

Critics say music fuels fire Rap's sex and violence mirror society

By Anthony D. Speights

During its infancy in the 1970s, rap music was carefree, geared toward people partying and having a good time.

Then it grew up, and began to cast a reflective eye on the problems of society, such as gangs and violence.

But critics say rap got too caught up in those problems. And rather than helping to solve them, they say, rap now fuels violence, overshadowing the positive messages many rappers are trying to convey.

Some rappers, such as Hammer and Young MC, try to spread the word against violence and portray women as some-

thing other than sexual objects.

In 1988, M.C. Hammer broke into the music scene, and by the time he released "Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em," he was rap music's equivalent of Michael Jackson. Hammer brought with him messages of peace, love and anti-violence.

But by the time Hammer released his latest LP, "Too Legit To Quit," fans were few.

Diana Campbell, a senior engineering student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said rappers with a positive message often turned off some listeners, because they failed to give listeners even a smidgen of reality.

"He has so much gloss to his music that he has lost his flavor," Campbell said.

"People who have to listen to rap music want to listen to music that's real on a mature level, and Hammer no longer caters to this."

Damion Turner, an investigator with the Douglas County Attorney's Office in Omaha, said his work with

gang members made it clear that artists such as Hammer weren't dealing in reality.

Those who boast of their women and riches may be equally far removed, he said, but kids don't know that.

Ice Cube echoes that sentiment in "Gangsta Gangsta":

"To a kid looking up to me/life ain't nothing but bitches and money."

Turner said young kids were impressionable. And groups such as NWA who boast about gang banging make a bigger impression than DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince grumbling about parents who just don't understand.

Grant "Klass K" Kauffman, a senior broadcasting major and a local rapper, said artists like Hammer were entertainers, not rappers. Real rappers out there are trying to be positive, but they don't get the recognition they deserve, he said.

Donnie "DJ Romeo" Jones, a local DJ,

said rappers such as Def Jeff, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince and Young MC tried to be positive, but kids wouldn't spend money on their messages. The market right now is for the DJ Quicks and the Ice Cubes, who rap about violence and degradation of women, he said.

Critics worry that a violent society is made more so by influential rap acts such as NWA, Compton's Most Wanted, and AMG, who raps in "Word 2 Tha D."

"I shoot motherfuckers to get me bent/and a thick-ass bitch to get me laid/and a smoke down fiend to get me paid."

Steve Exon, an Omaha city councilman and member of Omahans for Decency, said such lyrics became threatening when placed in the context of a crippled family structure. The burgeoning number of single parents and families in which both parents work creates a society of children who don't receive proper home care — a society of children who lack an adult perspective on the music they listen to, he said.

Music plays an important part in shaping a generation, Exon said, citing the influence music had on the hippie movement and values of the '60s.

But alone, he said, music doesn't determine people's actions.

"I don't think that driving down the street (listening to rap) will make somebody kill a cop," Exon said.

Lincoln Police Officer John Ways said rap music alone usually did not provoke violence among kids.

But to kids who already have troubles of their own, he said, rap's violent messages can be powerful. Even if the underlying message in the violent lyrics is positive, he said, listeners don't always put the emphasis in the right place.

Sharilyn Bullock, an undeclared graduate student, said rap was not to blame for violence.

"The kind of people who kill because of a song will kill anyway," she said.

Campbell agreed and said violent people were troubled by something other than the lyrics in a song. The lyrics may add incentive to commit a violent act, she said, but the intent is already there.

LPs such as "Music To Drive By," by Compton's Most Wanted or Ice Cube's "Kill At Will," simply reflect and capitalize on what's going on in the city streets, Campbell said.

Romeo said profits were the basis of the lyrics.

"A lot of times it's all about the money. Some rappers are going to do things that

make them money, even if it is capitalizing on something violent to get it."

Exon agreed. "There is no question about this — it is driven by the dollars, driven by that money-hungry animal Time Warner who has such groups as Ice-T and Luke Records."

Violence has no place in rap music, he said.

"There is no place in any type of music for this," he said. "As a place for protest, yes. Violence perpetuates violence, and glorifies it."

Rap is going a step further. It not only glorifies violence; it degrades women, he said.

Lyrics from AMG's "Word 2 Tha D" are an example:

"Wait till the tape drops then watch all the stupid ass hoes jock/They want to ride this dick like a motherfuckin' cowboy but I ain't down boy/But a bitch ain't nothing but a bitch to me/Word to the motherfuckin D."

In its degradation of women, however, rap is not alone, Exon said.

"Most music, not just rap music, is degrading to women," he said. "Music is a reflection of the male ego. Music encourages rape, sadomasochism and domination of the female sex."

But sexism in rap music is unjustified, Wade said, and only serves to perpetuate stereotypes and ignorances.

"By having sexist lyrics in music, it represents the decline in the moral values that we have seen over the years," Ways said.

Marla Styles, an undeclared graduate student, said sexism and violence existed in rap music. And their presence is justified, she said, "as long as it portrays the truth."

Kauffman said violence was selectively appropriate in rap lyrics.

"When you have people shooting people in the face just to be hard or to be gang banging, that is the type of violence that hip-hop doesn't need," he said.

"But when it comes to hate versus hate or fire with fire when having to defend yourself, then violence is justified."

Kauffman said violence was a last resort for many rappers.

"They speak out that something should be done about the way things are run in this country, and if certain situations don't change, then violence is going to happen."

Turner said he believed that rappers prompted violence, but freedom of

speech protected their right to speak their minds.

Sexism toward women in rap lyrics seems to be a heavy draw. Women often are targets of rappers — some raps acts, such as Too Short, dedicate an entire half of an LP to degrading women. Yet, women represent a large chunk of the audience for such music.

The reason is no mystery, Bullock said.

"It's all about choice," she said.

"People listen to the music most of the time and not the words; girls also do not think that what the artists are saying is talking about them."

Ways said that while people got caught up in the beat, they still subconsciously heard the words, no matter whether the message was positive or

negative.

"If you repeat something long enough, you'll start to believe it," he said.

Romeo said some people listened to sexist music because they wanted to be gangsta and emulate what they heard.

They think that slapping women around and having multiple sexual partners makes them cool, he said.

But Ti model be reality.

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the song flow, he said.

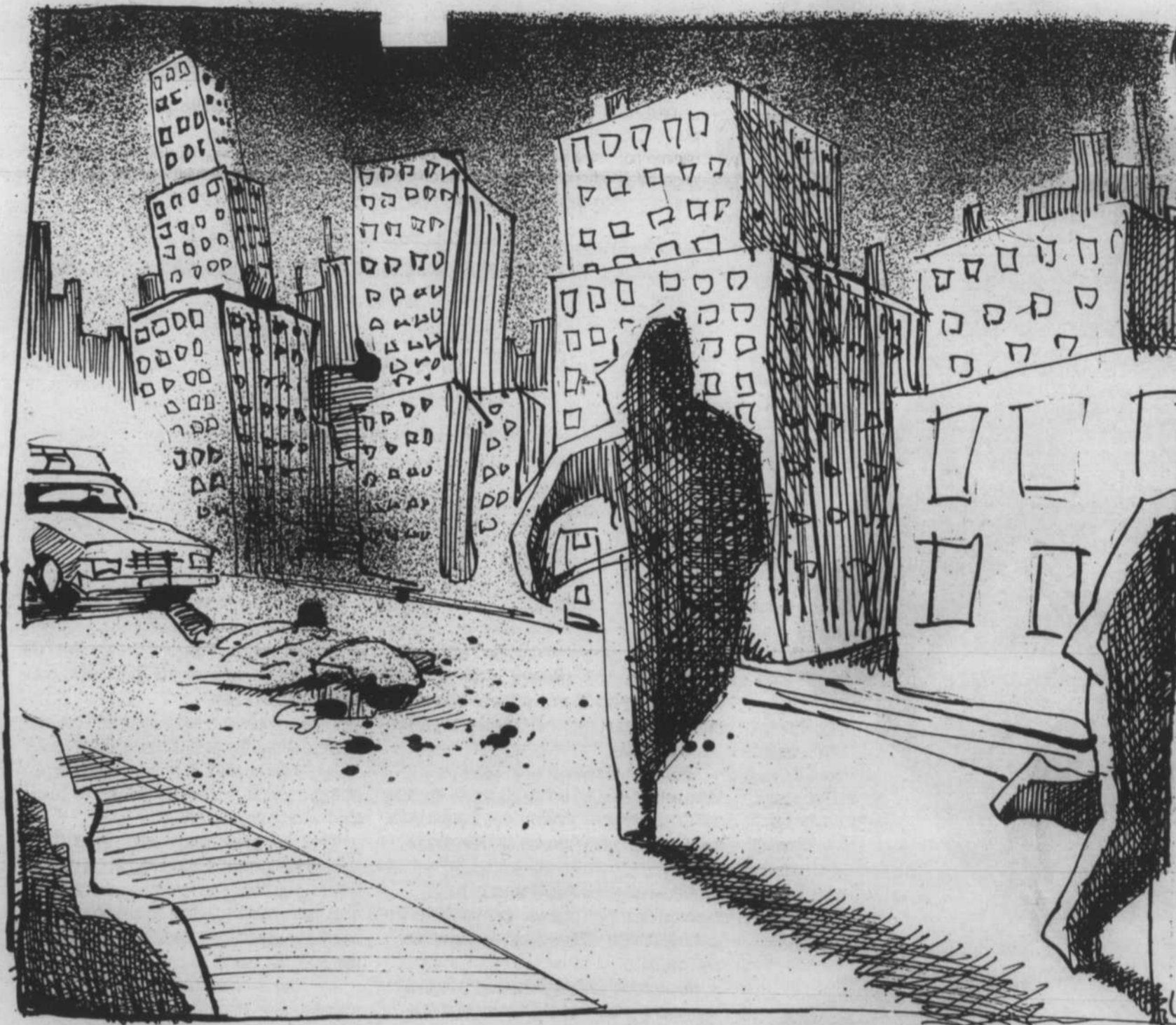
Still, the records sell, to people of all colors.

Turner said that about two-thirds of rap music was bought by the white community.

Campbell said white people bought rap music because it perpetuated the stereotypes that they already had regarding the black community.

Kauffman said that hip-hop was a scapegoat and that signaling out a few artists kept the conflict going about whether rap was worthy of being called art.

"As long as there are artists out there working towards the positive, then the good reputation of hip-hop music will prevail in the end."



Drop top: a convertible automobile

Ducat: money

Eight ball: Olde English 800 malt liquor, also referred to as a 40 ounce

Fade: hairstyle in which the hair is lower on the sides than on top

Fat: living well, doing well, being successful

Fess (fess up): tell the truth

Five-O: police

Flavor: the tone or vibe of a person, place or situation

Flex: to act in a way that invites trouble

Fly: high form of praise; often refers to well-dressed females

Freak: a wild, sexually active person

Fresh: positive assessment and appraisal of anything

Frontin': trying to impress someone or telling lies

Gang bangin': being in and involved with a street gang

Gangsta (gangster): street hoodlum

Gas face: a silly look when expressing displeasure



Daytons: expensive car tire rims

Dead presidents: American money

Def: a high form of praise

Dime: ten dollars

Dis (or diss): to disrespect

DJ: disc jockey; in dancehall reggae, the rapper is the DJ and the record spinner is the selector

Do damage: doing something well

Dog: to treat badly

Do-or-die Bed-Stuy: the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn

Dope: a high form of praise

Double deuce: .22 caliber pistol

Down: to be closely involved with a person or situation or to be in agreement

Down by law: officially involved in a situation as decreed by someone in charge, as in crew, posse or employer

Drive by: a West Coast, gang-style shooting that occurs from a passing car

Drop science: to inform, explain and educate in a knowledgeable fashion