Overview of Hip-Hop History in the 1970s

The culture, music, and lifestyle known as hip-hop began in the Bronx in New York City. At house parties and community centers DJs mixed songs from different records together. They started extending short drum breaks into longer dance mixes by switching between record decks. Bronx DJs experimented with touching and moving vinyl records with their hands. They also used electronic sounds coming from other places, like Europe. A famous example is Afrika Bambaataa’s use of Kraftwerk’s 1977 Trans-Europe Express.

In 1973, DJ Kool Herc DJed his first party in the South Bronx. The South Bronx was a poor neighborhood isolated from the rest of New York. One factor in this isolation was construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, which created a scenery of rubble in neighborhoods it ran through. Young people of color found their own way to make these bleak surroundings positive and beautiful. They spray-painted and danced on cardboard they laid on the ground. Hip-hop parties were positive alternatives to gang violence.

Kool Herc, who became known as the father of hip-hop, formed the basis of hip-hop music by experimenting with instrumental breaks of funk, soul, and R&B songs. In the following years hip-hop pioneers such as Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Grandmaster Caz start DJing at parties across the Bronx.

The story of Afrika Bambaataa—for example, his life-changing trip to Africa that resulted in his name change and his efforts to transform the South Bronx community—shows how the emergence of hip-hop is connected to identity, race, and place. Reformed gang member Bambaataa defined the four elements of the hip-hop scene. The four elements of hip-hop culture are:

- **DJing** – The art of spinning records at a dance party, picking out songs in a crowd-pleasing sequence. Also the art of touching and moving records with your hands. Cutting (using volume control to drop in a section of music from one turntable into music from another turntable) and scratching (the sound a DJ makes by putting his hand on the record and rubbing the vinyl under the needle in time with the music) are two popular DJing techniques.

- **Breakdancing** – A style of dancing that includes gymnastic moves, head spins, and backspins. Young people who were into dancing to the breaks at Bronx parties started calling themselves B-boys and B-girls, and their style of dancing came to be known as breakdancing. B-boys, B-girls, and members of the Zulu Nation made breakdancing popular.

- **Graffiti** – Visual art, an expression of youth culture and rebellion in public spaces. The first forms of subway graffiti were tags, or signatures of someone’s nickname or crew (group of artists that work together). It has evolved into elaborate scripts, color effects, and shading.

- **MCing** – MC are initials for “master of ceremonies.” MCs originally hosted parties and introduced tracks to the dancing audience. Eventually the term was used to describe rappers. Rapping is the art of saying rhymes to the beat of music. It comes out of the African-American oral tradition of using rhyming language to ridicule your friends or enemies in a clever way. In the early 1970s, this developed into street jive, a type of half-spoken, half-sung urban street talk. Rapping also has roots in Jamaican toasting, a type of lyrical chanting.

Bambaataa also formed the Universal Zulu Nation, a hip-hop awareness group that organized cultural events for youth. The group was an alternative to gang activity for many young people. Over time, the Zulu Nation has spread internationally as a hip-hop awareness movement guided by certain spiritual principles.
The Sugar Hill Gang recorded the first popular commercial rap recording, “Rapper’s Delight,” in 1979. This song was many Americans’ first brush with hip-hop. In the 1980s, the hip-hop scene expanded and entered the mainstream in the U.S.

“The Hip Hop Years” (Part II)

1. What impact did MTV have on hip hop in the mid-1980s?

2. What set Public Enemy apart from their predecessors in hip hop?

3. What made West coast rap different?

4. What made *Straight Outta Compton* groundbreaking?
5. Provide some evidence of rap’s commercial appeal.

6. What were some of the criticisms made of hip hop in the early ‘90s?

1980s-1990s Timeline

Directions: Read over the following documents/timeline. Underline/highlight key events and make notes in the margin as to the importance of each one. Then answer the questions that follow.

1981 Rival gangs, the Crips and the Bloods, became heavily involved in production and distribution of “crack” cocaine
**Average Family Wealth by Race/Ethnicity, 1963–2013**

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**1980s Reagan Administration**

- Wages for the average worker declined and nation’s homeownership rates fell. Minimum wage was frozen at $3.35 an hour, while prices rose, eroding the standard of living of millions of low-wage workers.
- The number of people living beneath the federal poverty line rose from 26.1 million in 1979 to 32.7 million in 1988.
- The 1980s saw pervasive racial discrimination by banks, real estate agents and landlords, unmonitored by the Reagan administration.
- Community groups uncovered blatant redlining by banks.
- Eliminated revenue sharing to cities, cut funding for public service jobs and job training, cut anti-poverty programs and reduced funds for public transit.
- Dramatic cut in spending on low-income housing subsidies. In his first year in office, Reagan cut the budget for public housing and Section 8 rent subsidies in half.
- By the end of the decade, the income gap had widened and the richest 1% of Americans had 39% of the nation’s wealth.

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**1991** Sup. Ct. nominee **Clarence Thomas**, an African-American, faces charges of sexual harassment at his Senate confirmation hearing. Accused his opponents of staging a “high-tech lynching.”

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**1992** 3 white police officers are found not guilty in the on-camera beating of **Rodney King**, an African-American motorist. Led to **5 days of widespread riots in LA**, during which time 53 people were killed, 2000 injured, damaged over 1000 buildings ($1 billion in damages.)
803 people are killed in gang-related murders in L.A.  

1993  National gang peace summit held in Chicago  

1995  Former football great O.J. Simpson is found not guilty of murdering his ex-wife and her companion. African Americans generally cheer the verdict, while many whites are outraged  

The Million Man March, an event promoting unity and responsibility among African-American men, is held in Washington, D.C.  

President Bill Clinton delivers address on race relations, calling for unity  

1996  Rapper Tupac Shakur is murdered in a drive-by shooting in Las Vegas  

1997  Rapper Notorious B.I.G. is murdered in Los Angeles  

1980s-1990s Timeline Questions  

1. What were some of the challenges being faced in the nation’s cities? (Support with some specific examples.)  

2. What impact did the Reagan administration have on the lives of urban, non-white and/or poor Americans? (Support with some specific examples.)  

3. What gains or continued challenges were faced by African-Americans in the early 1990s?
Hip Hop in the 1980s-1990s

Compton, CA:

Compton is a city of just under 100,000 people southeast of Los Angeles, California. Its population is predominantly African-American and Latino.

Compton was hit particularly hard by the crime wave that followed the influx of crack cocaine in the 1980s. Gang-related violence became a serious problem, although crime rates have dropped somewhat in recent years.

In the ‘80s and ‘90s, Compton became closely associated with Hip Hop and Gangsta Rap, particularly after the release of NWA’s “Straight Outta Compton” in 1989. Many Hip Hop stars have since come from Compton, including Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and Eazy-E.
N.W.A., “Straight Outta Compton”

You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge

Straight outta Compton, crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube
From the gang called Niggas Wit Attitudes
When I'm called off, I got a sawed-off
Squeeze the trigger and bodies are hauled off
You too boy if you fuck with me
The police are gonna have to come and get me
Off your ass, that's how I'm going out
For the punk motherfuckers that's showing out
Niggas start to mumble, they wanna rumble
Mix em and cook em in a pot like gumbo
Going off on the motherfucker like that
With a gat that's pointed at your ass
So give it up smooth
Ain't no telling when I'm down for a jack move
Here's a murder rap to keep y'all dancing
With a crime record like Charles Manson
AK-47 is the tool
Don't make me act a motherfucking fool
Me you can go toe to toe, no maybe
I'm knocking niggas out the box, daily
Yo weekly, monthly and yearly
Until them dumb motherfuckers see clearly
That I'm down with the capital C-P-T
Boy, you can't fuck with me
So when I'm in your neighborhood, you better duck
Cause Ice Cube is crazy as fuck
As I leave, believe I'm stomping
But when I come back boy, I'm coming straight outta Compton

Yo Ren
(Whassup)
Tell em where you from

Straight outta Compton, another crazy ass nigga
More punks I smoke, yo my rep gets bigger
I'm a bad motherfucker and you know this
But the pussy-ass niggas won't show this
But I don't give a fuck, I'mma make my snaps
If not from the records, from jacking or craps
Just like burglary, the definition is jacking
And when I'm legally armed it's called packing
Shoot a motherfucker in a minute
I find a good piece of pussy and go up in it
So if you're at a show in the front row

I'mma call you a bitch or dirty-ass ho
You'll probably get mad like a bitch is supposed to
But that shows me slut, you're composed to
A crazy motherfucker from the street
Attitude legit cause I'm tearing up shit
MC Ren controls the automatic
For any dumb motherfucker that starts static
Not the right hand cause I'm the hand itself
Every time I pull an AK off the shelf
The security is maximum and that's a law
R-E-N spells Ren but I'm raw
See, cause I'm the motherfucking villain
The definition is clear, you're the witness of a killing
That's taking place without a clue
And once you're on the scope, your ass is through
Look, you might take it as a trip
But a nigga like Ren is on a gangsta tip
Straight outta Compton

Eazy is his name and the boy is coming...

...Straight outta Compton
Is a brother that'll smother your mother
And make your sister think I love her
Dangerous motherfucker raising hell
And if I ever get caught, I make bail
See I don't give a fuck, that's the problem
I see a motherfucking cop, I don't dodge him
But I'm smart, lay low, creep a while
And when I see a punk pass, I smile
To me it's kinda funny, the attitude showing a nigga driving
But don't know where the fuck he's going, just rolling
Looking for the one they call Eazy
But here's a flash, they'll never seize me
Ruthless, never seen like a shadow in the dark
Except when I unload
You see a spark and jump over hesitation
And hear the scream of the one who got the lead penetration
Feel a little gust of wind and I'm jetting
But leave a memory no one'll be forgetting
So what about the bitch who got shot, fuck her
You think I give a damn about a bitch, I ain't a sucker
This is an autobiography of the E
And if you ever fuck with me
You'll get taken by a stupid dope brother who will smother
Word to the motherfucker, straight outta Compton

Damn, that shit was dope
Yet our best trained, best educated, best equipped, best prepared troops refuse to fight. As a matter of fact, it's safe to say that they would rather switch than fight.

1989 the number another summer (get down)
Sound of the funky drummer
Music hitting your heart cause I know you got soul
(Brothers and sisters, hey)
Listen if you're missing y'all
Swinging while I'm singing
Giving whatcha getting
Knowing what I know
While the Black bands sweating
And the rhythm rhymes rolling
Got to give us what we want
Gotta give us what we need
Our freedom of speech is freedom or death
We got to fight the powers that be
Lemme hear you say
Fight the power

[Hook]
Fight the power
We've got to fight the powers that be

As the rhythm designed to bounce
What counts is that the rhymes
Designed to fill your mind
Now that you've realized the pride's arrived
We got to pump the stuff to make us tough
From the heart
It's a start, a work of art
To revolutionize make a change nothing's strange
People, people we are the same

No we're not the same
Cause we don't know the game
What we need is awareness, we can't get careless
You say what is this?
My beloved let's get down to business
Mental self defensive fitness
(Yo) bum rush the show
You gotta go for what you know
Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be
Lemme hear you say
Fight the power

[Hook]
Elvis was a hero to most
But he never meant shit to me you see
Straight up racist that sucker was
Simple and plain
Mother fuck him and John Wayne
Cause I'm Black and I'm proud
I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
Sample a look back you look and find
Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check
Don't worry be happy
Was a number one jam
Damn if I say it you can slap me right here
(Get it) let's get this party started right
Right on, c'mon
What we got to say
Power to the people no delay
To make everybody see
In order to fight the powers that be

[Hook]
VIDEOS: “Straight Outta Compton” and “Fight the Power”

Look back at the 1980s-1990s timeline. Can you identify examples of some of these specific events reflected in either song?

How does each song reflect what was going on in the 1990s?