

Fire:
The Evolution of the Digital Mixtape, and Its Uncertain Future

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PROLOGUE: The Shift

Bobby Woody is moving.

He sits on a folding chair, one of the sole furnishings in his now-empty room, stuck between his friend's childhood home in Jamaica, Queens, and his new digs in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn. He figured he'd stay one last night while his new apartment is still without bedsheets or wi-fi.

A native of Baltimore, Woody, a rapper, producer and arranger, moved to New York City within weeks of graduating SUNY-Purchase with degrees in music studio technology and mathematics. "It's hard, but there's music money in New York," he explained. "I'm glad I don't have to sit at a cash register all day." While working on his music, he rose to something of a campus celebrity, developing a fame for his amiability, robust full-band live performances, and his ever-stalled debut recording project. The fruit of his labor, "Cartoons Are For Kids," dropped in the spring of 2018, after a period of anticipation that felt as long to Woody's fans as the 15-year wait for Guns N' Roses' "Chinese Democracy" or Dr. Dre's still-undelivered "Detox" felt to theirs.

These days, he keeps himself paid through a series of odd jobs, including working as a member of the floor staff at a Brooklyn rehearsal studio, and doing audio and lighting for local parties and weddings. "If I was doing the same thing every day, I'd go crazy too. That's why I have multiple [gigs,] until we can make \$10,000 a show," he says, chuckling.

Woody's moves from location to location almost mirror the state of distributing his own music in 2018. Making music since his high school days, he has witnessed the way that the internet, its users and the music industry have transformed entirely the way that music is

consumed. Once ubiquitous websites, like DatPiff or LiveMixtapes, which hosted exclusive works that gained a critical reach outside of the traditional record-label system, have seen attention shift to streaming platforms in recent years. These streaming platforms allow artists to work with a major label, publisher, or even the platform itself, to turn a profit off of music that would otherwise be distributed freely. This, in turn, has changed the way that artists would label their projects, as well as altered the impact of their intentions.

Woody says “Cartoons Are For Kids” is a mixtape. “I also realize in 2018 it doesn’t matter what you call it, ‘cause it all goes on the Spotify,” he shrugs, his voice dripping with derision.

* * *

“Check out my mixtape, it’s fire,” as the saying goes; a rather innocuous memetic phrase that runs the risk of being rendered meaningless if you stare at it long enough. It’s an idiom that could be considered indecipherable in the Queen’s English, or even American millennial and Gen Z vernacular, as recently as five years ago. To be understood, a set of circumstances have to be looked at: there’s an understanding that the subject’s mixtape exists for free on the internet to be consumed in a flooded market that deems self-promotion, at any cost, essential, no matter how humorous, pathetic or inconsequential the artists sound while promoting their work. The saying is gibberish, unless one ponders how the mixtape has informed decades of media consumption, particularly online in recent years, thereby uprooting hip-hop’s structure at its core. As simple as the joke may sound, the truth is that the means to produce and exhibit a mixtape are as free and anarchic as anything else on the internet.

That being said, the transition of the mixtape—from a fragment of DJ culture of the 1970s, through hip-hop’s unquestioned takeover of what is broadly called popular music, and from physical (album, cassette, CD) to digital release—has been relatively turbulent as well, and offers an illustration in microcosm of not only hip-hop’s dominance but its ever-shifting landscape. The mixtape, and its laissez-faire online market, has proved essential to fans of new music: it’s an accessible gateway to the new, the radical, the pioneering.

As it currently stands, usership of on-demand, paid streaming services like Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, Deezer, and others has taken over the distribution model of music, disrupting the traditional major-label system in the process. These services provide music as a subscription service, charging monthly for unlimited access to their vast catalogs of tunes via apps for desktop computers and mobile phones. Users can be enticed by an accessible interface, exclusive features or celebrity endorsements. Jay-Z is the public face of Tidal, an artist-owned service notable for its high-fidelity audio quality and exclusive streaming rights to Beyoncé’s 2016 album “Lemonade.” The aforementioned Dr. Dre and industry impresario Jimmy Iovine are the faces behind Apple Music, a subsidiary of the ubiquitous tech giant, which is currently foraying into exclusive video content. Spotify, far and away the most used audio streaming service, came to the United States in 2011, and currently sits at 87 million subscribers, according to their 2018 third-quarter earnings.

However, though streaming services were once considered an antidote to the rampant piracy of music during the download era, the payoff for artists is downright dismal. “Spotify pays about \$0.006 to \$0.0084 per stream to the holder of music rights,” reports Kabir Sehgal for CNBC. “And the ‘holder’ can be split among the record label, producers, artists, and

songwriters.” This leaves a grey area for both artists breaking into the music industry as well as established artists as well. Take, for instance, the story of Philadelphia rapper Lil Uzi Vert’s breakthrough single “XO Tour Llif3.” As reported by The Fader, the song racked up 1.4 billion streams across services in seven months. Lil Uzi Vert came away with a \$900,000 payday, which doesn’t sound all that bad until you compare it to the near \$4.5 million it generated for Atlantic Records.

With the changing of the guard, the model for exchanging free mixtapes—and, in the process, shaping the tastes of music critics, cutting-edge fans, fellow musicians, and other influencers in the music marketplace—seems to have been taken down with it. As artists play fast and loose with the creative freedom that the mixtape allows, the already-struggling major-label distribution model has attempted to keep up and co-opt the mixtape for the authenticity it provides artists, while pinching pennies along the way.

CHAPTER 1: *The Rise of the Underground*

As a physical entity, the mixtape sprung from the boomboxes of anyone with access to a “record” button. Anybody could be their own disc jockey or curator, creating something personal that could add to the atmosphere of living in the 1980s. “Mixtapes rule,” legendary writer and essayist Luc Sante recounts of the era in the 2018 anthology “Beastie Boys Book.” “Which is why you can take in brand-new 12-inch releases on the fly before you’re necessarily aware of what you’re hearing. Mixtapes also account for the middle-aged Ukrainian guy walking down St. Mark’s Place blasting Merle Haggard. Try finding Merle on the radio anywhere in New York City.”

DJs would blend their mixes to cassette tape and distribute them; DJs as influential as Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash would distribute and sell recordings of their live sets' pioneering uses of cutting, scratching and crossfading. In the process, they proved that the nascent hip-hop sound had a market. "These tapes would then be re-dubbed, duplicated, and passed around, and the best releases began to gain traction. Although the tape's quality would be reduced the more it was dubbed, it was a signifier of mass popularity and appreciation within hip-hop circles," noted Sope Soetan, in an article for Pigeons and Planes. DJs like Lovebug Starski and Kid Capri would become notorious for their blend tapes later in the decade. It wasn't until the 1990s, where New York legends "DJ Clue and DJ Doo Wop began using them as curated proving grounds for rising and established MCs with exclusive freestyles and songs," according to an article by Billboard's Dan Rys in 2017.

By the middle of the decade, mixtapes hosted by DJ Clue, DJ Doo Wop, DJ Premier, Stretch Armstrong and the pioneering Ron G, among others, had become an essential tool for fans, artists and DJs. By hosting a mixtape, a DJ essentially acted as an executive producer or curator, arranging the tape as he would a hype set, dropping producer tags abundantly as a sort of audio watermark. New York icon Funkmaster Flex is notorious, in part, for his iconic bomb drops on hot tracks. Some DJs even produced or remixed the tracks on their own mixtapes; Premier and Clue, for example, are legendary producers in their own right. Artists got to promote previously unheard material (usually over the instrumentals of their contemporaries as a show of strength), which provided club DJs with infectious bangers that would guarantee placement on forthcoming recordings, creating a mutually beneficial relationship that would continue ad infinitum.

“Although there were hundreds of DJs in cycle, the mixtape game was a level playing field. It was survival of the hardest working,” recounted author, podcaster and BBC Radio 1Extra host DJ Semtex on Medium.com. “The DJs that got the exclusives, and mixed or marketed their product the best, won. Even though stores, DJs, and artists benefited from the exposure and financial returns, this was a highly illegal process. Stores were effectively selling bootleg material, unauthorized copies of intellectual property. Despite this, demand grew and DJs kept supplying that demand.”

Occasionally, industry figures would even leak their own artists’ material to these DJs in the hopes of generating an underground following; Bad Boy Records, the brainchild of East Coast impresario Puff Daddy, released mixtapes in conjunction with many of the New York DJs listed above.

This raw format also proved important for the rise of several important regions in hip-hop, otherwise ignored by a mainstream audience distracted by the throes of the heated East Coast/West Coast feud: Memphis’s scene was kickstarted by DJ Paul and Juicy J of the massively influential Three Six Mafia, while DJ Screw’s tapes and remixes were the blueprint for Houston’s famous chopped ’n’ screwed subgenre. The surface noise and low cost of the cassette tape supplemented the mystery, raw sound and unique aesthetics of all involved.

CHAPTER 2: 50 Cent Platinum

In the beginning of this century, however, another major sea change took place. The mixtape shifted from a DJ’s medium to a rapper’s. Nobody exemplified this more than New York’s own 50 Cent. Before he reached his breakthrough with 2003’s multi-platinum “Get Rich or Die Tryin’ “ the rapper, born Curtis Jackson, was signed to Columbia Records, who shelved

his album after the infamous altercation that left his body with nine bullet wounds. Without a record label, and effectively blackballed from the music industry, Jackson dropped the legendary “50 Cent Is The Future,” presented by DJ Whoo Kid, which caught him turning club smashes out of beats originally from Jay-Z, Mobb Deep, Geto Boys and the Wu-Tang Clan. “An entire mixtape based on one artist’s music had not been done before,” noted Semtex. “‘50 Cent Is the Future’ was the ultimate showcase of 50’s uncompromising ability, free from any label or industry restraints, free of any pressure to appease the mainstream media.”

“My man 50 done put out, what, three albums on the street?” shouted 50 Cent’s cohort, Tony Yayo, at the end of the tape’s second track, “Bump Dat Street Mix.” “And y’all ain’t even hear the new shit... Just keep goin’ and goin’ and goin’...”

“50 Cent Is The Future” caught the attention of Dr. Dre and Eminem, who signed the artist to a \$1 million deal with Shady Records and Aftermath Entertainment. From making the era’s most prominent mixtapes to defining an era’s sound, “Get Rich Or Die Tryin’ ” received a perfect XXL rating from XXL Magazine and spawned massive singles like “21 Questions,” “P.I.M.P.,” and the bulletproof “In Da Club.” By the end of 2003, the album would be certified platinum six times over. None of this would have been possible without the ingenuity and business acumen of Jackson redefining what a mixtape could be, how it could be used as a promotional tool, how a rapper could sound on one, and how it could generate power.

It didn’t take long for other artists to adopt and adapt this method: The Diplomats, led by Harlem stalwart Cam’ron, dropped mixtapes intermittently throughout their run on Roc A Fella Records, often to drum up support for full length solo projects or group records like their gold-selling double album “Diplomatic Immunity.” Atlanta artist Clifford “Tip” Harris, better

known as T.I., rebounded from being dropped by Arista Records by promoting several mixtapes with his personal DJ, the recently-relocated DJ Drama. He signed a joint venture deal with Atlantic in 2003, a working relationship that continues to this day, and released the album “Trap Muzik” that same year, laying the groundwork for the now-ubiquitous hip-hop subgenre of the same name.

“Me being in Philly, it was a thing where I had to go to South Street and go to the Layup or go to Cheltenham Avenue to a specific spot to get the tapes. It was a very exclusive world—you almost felt like an elite social group,” reminisced DJ Drama in an oral history with Dan Rys in *Billboard*. “From hearing [the Notorious B.I.G.’s] ‘Who Shot Ya?’ for the first time on a Clue tape through to the mid-2000s and it being accessible on these mixtape websites—[it] kind of made the era I came up in a little easier because I was able to touch a larger audience quicker than those who came before me.”

CHAPTER 3: *The Pirate Age*

Concurrently, at the turn of the 21st century, Napster and other file-sharing sites moved faster than a horde of termites to devour the previously impregnable pay model of the recording industry. With the digital revolution in full throttle, consumers no longer wanted to pay for music if they didn’t have to, and file-sharing sites proved that they didn’t. Federal courts would later rule that the audience did, in fact, have to pay for music, and Napster and others were forced to either close or retool their service and charge the audience. Regardless, these sites left massive destruction in their wake, not least of which were Tower Records, Sam Goody and other bankrupted music retail outlets, bog box and mom-and-pop alike, that sold CD’s for the now-ludicrous price of \$14.99 or more.

But what some see as destruction others now call disruption, something that physical mixtapes had already started. As the aughts raged on, mixtapes went going digital, fomenting even more disruption. Websites, which included the now-defunct MixtapeKing.com and RapMullet.com, would host and distribute these tapes to a fervent online audience. In the post-Napster landscape of online music, the ground was fertile for new forms of consumption. The compact disc had hit its high water mark: sales were still astronomical, but you could start to see the cracks in the system. Apple's iPod was a certified hit, both in classic and mini form, standardizing the legal download of singles at 99 cents a pop (\$9.99 for an album), much to the chagrin of label heads. CD-R burning and peer-to-peer filesharing (whether via Napster clones like Limewire or torrent clients downloading files found on sites like The Pirate Bay and Isohunt) was "killing music," just as home taping was supposedly doing in the decades beforehand. In an effort to prevent piracy in a scared-straight way, the FBI stamped menacing warnings on CD jewel cases.

During this period, Drama became the most notorious DJ in America, dropping his "Gangsta Grillz" stamp on legendary mixtapes, often making five figures to host a mixtape in the process. This included Lil Wayne's famed "Dedication" series: projects that transformed him from Cash Money Records teen-star to burgeoning legend. During his stellar run of albums and releases in the late 2000's Wayne began to dub himself the greatest rapper alive (and at the time, he was *objectively* right.)

In the winter of 2007, the Atlanta studio of DJ Drama and his cohorts, The Aphilliates, was raided by a Fulton County SWAT team in supposed violation of Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations, or RICO, statute, typically used to curtail violent gang or

mafioso activity. Officers confiscated vehicles, recording equipment and thousands upon thousands of “illegal CDs” and held Drama and studio co-owner DJ Don Cannon overnight. “Drama and Cannon’s studio was not a bootlegging plant,” reported Samantha M. Shapiro of The New York Times. “It was a place where successful new hip-hop CDs were regularly produced and distributed. Although their business almost certainly violated federal copyright law, as well as a Georgia state law that requires CDs to be labeled with the name and address of the producers, they were not simply stealing from the major labels; they were part of an alternative distribution system that the mainstream record industry uses to promote and market hip-hop artists. Drama and Cannon have in recent years been paid by the same companies that paid to help arrest them.”

Mixtapes didn’t retreat from the internet from there. If anything, they grew even wider. Websites like Datpiff.com and LiveMixtapes.com began to distribute both classic and new mixes for free, exchanging the profit that had been made from tapes of yore for a blank slate on intellectual property restrictions. MySpace, the mid-aughts reigning social-media platform, became an all-in one tool for musicians: dedicated profile formats for artists allowed uploading of mp3 files for an embedded music player that automatically began playing when the page fully loaded; at the same time, the site tallied metrics on listens, profile engagement and “friend” count. Digital Audio Workstations (or DAWs), like FruityLoops and StudioOne, made the act of making a beat accessible to anyone interested enough to learn, while also being particularly easy to pirate. Apple Computers were coming pre-loaded with GarageBand, a rudimentary but user-friendly DAW, which made it absolutely free to record yourself over an instrumental, or allowed you to experiment with drums and loops.

With this perfect storm of accessibility, the internet became a sort of musical playground. Users could upload their own collections of hot freestyles to DatPiff, at the same time as the platform hosted successful artists like Lil Wayne and Young Jeezy and blog-approved industry rookies like Wiz Khalifa and Kid Cudi. Oakland rapper Lil B The BasedGod created 155 separate MySpace pages to combat the six-song limit on their profile pages; this was on top of releasing mixtapes online. It was, at this point, entirely feasible for a newcomer to promote, display and record their material without even getting up from their chair.

“That was a time where I remember in the mixtape game we looked at DatPiff as if they were the enemy, because they were streaming mixtapes for free,” Drama recounted to Rys. “But at the end of the day it helped to come back to the essence, which is about getting that music to the people. It cut out a lot of red tape.”

Before the decade would come to a close, the tides had changed dramatically. Looking back at the 2000s, Billboard writer Steven J. Horowitz concluded in 2011: “The mixtape had evolved from a mere display of DJ skills to a promotional tool packed with exclusive freestyles to an actual album-before-the-album, one that could spawn chart-topping singles without labels at the helm.”

CHAPTER 4: Teens Stars

Horowitz’s article was written as an analysis to an instance where “the mixtape paradigm shifted.” This is, of course, referencing “So Far Gone,” the star-making mixtape by Drake, which spawned the No. 2 charting single “Best I Ever Had.” The tape, hosted on OctobersVeryOwn.com, introduced the world to the Torontonion artist, his record label and his artistry, all of which would propel him to be one of the preminent superstars of the Teens. The

fixed definitions that distinguished albums from mixtapes began to deteriorate. A new gang of young adult misfits, from California's Odd Future collective, to New York's A\$AP Mob, began to release mixtapes under a simple operating principle, as explained by Horowitz for the same Billboard piece: "As a reward for artists remaining loyal to them (by giving away original music), fans return the favor by buying concert tickets, merchandise and 'real' albums from record labels. The result is a give-and-take relationship that keeps rappers in control of their brand and marketing, and iTunes playlists full of free albums disguised as 'mixtapes.' The payoff is an active fan base, which labels and management hope stimulates retail purchases."

After garnering a loyal fanbase with his "K.I.D.S." and "Best Day Ever" mixtapes, the late Mac Miller became the first artist since 1995 to have an independently distributed album debut at No. 1 in November of 2011. After releasing three breakthrough mixtapes throughout 2011, R&B superstar The Weeknd signed to Republic Records in September 2012. They quickly remastered and repackaged the three tapes as a collection, entitled "Trilogy," one month later.

"I think the mentality of the artist is different now," says producer and Purchase alumnus Joshua Hazelhurst, comparing the halcyon days of peak mixtape. "They have more of a go-getting mentality. The people, too. The culture just shifted, and if you weren't in that shift, you were kind of left behind. There's a whole younger generation that's doing the same thing, but digitally. Now you have label heads looking at you."

Mixtapes would help artists like Donald Glover transition from comedy to music to whatever the hell he wants to do next. A YouTube sketch comedian and 30 Rock writer at the time, he began to release music under his Childish Gambino moniker in 2010. His debut mixtape "I Am Just A Rapper" saw him rapping modestly and semi-ironically over notable indie rock of

the era; seven years later, he would be nominated for Album Of The Year at the Grammys and announced as a featured player in the then-upcoming “Solo: A Star Wars Story.” When trap music veteran Gucci Mane was incarcerated on weapons charges in 2014, he recorded enough material before his sentencing to release over two dozen mixtapes over two years while behind bars. Mixtapes turned Chance the Rapper, a suspended high schooler who dreamed of Grammys, into someone who bent the arm of the Recording Academy until they submitted, allowing free material to be considered for awards. He was rewarded for his audacity when “Coloring Book,” a free mixtape that was released as an Apple Music exclusive for its first two months, him three Grammys, including Best Rap Album, in 2017. But as mixtapes change in shape and form, so too do the media we use to consume them.

EPILOGUE: The Price of Free

As streaming services hit a point of ubiquity among music fans, one can wonder about what we lose in the name of convenience. One could argue that they have have virtually cornered the market on how music can be digitally distributed, consumed and discovered. “Spotify has created an on-demand alternative universe. It knows what you listen to, when, and for how long,” writes Lucas Shaw for Bloomberg Businessweek. “It processes that data to churn out custom mixes such as Discover Weekly, a collection of songs from bands you haven’t heard and deeper cuts from those you have. Spotify’s premade playlists account for about 30 percent of listening on the service, which gives them the power to make careers.” A prime example: RapCaviar, Spotify’s most popular curated playlist currently boasts over 7 million followers. Spotify’s nationwide and global charts are swimming with American hip-hop, as well as hip-hop across coastal and linguistic boundaries. It would be career suicide to actively keep your material

off of streaming services. In turn, artists and labels are clamoring to release more polished content.

“If I think of what a mixtape was, the mixtapes being released on DatPiff are completely different from anything that would be called a mixtape or an E.P. today,” responded writer Henry Solotaroff-Webber over the phone. “[On one end,] why come up with a new name for something when it’s already so similar, but I feel like if there wasn’t an intentional reusing of these names, we would forget about them so quickly. Once there isn’t that nostalgia to mine anymore, once streaming becomes even more enveloped into our music listening practices, will E.P.’s fade into our memory as well?”

In lieu of uploading a mixtape to DatPiff, where usership is down but the rules are still the same, why not find a publisher and distributor for your tracks and put it on streaming services? Such things are possible, now that the standards for what a mixtape could be have grown over the past decade. In turn, obtaining rights clearances for music samples has once again become an issue.

“The internet is, every day, becoming less of a wild wild west,” sighs Woody, the creator of “Cartoons Are For Kids.” To accommodate new listening habits, Woody’s mixtape technically exists in two formats: One on Bandcamp and SoundCloud, which includes two tracks that can’t be found on paid streaming services. Most prominently, the track “My Boo” is built around interpolation of the Ghost Town DJs hit of the same name, as an homage. “I don’t even wanna try to clear those samples,” he says. “I love the songs so much, but I don’t know what’s gonna happen. Realistically, [the song would be] relegated to my friends and extended Baltimore / New York / Philadelphia people. I always hope that one day my song blows up, but you can’t

profit off of stuff that's not yours. Technically you can't even post it" to SoundCloud or YouTube, which distribute royalties, as does Spotify and other paid streaming services.

Such an issue came up in the fall of 2018, involving the R&B singers Ella Mai and Jaquees, Woody recounted. Jaquees had recorded and posted a cover version of the Ella Mai track "Trip," with a full music video, before her album or video for the track could be released. Jaquees, known for his "quemixes" of popular songs, very much in the vein of traditional mixtape cuts, was delivered a cease-and-desist from Ella Mai's record label, who accused him of using YouTube and SoundCloud to gain profit from a song that wasn't his.

Hazelhurst confirms that Woody is right to be careful. "A lot of producers are going to get hit with some lawsuits pretty soon," Hazelhurst predicts. "You know for a fact that some songs are not cleared. If one of those songs pops, God forbid somebody famous hears your stuff, now your whole entire discography is in jeopardy. You're taking a risk when you're uploading a mixtape. You're leading a trail back to yourself."

Conversely, artists may not be left with an option if they want to keep fans and gain a profit, as well. "It's so easy to make money off of music nowadays that there is far far less incentive for rappers who have a label or a P.R. firm behind them to make and put out music that they can't monetize in that sense," Vulture and Pitchfork contributor Paul A. Thompson says in an interview over FaceTime. It is in this that we see old mixtapes from artists like Wiz Khalifa, Lil Wayne and Mac Miller—all with the previously pirated samples now legally cleared—back up on streaming services. Cases of unclearable samples do pop up, like R&B superstar The Weeknd sampling Aaliyah on 2011's introductory blog-hit "What You Need," or Lil Yachty's sample of Koji Kondo's score for "Super Mario 64" as the basis for his mixtape deep cut

“Run/Running.” The sample was removed for The Weeknd’s aforementioned release of 2012’s “Trilogy,” whereas the Yachty song was removed from his 2016 debut mixtape altogether. Even the mixtape that began this sort of renaissance, Drake’s “So Far Gone,” ran into a rather loud sample clearance issue in late 2018, nearing its 10-year anniversary, while publicly feuding with Kanye West. As the “So Far Gone” cut “Say What’s Real” was based upon an instrumental loop of West’s 2008 song “Say You Will,” West took to Twitter to publicly blast Drake for having the gall to ask him after a year of interpersonal drama. The verdict: “By the way... not cleared,” West tweeted, along with a laughing-with-tears emoji.

“With streaming, we’re seeing a couple of weird things,” replies Thompson. “To me, the line between mixtape and album for rappers has become really blurred. It’s become sort of an arbitrary distinction that artists and their labels will make, but the question as to what an album is, vs. an E.P. vs. a [long-form, Beyoncé-style] music video, even. I think that’s more interesting, because it’s getting at creative intent. You can call whatever you want an album, just like you can call whatever you want a mixtape.”

The future of the mixtape is as uncertain as the way we’d be listening to it a decade from now. Decades of growth has informed the mixtape as a crucial milestone of the hip-hop world, and its evolution from here on out is worth imagining. “I’m not really sure what will happen,” concludes Thompson, “but I do know that we are going to talk about what’s happening creatively with mixtapes and albums and what’s happening commercially with mixtapes and albums as if they’re two separate things, and they almost never are, because that’s what it was in the beginning: It was people rapping over beats they couldn’t afford.”

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SOURCES

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Paul A. Thompson is a contributor to Pitchfork, and has been reviewing hip-hop albums for over three years. He is the writer for the weekly column “The Week In Rap” for Vulture. His writing has also appeared in The Fader, The Atlantic and he has contributed to podcasts for The Ringer. Interviewed via FaceTime on December 5, 2018

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Bobby Woody is a rapper from Baltimore, Maryland. He released the mixtape “Cartoons Are For Kids” in the spring of 2018. He currently resides in Brooklyn. Interviewed on December 3, 2018.