

Student sample #2: average range  
Body paragraph-persuasion-learning experience

If rap music is censored it can create an extreme violation of our rights as people of this country. The freedom of speech is one of our greatest rights and many problems would arise if it was taken away. To stop this would be to snuff out the thoughts, views, opinions and ideas, and emotions of rappers and listeners. It would be like cutting out all freedom of expression. Also, if the government started censoring rap, censorship could grow and our country would be pushed down the "slippery slope towards totalitarianism," according to Christopher Ruane in "Gangsta Rap." All the rights we enjoy as citizens should be exercised freely to prevent too much federal power.



international debate education association

**Gangsta Rap, Censorship of**

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**Summary:** Should the government censor lyrics of songs that are violent or expletive, for example "gangsta" rap?**Introduction****Author:** Christopher Ruane ( Ireland )**Created:** Wednesday, December 31, 1969**Last Modified:****Context**

There is an ongoing debate about the impact of music on certain listeners – especially music such as « gangsta » rap, with lyrics linked to violence and illegal acts. There is widespread disagreement, for example between the music industry and parents' groups, about the effect such music has on young listeners, and their behaviour, i.e. does it encourage them to behave in a particular way?

**Arguments**

Pros	Cons
<p>Gangsta rap encourages listeners to criminality. This is so on two levels. First, it sometimes uses language that actively incites crime, for example encouraging weapons use, spousal abuse or homophobic attacks. Secondly, it glorifies a lifestyle that is rich with imagery of criminality (e.g. gun use and drug dealing) and this sends out a subconscious but consistent message affirming criminality.</p>	<p>Gangsta rap is a form of entertainment like any other. Some of its purveyors may use words or imagery that portrays certain criminal acts, but that is because they reflect the culture from which it spawned. Critics miss the subtleties of rap music, in which the rapper often takes on a particular persona in a song and so does not necessarily endorse the views or actions it portrays; rap fans are well aware of these ambiguities. Violence and criminality are also endemic in other forms of entertainment, for example opera and classic films often contain large-scale killing and violence. Trying to link gangsta rap to crime is singling it out amongst entertainment forms for political reasons. Would heavy metal, with its comparable content, be picked on instead if it were the music of a black urban underclass?</p>
<p>Gangsta rap is especially pernicious because it targets the youth market at a crucial, receptive adolescent age. Gangsta rappers clearly seek to appeal to a receptive youthful audience, which is why so many of their images use young people and songs refer to events which would strike an especial chord with adolescents and young adults. This is irresponsible, as it represents an attempt by gangsta rappers to use their power to influence young people with a subversive, anti-societal message.</p>	<p>Gangsta rappers in fact provide a positive role model for young people. They are self-made success stories who have often achieved considerable fame and wealth despite humble beginnings. Censoring them sends out a discouraging message to other young people who may see them as a form of inspiration to themselves to succeed in life.</p>
<p>Gangsta rap is socially corrosive because it affirms negative stereotypes. Much gangsta rap revolves around the affirmation of stereotypes, such as black violence and wife beating. It purports to be social realism but in fact conveys a very selective portrayal of life which reinforces already damaging social stereotypes, of groups who are often poorly placed to campaign successfully by themselves against such portrayal. It is therefore right for government to censor such negative stereotyping, as it often does when regulating e.g. race relations or criminal acts.</p>	<p>Gangsta rap does not employ negative stereotypes more than is reasonable. Mostly it is a form of social realism which simply tells hard truths that many policymakers would rather pretend did not exist, not least because in part they reflect those policymakers' own failures. Even where such affirmation is concentrated in such a way as to make it an unrealistic representation of everyday life, this is no worse than the same phenomenon in other forms of popular culture e.g. soap operas.</p>
<p>The government has a moral legitimacy in censoring. People correctly look to the government as the public arbiter of common morals, for the wider social good. It is in line with this role, therefore, for the government to take such steps as it thinks necessary to protect the public morality. This may include censorship of things which are likely to cause moral harm, an approach often manifested in e.g. film classification schemes.</p>	<p>Government censorship is a dangerous form of statist control. Even if one accepts the argument for some limited form of government censorship to protect public morals, this needs to be very precisely and conservatively defined to avoid the slippery slope towards creeping totalitarianism. Allowing censorship of popular culture on grounds that the lyrics are mildly subversive is unwelcome as it incorporates a very expansive view of the proper ambit of government regulation. This issue is properly the concern of parents, who should take more interest in, and responsibility for, the music (and films, TV, internet use) to which their children are exposed.</p>
<p>Censorship would be an effective method of keeping gangsta rap out of the hands of the people who are most susceptible to suffering from its corrosive message. Those who would proactively go to some lengths to obtain the material through black market channels in the event of censorship are not the intended target for such a censorship to affect.</p>	<p>It is very difficult in practical terms to enforce such censorship on a national level. This is especially so because of the global nature of many parts of the music industry, including the cross-country appeal of artists and the international availability of media. Therefore, a ban e.g. on sale of uncensored media could possibly be circumvented by Internet-based file swapping.</p>

**Motions**

This House believes that children should be protected from subversive cultural influences