

# INTRODUCTION

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Since the release of our first issue on May 29, 2020, the predicament our world has been placed in has intensified. Socially we have experienced things personally, nationally, and on a global scale that we could not even fathom discussing two years ago, thus over the past year our most important achievement has been simply staying operational. This is an accomplishment which cannot be understated within this era of trials and tribulations that we are living in. Being able to continue our journal, even as we met and studied remotely this year, is a blessing that we have not taken lightly and are extremely thankful for. In addition to simply remaining operational, our journal wanted to make it a point to widen our scope of influence to not just focus on our campus, but also the rest of the country. We have begun building our network of students and professors from the west to the east who all identify with our primary goal: to move knowledge. Though we are still in the early stages of the process, the groundwork has been laid for us to help spread *The Word* across the country in the months to come. Our laid roots have even borne fruit already in our latest blog post, “Turning Entitled White Men Into Memes: Cardi B’s ‘WAP,’ Ben Shapiro, and (Mis)Representation” by Brianna Ellis of William Paterson University. If you are studying or teaching hip-hop studies at the college level, we enthusiastically invite you to submit your work or invite your students to do so!

Usually in times of great trials and tribulations we look to our artists to encapsulate the state of our society in their works, showing where we are and where we need to be through their musical prowess and wizardry with words. Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, however, many of the artists whose voices we have grown accustomed to over recent years decided to remain silent. The release of music icon Drake’s sixth studio album *Certified Lover Boy* was supposed to kickstart the year with its release in January, but it’s June and we are still listening to his singles and leaks to tie us over. Several artists’ release schedules, such as the remarkably consistent Tyler the Creator’s, seem to have been indefinitely delayed until it is safe to

tour again. Since the start of the pandemic, nearly every musician on the Top Dawg Entertainment roster has had a drop teased, but one year later and us fans have grown cynical to the rumors.

Meanwhile, the relative quiet from chart-toppers gave smaller artists as well as major women MCs a chance to shine their lights. Lil Baby's "The Bigger Picture" became an anthem of summer 2020's refocus on the Black Lives Matter movement and continued police and vigilante violence toward Black Americans. Noname continued holding hip-hop accountable to the people with her "Song 33" in 2020--a scathing rebuttal to J. Cole's ill-advised "Snow on the Bluff"--followed up with her "Rainforest" in 2021. The subject of one of our blog posts, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's "WAP" rushed the airwaves in late summer 2020, circulating through social media stories and pearl-clutching news bites as we belted its raunchy lyrics at home. Cardi B followed with her infectious "UP," released in early 2021, while Megan's "Body" and "Cry Baby" made the rounds from her 2020 EP *Good News*. Doja Cat and Saweetie's "Best Friend" had us missing our besties, while Chika announced her retirement, the wax still drying on her 2020 debut. And while we might debate their hip-hopness, you can't argue that Jazmine Sullivan's *Heaux Tales* and Lil Nas X's "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" are still on repeat. On a somber note, this year we also mourned DMX, a growling king of the 1990s and early 2000s, and MF Doom, the masked titan of the underground.

Our second issue brings you three important new pieces of hip-hop studies research from Stanford University undergraduates, who each comment on pressing cultural phenomena. Tyah-Amoy Roberts opens the issue with her crucial study of transphobic and misgendering language directed at hip-hop star Megan Thee Stallion, which, following Black Feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins, Roberts ultimately theorizes as *ungendering*. Analyzing real social media posts that question Megan's femininity after she was violently attacked in summer 2020, Roberts asks us to confront how Black women are continually positioned as outside of normative American femininity. Next, Emma Rashes analyzes "crowdsourced appropriation" on the popular website Urban Dictionary, arguing that the site's irregular algorithmic behavior, and its founder's misunderstanding of African American Vernacular

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English, create pathways for anti-Black and misogynistic mis-definitions to circulate even as they produce profit for the company. Finally, Cahron Cross closes the issue with his 2-part multimedia deep dive into Afropessimism in hip-hop rhyme. Cross opens with a brief study of Afropessimistic poetics in Earl Sweatshirt's verse on Black Noi\$e's "Mo(u)rning," then pulls out all the stops on a 6-minute rap, shredding bootstrap ideologies that insist the upwardly mobile look down at the communities that made them. We are especially proud to be adding to the very short list of peer-reviewed hip-hop music, a trend that began with the publication of A.D. Carson's peer-reviewed album *i used to love to dream* by the University of Michigan Press in 2020. Carson was also a guest speaker at *The Word's* first issue launch party in June 2020.

While we are undoubtedly excited to be releasing our second issue, we do so with an acknowledgement of how difficult and devastating the past year has been for so many. The COVID-19 pandemic and persisting egregious police violence against Black Americans and other people of color made 2020 a year of immense grief, and as we celebrate our second issue, we reflect on a view we consider to be central to our journal's mission: that of hip hop as not only a form of creative expression, but also as a voice of marginalized communities and a method of inspiring activism. We are saddened by how much the last year has stolen from everyone, but also grateful for the incredible music and papers that our contributors have produced during this time. As we move forward, we invite you to have a hand in our next issue! If you are at another school, submit your work for our blog or full-length Issue 3; if you are at Stanford, we hope you'll join our team and attend our in-person events in the fall.