

How rap became the sound of mainstream

Notes & Cues:**Article:**

When Philadelphia rapper Lil Uzi Vert was 20 years old, he uploaded a few songs to SoundCloud, a free music-sharing platform. In just three years, Lil Uzi Vert has accumulated over a billion Spotify streams and nabbed a Best New Artist Grammy nomination.

Uzi's rise is impressive. But this year, he's just one in a crowd of hip-hop stars who are dominating the mainstream. Nearly half of the songs on Jan. 27's Billboard Hot 100 chart were rap or incorporate elements of hip-hop.

So what changed? It's now easier than ever for rappers to make music—create a beat on a computer and drop in a voice note and you have the beginnings of a song. Add the power of streaming platforms, which makes it easier for fans to discover emerging voices, and it's no surprise that hip-hop has been given a new and lasting way to shine.

In a national moment of deep division, it's apt that people—especially young people of color—are turning to music to find an outlet. The barriers to entry, either as a fan or an artist, are lower than they've ever been; the visibility of those who have made it is, thanks to social media, higher than ever before.

For kids, to become the next Lil Uzi Vert, rising from the streets to hip-hop royalty, is a new American Dream.

Summary: