Television You Control.” The Box gained popularity for playing videos that MTV and VH1 would not play, particularly hip hop videos. In its prime the network reached about 30 million households (Thompson 2016), introducing viewers to such acts as 2 Live Crew, Sir Mix-a-Lot (Anthony Ray, 1963–), and Vanilla Ice (Robert Matthew Van Winkle, 1967–). By providing a space for hip hop videos to reach wider audiences, The Box helped hip hop grow as a genre and culture.

Vending machine entrepreneur and mortgage broker Steve A. Peters (1945–) founded the Video Jukebox Network in 1985. Three years later he received a patent for his video jukebox system, in which television viewers would call a phone number and enter a code that allowed them to make up to three video selections. A computer would then prepare the video for broadcast, and the viewer’s telephone company would charge a fee anywhere from $0.99 to $2.99 for the request. Information about how viewers could request videos would be displayed between videos on the lower part of the screen while the videos were playing. Investors in the new network included Communications Equity Associates, Tele-Communications Inc., the Newhouse brothers (the media moguls behind Condé Nast), and Island Records. By 1990 the network was known simply as The Box.

Peters launched the network in Miami, Florida. The network’s first hosts were the Miami Boyz, a local rap group. The network then launched in Jacksonville before spreading across the nation to other local cable affiliates. During its fifteen-year run, The Box catered to local audiences’ desires, revealing the growing popularity of hip hop. The network began showing hip hop videos years before MTV. Even after MTV started playing hip hop, MTV avoided airing riské content, whereas The Box fulfilled this demand for audiences. For example, 2 Live Crew, a controversial Miami-based rap crew, found great success on The Box. At one point they were the network’s most requested artist, and their video for “Pop That” (1991) reached a wide audience despite being banned from MTV.

Other hip hop artists who gained popularity due to The Box include Heavy D and the Boyz, Sir Mix-a-Lot, and Vanilla Ice. Although musical artists from other genres, such as R. Kelly (Robert Sylvester Kelly, 1967–), Brandy (Brandy Rayana Norwood, 1979–), Madonna (Madonna Louise Ciccone, 1958–), Green Day, and Britney Spears (1981–), also gained viewership and fans on The Box, hip hop artists were the network’s main success story. For hip hop artists the network provided a launchpad and testing ground for mainstream success.

The Box was known not only for helping up-and-coming hip hop artists reach a wider audience but also for its low-quality aesthetic and penchant for playing the same video multiple times in one day. Its early technology was more about the ability to provide audiences with the music videos they wanted to see than a futuristic viewing experience. Also, with viewers in charge, there was no mechanism for limiting how many times a video could be played within a day. Nevertheless, The Box continued to gain viewership through the 1990s and at its height was available on 115 stations.

Money problems and issues with cable affiliates that felt the content was too controversial eventually led to The Box’s downfall. In 1999 MTV bought the network and turned it into MTV2. The Box’s influence is visible on MTV’s hit video request show Total Request Live (1998–2008; 2017–), which began airing in 1998. In 2010 cable music service Music Choice revived the concept of The Box by launching Music Choice Play, a video request network driven largely by social media.

SEE ALSO Campbell, Luther “Luke”; Commercial Hip Hop; Culture Wars; Entrepreneurialism; Miami; Payola; Video Music Box; Yo! MTV Raps

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Courtney Cain

BREAKBEAT DJing

SEE DJing.

BREAKDANCING

Breakdancing began in the South Bronx, New York, in the 1970s as an underground dance movement. As Elizabeth Burbach observes in her 2013 essay in Voices: Journal of New York Folklore, breakdancing “became an alternative to gang fighting: that is, a non-violent resolution to the problems of the street through the creative use of the body, mind, and space without weapons” (32). Breakdancing often involves groups of
performers, although it can also feature soloists. Breakdancing groups are known as crews, and the competitions in which they participate are called battles.

Breakdancers are known as B-boys and B-girls. Along with the dancers themselves, hip hop aficionados prefer the terms B-boys or breaking to breakdancing. In her description of hip hop in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music* (2013), musicologist Felicia Miyakawa argues that the term breakdancing represents the perspective of a cultural outsider, whereas B-boys or B-girls is the preferred term. Various interpretations exist for what the “B” stands for in B-boy and B-girl, including “break,” “Bronx,” “beat,” and “battle.” Regardless of the gender of the performer, B-boys tends to be preferred over B-girls.

**ORIGINS**
The origins of breakdancing trace to the “break” a DJ would incorporate into his or her performance. During this break the vocals would fade out into a purely instrumental groove, most frequently a funk or soul recording, offering the dancers on the floor an opportunity to improvise and display their virtuosity. The DJs, too, displayed physical finesse in the art of spinning and scratching records—it was customary to use multiple records during a single song. To create the break that inspired the breakdance, DJs began using two turntables to loop and repeat the break so that the dancers could dance for a longer time than they could with a single groove.

In her 2006 article in *Clergy Journal*, Richelle White identifies breakdancing as one of nine central components of hip hop. The others are MCing, DJing, graffiti art, beatboxing, street fashion, street language, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurialism. Of the nine elements identified by White and others, four are integral to a hip hop aesthetic: DJing, MCing, breakdancing/B-boys/B-girls, and graffiti art.

**RISING POPULARITY**
Breakdancing became a part of mainstream culture in America in the early 1980s, especially due to the popularity of the Rock Steady Crew, who appeared in the movie *Flashdance* (1983). The Rock Steady Crew effectively transitioned breakdancing and B-boys from an underground localized movement into a global phenomenon. Several other groups also promoted the style, including the organizers for the closing ceremony of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games and the producers for films such as *Wild Style* (1983), *Style Wars* (1983), *Breakin’* (1984), *Beat Street* (1984), and *Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo* (1984). However, as Miyakawa notes,
“B-boys had a short media life, virtually disappearing from the big screen by the late 1980s until revival films such as Planet B-Boy (2007) brought the dance back to popular attention” (2013).

DANCE TRAITS
Some of the characteristics of breakdancing include call-and-response participation in a cypher, represented as a circle of performers. The word cypher (also spelled as cipher) derives from the Five Percent Nation (FPN), a movement founded in 1964 by Clarence 13X (1928–1969), who was known as “Father Allah” to FPN devotees. According to Joseph Schloss in Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York, the FPN used the term cypher to denote “the circle of onlookers in which the dance is performed” (2009, 13).

The circle formation is a performative feature of many black and African American practices, and breakdancing is no exception. As Halifu Osumari writes in a 2002 essay in the Dance Research Journal, the “improvisational circle [allows] each soloist to demonstrate his or her skills while encoding gestural messages into the executed movement phrases” (33). Each participant in the circle dances for up to half a minute before the next dancer begins. The participants delight equally in cheering for and dissing the crew. While the nature of this dance circle is competitive, the circle formation itself is inclusive and participatory.

Several types of dances feature in the cypher, and the name of the dance is relative to the dancer’s position on the floor. For example, one dance is the “toprock.” To do the movement, the dancer remains upright (at the “top”) and introduces his or her character through rhythmic movements (the “rock”). The word rock has implications for movements not only in African American dance battles that originated in the Bronx but also in Latin American dance battles that originated in Brooklyn.

Other dances include the “go down” or “drop,” involving a quick movement to the floor; connecting poses between the toprock and the floor; and technical floorwork, which, as Schloss explains in The Grove Dictionary of American Music (2013), features “dancing in a more lateral position where both hands and feet may contact the floor.” Finally, the dancers often incorporate as a closing pose a movement known as a “freeze,” which entails holding the pose for a longer period than the established groove. Apart from the freeze, breakdancers might emphasize one of these movements more than the others to showcase their best skills in the course of the battle.

Each type of dance can be subdivided into several categories, including three categories identified by Schloss (2013): “footwork (intricate rhythmic movements on the ground), air moves (acrobatics), and power moves (movements intended to demonstrate physical strength).” A debate surrounds the aesthetic merits of air moves and power moves in contrast with dancing that incorporates subtler and less flashy technical skills. As Schloss explains, “Since the ’90s … there has been an ideological split in the b-boy world between those who favor more acrobatic ‘power moves’ and ‘air moves’ and those who favor the traditional, intricate, and rhythmic style” (2009, 12).

Regardless of the debate, all of the intricacies of breakdancing are integral to its competitive spirit. Breakdancing has even influenced other essential elements of hip hop. For example, while the DJs do not breakdance, they nonetheless incorporate flamboyant movements and tricks into their record spins and scratches. As Mark Katz describes in Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music (2004), “DJs often employ what are called ‘body tricks.’ These moves do not—or should not—affect the sound of the routine, but add to its visual appeal or level of difficulty” (126).

A WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON
Breakdancing has become so popular that it has inspired both national and international battles, including Battle of the Year (Germany), R16 Korea (South Korea), and Red Bull BC One (international). Countries with crews consistently winning the most breakdancing battles include South Korea, France, and Japan. This popularity extends to the United States as well, resulting in the consistent presence of hip hop dance routines on shows such as So You Think You Can Dance? and America’s Best Dance Crew.

B-boys and B-girls view breakdancing as an innate and intensely personal expression within the world of hip hop culture. As B-girl MiRi Park stated, “B-boying is a metaphor for life…. Hip-hop, just its ideology, allows you to be the best person that you can possibly be” (Schloss 2009, 2).

SEE ALSO B-Boy, B-Girl; Cypher; DJing; Film; Five Percent Nation; Korean Hip Hop; New York City; Nine Elements of Hip Hop; Rock Steady Crew; Style Wars; Wild Style

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BRONX RIVER COMMUNITY CENTER

The Bronx River Community Center is an important site in the creation and cultivation of hip hop culture. It is most widely known for hosting the first gig of DJ and producer Afrika Bambaataa (1957–) and serving as the twenty-year home of his activist group the Universal Zulu Nation. Located at the center of the Bronx River Houses in New York City’s Bronx borough, the Bronx River Community Center hosted parties and social gatherings for the hip hop community for roughly twenty years. (The Bronx River Community Center discussed in this entry is not Bronx River Community Center Inc., which after 1995 managed the Bronx River Houses.) Through the work of the Universal Zulu Nation and the parties it hosted, the center became a safe space for members of a community that experienced high levels of crime and violence.

LOCATION AND CONSTRUCTION

The Bronx River Houses were constructed in the Throggs Neck section of the Soundview neighborhood between 1951 and 1966 as temporary housing. Aimed at addressing the housing crisis in New York City, the development became home to a large Puerto Rican and African American population. Many of the hip hop stars of the early era lived in the Bronx River Houses, including DJ Jazzy Jay (John Byas, 1961–), DJ Red Alert (Frederick Crute, 1956–), Afrika Islam (Charles Glenn, 1967–), Sean Perry, and Bambaataa, the center’s DJ. Known to many as the godfather of hip hop and the “Master of Records” (Asante 2008, 86), Bambaataa performed his first gig on November 12, 1976, at the community center.

Bambaataa would later claim that he and his friends began holding parties in the community center in the early 1970s. Over the course of a decade, the space became home to Soul Sonic Force, an electro-funk band that Bambaataa started, and the Universal Zulu Nation, a group dedicated to African American empowerment and keeping the peace in the hip hop community. For years Bambaataa held annual parties at the community center to honor the historical importance of the site to hip hop. He also attempted on several occasions to establish a museum for hip hop near the site.

New York’s mayor and police believed hip hop brought violence to the area around the Bronx River Houses when, in actuality, Bambaataa helped make the community center a haven from violence and crime. A prominent example is the Black History Month celebration he held in February 1982, featuring such heavy hitters in hip hop as DJ Kool Herc (Clive Campbell, 1955–), Grandmaster Flash (Joseph Saddler, 1958–), and the Cold Crush Brothers. Many of the acts did not show up to the free event, but Bambaataa started the party anyway by playing a set of dance music. After a few hours, gun violence broke out at the entrance to the center, prompting New York City Housing Authority police to
respond. Panic ensued, but Bambaataa calmed the audience by playing a track by soul singer James Brown (1933–2006). The party resumed, giving partygoers refuge from the violence outside (Cepeda 2004).

**DECLINE IN HIP HOP COMMUNITY**

In 1995 Bronx River Community Center Inc. took over the management of the Bronx River Houses. Along with the New York City Housing Authority and New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani (1944–), the management company ousted the Universal Zulu Nation. Giuliani blamed Bambaataa’s group and hip hop in general for the proliferation of gang violence in the area and believed their removal would decrease crime in the neighborhood. The police placed the Bronx River Houses under twenty-four-hour surveillance and pushed the gangs out of the housing complex. Graffiti was washed from the walls, and the community spaces were redesigned to facilitate increased police surveillance. With the expulsion of the Universal Zulu Nation, which police classified as a gang, the Bronx River Community Center lost its prominence in hip hop, and many hip-hoppers moved on to spaces in Harlem.

SEE ALSO Afrika Bambaataa; The Cold Crush Brothers; DJ Kool Herc; DJing; Grandmaster Flash; New York City; Universal Zulu Nation

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Melinda González

**BUSINESS MODELS**

SEE Entrepreneurialism.

**BUSTA RHYMES**

1972–

AKA: Trevor George Smith Jr.; Bussa Buss

Jamaican American rapper, actor, and record executive Busta Rhymes (Trevor George Smith Jr., 1972–) is a hip hop pioneer who captivates audiences with his high-energy performances, bold fashion statements, dynamic movements, animated facial expressions, and electrifying shows. He has never played it safe in his career, choosing to push the envelope and raising hip hop artistry to the next level. He stands out from the pack of all MCs due to his unique, high-speed rapping style and use of internal and half rhyme. Thanks to Busta’s high-speed delivery, he appeared in the 2000 edition of *Guinness World Records* with the record for rapping the most syllables in one second. His unique delivery and versatility in lyrical content is coupled with his distinctive grunts and ad libs such as “Ha!” and “Bwah!” Rapper Chuck D (Carlton Douglas Ridenhour, 1960–) of the hip hop group Public Enemy presented Busta with his nickname in 1989, inspired by now-retired National Football League wide receiver George “Buster” Rhymes. (Busta also goes by the moniker Busta Buss.)


**GETTING STARTED**


In 1989 Smith paired with other Long Island residents Bryan Higgins (1970–), James P. Jackson (1971–), and Sheldon Scott (1970–), who adopted the monikers Charlie Brown, Dinco D, and Cut Monitor Milo, respectively, to form the hip hop group Leaders of the New School. By the age of eighteen, Busta was signed to a label as part of the group. Leaders of the New School received their big break when they served as an opening act on a Public Enemy tour in 1991, and they released...
1995 he and his brothers founded the Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation, a charitable organization devoted to providing disadvantaged inner-city children with access to the arts. In 2001 Simmons and Benjamin Chavis (1948–) cofounded the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN), an organization seeking to employ hip hop as a catalyst for political engagement and social activism. Around this time Simmons was involved in an unsuccessful crusade—documented in the 2006 film Lockdown USA—to repeal New York’s Rockefeller Drug Laws, whose mandatory minimum sentencing requirements were widely regarded as the most draconian in the country. (These laws were partially reformed in 2009.)

Other social issues on which Simmons has focused his energy include animal rights, LGBTQ rights, and various healthy lifestyle causes, including veganism and yoga. He has also published several self-help books and participated in social programs aimed at helping disadvantaged urban youths manage their financial opportunities. In 2003 he launched the RushCard, a prepaid debit card aimed at people without traditional bank accounts. The card proved highly controversial, and some commentators argued that, due to various hidden fees, using the card was not a wise choice for the impoverished groups that constituted its primary client base. In 2009 Simmons was named as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Slavery Memorial.

Simmons’s involvement in these and many other instances of public advocacy, a trend that became especially pronounced following the turn of the twenty-first century, stands as a testament to his status as one of the elder statesmen of hip hop entrepreneurship. Many historians believe that his career was at the epicenter of hip hop’s development from a New York subculture to a globally popular phenomenon. However, not everyone regards his role in this process in wholly positive terms, and some have criticized what they see as the crass commercialism of some of his business enterprises. Nonetheless, Simmons’s close involvement in the creation and dissemination of some of the most acclaimed and influential hip hop music of the twentieth century is widely acknowledged, even by his critics. Bill Stepney, a Def Jam staffer who regarded Rubin as the principal architect of the label’s vision, nonetheless asserted that “if Rick built Def Jam, it’s still subordinate to Russell’s building hip hop. Russell built the culture. There would be no hip Def Jam, or the success of Rick with Def Jam, without the magic of Russell Simmons, who essentially carried the culture on his shoulders and moved it all along” (Whisler 2011, 116). See also Beastie Boys; Commercial Hip Hop; Def Jam Recordings; Entrepreneurialism; Fashion; Film; New School; New York City; Run-D.M.C.; Sneakers

Sisters in the Name of Rap

Sisters in the Name of Rap began as a 1991 television event, a two-hour rap concert filmed at the Ritz in New York City. Hosted by Dee Barnes (1973–) of hip hop show Pump It Up! fame, the program was notable for (and marketed on the basis of) its predominantly female lineup of MCs—including both emerging artists, such as Tam Tam (Tammy Hairston) and Nikki Kixx (Nicole Franklin), and established stars, such as Queen Latifah (Dana Elaine Owens, 1970–) and MC Lyte (Lana Michelle Moore, 1970–). In a stylistically diverse revue of their hit singles, the artists spoke to a variety of themes concerning their experiences as women in the male-dominated world of hip hop. Some, including Yo-Yo (Yolanda Whitaker, 1971–) and trio Salt-N-Pepa, emphasized women’s self-determination in matters of sex and romance, whereas others stressed their ability to out-rap their male counterparts.

Initially available only via pay-per-view, the Sisters in the Name of Rap television special was later edited down to a seventy-five-minute VHS edition, which was released by PolyGram Diversified Entertainment in 1992. As of 2017, the recording had not yet been rereleased in a modern format—meaning that, as tape media inevitably age, Sisters is ever closer to becoming a lost classic. Critical discussion of Sisters in the Name of Rap has been limited in the decades since its initial release, but the work has been acknowledged as an important glimpse into the rise of the female MC.

Sister Souljah


James Overholtzer

Sister Souljah


James Overholtzer

SISTER SOULJAH

SEE Literature.

SISTERS IN THE NAME OF RAP

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SEE ALSO Beastie Boys; Commercial Hip Hop; Def Jam Recordings; Entrepreneurialism; Fashion; Film; New School; New York City; Run-D.M.C.; Sneakers

James Overholtzer

SISTER SOULJAH

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THE PERFORMERS

Several of the concert’s performers were rappers with established careers and high public visibility. The host, Barnes, was at the time widely known through her appearance on Pump It Up!, a hip hop–themed television series broadcast on Fox starting in 1989. Headlining the roster of rappers was MC Lyte, notable as the first female rapper to release a complete solo album (Lyte as a Rock, 1988) and, by 1991, the creator of a distinguished string of popular singles. Roxanne Shanté (Lolita Shanté Gooden, 1969–) , whose confrontational 1984 hit “Roxanne’s Revenge” sparked the so-called Roxanne Wars of the mid-1980s, appeared later in the concert. Queen Latifah’s single “Ladies First” was the unofficial anthem of the event, performed during a lengthy but energetic set toward the end of the evening.

Other rappers were relative newcomers. Sisters in the Name of Rap was a virtual premiere for Boston-based Tam Tam, whose 1991 album Do It Tam Tam had just been released at the time the concert was filmed. Nikki Kixx (Nicole Franklin), a protégée of MC Trouble (LaTasha Sheron Rogers, 1970–1991), likewise put in a rare live appearance. MC Trouble, herself an up-and-coming rapper with a successful recent album (Gotta Get a Grip, 1990), was also scheduled to appear but died following an epileptic seizure shortly before the concert aired. Both the TV and VHS versions were dedicated to her memory, with the former including a video tribute.

The performers featured in Sisters were wide-ranging in musical style, offering a cross section of contemporary hip hop trends. Shelly Thunder (1965–), a Jamaican artist popular during the late 1980s, delivered a set that fused rapping with reggae and dancehall elements in her songs “My Name Is Shelly” and “Working Girl.” Tam Tam’s performance of “Do It Tam Tam” began with eerie sci-fi instrumentals, then faded into a funk idiom, complete with a quotation of the classic James Brown (1933–2006) drum break. Queen Latifah, whose own set opened with 1930s-style close-harmony vocals, wryly described her performance as “a new fusion … hip hop jazz with a little pizzazz” on “Come into My House,” her song first featured on 1989’s All Hail the Queen album.

Given the concert’s implicit aim of challenging gender stereotypes, the artists’ wardrobe choices were notable as well. Reviewer Taehee Kim, writing for Entertainment Weekly, describes Sisters in the Name of Rap as a refreshing contrast to the “scantily clad sex kittens” frequently seen in commercial music videos (1992). However, as Robin Roberts points out in “Sisters in the Name of Rap: Rapping for Women’s Lives,” this did not mean the outfits were necessarily drab or even desexualized: “Even though female rappers may wear bustiers and stretch pants, … their costumes are characterized by large, loose-fitting jackets that cover up or minimize the exposure of their flesh” (1995, 328). MC Lyte, for example, donned the same outsized graffiti-print jacket as her (male) backup dancers. Nefertiti (Angelica Strong) wore a flowing white-and-gold garment reminiscent of a kurta. More important than individual sartorial choices, however, was the overall effect: “[The performers’] bodies are not compartmentalized or fetishized as they are in so many rap videos by male performers (or for that matter, music videos by male and female rock performers),” Roberts notes (1995, 328).

THEMES

Reviewers of Sisters in the Name of Rap generally understood the concert as a feminist counterpoint to the pervasive male chauvinism of rap culture. Barnes, at the time, was widely known as the plaintiff in an assault case against Dr. Dre (Andre Romelle Young, 1965–), who had attacked her in a club in retaliation for (as Dr. Dre described it) an unflattering portrayal on Pump It Up! Seen in the light of this incident, Barnes’s decision to host Sisters was a natural extension of her efforts to bring attention to
Sisters in the Name of Rap

the violent machismo promoted by N.W.A and other rap groups. The problem of sexism in hip hop extended well beyond Dr. Dre’s actions, however. “Hip-hop,” observes Kim, “has always been a . . . man’s world. At its worst, rap can encompass moronic, ‘yo-baby’-style sexist rants that see women as little more than whores or goldiggers” (1992). For Kim the performers in Sisters adroitly dismantled that stereotype by insisting on respect for themselves both as women and as artists. Queen Latifah confronted the “yo-baby” rhetoric directly in her song “Fly Girl,” which she performed toward the end of her set: “My name ain’t yo, and I ain’t got your baby.” Yo-Yo, whose stage name playfully reappropriated the interjection, insisted that celebrating one’s sex appeal—even flaunting it—did not make one any less of a “lady” or any more of a “ho.” In the coyly titled song “You Can’t Play with My Yo-Yo,” she mocked those who failed to see the distinction.

At times—especially in the live 1991 version of the concert—male rappers seemed to undercut the other performers’ emphasis on female solidarity. Appearing partway through MC Lyte’s set (but absent in the VHS edit), guest-starring duo Audio Two bragged during their performance of their 1987 hit “Top Billin” that “if your girl’s out of place it’s your girl I’ll slap.” In general, however, guest artists Ice Cube (O’Shea Jackson, 1969–) and Grand Daddy I.U. (1968–) remained on-message—even if their other work, such as Ice Cube’s recordings with N.W.A, frequently included misogynistic language. Nor, for that matter, did the shared theme of women’s self-empowerment prevent some friendly (and at times rather aggressive) verbal sparring among the female MCs. Although many of the performers, such as Yo-Yo, opted to identify themselves as “ladies,” one performer featured in the VHS release—Roxanne Shanté—unapologetically reclaimed the label of “bitch.” With larger-than-life swagger and consummate self-confidence, Shanté declared that she had come “to get down to business,” taking evident delight in her ability to command the crowd. During her brief time onstage, Shanté conjured up a powerful, even dangerous persona similar to that found in her studio recordings. Many of the show’s performers expressed a wish—or, more often, a demand—for greater agency and control in relationships. Lyte, whose single “When in Love” begins the VHS edit of the concert, jokes in it about her own tendency to “do some crazy things when in love,” a point reiterated by duo Def Dames in “The King of Romance.” Nonetheless, these songs also offered listeners a chance to laugh at the antics of unfaithful would-be Romeos attempting to hide behind their fashionable clothes and player moves. Other rappers, including Salt-N-Pepa, were more direct in preaching the importance of boundary-setting, mutual respect, and sexual consent: “Be my friend, not just my lover,” the trio urged in their song “Do You Really Want Me.” (In the televised version of the concert, Salt-N-Pepa doubled down on these themes with performances of their hit singles “Let’s Talk about Sex” and “Most Men Are Tramps.”)

LEGACY

As of 2017, Sisters in the Name of Rap had not been officially rereleased on DVD or other modern media, hampering its accessibility to viewers. It has, however, attracted a modicum of attention from cultural critics interested in the intersection between hip hop and feminism and has occasionally been screened in academic settings. For example, the film appeared as part of the 2015 Hip Hop Feminism Film Festival, a project of Harvard University’s Hiphop Archive & Research Institute. To date, however, Sisters has received less sustained critical examination than might be expected, given the impressive roster of artists appearing in the concert. Roberts’s essay remains one of the rare scholarly works to offer a comprehensive analysis of the performance.

Despite its lack of prominence in twenty-first-century discussions of hip hop, Sisters in the Name of Rap may be viewed as a trailblazing work, carving a path for subsequent documentaries and concert films that explore the role of women in hip hop culture—not only as rappers but as DJs, graffiti artists, and producers. Notable works in this vein include Miss MC: Women in Rap (1999) and My Mic Sounds Nice: A Truth about Women in Hip Hop (2010), a documentary directed by Ava DuVernay (1972–). Moreover, although it may be little viewed in the twenty-first century, Sisters in the Name of Rap is a work of considerable historical significance, serving as both an acknowledgment of female MCs’ early successes and as proof of their viability in an increasingly commercialized hip hop industry.

SEE ALSO Dr. Dre; Feminism and Hip Hop; Film; Ice Cube; Misogyny in Rap; N.W.A; Queen Latifah; The Roxanne Wars

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Michael J. Hartwell