

In this first musicological history of rap, Cheryl L. Keyes traces the genre from its roots in West African bardic traditions, the Jamaican dance-hall tradition, and African American vernacular expressions to its permeation of the cultural mainstream as a major tenet of hip-hop lifestyle and culture. Rap music, according to Keyes, is a forum that addresses the political and economic disfranchisement of black youths and other groups, fosters ethnic pride, and displays culture values and aesthetics. Blending popular culture with folklore and ethnomusicology, Keyes offers a nuanced portrait of the artists, themes, and varying styles reflective of urban life and street consciousness. Drawing on the music, lives, politics, and interests of figures including Afrika Bambaataa, the godfather of hip-hop, and his Zulu Nation, Grandmaster Flash, Kool DJ Herc, MC Lyte, LL Cool J, De La Soul, Public Enemy, and The Last Poets, the book challenges outsider views of the genre. It also draws on ethnographic research done in New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, and London, as well as interviews with performers, producers, directors, fans, and managers. Keyes' vivid and wide-ranging analysis covers the emergence and personas of female rappers and white rappers, the advent of rap music videos, and the existence of gangsta rap, Southern rap, acid rap, and dance-centered rap subgenres. Also considered are rapper-turned-mogul phenomenons such as Queen Latifah; the multimedia empire of Sean P. Diddy Combs; the cataclysmic rise of Death Row Records; East Coast versus West Coast tensions; the deaths of Tupac Shakur and Christopher The Notorious B.I.G. Wallace; and the unification efforts of the Nation of Islam and the Hip-Hop Nation.

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