
Hip Hop: College Admission Essay Sample

“Understand the meaning of MC. The power to Move the Crowd like Moses splits the seas.” Remembering the lyrics of Talib Kweli, my favorite rapper, I rapped, surrounded by a small crowd on the streets. As I stole glimpses of teens in their oversized sweaters and baggy jeans throwing their hands in the air and swaying them left and right, I felt as if I were a talented rapper – a real MC.

“Hip hop is for African Americans,” retorted my English literature teacher after overhearing my views on rhymes in rap music. He argued that a middle class Asian girl’s mimicking an African American rapper’s style and lyrics wouldn’t make her an authentic artist. Though I wanted to fight back, I found myself unable to offer a counter argument.

That night, I sent an e-mail to Vanessa Diaz, the director of the Cuban hip hop documentary, *Desde el Principio*, which had mesmerized me only a few nights ago, explaining what had happened during that class – and the problems of expressing myself through hip hop. Through her lengthy reply that arrived after many days, I learned that the Cubans and African Americans had gone through similar predicaments – poverty and oppression – and thus adopted similar music as a means of expressing their sufferings. Toward the end, she added, “What kind of strife are you going through?”

To that question, I was dumbfounded. Perhaps, it was because I was too immature, inexperienced, or maybe because I was born to middle class comfort. Though my heart throbbed with the pulsating beats, my body swung to the smooth melody, and my eyes were enthralled with the flamboyancy, I then realized that I knew not the pains of oppression and deprivation the musicians rapped about. I knew I wasn’t faking it, but I wasn’t identifying with it either.

So I stopped rapping. Rapping without consciousness, I thought, was like trying to pass for something that I was not. Days had passed when Jin, a member of the school rap group, called and asked, “Come and show how to freestyle.” “No,” my mind resisted, but before I knew it, the rhythm of the body had already swept through my small frame. “Give her the beat!”

Riding the Talib Kweli quadruple beats, I rapped Korean rhymes mixed with my hometown dialect – about suffocating competition at school, about the estrangement I felt living alone to continue my studies, about a friend who refused to talk to me for days, about the xenophobic tendency of certain Koreans, and about a few populist politicians’ branding us, foreign language school students, “elitists.” None of my stories actually coincided with those of African

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American or Cuban rappers, but the lyrics this time were fully mine.

Hip hop is a vessel through which one molds and refines one's identity. I was initially attracted to certain beats, particular rhymes, and the unrefined swagger the musicians embodied. But now I know, whether I am African American, Cuban or Korean, that this music is a way of figuring out who I am.

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