

Meiling

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English 11: Argument Essay

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### The Oppression In Black Music

“Hip-Hop has been closer to the pulse of the streets than any music that we’ve had in a long time,” said Quincy Jones, an African-American record producer, musician, and film producer. In *The 1619 Project* developed by Nikole Hannah-Jones and published by *The New York Times* in 2019, Hannah-Jones asserts that music has been a major influence since the first ships containing slaves arrived in the United States in 1619. In the essay titled, “America Wasn’t a Democracy, Until Black Americans Made It One,”<sup>1</sup> Nikole Hannah-Jones discusses how black music developed throughout the years since 1619. To this day, African-Americans continue to use different ways of music to make sense of their lives. African-Americans have always used music to cope with oppression, whereas other groups tend to use music mostly for entertainment and profit.

African-Americans began the tradition of using music to confront their oppression with Negro spirituals. These songs were written and sung to deal with the oppression of enslavement. The history of Negro Spirituals dates back to when African-Americans were first captured and stripped from their homes, languages, families, and cultures; however, whites could not take away their music. “African-Americans adopted Christianity, the religion of their masters,”<sup>2</sup> said the author of “The Negro Spiritual: From Cottonfield to Concert Hall.” African-Americans

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://spirituals-database.com/the-negro-spiritual/>

inherited the Christianity of their slaveowners, but they created a much deeper and personal meaning for themselves through Negro spirituals and community practices. All Africans did not share the same language but they shared a similar cultural background which they were able to recreate and infuse into the religious practice of Christianity in order to make it theirs. All African-Americans were dehumanized and put into the same category, yet they were still able to come together to create a new life. Overall, African-Americans revolutionized the popular art of music in genres such as hip-hop, R&B, blues, and more.

Though slavery is long over, Black musicians still use music to express themselves in the face of modern forms of oppression. Many Black musicians send messages in their music that show signs of still being oppressed. It is a common problem in today's society where African-Americans are mistreated by police and the government. Meek Mill, a famous Philadelphian rapper, has a popular song called "Trauma" on his most recent album, *Championships*, in which he talks about his problems dealing with systemic oppression.<sup>3</sup> He refers to police brutality and how the police kill unarmed African-Americans for no reason at all other than race. Mill's lyrics, "They shot that boy 20 times when they could've told him just freeze/ Could've put him in a cop car, but they let him just bleed,"<sup>4</sup> is a direct reference to a modern-day event in which yet another Black man was killed by the police. Meek Mill uses his personal experiences to express how African-Americans are still mistreated, and how the government makes the world look at Blacks.

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<https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2744103-colin-kaepernick-meek-mill-victim-of-systemic-oppression-after-prison-term>

<sup>4</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/rjxpoe>

Many believe that Black music is no different from any other type of music. Some say that African-Americans use music to express their life stories but so do other musicians. White people show signs of sadness through their music too. This is true, but the difference between Black musicians and non-Black musicians is that White musicians never had to face the systemic oppression faced by Blacks. They never suffered through slavery, segregation, or racial discrimination as African-Americans have and continue to be subject to, so their music does not share a connection with the Black community. Eminem is a popular White rapper who a lot of people say sounds Black. He does not make his music to mimic Black rappers, but rapping is the best way he can talk about his life. “He raps about his hatred of his mother, Debbie Mathers-Briggs (whom he says was a drug addict and who unsuccessfully sued him for slander), his ex-wife Kim Mathers, and the news media.”<sup>5</sup> There is no problem with him being a popular artist in the Black community. Eminem is given this recognition from Blacks because even though he uses rap which was created by Blacks, he still gives credit to Blacks and acknowledges that they are the originators.<sup>6</sup>

African-Americans have always used music to cope with oppression, whereas other groups tend to use music mostly for entertainment and profit. Even though there are many different genres of music, Black music outshines other genres in a positive way. African-Americans have been through so much in their lifetime, but somehow they still manage to shine, whether in their music, fashion, or positive contributions to society. Blacks did not only use music to cope with oppression, but also to communicate codes and messages through Negro spirituals, and to messages that would eventually lead them to their freedom. It is amazing to see

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/28/business/the-angry-appeal-of-eminem-is-cutting-across-racial-lines.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/feb/11/hip-hop-appropriation-eminem-iggy-azalea>

African-Americans excel. Black music has come a long way from when it first originated, and finally, it is getting the recognition that it deserves.

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