

Interconnection of Hip-Hop and Rap to African and American Pop Culture

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Overview

This curriculum unit is designed to encourage tenth grade world culture students to take a more meaningful interest in the study of contemporary Africa by using aspects of hip hop culture especially rap music culture as means of expression.

The activities in this unit are designed to help students become proficient in their knowledge of African culture and develop the means and method to express their new awareness. Students will use hip-hop, rap, and graffiti art to develop abstract skills and critical thinking.

Students will learn African religion(s), marriage, and family traditions. Through the study of rap lyrics they will examine problems in urban Africa. They will compare and contrast these problems with those of American youth. They will learn about traditional African values. They will study contemporary issues related to Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast.

Rationale

The Pittsburgh public school system is one of the few institutions involved with teens that should embrace the use of hip-hop culture as a tool to relate to youth. This is unfortunate because as leading designer Tommy Hilfiger notes, “Hip-hop has created a style that is embraced by an array of people from all backgrounds and races.”

Some leading hip-hop commentators feel that staid institutions like public school systems fear the power of hip-hop. Lisa Sullivan, founder and president of Listen, Inc., notes the generation gap between older leaders and hip-hop leaders is the cause of mistreat and fear. She expressed the following:

“It's not in the older generation's best interest to cultivate a hip-hop generation

of leaders. Old heads in power are threatened by the power of hip-hop given the way we control the marketplace and dominate pop culture, they realize that if we ever turn that energy on to community and political activism then it's all over for them."

The purpose of employing elements of hip-hop culture is two folds. First, it's an exciting way to increase knowledge about Africa. Secondly, it will highlight social issues of their generation.

Before I begin discussion of the use rap in examining social problems I should explain the elements of hip-hop culture. Also I will discuss why it should be incorporated into a study of Africa and tap into this well spring to provide students with opportunities for expression in a familiar medium. It will offer chances to be creative.

My ten-year-old son introduced me to rap back in the late seventies. Emanating from his room was an unusual music. Music I never heard on the radio or even in music stores. Where did he buy it? What is it called? He told me guys were selling rap tapes out of their car trunks. In 1979 he introduced me to the first hip-hop hit, Sugar Hill Gang's *Rapper's Delight*. Thereafter, I followed the nascent development of rap. After nearly 30 years I am unable to keep up with its themes, syncopated rhymes and rhythms. Since those early hurly-burly days, rap has dramatically changed.

My attention to the connection between hip-hop and African youth resulted from animated conversations I had with recent young African immigrants. Amongst other things, they have in common a love for rap and hip-hop style. They explain that today's African youth music no only encompasses rap but also includes soukous and zouglou. Several Ivory Coast teens, sporting the latest hip-hop gear, regale about recording studios, nightlife, and the diverse cultural milieu in Abidjan. They are taken aback at my ignorance of the music of Salif Keita, Mory Kante, Mone Bile and Sam Mangwana. With excited expressive hand gestures, a young muscular Nigerian from Kano described the Lagos' club scene. He put headphones to my ears to liste to the Styl-Plus's hit "Olufunmi." Styl-Plus is from Abuja. "You're hearing 2Face; it's one of the hottest hip-hop acts from Nigeria," he intones. I rock to the sounds of 2Face's hit Nfna Ibaga (No Problem). Students can listen to ththese and other Nigerian hip-hop hits on the BBC web site:

[Http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/africaonyourstreet/jjc.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/africaonyourstreet/jjc.shtml).

My interest in rap was further perked by an article in November 3, 2003, The New Yorker entitled, "*Letter from the Ivory Coast Gangsta War: Young fighters take their lead from American pop culture.*" The author, George Packer, didi a teaching stint in rural Togo. He was prompted to venture to the Ivory Coast

after he overheard a Togolese mother talk longingly about the time she spent in Abidjan. She depicts Abidjan as a cosmopolitan, kind of dream world with abundant work. She, like many West African immigrant workers, refers to the Ivory Coast in miraculous terms such as the Paris of Africa.

Ivory Coast's initial success was built on the high price of coca. The country exports approximately forty percent of the world's coca. Some six million people in the Ivory Coast depend directly or indirectly on coca revenue. The expanding coca economy encouraged migrants from all over West Africa to emigrate there. Today, over half of the country's population is non-Ivorians. Some claim it is the most technologically and economically advanced country in West Africa. A great deal of credit for Ivory Coast economic success is given to the skills of the French expatriate community whose members help run the government and private sector.

Before teachers use this unit they should take the time to learn about hip-hop. To do so, pursue hip-hop magazines like *The Source* and *Vibe* (*Vibe.yahoo.com*). *Source*, started in 1988 by Harvard undergrads Jon Shecter and David Mays, is widely read and a good source of hip-hop. *Vibe* is another great periodical covering today's rap scene.

Hip-hop is all around us in films, books, fashions (FUBU, Sean John). Hip-hop represents a realignment of American's cultural aesthetics. It openly exposes social ills, as well as, celebrates the good and evils of capitalism. Rappers sum up materialism, capitalism with the slogan "*It's all about the Benjamins.*" They are keenly aware of the global social, political and economic upheavals. They realize that the world's underclass is growing by leaps and bounds and rap gives them a voice. The yuse rep to tap into the psyche of the unappreciated underclass, the downtrodden, and the invisible people of modern society.

Bakari Kitwana's *The Hip-hop Generation: young Black and the Crisis in African American Culture*, (Perseus, 2002), analyzes the activism and politics of the hip-hop generation. Furthermore, he advocates that the hip-hop generations brings the central issues of the downtrodden to international awareness the issues of poverty, inequality; racism must be placed high on the global agenda.

Hip-hop emerged from the primordial sludge of the urban ghettos, such as Bronx, New York. Its message is highly influential and encapsulates an entire generation. Its sway is so pervasive that advertisers, filmmakers, and writers adopted "street" signifiers like cornrows and terms like "player hater" (Log onto [www. Playahater.com](http://www.Playahater.com)) in order to reach the youth market. Hip-hop has given the invisible the right to be heard. Their voice makes known the socio-cultural issues that affect their constituency.

Educators consider the impact of rap as a social force. Harness its power to garner students' interest in social, political and historical topics. Message raps frequently make reference to these issues. Rappers comment on numerous subjects like AIDS, unemployment, crime, and social change in America, the Caribbean and Africa. In doing so, students learn how these issues play out in Africa's cities where traditional African values are often challenged. Confront pupils to debate the differing relationship between modernity and traditional values.

Background: Hip-hop and the youth

Many students are expert in understanding contemporary hip-hop issues. Do not be alarmed if they correct your assumptions about it. Welcome the challenge to invite stimulating discussions. Whole generations of kids, black, white, Latino, Asian and African have grown up immersed in it. Hip-hop originated during their parents' prime so many of them lack prior knowledge of its early development.

Some background information will help you to present this topic. It will augment, simplify, and make it easier for students to do research to complete activities. Here is a cursory view about hip-hop culture and how it relates to African youth.

Christopher John Farley examines music trends and personalities. He writes extensively on how and why hip-hop style has saturated youth around the globe. Rap is a phenomenon unlike anything that the popular culture has previously witnessed. He defines rap as a form of rhythmic speaking in rhyme. When rap first appeared, outsiders scuffed at it as faddish without meaning.

People who were not raised in the hip-hop culture think rap is little more than rhythms and rhymes. Hip-hop is a part of the backing music for rap and is often composed of a collage of excerpts, or "samples," from other songs. The two terms, hip-hop and rap, are nearly but not completely interchangeable. There are a number of contemporary African musical styles that have enhanced or merged into the hip-hop menagerie such as reggae and Zouglou.

It's important to develop a worldview of hip-hop culture, the youth-oriented lifestyle that birthed rap music. The four essential elements of rap are break dancing, Dj-ing, rap music and graffiti. Now that it has become mainstream, the definition of hip-hop culture must be expanded to include verbal language, body language, attitude style and fashion, and increasingly political activism. Its clothing, style and music are transforming the culture of America.

Hip-hop culture is shaped by many elements that come from diverse sources especially from street and prison gangs. Large numbers of young black

males are exposed to prison. They developed a prison style that includes language, attitude, and dress like baggy clothes. As a result, the distinction between prison, street, and black youth culture has blurred. In the black community rappers have obliterated the stigma of a criminal record. Moreover, ex-cons are highly influential in determining what's "cool." In places like Abobo, one of Abidjan's largest ghettos, rap-like lyrics come from African youth that are in similar situations.

Hip-*rap* and rap have gone through many changes over the years. In the following passage a commentator notes its transformation.

My Love Letter to Hip Hop

Hip hop is a black man and he used to love me.
But hip-hop doesn't love me anymore - me - a loyal black woman.
I used to be so in love, but I'm slowly falling out of love, because he's too violent, lewd, and disrespectful.
Hip-hop has a cheating heart.
He is constantly flirting with Violence and Death.
Ms. Bling Bling has his nose wide open, and Foolish Pride is his best friend. Hip-hop is now a drunken weed head performing a live minstrel show with platinum chains and fancy cars. He lacks the direction and passion he used to have when we first fell in love back in the late 70's.
Now that he has the acceptance of the mainstream he seems to constantly regress. His anger used to be beautiful and full of fire - aimed at systemic discrimination and injustice. He used to call himself Prophet, MC (Master of Ceremony), Revolutionary, and Messenger, but now he reduces himself to thug, gangster, and pimp. It's not even me that Hip-hop fantasizes about anymore. Gone are the days when he idolized my black beauty and Afrocentrism. I guess the glare of bling bling has skewed his opinion of beauty. The women in his videos are mutations of my best qualities, MUTS for short.

Like reggae, hip-hop has an African spiritual culture connection. Its nexus to Ivorian musical style of zouglou is remarkable. They both employ ebullient stylized words and witty phrases. Zouglou, like rap, often expresses the troubles and aspirations of youth. Rap and zouglou songs deliver the message again and again, to "*keep it real.*" These genres reflect the type of music that springs from necessity. It is the music of need arising out of the streets, reflecting the hard core realities of urban ghettos. Its colloquial lyricism explores beauty, anger and violence of "hood" life. The underclass mostly ignored by the power elites, developed hip-hop and zouglou to create excitement, artistic fulfillment and

even a sense of identity by exposing social and economic problems in urban Africa and America.

If the issues or problems of intercity blacks are real then rap offers a way to vent. If the issues or problems of urban African youth are authentic then zouglou offers a way to air them. If the issues or problems of Caribbean blacks are genuine then reggae helps to accentuate them.

Eventually, rap genre penetrates the middle class suburbs. Rapper Will Smith's 1990 sitcom "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" brings hip-hop culture there. Like most African music, rap, reggae and zouglou use syncopated techniques, and accentuate beats that are normally unaccented. In addition, rap captures the attention of young whites living on the margins of society. It is easy for them to identify with rap's message because they suffered many of the same problems. The issues, dead-end jobs, poverty, drugs and vicarious violence, transcend race. Therefore, young whites are encouraged to rap about them too, such as superstar rapper Eminem who brought white working class issues before the public. Now whites purchase more than 70% of hip-hop

Rap lyrics simultaneously address every imaginable gender issue ranging from dating, gender equality, domestic violence, and rape to sexual harassment. It has shaped an entire generation's social habits especially dating and marriage. Having an appreciation of rap music is critical to understanding teen ethics. More importantly rap music is one of the few arenas where the full range of gender issues facing young blacks is documented in their voice. (Z Magazine, February 1994)

Socio-political issues are a major part of rap's makeup.

In 1984, super rappers Run-D.M.C. from Queens, New York rapped about *Hard Times*. 1985, Grand Master Flash extols underclass life in *New York, New York, City of Dreams*. White rap trio Beastie Boys, in 1986, mixed hard rock and hip-hop to make *Licensed to Ill* exhorting the youth "You gotta fight for your right - to party!" It becomes a favorite at frat parties and the first rap album to hit the top ten on the charts.

By 1987 rap protest message had grown increasingly clamorous. Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Down* offers strident condemnation of black oppression. Public Enemy exhorts hip-hoppers to "Don't believe the hype" and sets the tone for a more up-in-your-face confrontational style rap.

This confrontational style was at its zenith in 1989 when N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* brings national attention to police brutality. They spark

the start of gangsta rap in “*F___ tha police*,” point out the harsh reality of life in the ghetto. Their lyrics foreshadow the Los Angeles uprising of ‘92. N.W.A. belief that injustice prevails strongly influences the hip-hop generation’s attitude towards the police and creates more tension between police officers (even Black ones) and young blacks. p. 29

In 1989, 2 Live Crew created the foulmouthed album *Me so Horny* pushing into the national spotlight youthful freedom of speech. Tupac Shakur’s expression of grief tells about his life growing up with a crack addicted mother a former Black Panther member. He laments, “*Even as a crack fiend, mama/ You always were a black queen, mama.*”

During 1992, Sister Souljah raps militant messages about racism. Presidential candidate Bill Clinton makes her militant views a campaign issue. DMX raps about being tried of crime, bombs and the ills of a capitalistic materialistic society. In his smash hit, *Hard-Knock Life*, Jay-Z raps about life in the projects. Jay-Z becomes one of the richest men in America at less than 40 years of age. (See *Fortune*, September 2004).

More and more rappers attend college. They turn their message into gold. transcending the streets, the projects, to become streetwise, boardroom savvy and the ambassadors of cool. They use name recognition to start business enterprises. Hip-hoppers like Master P, Russell Simmons and Sean Combs become corporate moguls earning hundreds of millions of dollars. They fraternize with the jet set. Combs hosts polo matches in the Hamptons has celebrities such as Muhammad Ali and Martha Stewart at his birthday. Even Madison Avenue took notice of the profit margins involve in the rap business. For example, Tommy Hilfiger’s apparel company sells over a billion dollars a year in over-sizes shirts, loose jeans and other hip-hop accessories.

For the African urban experience I focus on life in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Ivory Coast was founded as a French colony. It was involved in a brutal bloody dehumanizing civil war that left thousands of youth traumatized, physically mutilated or orphaned. The civil 2war ended nearly two years ago with a peace agreement but ethnic violence continues in the western and central coca producing regions. (Obtain article: Ethnic Violence Spreads in Ivory Coast’s Coca Belt at <http://www.voanews.com/artic.acfrm?objectID=sC09515E-sC50-415F-951B0985DE20A>)

During much of Africa’s long history, the need to eke out a living from farming kept over 90 percent of its population in the countryside. Now, the ability to produce surplus food allows people to realize their urge to cram together. Today more young Africans are crowded into cities; millions migrate to large cities like Abidjan and Nairobi with the hope that they will be able to secure

meaningful productive employment. In doing so, they flee the ravages of poverty and the breakdown of the rural infrastructure. Even in the country side rapid population growth is overwhelming public health facilities, causing schools to be under-equipped and teachers underpaid.

There is a disconnection between city dwellers and those in the countryside. Once they become accustomed to city life some shun and stay away from the country side. One reason they stay away is fear that their children might come into contact with unknown diseases. They also worry that rural relatives will teach superstitious ideas to their youngsters. Children born in urban areas become unfamiliar with the rigors of rural living. They cringe from having to sleep in huts, eat strange food, listen to unknown languages, tote water and wood, use pit latrines or trudge long distances on foot. They don't quite understand the nuances of ethnic animosities and bickering that often dominate these areas. The cleavages between the rural and urban are ever widening and are likely to worsen social turmoil.

Upon arrival, migrants find cities collapsing under the weight of shantytowns, environmental degradation, urban crime, and unemployment. They have no choice but to settle in urban centers on the verge of social implosion. Sometimes they are lucky enough to squat with overburdened relatives. Urban relatives are besieged by a deluge of impoverished country relatives. As a result, there is a diminution of ties that create the extended family. Therefore, ideals of the duties of the extended family are quickly disappearing along with it the loss of meaningful help. Without this assistance the challenges of city life are so overwhelming that the newcomers are likely to succumb to criminal activities, prostitution and/or mental illness.

My attention to the connection between hip-hop culture and African youth resulted from conversations I had with recent young West African immigrants. Amongst other things they all had in common a love of rap and hip-hop style. Several Ivory Coast youths told me about the recoding studios, nightlife, and the diverse cultural milieus in Abidjan. They introduced Salif Keita, Mory Kante, Mone Bile and Sam Mangwana's music. They explained several kinds of youth music of the '90s that included soukous and zouglou.

An examination of how urban youth have used hip-hop, rap, reggae or zouglou to influence politics is found in George Packers' Gangsta War article. The article focuses on how Charles Ble emerges as hip-hop leader of the Young Patriots. In doing so, he uses syncopated hip-hop language to whip up virulent anti-French feelings by exhorting the young to exhibit vehement disgust with all things French. He and his followers are angry with the French government for its reluctance to help its former colony out of travail and for failing to intervene in Ivory Coast's civil strife. He implores Ivorians to be more pro-American and

speaking the language of the superpower. (For more information use <http://www.didierbile.com>)

Young men like Charles Bel originate out of the Abidjan's miserable slums. One such slum which young thugs named Chicago is like its American namesake. In excess of three million people live there in wretched conditions. Chicago, a flood ravaged area, is located in a gully teeming with coconut palms. Few residents have ready access to electricity, a sewage system, or a clean water supply. Children defecate in a stream filled with garbage and pigs, droning with malarial mosquitoes. In this stream women do their washing. Millions more live in conditions not much better.

Robert D. Kaplan's Atlantic Monthly article, *The Coming Anarchy*, graphically illustrates how scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism, and disease are destroying the social fabric of traditional African societies. He writes about the living conditions in slums like Chicago. He describes these shantytowns slum as checkered works of corrugated zinc roofs and walls made of cardboard and black plastic wrap. Young unemployed men spend their time drinking beer, palm wine and gin while gambling on pinball games constructed out of rotting wood and rusty nails.

The harsh living conditions impact more affluent areas of Ivory Coast's capital. At night, there is much beer drinking, and unemployed youth roam well-heeled districts making the streets unsafe. The streets, often unlit and poorly maintained, are used to the advantage of ragtag armies of street urchins who under the concealment of darkness burglarize houses in more prosperous neighborhoods. The streets are slums proliferate with armed burglars, carjackers and muggers.

These harsh living conditions produce the most virulent rappers like M.C. Ble, Didier Bile and Alpha Blondy. Ble emulates African American hip-hop rap culture in every detail. He and his boys, all of whom are in their twenties, menacingly scowl behind mirror glasses, dressed with gold chains, tracksuits, muscle shirts and droopy hats.

Ble harangues the crowd with a call-and response litany that always ends in *bete*. Countries like Burkina Faso and Liberia are *bete* because they are suspected of arming northern insurgents. Immigrants with Muslim names are *bete* for supposedly sympathizing with the rebels. Eventually his group turned their cheerful rallies into a stage act much like those found in the intercity of America. At rallies boys vendors sell hats in the national colors of orange and green and T-Shirts with xenophobic expression. The new trend is for swaggering youth to jig and basted reggae, zouglou, the domestic hip-hop pop music, to mesmerized crowds.

The musical force akin to rap is zouglou. It emerged in the early 90s, much like rap. Zouglou's satirical lyrics are full of biting wit and are punctuated with expressive jerks intended to enhance the message. Unlike rap, zouglou has taken traditional folklore and modernized the rhythm. In Baoule, "O ti le zouglou" means "gathered up the garbage!" This denigrating statement depicts life and working conditions of Ivorian students. Just as rappers are starting to do in the United States, zouglou is developing into a catalyst for student protest movements.

The zouglou phenomenon has created stars like Didier Bile, whose first album sold more than 90,000 copies throughout the Ivory Coast. The horizon of zouglou extends to many neighboring countries in West Africa. Didier's influence is so strong that the Ivory Coast government offered him a scholarship to continue his studies in France for fear that he would join the opposition party.

A zouglou group penned *Sacrificed Generation*

Scarified Generation

They say students make too much trouble.
They say students on strike too much.
At the start they took away our scholarships
They made us pay for rooms and meal tickets
Students are poor . . .
When we present our demands
They answer us with tear gas . . .
The big brothers are angry
The old fathers don't want to get out of the way!

African Youth Challenges the Role of the Elders

See Kwame Gyekye's *African Cultural Values* for a list of principles teachers might want to use for this unit.

John S. Mbiti highlights the African tradition of respecting the elders.

The older a person is, and the higher his social status is, the more he is thought or expected to have this mystical power, either in himself or through the possession of the necessary objects in which it may be stored. (African Religions and Philosophy p. 199)

The emergence of African youth willing to protest and defy the elders has profound implications for the stability of many African governments. Increasingly, in places like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast, anywhere

there is endemic mass, poverty people find liberation in violence.

The young have always been a catalyst for change in Africa. For example, youth willing to challenge the status quo nearly toppled Togo dictator Etienne Eyadema. In 1991, thousands of stone-throwing adolescents challenged his right to rule. In Sierra Leone, angry dispossessed youth under the leadership of 27 year old army captain, Valentine Strasser took over the running of the Sierra Leone after the elders had mismanaged it for forty-five years after the British departed. Strasser and his boys came from Freetown's slums of corrugated metal shacks teeming with children. Rural poverty is accepted as normal; urban poverty is socially, political economical destabilizing. According to the London-based magazine *West Africa* this behavior is a harbinger.

Commenting on Strasser's coup, a Sierra Leone Minister called it “. . .the revenge of the poor, of the social failures, of the people least able to bring up children in a modern society.” After reading vignettes about the transformation of contemporary Africa, hopefully, students will realize that only when people attain a certain economic, educational, and cultural standard is the trait for physical aggression tranquilized.

Darrell Dawsey gives voice to young jobless black men who exist in a sea of hostility. He notes, “As a Black men, (twenty-seven) I and everyone who looks like me live in an extreme world. To begin understanding us, you must understand this world. And to understand this world, you must understand out place in it.”

Rapper Mobb Deep expressed the struggles of urban youth in Darwinian terms in:

Survival of the Fit

There's a war going on outside
No man is safe from
You can run but you can't hide forever.

Rapper Nas explores the same issues in his message:

I Want to Talk to You.

Mr. Mayor, imagine this was your backyard
Mr. Governor, imagine it's your kids that starve
Imagine your kids gotta sling crack to survive,
Swing a Mac to be live . . .

During the 60s, sociologist Sidney Wilhelm predicted the changing status for black workers. He argued civil rights leaders of who focused on civil rights legislation alone had it all wrong. The real issue was real employment opportunity with equal pay. He prophetically indicates that black labor, something America had taken advantage of for more the 350 years, is obsolete. He blames the rise in black unemployment to the rise of the computerization of American industry.

“Since the introduction of automation during the 1950s, white America had been able to expound its racism more fully and force an unwanted people into ghettos as a way of life. Increasingly, the Negro faces the alternative of passive acceptance of the ghetto fate or talking the initiative by resorting to confrontation against White America.”

Wilhelm could anticipate the fact that by the early part of the 21st century millions of industrial jobs would be exported to other countries. American corporations relocated jobs by the millions to such far off places like India and China. However, there are very few American jobs exported to black Africa. Globalization of work and competition from cheaper foreign labor presents millions of unskilled, skilled African Americans; and now even professional jobs, with unexpected challenges. The transference of jobs is devastating urban black America.

All these trends do not go unnoticed by the hip-hop generation. During the 80s and 90s, they quickly realized that a forty-hour-a-week, minimum-wage job wouldn't meet their basic needs. So, many took their chances in the underground economy, hence the mass appeal enjoyed by rap lyrics that described the gritty underworld of “clocking on the low down” (Read the life of rapper 50 Cents in Vibe, May 2003)

In addition to the above developments, African-Americans are besieged by an influx of competing immigrants. More often than not, Asians often enter the top echelons of employment. Therefore, unskilled young black males must scramble and compete for Latinos for low paying jobs. Increasingly, for the same reason, young whites and other American racial and ethnic groups living in pockets of poverty in suburban rural communities are identifying with the hip-hop message.

The impact of globalization has not stopped at the traditional borders of the inner city. Youthful Blacks suffer from an additional burden of racial discrimination. Poor and middle-class whites are not immune from the impact of economic change. This is fact highlighted by the continuing protest against the actions of the World Bank, World Health Organization and the International

Monetary Fund.

The teachers should demonstrate that hip-hoppers are aware of the United States foreign policy towards Africa. Young Blacks see that the U.S. government does not have a meaningful foreign policy agenda that is beneficial to the African diaspora. Instead, they see America's foreign policy choking the economical and/or environmental life out of people of African descent. The hip-hop generation believes that if indeed America has a healthy colorless policy at home, it ought to be reflected in its policy abroad as well.

The hip-hop generation hopes U.S. foreign policy planners realize that unless the government takes action that is economically meaningful to the world's dispossessed population; America will not live in peace. Afrocentrists are right in one respect: we ignore the downtrodden at our own risk. Samuel P. Huntington argues in "*The Clash of Civilizations*" that the world is heading towards a cultural showdown where ethnic conflict will cause havoc in many nation-states.

Problems faced by African Youth

Teachers should investigate the shock of internecine civil strife on Africa's young. Endemic civil discord is altering the outlook of many young Africans. Many are impaired by the tribulations of civil war. Civil war taints the sense of family, friendships, and marriage. Family friends and community often reject youth with some connection to or who have participated in social violence.

Researchers have exhaustively examined the psychological and physiological impact of prolonged exposure to carnage. In doing so, they have developed the precepts of psychoneuroimmunology, a new field of study. Evidence demonstrates the long-term impact of war of such as increased alienation, isolation and personal devastation. These experiences often lead to self-loathing and can wreak havoc on the body or brain. Protracted exposure to persecution, famine, disease and dislocation generate types of attitude, style and swagger young Africans need to confront the tyranny that is so much a part of their existence.

The aftermath of civil rivalry can increase lawlessness making some cities of West Africa unsafe places especially at night. Lagos, for example, has become the cliché for the tropical Third World City of crime, pollution and overcrowding. Monrovia, Freetown and Abidjan have become dysfunctional as they try to adjust to the aftermath of civil strife and the deluge of illiterate bedraggled refugees and migrants.

A central problem faced by African American and African youth is poverty and joblessness. African youth, displaced by either conflict or migration are

marginalized, without benefit of systemic help and/or the aid and comfort of the traditional extended family. Without the village safety net, they are left to fend for themselves.

David Sloan Wilson comments on how humans who pool their reasoning usually make far better decisions than those lone rangers who keep their calculation to themselves. For displaced youngsters decision making is left totally to serendipity.

Objectives:

Students will study the following:

- a. The history of rap.
- b. The importance of rap as medium of communication.
- c. Socio-economic issues expressed in rap lyrics.
- d. Contemporary problems/issues of intercity and African youth.
- e. How problems have impacted traditional African youth.
 - i. Religious values
 - ii. Humanity and brotherhood
 - iii. Importance of communal living
 - iv. Moral values
 - v. The role of the family

Activities:

Presented below are some activities that the teacher might use to implement this unit.

1. From students determine the qualities that make rap popular
2. From students determine the qualities that make good rap.
3. Use hop-hop magazine articles concerning urban issues.
4. Down load rap lyrics that express issues involving American and African youth.
5. Pass out the lyrics of raps with political messages.
6. Have students analyze the content of each rap.

Examine issues faced by African American and African youth.

1. Select three issues/or problems that greatly impact African youth.
2. Develop notes based on the information in this unit.

Seek critical issues discussed by rappers.

 - a. Make a list of the issues.
 - b. Examine how these issues affect the outlook of African youth
 - c. Use the Internet to gather and examine primary source materials.
3. Develop a synopsis of issues faced by African and inner city youth.

4. Have students write a rap about issues of the hip-hop generation in Africa.
 - a. Raps will emphasize poignant issues of contemporary Africa.
 - b. Present rap to class.
5. Create a graffiti panorama depicting the issues faced by African youth.
6. Teachers can view the work of Sabine von Dirke, associate professor of German at the University of Pittsburgh. His students learned about rap as the voice of the German underclass. His course, German Today, examines the influence of American hip-hop culture on German youth. Also Pitt's Department of French and Italian Languages and Literatures examines how rap music has emerged in France and Italy and notes that its popularity growth pattern is similar to the growth of rap in the U.S.

Discussion of traditional African values might include the following topics:

- a. Marriage at puberty.
- b. Ethnic identification.
- c. Contemporary urban values.
- d. The influence of hip-hop music on social values
- e. The influence of hip-hop music on politics.

Students can study the African tradition of marriage at puberty.

For example, they can study the practice of child brides especially in Islamic areas. The practice is defended on the basis that it protects young girls from immorality, strengthens clan relationships, and honors Islam.

Read Stephen Buckley's article concerning the practice.

"The marriages typically occur within clans, the girls compelled to wed distant relative—often three times her age—that sometimes has chosen her long before puberty."

Read about the marriage of 14-year old, Aisha Camara.

She is wedded to 360-year old Ahmed Toure. Debate the situation of the 12-year old child bride, Fanta Keita who killed her 30-year old husband by slitting his throat.

Examine the tradition of Africans identifying themselves with specific ethnic groups.

Does this practice lend itself to social strife?

The youth grown up in urban areas are often stunned by "tribalism" in rural areas, where sometimes one's whole life revolves around tribal identity. In some places one's neighbors, work mates, the

business owners and government administrators are all members of the same tribe.

Research aspects of these values in contemporary urban Africa.

Visit Mbugua Ngugu in Nairobi, Kenya. Learn how urban life influences the tradition of “tribal” ties. Does this create cleavages between have-and-have not and urban vs. rural in contemporary Africa?

He’s 18 years old, nicknamed Skip, wears a gold stud in his left ear. He generally wears a Nike T-shirt, Nike sneakers and loose-fitting Levi’s. He listens almost exclusively to hip-hop, watches reruns of “The Fresh Prince of Bel Air” and his favorite sport is basketball.

Learn about Robert Odongo, 20. He was born and raised in Nairobi and is half Luo and Kikuyu. He cannot speak the languages of his relatives.

Investigate the role played by musicians in the December 1999 military coup in Ivory Coast.

Reggae musician Alpha Blondy is an Ivorian national hero whose music inspired a coup. His highly politicized lyrics helped to modify the behavior of Ivorian soldiers during the 1999 military court. His lyricism La queue du Diable call attention to the decrease in civil servants’ and workers’ salaries. He mocks the government for holding conferences with champagne and caviar while the country faces serious social problems.

Study how politicized song inspired 1999 coup leader Robert Guei to recognize a new generation of youth that is positive about life and about Africa.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice.africa/features/rhythms/ivorycoast.shtml>

Possible questions students can discuss and research:

1. How have the pressures of globalization affected traditional African values?
2. What is the impact of AIDS in contemporary Africa?

The youth of much of Africa is ravaged by endemic diseases like malaria and AIDS. In the Ivory Coast for instance more than 10 percent of the population is HIV-positive. Accordingly, Alan Greenberg, M.D., who studied the expansion of the HIV virus and tuberculosis, found that of the approximately 4,000 newly diagnosed tuberculosis patients in Abidjan, 45 percent are also HIV positive.

3. What do hip-hoppers say about the prevalence of AIDS in Africa? Does it play a part in accelerating the moral, political and economic decline of African states?

Hip-hoppers view AIDS as an international conspiracy to depopulate Africa. They believe that AIDS is the result of experimentation gone mad. They conjecture that African Americans and Africans were deliberately infected with the AIDS virus for population control and for the international drug companies to make money.

4. Do African youth see their governments as being impotent, weak and ineffectual for their failure to handle or halt the spread of AIDS.
5. Has AIDS related death of so many parents weakened the extended family system?
6. How have rudderless African youth, those without parents, elders and the extended family social safety net survived?
7. What Kaplan had experienced in cities in six West African countries was explained to him by his Minister friend. His rationale used suggested the breakdown of village culture.

“ . . . In the villages of Africa it is perfectly natural to feed at any table and lodge in any hut, but in the cities this communal existence no longer holds. You must pay for lodging and be invited for food. When young men find out that their relation cannot put them up, they become lost. They join other migrants and slip gradually into the criminal process”

8. Have huge numbers of ragamuffin orphans changed the nature of African cities?

Crime, lawlessness and drugs in the intercity often plague students of the hip-hop generations. They are forced into the underground economy where the risk of a violent death is real.

Martin van Creveld wrote in *The Transformation of War*:

“If crime and war become indistinguishable, then “national defense” may in the future be viewed as a local concept. As crime continues its growth in our cities and the ability of state governments and criminal-justice systems to protect their citizens diminished, urban crime may, according to Van Creveld, “develop into low-intensity conflict by coalescing along

racial, religious, social, and political lines. As small-scale violence multiplies at home and abroad state armies will continue to shrink, being gradually replaced by a booming private security business, as in West Africa.”

9. How have rap and American pop culture influenced the youth of Africa?

For example, young people of African now challenge and usurp the traditional hierarchy of African villages. In the recent and past the young elaborately deferred to the old. Increasingly, the elders' role in political events is diminished. Some are cast aside in the wake of the new gangsta hip-hop. Gangsta hip-hop played a role in ultimately forcing Ivory Coast's elite to relinquish some of its power.

10. How has the ideology of urban youth culture undermined traditional religious beliefs?

Many hip-hoppers don't ascribe much faith to western religions. They often infer that main stream western religions are used to oppress and suppress. They often note the role of missionaries in undermining traditional African religious values. For example, Robert Kaplan holds that western religion is undermined by animist beliefs. He says that these beliefs are not suitable to a moral society, because they are based on irrational spirit powers. One person against another, one group against another seeks spirits to wreak vengeance.

11. How has the hip-hop generation influenced marriage?

Hip-hoppers often rap about how they don't trust the institution of marriage. They often lament about the single parent families in which they were raised. They really lambaste absent, deadbeat or imprisoned fathers. They blame the system for making the ghetto family dysfunctional.

Kaplan says polygamy, designed for a pastoral way of life, thrives in sub-Saharan African urban environment resulting in losses of family structure where a mother can live in one place and the father in another. He describes the plight of Damba Tesele that came to Abidjan's slum Chicago from Burkina Faso in 1963. Damba has four wives and thirty-two children, not one of whom has made it to high school. Kaplan says this arrangement is largely responsible for the world's highest birth rate and the explosion of the HIV virus on the continent.

12. What issues are faced by African and American innercity youth?

The hip-hop generation has been reeling against the impact of globalization. Sub-Sahara Africa and African American youth have been virtually shut out of the trend towards global prosperity.

*Richard Freeman and Lawrence Katz edited *Difference and Changes in Wage Structure* (University Chicago. 1995) to explore this trend and revealed the widening division between the haves and have-nots that occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This tendency has accelerated unabatedly in the 21st century. In short, "The U.S. labor market experiences a massive twist against the less skilled and lower pay that reduce living standards."*

The same can be said about poorer relatively backward African economies in that they have difficulty in importing know-how, capital, foreign investment, and the development of an educated technological savvy workforce. Without these measures, sub-Sahara Africans can never hope to remotely narrow their income gap with their former colonizers.

Strategies:

This unit is designed to develop methods and strategies can be employed to ensure that students practice and develop skills such as abstract thinking, critical analysis, and deductive reasoning.

These areas are the most difficult skills to implement in lesson plans and classroom procedures. The use of original documents and published rap lyrics allows students to investigate some of the social issues present in hip-hop literatures.

Students should be able to give a valid source for assertions made in rap. Using various sources of information, statistical data students will develop their own interpretations and judgment about the state of African countries.

Students can apply what they learned to writing political messages that incorporate their understanding of the popular attitudes and social climate of contemporary Africa.

Students will examine and compare/contrast political and social statements contained in primary sources to those in espoused raps. They will concern themselves with the language; and attitudes expressed in these raps to see if they reflect contemporary issues.

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http://www.afropop.org/explore/county_info/ID/3Ivory%20Coast/

A guide to African and world music via public radio and the web. Introduces the listener to Ivory Coast: Afropop West African music reggae and zouglou.

www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/rhythms/ivorycoast.shtml.

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www. eminem lyrics.	Web site to study lyrics contained in eminem's raps
www. enimenonline.com	Web to examine the most popular white rapper.
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www. ohhla.com/	Web site offer original hip-hop lyrics.
www. playahata.com.	Web site that is geared towards hip-hop youth.
www. rap dictionary.com	Web resource for hip-hop slang.
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www.washingtonpost.com/YoungUrbanKenians Youth inKenya Feel Few Tribal Ties

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Website offers Stephen Buckley's article on child brides in Ivory Coast, photos of child brides.

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Content Standards

The following Pittsburgh Public School Content Standards are implemented in this curriculum unit.

Citizenship

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, culture, groups, and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations.
4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation, and worlds by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues confronting

the United States and other nations by conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.

8. All students demonstrate the ability to work effectively with other.

Communications

2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

3. All students respond orally and in writing to convey information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational text and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform, and persuade in all subject areas.

6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.

7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure, and use.