongside the blues and popular music, and all these genres overlap in many ways. Nevertheless, critics generally agree about whether Artists fall squarely in one camp or another. Jazz these days is a celebrated form of music that develop primarily as a city phenomenon.

In an attempt to capture in music, the cadences, voices, and even the rising skylines of new urban America, Jazz serves as one of the major progressions towards the ultimate nature of rap. It can also be taken that jazz was the final phenomenon that heralded the all embracing nature of rap. According to Philip Badarin in *the Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997: 55):

Particular jazz was influenced by the tremendous and the music in-motion of the modern train the beautiful machine that seems to have presented both the power and the promise of moving away from the land where ones parents and grand parents have been slaves and the resemblance of such earlier train images in the spirituals.

The ultimate concept of rap which forms the invent of our discourse, here, was a fairly recent phenomenon. Jeff Chang wrote that: It

emerged in the United States black urban centers in the 1970s and 1980s. Rap, which is a very essential element of hip hop and African American orature, takes its peculiarities from the forceful and distinct nature of its mode. Rap draws from jump rose rhymes and other game charts and song. According to Jeff Chang (2003:194) in the book *"Can't Stop, Won't Stop"*.

Hip hop had been reduced to a kid friendly
Broad way products scrubbed clear for prime-time,
Force fitted into one-size fits-all. But the style tribes
of Harajuku would have scoffed at this stuff. Hilly
wood had broadcast hip-hop onto tiny islands
In the pacific and to teeming working-class ethnic
Suburbs in Europe, but the sport shined thing
increased the craving for the real thing.

Rap, till date, is been interpreted as Rhythm and blues. It combines the features of both mediums to bring about the needed urban effects. Rap as a feature came from different sources; like the Black Arts Movements and their popular poetry writers like Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Jayne Cortez, and Gill-Scott-Herori. These people performed various lines with unmitigated dexterity.

1.4 PERIODS IN THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ORATURE

A proper understanding of the various periods that characterized the oral enterprise of the African American community will be needed to

assist our understanding of the nature of rap and its present status in the affairs of blacks in the American society. These periods though do not represent a sharp delineation from one another, they however try to define the different stages present in African American oral literature. The periods include the Middle Passage, the Antebellum period, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Protest Movement. These are the emergence of the more recent periods that predate rapping phenomenon in the African-American community.

The Middle Passage tells the story of the transplantation of the African American from Africa to the new world. Quite a lot of African-Americans of the colonial period were slaves that only tried to secure education and literacy in the English Language. Their literary output and their struggle for freedom testify to the nature of slavery in colonial America.

The Antebellum period (1800 – 1965), ushered in a very stiff resistance to slavery. Very many blacks became literate and they began to write tales about the brutality and inhumanity of slavery. There were more and more collaborations between the two races (black and white) on various developmental projects. The resultant abolition of slavery did not truly succeed in putting a distinct halt to the suffering of the blacks as they were also largely denied of various jobs, education and housing during the Antebullium period.

Other periods include the Harlem Renaissance and the Protest Movements, which saw the emergence of African American like Martin Luther King, and Malcon X. The black pantler movements also contributed to the present status of Rap in African American orature.

Rap as a mode of rapid expression defines the true nature of the American society during the time it came into existence. This is a society where racism is highly practiced. Tupac, in one of his many rap songs, titled 'Changes' asserts:

I see no changes

All I see is racist faces

These and many other Rap music have sprung up in the continuous quest for an unbiased measure of freedom. Blacks in America now through rap music do so much to ensure that the American public or the white race in America give the right attention to them. The enterprise of rapping took much straight concentration from blacks but nonetheless, this is a major part of their life. It is in doing this that the world around tends to understand the issues or the affairs going around them.

What seems clear upon listening to the words created by black poets in English or critical oral medium is that the production of orature; this was the central arena in which persons of African American descent could or could not establish and redefine their status within the human community. The black community had to represent themselves as

speaking before they could be recognized by the white society. It is important to note here that slaves in America were chained even in the mouth and this should have served as the impetus to express their desire for freedom. They were unable to say or have a say in everything. Hence the unlocking or release of these chains from their mouth, which is the only means to orature brought about an uncontrolled outpour and outburst of their feelings and disposition. The African Americans have been silenced for too long and their literature and orature reveals a lot about this. In a bid to facilitate the emancipation of African-Americans, various mode of poetry were churned out by great African American poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Zora Nearle Hurston. African American orality extended to what we now hold to be rap. The mode of creativity of the orature so explored, this is because their message of the eighteenth century was dearly freedom.

1.5 **THE MENTAL PROWESS AS THE HARBOUR OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ORALITY**

The oral medium as a means of communication has quite a lot to do with the mental hemisphere. Owing to the fact that African Americans had little or no knowledge of the English Language, the only mode of expression became oral. Here we find them in various wore songs and travel songs. Orality in African American literature also abounds in critical essays. According to Killens J. Oliver. and Jerry Ward JR,

(1992:22) 'The people of the black south were closer to their African roots, in its culture, its humanity, the beat and rhythms of its music, its concepts of family, its dance and its spirituality. W. E. Burgharatt in Du Bois's Black Reconstruction in American. (1995:3) wrote that "it was thus the black worker that laid a founding stone for a new economic system in the 19th century".

The context of rap in African American orality remains a celebrated phenomenon as it serves as a weapon to fight for equality and freedom. Nonetheless, it has extended beyond the scope of slavery and racial discrimination. Rap has emerged to become one of the most extolled genre of music and a very crucial aspect of African American oral literature.

1.6 RESEARCH PROBLEM

In this study a critical look at the works of some rap icons such as: Grandmaster Flash and Furious Five's, "The message", Amiri Baraka's "Dope", NAZ "I can", 2-Pac's "Trapped", 2 live crew's "In The Dust" and others, show that they are chronicles of the various happenings in recent times without a recourse to their glorious source which is oral literature. This no doubt has adverse effect on the quality and richness of the music. This study therefore traces Rap music back to oral literature with a view to reposition it by linking it to its root.

1.7 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is carried out against the background of the fact that the African American rap music that should be a veritable source to make recourse to in terms of oral literary expression has become mere chronicles of day to day events. This research believes that the rap culture must be encouraged to go back to its glorious past of reflecting more of oral literary expression it originated from.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research is justifiable because it is carried out to fill some of the gaps unfilled by researchers in Nigerian universities in recent times with respect to the oral origin of rap music in the United States.

1.9 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is restricted to Five (5) African-American rap artistes based in the United States.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Lyrics of songs of selected rap artistes in the United States like Grand Master Flash, Furious Five, NAZ, 2-Pac and others are selected for the purpose of this study. Relevant lyrics extracted from the albums of the artistes under study are given critical analyses. The internet and relevant literature are equally consulted.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ORALITY AND RAP IN VARIOUS WORKS

Societal problems and the unjust treatment of blacks have been identified as some of the many factors that brought about the increase of rap. The word Rap, which is identified as Rhythm and Blues, rhythm because it appeals to your soul and person, Blues for the fact that it utilizes distinct punch lines that cannot but be noticed; sometimes been used interchangeably with hip-hop. This is due to the defining similar characteristics of both forms of creativity as oral expressions. According to Edgar H. Tyson, (2003:5) in his essay Directions on Rap Music.:

The increase in the volume of research on rap music has occurred primarily in although a variety of other disciplines such as literature, cultural studies communication and Education have also begin to publish research or rap music with some regularity. Arguably rap music has become the most effective and successive means of urban expression and communicating messages to the adolescents and adults (5)

One might meaningfully say that the concept and overwhelming characteristics of Rap did not just suddenly come into being, that its evolution was not as a result of urban expression and racial discrimination alone. In chapter one, we tried to establish the fact that the rap culture was a significant mode of expression the oral culture of the earliest African Americans writers. These literary figures include Paul Laurence Dunbar and Luaj Terry. These and more are some of the prominent African-Americans that have in one way or the other distinguished themselves in the enterprise of black literature.

For the purpose of our study, the post colonialist discourse will form the rivet of our discussion on the rap medium of African American orature. Post colonialism, as a modern theoretical concept is predicated on the reactions, reflections and reminiscence of colonialism not only in Africa but also in other places where there are blacks in large numbers.

Peter Barry, (1993:195) in his book, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Critical Theory*, identifies the three major phases of post colonialism as a literary theory. These stages are the adopt, adapt and the adept phases. They tend to define the development stages of post colonially significant medium.

Initially, African American orature was characterized by a slow and rickety cry towards emancipation. This is evident in the blues, ballads, spirituals, work songs and spade songs that were discussed in the

previous chapter and by extension that which we find around. Blues for example, as a form of escape gave a rather cosmetic approach to the act of slavery and segregation. There was no conscious effort to fight back and adore their person or human integrity. According to Bill Stepaney (2003) "hip-hop was not just "fuck you" to the white society it was also 'fuck you' to the previous Black generation as well. Peter Barry (1995:195) asserts that the era of ballads, spirituals and work songs can be regarded as the period of unquestioned acceptance of the authority of the slave master. This era typifies the act of fear and power. It was a juxtaposition of inferiority against superiority. According to Peter Barry (1995:195):

This can be called the "adopt" phase of colonial literature, since writer's ambition is to adopt the form as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity

The slave or ballad singers in the stance tend to hold the belief that blacks are meant to be subsumed or submissive to whites. According to Peter Barry (1995:195): the second phase

can be called the adapt" phase, since it aims to adapt the European form to the African subject matter thus assuming partial right of intervention in the genre

This phase, in African American orature, can be regarded as the stage when African-Americans were beginning to regain control and stabilize their being. African-Americans tend to have an undiluted pictorial figment of their personhood. Happenings that define this stage include the American civil War that lasted 1861 - 1865. African-Americans at this time began to get a new interpretation of their personhood and existence. A new and definite status about their human status sprang up. It should be noted that one of the reasons for the resolute engagement of African Americans in the civil war was to bring about emancipation to themselves and the upcoming generation. One notable figure of this war was Captain Ander Calloux of Company E, Regiment Louisiana Native Guards. According to Stephen J. Ochs (2001:31):

Calloux had been one of the first black military heroes of the civil war, an officer in the first black regiment officially mustered into the United States Army

Stephen also wrote that:

From the day
he first held
a bayonet, the
negro became
a citizen of the
United States (31)

The third and final phase was the “adept” phase. This was the stage where African-Americans have evolved into a totally different people entirely. They have become a hybrid of various traditions and cultures culminating in the evolution of a distinct identity. Adept can be viewed as a state of being skillful and highly proficient at something. Peter Barry (1995:195) while discussing the final phase wrote that:

The final phase is called the “adept” phase since its characteristic is the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent “adept” in the form, not a humble apprentice as in the first phase or a mere licensee as in the second. This stress on cross – cultural interactions is a fourth characteristic in post colonial criticism.

This final phase seems to have taken its toll on African American orature. Concepts like Blues, a form of Black music, that originated towards the end of the eighteenth century, is one of the major precursors to the third phase. The final phase saw the coming of Jazz and ultimately Rap. Rap as distinct sect of black music and orature has truly distinguished the African American. It can be said to be the end product of the previous stages discussed. According to Tony Mitchell (2002:65).

These analyses were also made more evidently the fact of those who assume these popular productions. Not belonging to an undifferentiated mass but to a multilayered and varied path work of sub groups reach with his own interests.

Gospels as a form of escape is also effectively represented in African American orature. As one of the earliest means of African American orature, gospels were highly regarded and practiced. As a rather slow and somewhat melancholic medium, gospels were sung with much interest and vigour. Some striking similarities however exist between gospels and spirituals. Both are born and nurtured in the content of ritualized Christian worship, and yet both comment widely on the circumstance of black life in America. According to Sterling A. Brown (1940:18).

These singers fight the devil by using what have been considered the devil's weapons tambourines, cymbals, trumpets and even trombones and bass fiddles are now accepted in some churches. The devil has no right to all that time rhythm, so a joyful noise is made unto the Lord with bounce and swing

Blues came to being at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was actually observed in New Orleans and some other places in America that noticed this. As a type of black folk music, the blues were considered to be a medium that transmitted a blood force, a cultural rather than a purely individualistic experience. The songs represent the collective yearnings and feelings of African American people. The singer transmits a communal consciousness and nostalgic feelings to the listeners. Various shades of familiar idioms and saying are utilised to carry the emotions of the audience along. The blues reflect the chief characteristic

of African music, in particular dupe rhymes, improvisation and syncopation. According to Philip Badarin in the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*; "TELL OLE PHAROAH, LET MY PEOPLE GO", *African American History and Culture 1808 - 1865* (1997:570).

The melody for each line is typically condensed into a little more than two measures of the four measured phrase; this allows for a pause or "break" - at the end of each vocal line, during which the accompanying instrument (guitar, piano or instrumentals ensemble) improvises the singer interjects spoken asides, such as "oh Lordy," "Yes, man," "Oh, play it", etc. The resulting Effect is that of call and response the instrumental improvisation representing the response" to the voice call

The singer improvises by using a device in the blues pattern called "worrying the line" that is he or she may slightly shorten or lengthen the repeated line by using words that differs slightly from those in his or her first, personal statement line.

Lahamisha Patrica Brown (1942:29) writes that:

Orality is a communal expression: African American audiences talk back to movie, Screens, television screens, and radio as of the speakers were physically

present. The "amen corner" translates into the seal tar
sphere at every concern venue and at theater
performances as well. Call elicits response from
African American vernacular culture. A written
text can function as a call. Text can call and respond
to each other as well as to their readers. Individual
writers provide variations on common vernacular
and literary themes. In the matter of individual

Brown tries to explain that African-Americans are a distinct oral
audience that takes pride in their rich oral culture. Their personhood and
being are defined by the oral mode of literature. In another instance she
avers that: "The African American writer condenses regularizes African
American orality by bringing it into the realm of the printed word". In
African American culture a literary work exists to be performed". The
enterprise of orality form the various forms of music and poetry in the
African- American society.

Journeys and migrations were very much a part of the African
American oral culture as blacks were said to have moved to different
places in the quest to secure freedom and prosperity. In fact the story of
the black begins in the East as there were several deliberations on what
the course and history of African-Americans will be. Many times their
reason for the journeys was to look for places where they could find

succour and happiness, but there were situations when these people are apprehended and sent back into slavery. On some occasions adverts were placed in newspapers to call the attention of the owners of slaves to come and claim their slaves.

According to Quintard Taylor (2001:41):

Black people had been traveling west long before the Philadelphia convention. The first to enter came from the region of Mexico beginning in the 1600s these Spanish Northern frontier, helping to found cities from San Antonio to San Francisco. They moved there to better their – something they found difficult to do in the Mexican interior, where success and social status were dictated.

Rap as a prominent aspect of life in Black America urban centres draws from many sources, especially African music forms. Rappers themselves often hate African musical forms and their underlying sensibilities as some of their sources of inspiration and motivation. It will be recalled the African American Rap mode presents orature in a rich and definite manner. It is crucial to note that like its predecessors, which include rhythm and blues, jazz and other forms, Rap as it is, is also in group ritual music performance. This is actually why in many instances we have had cases like gangster Rap and lyrics. *According to Philip Badarin in the Norton*

Anthology of African American Literature (1997:60).

Many Rap performances, drawing directly from Vernacular sources, describes (sometimes in the Bawdiest of terms) sexual quests and imagined conquests along with fantasies of power, mobility, and access to money and its trinkets. One strain one strain of this music sometimes called “gangsta rap” offers raw and can cause testimony in language often intentionally offensive in its blunt vulgarity, brutal sexist diction and occasional anti-semiticism

Jeff Chang (2003:128) explains that:

The audiences had moved on from Bronx sound-system battles and outdoor jams to the drinking age uptown nightclubs depriving b-boys and DJs of their competitive setting. At the same, disco nightclubs DJs in Harlem were finding success by adapting the Bronx rap styles and mixing techniques into their gigs, entering a more sophisticated version of the Bronx beat for a maturing crowd.

Jeff Chang tries to celebrate and romanticize the rap mode in the extract above. It was a very marketable phenomenon there were DJs and the yarning crowds to give the needed spice of the lyrics. DJs are seen moving about with few records of rap to play in one party or another. Indeed, the rapping revolution, the final and most effective phase of Peter Barry's post colonial critical literary theory started. Blacks were seen

celebrating and jubilating in various bars and outlets, regardless of the prevalent segregation and discrimination. A distinct form of orature that will speak powerfully not only to the white society but also to the entire American public had come into existence.

Various shades of Rap and hip hop works beginning to emanate from the African-Americans. Outside the floating of rap music, Roxy Reagan's recession had bloated unemployment out to the highest level since the great depression. There were over 30 million unemployed youths and there was a desperate need and search for work. The official black unemployment rate hit 22 percent. Poverty was also soaring to the heavens as there was little or no effort to curb it. Black poverty hit a twenty - five year peak in 1983, with 36 percent of the population long below the poverty level. It was highly worse and pronounced among the young people. One estimate was that only one in five New York City teens was employed and much worse only one in ten African-Americans

had a job. Jeff Chang (2003:178) writes that:

“that message” released just weeks after the “Roxy” opened was a down tempo tract that perfectly captured that after-dawn crash when the buzz wore off. It was credited to Grandmaster flash and the Furious Five, but the story behind that naming revealed other tensions as well. The song was a home-studio concoction of Sugar Hill Song writer house percussionist Ed “duke Bootee” Fletcher, featuring a memorable synthesizers hook from Jiggs

It is revealed that Grandmaster Flash and the rappers felt the song had no energy, that the lyrics would get them booed off stage by their hardcore fans.

Orality in Black literature has truly affected the rapping enterprise. This is evident in the rap songs of different black rappers a look into the works of rappers like NAZ, Tupac Shakur, and Jay Z shows that rap has now taken vulgarity and casual slangs in the course of rendering the lyrics as their mode of orature. In fact they are said to define the true nature of rap. Rap as a concept, took its toll, from great African-Americans like Grandmaster Flash and Grand Wizard Theodore, these two were amongst the earliest rappers the rocked the boat of the concept of African American rap culture. In the year 2000, Rapper Busta Rhymes performed in Las Vegas for a BET (Black Entertainment television), party this event amongst also Assisted in boosting the image of Africa American rap culture.

These days it is no longer new that the rapping medium of orature is the end product of the long exposure of African American to slavery and segregation, which brought about concepts like blues, ballads, work songs and spade songs. The earliest work on rap recorded was that by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five "The Message", this was done in 1982. The song served as the spring board of other entire known rap artiste like MC Hammer, Amiri Baraka a widely acclaimed black activist released the piece know as "Dope" the performance of which took the United States of America and the entire world by storm.

A Comparison of the Oral Forms and Rap Mode of Orature

One very significant difference between Rap and the crude oral form of literature that we find in African American literature is that rap music tends to be more forceful and definite. It is highly urban in nature. African American rap culture spells the definite between the period of slavery and these times when the issue of freedom is taken as a right and not a privilege. Dyson (1996) suggests that the art form is in part an expression of the socio-political and cultural reality of both African-Americans societies as well. He however condemns the sexist misogynistic, homophobic, and violent content of rap music. Dyson has however praised the genius nature of rap music.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE ADVENT AND PROPAGATION OF RAP CULTURE

Rap as a mode of music and orature is a fairly recent phenomenon. The word hip was used as part of the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as early as 1904. The word hip was initially meant to be an insult, a debilitating and disrespectful remark, but soon many decided to be identified with it. This owes the increase on the interest in this brand of music. According to Rosen Jody (2006:15):

The term hip hop also followed logically from the Previous African American music culture of "betop" Keith Stephens a rapper with Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five has also been credited with the coming of the term hip hop in 1978. This he did while teasing a friend who had join the US Army, by seat singing it mimicked the rhythmic the marching of soldiers. The marching soliers were then referred to as hip hoppers.

Jeff Chang asserts that Jamaican Born DJ Chive "kool here" Campbell is credited with originating hip hop music while living in the Bronx. After moving to New York at the age of thirteen, he was able to create the blueprint for hip hop music and culture late in his years. He built upon the Jamaican culture of toasting, or boasting impromptu and singing over music which he witnessed as a youth in Jamaica.

Disk Jockeys and rap Mcs generally tapped into the power lines to connect the equipment and perform at ventures such as public basketball

courts and historic building where hip hop was born. A place in New York called 1520 Sedgwick Avenue saw the great exploration of Rap. The equipment of these hip hoppers include numerous speakers, turntables and one or more microphones.

In America early rap has helped to placate the uncontrolled escalation of violence. It replaced physical violence with dance and art work battles. Though rap and hip hop has been tagged as bad and encouraging bad acts, there relevance and importance cannot be entirely ignored. While hip hop music now appeals to a broader demographic populace, media critics has long been disregarded by mainstream American in favour of "gangsta Rap" to prove the way hip hop and rap has bourgeoned in the real nature of African American oral culture.

Previous chapters tried to establish the fact that rap, as an off shoot of African American orality, is more definite and distinct. This is due to the all embracing fact that rap came about as a result of the bestial and dehumanizing treatment meted out to African Americans by an overwhelming white society. Definitely the case of blacks been transported from the point of no return to Europe and the Americas, the elongated period of slavery and servitude has bored deep into the mentality of African-Americans. Violence and urban destruction remains the only means of psychological escape to them. Quite a few took to the writing of narratives, either to give area live picture of what unfolded

during slavery or a real demonstration of it. What is apt here is the medium through which these messages were expressed. The course of orature took another medium which is rap. Though created in the United States by African Americans, hip hop culture and music is now global phenomenon and scope with its tentacles extending as far as Asia and Africa. According to Hip Hop: National Geographic World Music (2005:21)

Youth culture and opinion is meted out in both Israel hip hop and Palestinian hip hop. White France, Germany, the UK, Brazil, Australia, Africa and the Carribean have long established hip hop following from the African American medium.

One African American figure we cannot but consider is Martin Luther King Jr. (Popularly called MLK). He remain a daunting force in African American orality "I have a dream" was repeated for a total of seven times putting a lot of emphasis on the need for equality and freedom. According to him:

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, and its governor having hip hips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today!

The rabidity and consciousness at which this speech was delivered was quite alarming. MLK was discussing his disappointment at the unending rate of discrimination and segregation. He tries to give a true reflection of what is truly going on.

MLK's other great speech is "I have been to the mountain top". He delivered this on April 3 1968, at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple, in Memphis, Tennessee, on behalf of the city's black body of sanitation workers. They were pressing for higher wages and an end to their maltreatment by their white supervisors. Tupac Shakur in one of his rap songs titled "Changes" had lines that read thus:

I see no changes, wake up in the morning
and I ask myself, is life worth living or should
I blast myself.

This talks about the rabid and crazy state of the black man that has little or no hope of survival. They would stop at nothing to see that the needed changes are attended to in the American social setting.

Analysis of some extracted rap songs

Though Grandmaster Flash's "The Message is regarded as the first ever rap work recorded in the music format, in the United States, it actually took the whole of the Bronx, a place largely populated by blacks, by storm. Grandmaster. Flash also received ovation for this song.

Here we shall examine an excerpt from Grandmaster Flash's "The message"

It's like a jungle sometimes that makes me wonder
How I keep from going under
it's like a jungle sometimes that makes me wonder
how I keep from going under
Broken glass everywhere
people pissing on the stars
you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell can't take the noise
got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
rats in the front room, roaches in the black
Junkies on the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but couldn't get far
'cause the man in the two truck repossessed my car
don't push me cause I'm close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head
Ah huh huh huh huh
It's like a jungle sometimes that makes me wonder
how I keep from going under

An analysis of the song reveals that it presents the picture of the pressure of a ghetto and lowly life that shows the living and struggling of the blacks in America. The image and sound of broken glass and the act of "pissing on the stairs", tells of scene of disarray and confusion little or nothing is been done to see to the welfare of blacks. Rats, junkies,

roaches and others tells of a rather helpless and hopeless situation.

According to Tyson (2003:16)

Rap music appears to be a highly socio-political Form of expression. Some rap artistes have used their entrepreneurial talents along with the tremendous potential of par music as a moving force for youth to advocate collective mobilization.

NAZ, in the song, "I can" tries to show the genesis of the white domination of Africa. He tells us here that Africa as a continent had enough power prior to European domination and exploration. The white man had to come and learn from black teachers. According to NAZ:

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NAZ, in the song, "I can" tries to show the genesis of the white domination of Africa. He tells us here that Africa as a continent had enough power prior to European domination and exploration. The white man had to come and learn from black teachers. According to NAZ:

Be, be, fore we came to this country
we were kings and queens, never pouch monkeys
it was empires in Africa called Kush
Timbukutu, where every race came to get books
to learn from black teachers who taught Greeks and Romans
Asian Arabs and gave them gold when
gold was convinced to money it all changed
money then became empowerment for Europeans
the Persian military invaded
they learned about the gold, the teachings and everything sacred Africa
was almost robbed naked
Slavery was money, so they began making slave ships
if the truth is told, the youth can grow
they learn to survive until they gain control
nobody says you have to be gangstars, heroes
read more learn more, change the globe
Ghetto children, do your thing
hold your hands up as many queens
young princess when you get
Ur wedding ring. Then everybody says
she's my queen

In this song NAZ gives an all embracing picture of Rap and its components. Although Rap has a negative image, especially gangsta Rap', the lines above elevate the African component where the African-Americans are from. The song also serves as an advice to the younger ones on the danger and peril of consuming drugs. It would be recalled

that the delay in the freedom of the blacks had exposed the young ones to the dangers of drug and thug life. According to him "I Rap about reality"

Tali Kwali in his music "states" tries to show a clear distinction how the state react to the blacks found wanting in a criminal act.

Tali Kwali in the "state"

You have the emergence in human society

of this thing that's called the state

what is the state? The state is this organized bureaucracy.

It is the po-lice department. It is the Army, the Navy.

It is the prison system, the courts, and what have you.

This is the state – it is a repressive organization

But the state.. and give well, you know,

You've got to have the police, cause....

If there were no police, look at what you'd be doing to yourselves!

But the reality is ...

The police become necessary in human society

Only at that junction in human in human society

Where it is split between those who have and those who aunt got.

Tali Kwali tries to paint the prejudicial nature of how the police are utilised against the blacks in the United State. They are sometimes used to intimidate blacks. Although the police is very necessary in the state they should not be used to intimidate the "have not's".

Extract from 2 live Crew's "in the Dust" has this to say,

I'm stereotyped so I fit the
description
A Nigga has the stigma for pushing
or pimpin
Police harass me and public
embarrass me
They use brutality without asking me
I'm mad cause I was caught and
reached for his license.
Cops pulls the gun (Fires) cold
iced him
And I am a victim of society I got
societal ills
It's harder to pay bill than pop pills
They send a brother off to fight for
your country
When ask for ours we get nothing
I look for work and get my feelings hurt
They got my back against the wall
And my dick is in the DIRT-----

An excerpts from 2 Live Crew's rap song, "In The Dust" shows the fact that, the African-Americans in the United States were intimidated and harassed mostly by the police even when they did not commit any offence. The song shows us how the African-Americans indulge in crime because they are not given jobs, the only means of survival is crime.

An extract from 2 Pac "trapped" has this to say

Walk that city streets like a rap
pack of tyrants too many brothers daily heading
for that big penn Niggas commin' out worse off
than when they went in...

Tired of being trapped in this vicious cycle
if one more cop harasses me I just might go
psycho (Un, un, they can't keep that black man down)
they got me trapped.

Tupac started in a hole, much like most other young black men.
The black hole which he occupied kept him trapped. Tupac tries to paint
police brutality in his single debut album on the racial treatment melted
out on the blacks anywhere they are found.

It would be recalled that most scholars believe that one of the
reasons for the great explosion of Rap was to seek a very reliable means
to end the recurrent nature of violence in Black America. Amiri Baraka
wrote in one of his poems that:

We want poems that kill Assassins
Poem that shoot guns. Poems that
Wrestle cops into alleys and take
Their weapons leaving them dead

Amiri Baraka a very notable figure in the course of black struggle for emancipation wrote many other poems. He was reacting to the recurrent violent happenings in the black community.

At this point, it would be pertinent to discuss what makes rap worth listening to. Hence, we talk about some essential ingredients of rap. According to Campbell and Chang (2005:15): Turntableism 187 refers to the extended boundaries and techniques.

Nigurs are normal dying innovated
By hip hop. The first hip hop
DJ was Kool DJ there who
Created hip hop though the
Isolation of "breaks" the part
Of albums that focus solely on beats

The act of turntableism requires the attention of the skilled hands of DJ. Traditionally a DJ uses two turntables simultaneously. These are connected to a mixer, an amplifier, speakers and various pieces of electronic music equipment. The DJ will then perform various tricks between the two albums, currently in rotation. A DJ differs from a producer of a music track although there is some measure of overlap in the act of the two. In early years of hip hop, the DJs were the stars but their limelight has been taken by MCs in recent times.

The use of Graffiti in the course of hip hop dates back to 1960's in America around the Bronx Graffiti was used as a form of expression by political activists, also by gangs such as Javages skills, La familiar and Savage Nomads to mark territories. Towards the end of the 1960s, the signature of different graffiti writers began to appear. Philadelphia graffiti writers like Top Cat, Cool Earl, and Cornbread were among the prominent graffiti artists. Around 1970 - 1971 the centre of graffiti moved to New York City where writers following the wake of different styles will add their street numbers to their nickname. Bubble lettering also held sway initially among writers from the Bronx; this was done through the elaborate Brooklyn style, again Campbell and Chang (2003:14) wrote that:

Tracy 168 dubbed "wild style" would come to define art. The early trend setters were joined in the 70s by artists like Dondi, Futura 2000, Daze, Blade, Lee- and Zephyr. Break dancing is an early form of hip hop dance, that often involves battles and showing off of skills without any form of physical contact with the adversaries.

Break dancing is a dynamic style of dance, which developed as part of the Rap culture. It started taking form in the South Bronx alongside other elements of hip hop. Slangs like B-Boy and stepping took

their origin from the act of breakdancing. The “B” in B-Boy stands for break, in other words it means break boy or in some instance girl.

Campbell and Chang (2005:16) writes that:

The term B-Boy originated from the dancers at DJ Kool there's parties who save their best moves for the break session of the song getting in front of the audience to dance in a distinctive frenetic style.

A documentary film, titled the Freshest Kids, a history of the b-boy shows DJ Kool describing the “b” in b-boy as Short for breaking, which at the time was a slang for “going off”. Going off was one of the original names for the dance. Break dance came into world stage when it was documented for a release to a World Wide audience for the first time in “*Style Wars*”, it was further given a little more focus in the street fictional film “*Beat Street*”.

The next feature of rap music that we will be discussing is beat boxing. Beat boxing was popularized by Dong E. Fresh. Beat boxing uses the sweet vocal percussion of hip hop culture. It is primarily concerned with the act of creating beats, rhythms, and melodies using the human mouth. The term beat boxing is taken from the first generation mimicry of drum machines. They were then known as beat boxes, as it is a way of

creating Rap music, it is usually categorised under the production element of Rap Campbell and Chang (2003:23) avers that:

There are form enjoyed a strong presence
In the 80s with artists like Denren
“Buffy” the Human “Beat Box”. Robinson
Of the “Fat Boys” and Biz Mackle showing
Their beat boxing great attention
Since the early 80s, marked by the
Release of “make the music”.

Later on, as beat boxing grew into a multi-billion dollar industry, the scope of Rap culture also extended beyond the boundaries of its traditional four elements. As highlighted by KRS-ONE, a rapper of national repute and from the golden age of hip hop: “the traditional four and beat boxing, plus hip hop fashion, hip hop slang, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurship are very crucial aspects of Rap. KRS-ONE also suggests that hip hop and Rap are cultural movements and that there words must reflect this. He expresses the view it that hip hop is here to stay.

3.1 **RAP AS AN EVOLUTION OF A DISTINCT BLACK CULTURE**

As the 1970s gave way to the 80s, a popular culture of hip hop and Rap has to be effectively propagated. The decision to do this existed in

the hands of the masses. For some of them, Michael Jackson and Prince, another hip hop icon and urban dangerous were not ready for MTV. There are needs to have a definite figure that will be shot into fame to clinch such a pedestal. Some ideas are said to have come from bottom-up rather than topdown. Grandmaster Flash was said to be ready figure in this job as he made the complete work on rap and ultimately hip hop. According to Jeff Chang (2005:192):

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RAP CULTURE

Rap as an economic and social enterprise has attracted so much attention in the American society, especially in the context of the African American populace. It is estimated that rap artistes are amongst the richest in the United States of America. No thanks to the nature of some negative and obnoxious aspect of rap which includes gangster rap. Rap artistes have at one time or the other been involved in a major saga and pandemonium such that the integrity of this enviable culture is been called to question. In any instance of these troubles guns and other violent weapons were used. An article in Ebony Magazine (2003:52) on Curtis Jackson's (50 Cent) reveals that he was not nine times in the course of gangsterism and gangster rap:

50 Cent operated profitable drug houses that netted him 150,000 dollars a month and true to a gangster form he wore priceless jewelry, Drove a fleet of expensive cars and systematically set up or robbed his crack dealing competitor without basking a sweat

It is said that his debut album titled "*get rich or die trying*" went triple the platinum chart within the first month of its release, smashing the long established music industry records. The rap industry has also

emerged as one most profitable and rewarding musical sect of all times. According to Kelvin Chappell (2002:20) in his book; the Travail of Rappers:

The 1990s were a significant decade for

Bringing rap music into known prominence

According to the billboard charts "the rapping enterprise is presently estimated at over a hundred billion dollars". Rap has served as a means of employment and job creation for quite a number of blacks both within and outside the United States of America. The economic significance and relevance did not emerge until the late 1980s when a group known as Run DMC and the Hard Rock band Aerosmith collaborated on a version of the song "walk this way". They succeeded in creating a whole new audience that served as the melting point of rap music and introduce it to the rest of the world. Their audience was created from the suburban middle class rock fans. By the end of the 1980s, MTV (Music Television) had created a programme solely dedicated to Rap.

Sean Puffy Combe in another towering figure in African American rap culture. His single "*missing you*" released to honour his late friend Christopher Wallace, also known as (Biggie Smalls) one of the many unfortunate victims of violence in Rap; went ahead to top the chart within two (2) weeks of its release. Chris Waltermann writes that:

The 1990s were a significant decade for bringing rap music into the commercial mainstream. MC Hammer (later known simply as Hammer) went to the top of the charts in 1990 with "Please Hammer Don't Hurt Em", which sold 13 million copies in its first year and became the best selling rap album of all time a broader phenomenon was the harder-edged style known as gangster rap, which emerged on the West Coast beginning in the late 1980s. The multimillion-selling recordings of gangster rap artists such as the group N. W. A. (Niggaz With Attitude), Dr. Dre (Andre Young), Snoop Doggy Dogg (Calvin, Broadus), Tupac (2pac) Shakur, and the Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) combined grim stories of urban street life with gleeful celebration of the "gangsta" lifestyle. Gangster rap became incredibly successful in the

Electronic rap music or techno, also became more widely popular during the 1990s. The genre first emerged in the 1970s. Some aspects of techno were influenced by rap and rock music, others by experimental art music, Jazz, and world music, and still others by black popular music, including funk and rap. Although techno produced few commercial hits running into billions of dollars during the decade, the recordings of musical groups such as the Prodigy, Orbital, and Moby made in-roads into the charts during the late 1990s. Techno recordings were increasingly licensed as the sound tracks for technology - oriented television commercials and films.

The popularity of attentive rock exploded during the 1990s, featuring bands as diverse as R. E. M., Nine Inch Nails, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rage against the Machine, and the Dave Matthews Band. The genre spawned a number of substyles, such as the grunge rock of Seattle-based groups, Nirvana Soundgarden, and Pearl Jam. This attracted a wide range of audience, such that shows were organized to celebrate the influx of different rap starts. There was also the phenomenon of group rapping this has actually been in vogue during the times of Run DMC and Public Enemy. According to Murray Forman (2001:1):

In this description west communicates the irony that even a well dressed professional and prominent intellectual of African American Heritage must confront all the common System of racism of American society.

Forman further states that: "More than any other group., Nirvana was responsible for the commercial breakthrough of "alternative rock" in the early 1990s. Between 1991 and 1994, Nirvana – a group made up of singer and guitarist Kart Cobain, bassist Krist Novaselic, and drummer Dave Grohl – released two multiplatinum albums (Nevermunt an in Utero) and moved "alternative rock's" blend of hard-core punk and heavy-metal act of specially record stores and into the commercial mainstream. Coban's stunning 1994 suicide was widely viewed as at least partly attributable to the pressures faced by alternative rap musicians who

achieve commercial success and then face accusations of “selling out” of trying to manage their fame on a densely populated region in the face of share violence.

The social significance of Rap (On Political and Gangsta Rap)

Murray Forman (2001:1) opines that: “In the late 1980s, a large segment of rap became highly politicised, resulting in the most overt social agenda in popular music since the urban folk movement of the 1960s. Groups like Public Enemy came to prominence with their second album, “*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*” (1988) and the theme song “*Fight the Power*” from the motion picture “*Do the Right Thing*” (1989), by African American film maker Spike Lee, Proclaiming the importance of rap in black American culture. Public Enemy’s lead rapper, Chuck D, referred to it as the “black CNN” (Cable News Network).

During the mid-1980s, rap moved from the fringes of the African music industry as white musicians began to embrace the new style. In 1986 rap reached the top ten on the Billboard pop charts with “(you Gotta) fight for Your Right (To Party!)” by the Beastie Boys and “Walk This Way” by Run – DMC and Aerosmith known for incorporating rock music into its raps, Run – DMC became one of the first rap groups to be featured regularly on MTV (Music Television) also during the mid-1980s, the first female rap group of consequence, Salt – N – Pepa,

released the singles "The show Stoppa" (1985) and "Push It" (1987); "Push It" reached the top 20 on Billboard's pop charts.

Gangsta rap is another feature that came alongside political rap that has rocked the boat of the rap industry. Gangsta rap has to do with the creation of bitter enmity between rap groups and regions such that there is the use of violence and thuggery if the need arises. Major rap figures include the late Tupac Shakur Sean Puffy Combs, Christopher Wallace and Maze. Gangsta rap, attempts to depict an outlaw lifestyle of drugs, and gang violence in inner-city American. In 1988, "*Straight Outta Compton*", the first major album of gangster rap, was released by the Southern California rap group, Niggaz with Attitude (N.W.A). Songs from the album generated an extraordinary level of controversy for their violent images and inspired protests from a number of organizations, including the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation). However, attempts of censor gangsta Rap only served to publicize the music and make it more attractive to both black and white youths. N. W. A. became a platform for launching the solo careers of some of the most influential rappers and rap producers in the gangsta style, including Dr Dre, Ice Cube; and Eazy - E.

Kitwana (2009:5), in his book, *Generation Bibliography*, suggests that some factors have shaped this generation's worldview. One is rap music, which has given black youth culture unprecedented international

visibility while providing the "medium" by which a capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s, which has led to increased income disparities that have hit black Americans disproportionately hard. Third is the persistence of segregation and inequality in wages and salaries, housing, electoral politics, and other segments of society. A fourth factor is the widespread mistrust of and cynicism about the criminal justice system. A fifth involves the ways in which young blacks are portrayed in the mainstream media, particularly in reporting on crime. Finally, there is the reality of relatively high unemployment rates and rates of incarceration, gang activity, gun homicide, suicide, and AIDS. Kitwana suggests that the implications of these factors remain little studied or understood by scholars, journalists, or policy-makers. Further, he argues that an enormous division exists between the hip hop generation and the preceding generation, which was influenced decisively by the black Church and the civil rights and Black Power movements.

United State cable television network (CNN) established in 1980 presented videos of musicians and singers performing new rap music. MTV won a wide following among rock-music fans worldwide and greatly affected the popular music business on cables; there is little likelihood of being exposed to such music. The purpose of this work is to help familiarize the unmotivated with some of these never forms of music which have become so controversial.

When hip-hop music became popular in the early '70s, most people responded to the music (Sims, 1993:3), most recently, the term "hip-hop" describes a culture, superficially characterized by performers. The African American vernacular English has it that:

The word "hip" was as early as 1904. The Colloquial language meant "informed" or "current", and was likely derived earlier from hip. The term "hip hop" also followed logically the previous African - American music culture of "Bebop"

This is to infer that rap as an offshoot of hip hop started in the year 1904 but it is evident that happenings such as this predated the eventual emergence of rap as a social phenomenon. Rap, today, is a part of the black race and culture though it has been widely debated that it is not truly African due to its content of violence and foul language. The African setting as the cradle of the black race professes peaceful communal living and the language of respect for those around, especially elders. The social, political and relational sect of rap brought various shades of reaction amongst Africa-Americans in the United States of America. It is said that young ones became engrossed in the Rapping medium Jeff Chang gave an instance of a young lad of nineteen years who had much interest in rap. The boy named O'Shea Jackson said all he wanted to do was rap. According to Jeff Chang (2005:299)

All he ever wanted to do in life was to rap, and now looked like he might be able to make something of it. Arizons had been hell-hot, dry and boring. Still, his architectural drafting degree from the Phoenix Institute of Technology might get moms and pops off his back for a few months and within that time perhaps he could write a few lyrics, rhymes and make records, cash some checks and soon make his way out of his folks' house

A young chap sees rap as a way to make some money and perhaps make his way out of poverty. This is probably one of the extended reasons why rap was embraced in Black America. Murray Forman (2001:1) reveals that:

A detailed and consciously defined special Awareness is one of the key factors distinguishing rap music and hip hop from many other cultural and sub-cultural youth formations currently vying for popular attention. In hip hop space is a Dominant concern occupying a central role in the definition of untrue, meaning and practice.

There was the ground breaking search for raw talents and veterans in rap. This produced talents greats like Kid Frost, Ice T and the Khakis. In New York, there was a call for the creation of more rappers and different shades of rap. In the early 1980s, one prominent node on the Los Angeles hip hop map was a downtown club called Radio. It was modeled after the Rooy's "Wheels of Steel" night and presided over by local rap Kingpin Ice T and other prominent figures in Los Angeles. It is

apt to note here that the lyrics of rap have been greatly criticized by some veterans of the black race. They see the lyrics of rap as been derogatory and embarrassing to the black race. The words utilized by young black rappers in clubs and some public places were not in any way encouraging. It was described as the "Culture of Disrespect" in some areas. Bryan Monroe (2007:7) writes that:

Monroe was writing on the much debated "Culture of Disrespect", which black rappers in America finds themselves. Monroe was trying to prove that not all black rappers are trapped in the vicious cycle of gangster rap or bad activities just as we have African-Americans, young and old taking to questionable acts, so are there responsible African-Americans who have proved their worth in the American Society. In Black America there are issues to be resolved as rap continues to make its impact in the larger society. Valuable parts of cultures are been said to have gone down the hill. Hilarious types of debilitating words are been used to describe the African-Americans, and there is this "I don't care" approach on the part of the black race. It can be said that just as there is wide acceptance and exploration of the rap culture so is there widespread condemnation of it. Their exploits is to discuss contemporary issues in the society, talking about positive and negative aspects of life without the casual act of disrespecting themselves and others. Bryan also writes that:

We in the media have full participants, lulling our country into apathy and ignorance the audience has become anesthetize to these insults, accepting of racist or sexist attacks for pure entertainment purposes. As we cross line after line attacks on women, gays, fat people, and now even children the increasing insensitive public only wants more. They want us to provide them with more inanity, more rudeness, more vileness. We have to keep top-pong ourselves all in the name of better rating, increased circulation, and constant affection Chamillionaire a twenty-seven year old rapper and song writer who created the hit song "riding dirty" said that: when someone makes a racist or sexist comment it says something about that persons moral standards and I think that's the internal problem in our society.

This goes a long way to confirm that though Rap as a subset of hip hop has been labeled derogatory and lacking worthy morals, there are still quite a few rappers that believe that this type of music is a variable means of correcting some wrongs in the society at large, especially in the United States of America.

4.1 **WHY THE CULTURE OF DISRESPECT?**

A peep into the history of African American in America reveals that they are a group of people that have been subjected to racial and discriminatory abuse for an extended period of time. This has affected the way they approach issues and the eventual emergence of rap has rather helped to increase the wave of what has been happening over time. In

other words, since there has been so much disrespect in this culture of rap, it has brought about the issue of disrespecting the pride of other followers especially the ones around them. There is the urge that such will attract much fame and pride. The issue of being ashamed for doing the wrong thing is not considered important. According to Reverend B. Soaries (2007:23):

You can't get rid of disrespect, but you can get rid of it been normal. It's the restoration of shame. One of the things that drive older people crazy is that there seems to be no shame – and where there is neither shame nor honour, you have complete social breakdown.

In other words, to restore pride and the sense of shame back into the African American community in America, definite drastic steps has to be taken, Such as will not damage the great culture of hip hop and rap but will serve to reduce or eradicate the negative content in Rap. Maya Sokora while commenting in Dallas said that “when a DJ gets pried for playing yet another ‘bitches aren't sh-but trosand tricks’ songs as representation of how we feel about Black women then I will be impressed”. This stands to buttress the fact that not all blacks in America are really happy with what Rap has turned out to be in the USA. The killings, foul languages, and drug dealings that accompany this phenomena are better imagined.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Going by the critical and unprejudiced look into the nature of rap and its impact in America, especially in the African-American community, one cannot but conclude that gangsta rap has truly bless the way of life of the African-Americans. We can look at both sides which are the positive and negative sides but the fact is that rap has helped to advance the course of blacks not only in America but the world all over including Africa and Asia.

One of the ambits or the canons of respect to the black man is the ability to churn out various lyrics together and produce them in a distinct way that appeals to the public. A race that has been bedeviled by discrimination and second classed approach, need not be told or directed on how to bring about what the world will respect. Race as an issue discuss the various 'streets names. They are centrally significant in their communicative capacities to provide the cultural locations through her act and attitude all over.

Our first chapter took a historical overview of the nature, purpose and reason for rap. Rap is said to be an offshoot and the inborn nature of the true black person. The fact has been established through various modes of research and analysis that the African American populace that we know today emerged from Africa, which was hitherto known as White

Man's Grave. The one and very prominent aspect of African culture is orature (Oral Culture) and communication.

In the course of our historical overview we discovered that RAP as it is recognised is interpreted as RHYTHM and BLUES (Rosen Jody 2005:16) rhythm in the sense that it appeals to your soul and person, blues for the fact that it utilises distinct punch lines that cannot but be noticed.

The second chapter took us through the representation of rap and African American orality in various works of international and intellectual repute. Works like Edgar. Tyson's essay *Directions on Rap Music Research*, Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory* and Stephen J. Ochs' Essay *Spartacus*. These works and others that were reviewed in my "Review of literature" tried to establish the fact that rap as a musical and cultural phenomenon has become an issue of intellectual concern. Peter Barry, for instance, discussed the three phases of post colonial criticism, which are the adopt, adapt and adept phase. This reveals that space is a factor in African American hip hop. The metaphysical and psychological space from their actual root brought about their cultural hybridization.

Chapter three discussed the advent and propagation of rap culture. Rap as a socio cultural and sociological medium did not emerge overnight; there were antecedents that predated it. A notable explanation for this was presented by Rosen Jody who described the term hip hop, as

what is said to describe marching soldiers. In other words, they were commonly referred to as hip hoppers. Rap and hip hop as a twin rend with a suzeranic relation spurred up from the need for a rabid and distinct mode of self expression. It has become a worldwide factor. Spreading as far as Asia and Africa. These days we discourses Israeli hip hop, Palestine hip hop, French hip hop, and German hip hop. Australia, Brazil and the 'Caribbean are also part of the ever growing hip hop family.

The various individuals who activities led to the emergence of rap include Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Campbell and Chang Public Enemy, and Run DMC.

Grandmaster Flash and Furious Five released the tract The Message which till date remains one of the ground breaking works in the history of rap. It is the first ever work credited to raw rap. Martin Luther Kings speech I Have a Dream was another unforgettable, immitigable and ever appealing page in the African American history in particular and American history in general. We also discussed the use of Turntable, Beat boxing Graffiti, and Break dancing as the essential ingredients of rap.

My fourth chapter tried to explain the social and economic significance of Rap. In other words, rap is not just a brilliant and distinct phenomenon; rappers in America are amongst the richest. Rap has helped to change the life of quite a lot of African Americans, although there have been cases of violence and drugs. Rap has been utilised to make political

demands by African Americans. The group, Public Enemy, explored this fact when they came up with their second album "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back (1998). Their theme song, "Fight the Power" added in a brilliant colour to African American rap culture. Gangster rap has to do with the act of creating bitter enmity between rap groups. This has brought about great killing recurrent enmity in the nits of rappers. One incident worthy of mention in the sect of rap was the feud between Christopher Wallace (Notorious Big) and Tupac Amaru Shakur (2Pac) which ended in the death of both rappers. Other forms of biff and enmity is that of Curtis Jackson (50 cent) and NAZ and amongst others. They have always at one time or the other had to come against one another. However, the quality of what is churned out remains high and brilliant.

Interest in ties sect can be taken holistically from the East coast, West Coast trouble that rocked the rap industry in United States. Even as rap and hip hop continues to shape the African American society bringing about a true representation of different races, it should be duely documented and made to attract scholastic attention in such a way that this pride of the African-Americans does not evaporate into oblivion. Wherever a black man or more precisely a black rapper goes he is