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The 4-1-1 on Hip Hop and Rap

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Rap music is a powerful, multi-layered art that has deep roots ranging from traditional African music to jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock 'n' roll.

The art form called rap music has become a target of controversy and criticism. The word rap is derived from a 1960s slang word for conversation. Rap music originated in New York City in the mid '70s and was associated with breakdancing. Rap music is much more complex than simple rhymes about sex and violence. Instead, it is street poetry filled with alliteration, simile, metaphor, and hyperbole serving as an inventive manipulation of cultural idioms to address issues such as racism, education, sexism, drug use, and spiritual uplift. Rap music is a powerful, multi-layered art that has deep roots ranging from those going back to traditional African music, to the days of slavery and the call-and-response songs of the field slaves, to modern elements of jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock 'n' roll. Hip hop culture has been influenced by Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American musical, oral, visual, and dance traditions. Rap music has become an overwhelming favorite for students of color because it provides inner-city kids with a voice and allows suburban kids to disassociate themselves from the mainstream. *The 4-1-1 on Hip Hop and Rap* will be a multimedia, interactive session that will focus on providing the audience with an understanding of hip hop and rap and will also break down misconceptions about hip hop culture. This session will involve the listening to, viewing of, and creation of rap music in order to foster a sense of connectedness to students of color and create a more positive campus climate.

In order to appreciate multiculturalism and diversity, an effort must be made by staff and faculty of predominantly White institutions to educate themselves about the hip hop culture that has been so embraced by students of color. Popular comments and criticisms directed toward hip hop culture such as "all young people who listen to rap or wear baggy clothes are gangsters;" "rap promotes violence;" "all rappers are thugs/criminals;" and "rap/hip hop is limited to just the inner-city and to young Black listeners" are statements that reflect either ignorance or racism. Rap exists as a forum for artists to raise the level of political, racial, and social consciousness in the inner city. Because hip hop raises the awareness of issues affecting Black society, Rapper Chuck D. of the group Public Enemy says hip hop is the CNN of Black community. When gangsta rap refers to acts of violence, it is not attempting to provoke the listener to commit savage crimes; it is merely reflecting the violence that exists in Black communities or is conveying the rapper's frustration at the hopelessness and despair of the ghetto, the racism the rapper has encountered, and the struggle against the White social hierarchy. By viewing hip hop culture as an evil entity, critics are turning their backs on the economic and social problems of people of color and are simply using hip hop as a scapegoat to avoid confronting these serious issues.

The session will conclude with an invitation to audience members to test their rapping skills in a freestyle hip hop forum mediated by the co-presenters. The desired outcome of this session is not to persuade the audience to enjoy or become fans of rap music. Instead, it is hoped that by becoming educated and more knowledgeable about hip hop culture, educators who work with young people will embrace these slang-talkin', baggy-clothes-wearin' students and understand that these students have the same potential and deserve the same respect as others.

PRESENTERS

Andrew S. Cho, 24, is the Academic Support Adviser with the Student Support Services Program at South Seattle Community College. In 1990, he became a favorite of customers at Albertson Supermarket when he devised rhymes and used the store's intercom system to rap songs about the weekly specials on fish and meat. Customers remarked that they would buy steaks or salmon "because they loved his little rap songs." Currently, he enjoys his work with disadvantaged students and strives to improve the campus climate for students of color.

Derrick Shield, 28, is a student in the Student Support Services Program at South Seattle Community College. While growing up, he avoided gangs and street violence by becoming involved in rap and breakdancing competitions. Upon enrolling in high school honors classes, he recognized that he was often the only student of color in class and thus developed a strong dislike for a classroom environment in which he felt isolated and marginal. He lost his desire to attend college and joined the military to escape the uninteresting and biased school environment. After finishing his service as a Marine, he decided to give college a chance. Shield will earn his AA degree from South Seattle Community College in the spring and will transfer to the University of Washington in the fall.