

ever come to the ghetto/because you wouldn't understand the ghetto."

Pointing out class among blacks, Werner said, is a way of claiming turf and increasing competition between segments of the black community.

Tate said he disagreed that there still were strong lines being drawn between classes.

Rap, born in the Bronx, is a creation of black middle-class and working-class people. But the most dominant rappers today are the middle-class rappers such as Erik B. and Rakim, De la Sol, Queen Latifah and Public Enemy, Tate said.

"The middle class and the working class are the innovators of rap as well as other forms of music like jazz, blues and doo-wap," Tate said.

Tate questioned whether class, such as the criticism of the middle class by the lower class, was an element in rap messages. He said people in every class had common goals of acquiring wealth and material goods.

"When (calling out) does occur, it becomes a criticism of bourgeois values, or the notion that what is culturally correct is defined by the upper middle class."

Tate said that although some of the more political rappers chose to critique class differences, he didn't think it was a major part of the rap message.

### Youth struggle

For rap about social class, Werner said he enjoyed Kid Frost, a Chicano rapper from Los Angeles, and Ice-T, also from Los Angeles, because distance separated their voices from the problem. Werner said he thought these artists had a talent for explaining the struggle of living on the streets while still maintaining their respect and identity.

“*Music is music, I resist the premise that rap is just black music. If you want to take the argument that rap derives from a specific African position, for example, West African tradition, you have to study the culture.*”

--Craig Werner

Rap artists such as Kid Frost and Ice-T expound on the struggle of minority youths in the United States who are trying to become law-abiding citizens while the system seems to be working against them, Werner said.

"Schools are destroyed, teachers are pretending to teach young children to read, and (youths) are looking at the possibility of working at McDonald's," Werner said.

Werner blames the Reagan administration for the breakdown of many communities across the country.

The Reagan era was a time of denial and public manipulation, he said. The resulting anger of minority youths is expressed through music.

Public Enemy is a group that has been effective in relaying some of the political feelings of the 1980s through music. The group's music says, "Look, you can't deny this; you have to deal with it," Werner said.

"In the '80s there was an emphasis

on big stars; there was a glitzy surface," he said. "Behind that, stuff went down the drain."

"We heard there was no crack, no AIDS, no homeless; then in the '90s they pop up out of nowhere."

Werner said he thought one reason white kids listened to rap in the '80s was because they were using black culture to escape from the failings of white culture.

"They compensate (for the problems) in a stupid way and go to black folks," he said.

Rap music also has an element of rebellion that white kids use against their parents, much like that of rock 'n' roll in the '60s, Werner said.

"It's a music of rebellion, or rebellious turf," he said. "They know their parents won't like it."

### Midwest rap

Werner said he noticed the dramatic spread of rap in 1986, after visiting a mall in predominantly white North Platte.

He was traveling from his home in Colorado Springs, Colo., back to the University of Wisconsin to begin assembling one of his first rap courses. When he visited a mall in North Platte, Werner said he was shocked to find what he considered a large selection of rap music.

"I thought, 'Who is listening to this in North Platte, Nebraska?'" he said.

The selection of rap in North Platte was, and still is, indicative of the source of demand for rap music. White youths snatch up 80 percent of the rap records sold today.

"Welcome to America," Werner said. "The money is in the white kids."

But while white youths may be listening to rap music, Werner said, they don't always catch its messages.

In teaching his class, Werner said he had to be careful to root out white students' assumptions about the source of inner-city problems.

### Criticism

People often view rap music as a cause of problems, Werner said, rather than as a reaction to those problems. That is one reason why conservatives criticize rap artists, he said.

But Werner said it was important to make sure "we don't confuse cause and effect with rap."

Some of the criticism centers on the type of language and experiences, usually considered criminal, that are relayed in rap lyrics. Werner said critics of rap artists often become overly concerned with the example being set for other youths listening to the music. Afraid of the truth, those critics look at what is being said, but ignore why rap artists are saying it.

"The reality is they wouldn't be rapping about it if it didn't happen," he said.

He used the example of a cut from KRS-1 that says: "What are you going to do when you can't feed your family?/Will you drop a bag? (sell cocaine)/Of course you would."

Werner's classes can become uncomfortable for people who can't see beyond the critics' view of rap music. Werner said he wanted his students to realize that important aspects of rap were being overlooked by the critics.

"People get mad at each other, and mad at themselves in my classes. You can learn a lot about people by their responses to rap," he said.

"Rap is the reality of a multicultural society — the reality is, everyone is a part of the same cultural matrix."



**Olde E.:** Olde English 800 malt liquor

**Packin':** carrying a firearm

**Paper:** money

**Peep it:** to look closely at a situation, person or thing

**Played:** to be taken advantage of, cheated or conned

**Player:** someone who gets all his money off women; or someone who earns an illegal living by using his or her wits

**Pockets are fat:** having lots of money on hand

**Poot-but:** a lackadaisical, unmotivated, dumb person

**Posse:** a group of people who hang out together and will look out for one another if trouble arrives

**Pull:** clout; or to win the confidence of a woman

**Put heads to bed:** knocking people out

**Put your head out:** to kill someone

**Raggamuffin (dancehall reggae):** Jamaican parallel to hip-hop, with reggae influence

