

Ill Beats: Black Women Rap Artists and the Representations of Women in Hip Hop  
Culture

By

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## Abstract

An individual's identity development involves the intersection of several factors, including race, class, gender, and sexuality. Historically, enslaved women's identities were sexually, culturally, and politically framed on the plantations through the lens of white male hegemony. The double jeopardy of being African American and female in a white patriarchal society has generated a legacy of struggle to resist the images constructed such as Matriarch, Aunt Jemima/Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel to name a few. The resistance legacy of African American women like Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church-Terrell, has expanded into the musical sphere of popular culture. Blues artists such as Nina Simone, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith expressed their resistance to oppression and repression aesthetically. Through musical expression, African American women performers have formulated a space where they can protest the hegemonic paradigms of sexual and racial inferiority. In contemporary popular culture this musical space is in Hip Hop.

Contemporary African American women rap artists are continuing the struggle to overcome the characterizations and undertake the monumental task of demystifying the racist and sexist ideologies framing their identity. This thesis examines the ways that African American women convey the challenges they face both within the Hip Hop micro-culture and as African American women struggling in a white patriarchal macro-culture. In addition, African American women rap artists' employment of rap music as a medium to develop their own identities, whether negative or positive by "Black feminist"

or "womanist" standards is also explored. This study includes a survey of student attitudes toward these issues.