

Race, Rap and Trap



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Introduction

Trap music is a sub genre of rap which over the past seven years has increased significantly in popularity as elements of it are used now in a plethora of genres with use of synthesised snares and hi hats originally from the Roland 808 soundboard (pictured below) increase peaking as seen by the 24% increase in streams on Spotify from 2015 to 2017.

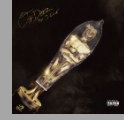


Key Aims

- Look back at the history of trap and how it became part of black culture
- Examine how the mainstream music industry and the media perpetuate subconsciously derogatory attitudes of wider society
- Explain how trap music has transformed to represent more specific identities within the UK and the effects this has caused in wider society

Method

Content analysis on a sample of four trap songs that represent the genre as a whole

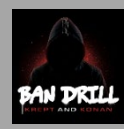


Identify recurring themes and patterns within the data



Link themes to the content within the music

Recognise themes being prevalent within the news, such as discrimination and misrecognition



Drill

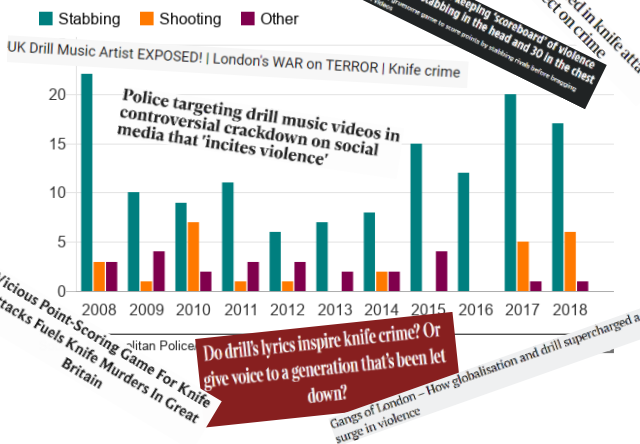
- In the UK, trap music underwent a transformation into drill which has become subject to government control and police oversight which has caused drill to be widely viewed in a negative light.
- Looking at Drill songs highlights how music is used to create and bring awareness to black identity, as well as to present an explanation for the rise in crime specifically within London from the perspective of working class black youths rather than the police.
- As seen on the graph to the right there was an increase in teenage homicides for which the government needed an explanation. This resulted in the scapegoating of drill music which caused the genre to be rejected and identified as a "problem genre" similar to (previously) grime, rock n roll and hip hop.
- This can be seen to echo cultural prejudices which originate from a history of prejudice towards non-European cultures since the origin of such music stems from people of African descent.

Findings

- Contemporary Trap highlights a number of key social issues such as :
- The promotion of the worship of society itself as there is a focus on indulgence and spending- habits that benefit capitalism
 - expression of political resistance in the face of racial oppression or as a reaction to the destructive impact of deindustrialization on black communities
 - Music can never be separated from its social context (Bramwell 2015: 87), so social context within trap music reaffirms class structures.
 - Influential rappers able to showcase vulnerabilities/ struggles of having wealth and using it as a coping for their personal struggles e.g. emotional stability and relationship issues
 - Trap embraces misrecognition and racism-conscious representation – presenting itself as a creative way of dealing with misrecognition

Teenage homicides in London

Number of deaths per year, by cause



Conclusion

- From studying narratives around trap music and the controversies around the genre, I have shown the role that race plays within this category of rap and how the negative connotation of trap music tends to revolve specifically around black people.
- These connotations of criminality and deviance link to past perceptions of people of colour, which are now being used by the media to create a negative image of rap subculture rather than a specific race, however the labels are applied beyond the music scene.
- This in turn, perpetuates the institutionalised racism that is still present within contemporary society as this negative perception of the subculture gets intertwined into wider black culture leading to the discrimination of people outside of the trap audience as a result of racial profiling by the media.

References

Bramwell, R. (2015). *UK Hip-Hop, Grime and the City*. New York: Routledge. Haynes, J. (2013). *Music, difference and the residue of race*. New York: Routledge. Fatsis, L. (2019). *VIEWPOINT: Now that Grime is "Pop", When Will the Panic about Drill Music Stop?*. [online] Discover Society. Available at: <https://discoversociety.org/2019/08/07/viewpoint-now-that-grime-is-pop-when-will-the-panic-about-drill-music-stop/>. Kaluža, J. (2018). Reality of Trap: Trap Music and its Emancipatory Potential. *IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication & Film*, 5(1),pp.23-42.

