

Rap banned

Warning labels: parental advisory or preliminary censorship?

By Jeremy Fitzpatrick

If the Devil didn't make you do it, blame rap music.

The belief that music has the power to negatively influence behavior started in the United States the 1950s and '60s, when rock 'n' roll became popular.

Today, messages of sex and violence found in some rap music draw the same criticism. Some argue that, because of its potential to fuel violence, rap music must be regulated. In Lincoln, no official sanctions exist on the sale of music, said Greg Graham, manager of Twisters at 48th and Van Dorn streets.

Graham said no state or federal laws regulated what music stores could sell or who they could sell it to. The only regulation of music in Lincoln, he said, is voluntary record labeling by record companies.

"There are no laws, there is nothing at all, dictating what has labels, what doesn't have labels," he said. "Just what the record companies decide may be controversial, they usually label."

The labels have a parental advisory that says the music contains explicit lyrics. Graham estimated that about 75 percent of the rap music that Twisters receives has labels.

Two University of Nebraska-Lincoln professors disagreed about the effect music could have on behavior and about whether music should be regulated.

Richard Duncan, a UNL law professor who described himself as a conservative, said he thought much of modern music, including both rap and rock 'n' roll, contained messages that were harmful to society.

People who hear music with messages of violence and crime could be influenced to duplicate that behavior, he said.

"That doesn't mean you listen to that music and you go out and do (what it says), but it may influence you," he said. "Every action begins with a thought, and the thoughts are out there in the music."

Duncan said his biggest concern was the effect music had on children.

"Much of music today is not in the best interest of kids," he said. "It's not telling them to do healthy wholesome things; it's telling them to do the reverse."

"We are hurting our kids," he said. "Their lives are messed up."

The responsibility for any harm music does to society, Duncan said, lies as much with the companies that produce it as with the musicians who write it.

"My real problem is with corporate America — the Time Warners of the world — who are making millions of dollars off the pain and destruction of millions of young lives in this country, particularly in the inner city," he said.

"These rap musicians driving around in their Rolls Royces, these corporate executives driving around in their Rolls Royces, are sort of fiddling while America burns."

Duncan said that, despite the detrimental effects of music, he did not favor government censorship as a means of regulating it.

"You might be able (legally) to limit access to children, but in terms of absolute prohibition, I don't think you could do that, and I don't think it's a good idea," he said. "You'd just make First Amendment martyrs out of (musicians) to try and prohibit them, which would just increase their sales and make them almost sympathetic characters."

He is not opposed to the voluntary labeling of music by record companies, but he said he didn't think labeling was the solution.



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of behavior is much more complex.

"I think people are affected by their social environment, including the ideas they get from their social environment, but they put it together in their own way and construct their own views."

Moshman said that also was true for children. Parents who are concerned about what their children are listening to should expose them to more ideas, not limit their exposure, he said.

"What is important to children's development is that they are exposed to a variety of ideas and opinions and are encouraged to construct their own views," he said. "That's where I would see a convergence between psychological research on development and the traditional civil liberties view that the proper recourse for bad speech is more speech."

For dealing with controversial music and children, he favors a system for record stores like the one used by the American Library Association. In that system, children can check out any book, and what they read is regulated by their parents.

Boycotting stores and music is a right Moshman said he supported. But he also said boycotts could be a dangerous way of dealing with controversial issues if they stifled free expression.

"I would support the right of people to boycott, but I think these things could be dangerous and should be used sparingly — and only in extreme cases," he said.

For example, Moshman said, he would support boycotting a store whose music was devoted solely to killing police, but not a music store that carried Ice-T's "Cop Killer" with its other music.

He questioned how those who supported boycotts would determine what was or was not acceptable.

"My view would be that there is no good way to determine what ideas will be boycotted," he said.

The Nebraska Legislature would have to pass any state regulation of music. Two state senators said they were opposed to regulation.

Sen. David Landis of Lincoln said he supported voluntary labeling by record companies, but opposed

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Rap: poetry and rhymes set to throbbing, funk rhythm patterns

Raptivist: politically and socially conscious rappers

Raw: hard, direct, truthful, and uncensored

Real deal: the truth

Red, black and green: the colors of black liberation worldwide

Sample: a portion of an existing record or sound

Scoop: to pick up a female

Scratch: manually manipulating records to create an abrasive, percussive sound

Set: place to hang out in the neighborhood

Seven digits: a phone number, preferably a female's

Shoot the gift: to engage in conversation, preferably with a female

Skeezer: a hip-hop groupie

Skins: female sex organ

Slammin': high form of praise

Steel: firearm

