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Kendrick Lamar – Voice and Social Change Proposal

Many hail him as the emerging voice of a new generation of the oppressed. Others view him as the latest in brash, loud-mouthed narcissistic celebrities. But most acknowledge that there is something different about Kendrick Lamar. One of many voices to rise from Compton, California, Lamar struggled for years with a stutter. When a teacher introduced him to poetry, Lamar's fate was sealed.

Rap music and hip-hop culture have always had a strange relationship with the white majority mainstream. White suburban teenagers continue to be the primary audience for rap albums, despite the fact that the music created voices a frustration with events centered around Black communities. From its origins in New York City in the 1970s, particularly poor neighborhoods located in the Bronx, rap can only be understood in its historical context. The music combines rhythms from classic forms of music associated with Black communities including jazz, blues, gospel and reggae. This influence is particularly obvious in the expression of political, social and economic ills, acting as a means to unify those who feel oppressed in these areas. Often this frustration manifests in rap music as a call to violent action. Rap artists have continually fought against efforts to censor these ideas, and many argue that artists have responded by “watering down” their messages.

Enter Kendrick Lamar, citing as influential artists such as N.W.A, Dr. Dre, and Bob Dylan. His musical style is akin to rappers of an earlier age whose music was designed to initiate conversations, to

hold a mirror up to society, to engender controversy.