

# HOW HIP-HOP HAS AIDED THE GROWTH OF BASEBALL

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## NELLY AND THE GAME:

The star out of St. Louis turned to baseball after family issues growing up. The HS phenom had looks from professional scouts, but chose the music route after his hit single “Gimme What U Got”. The 3 time Grammy winner inserted himself into the rap lineup in the early 2000s with his first album, *Country Grammar*, and 2 Super Bowl halftime shows. Even with this success, Nelly has said that he would trade his current accolades for a spot in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Nelly has included baseball influences in his music with songs like “Batter Up” and “Here Comes The Boom” as well as sporting baseball caps and jerseys in his music videos. Today, many ball players still choose songs by Nelly as they walk up to the plate.



POSTER:



REFERENCES:



**1878:** Bud Fowler becomes first professional Black minor league baseball player

**1920:** Rube Foster creates Negro National League to give Black baseball players equal opportunity

**1931:** Louis Armstrong forms ‘Secret 9’ baseball team to play game in New Orleans after a celebration



**1947:** Jackie Robinson becomes first player to break the MLB color barrier

**1991:** Breaking Atoms release “Just a Friendly Game of Baseball” as a metaphor for police brutality

**1993:** Ultramagnetic MCs release album, *The Four Horsemen*, with baseball inspirations and Negro League references

**1994:** Crocklyn Dodgers formed and sampled clips from old radio broadcasts



**2001:** Lil Wayne, Lil Zayne, Lil Bow Wow and Sammie release baseball inspired song “Hardball”

**2007:** Kanye West and Lil Wayne release song “Barry Bonds” named after controversial Giants star

**2009:** Jay-Z and Alicia Kets perform “Empire State of Mind” in NYC during the World Series in front of 50,000



## GETTING IN THE GAME:

Professional baseball can be traced back to the mid 1800s, but a small market gentlemen’s game evolved into a professional sports operation with the formation of the American league in 1901. Front offices began to rake in revenue, but also prohibited Black players from the league. **Moses Fleetwood Walker** debuted in 1884, but was the last Black MLB player until 1949. While the majority of the US was enjoying White baseball, the Negro National League was formed and attracted Black Americans across the country. Music celebrities like **Louis Armstrong** became fans of the league and wanted to find a way to get involved. In 1931, Armstrong created a celebration for his return to his hometown New Orleans which was capped off with a baseball game featuring his “Secret 9” players.

## LOOK GOOD, FEEL GOOD:

Baseball jerseys have always been sported on the field, but were never popular in everyday streetwear. While more formal wear had been the norm, jerseys took off in popularity in the 1990s as rappers like **Tupac** and **Flavor Flav** began to rock jerseys in their music videos. Many artists including names like **LL Cool J** and **Notorious B.I.G.** began to don backwards fitted caps in addition that many actually deemed as “disrespectful” to others. While parts of society may have disapproved, celebrities began to adopt this look alongside baggy pants and shorts. This baseball influence onto the rest of society established team jerseys and caps as emblems of the city they represented. People have become proud of their hometown teams and can connect with any person or celebrity in the city.

## PITCHIN’ HITS:

Americans may not have been able to enjoy the same game until the mid 1900s, but the rap community eventually came around. Baseball inspiration spread to lyrics as many rappers wanted to shout out their city, teams, and athletes. Houston native **Bun B** wrote an entire song about his hometown Astros and **Mike Stud** included lines about his pitching career at Duke in his song “Swish”. Rappers have also shown their fandom through appearances as **Jay-Z** is often seen at Yankees games and **Lil Durk**, **Kanye West**, **Chance the Rapper** have all thrown first pitches at White Sox games. These games drew crowds of almost 40,000 fans while the avg. attendance was close to 23,000. In all levels of baseball today you also hear batters choose rap songs as they walk up to the plate.