

Talk the Talk: Hip Hop Slang

© 2006 by Luc Reid

This is the original glossary of hip hop slang from the first edition of *Talk the Talk: The Slang of 65 American Subcultures* by Luc Reid, Writers Digest Books, 2006. Because hip hop slang is more pop culture than subculture, it was not included in the new edition, but this version may be freely distributed as long as it's not altered and this information remains intact.

The new second edition *Talk the Talk: The Slang of 67 American Subcultures* is now available for Kindle, with a paperback release in February 2013. You can find it on Amazon at <http://www.amazon.com/Talk-Slang-American-Subcultures-ebook/dp/B00B43LAB0>.

You can find out more about Luc Reid and his writing at his Web site, www.lucreid.com, and you can download this glossary from the Talk the Talk Web site at <http://www.subculturetalk.com>.

Introduction

The slang associated with hip hop is used by millions of Americans. Entire books have been written to document hip hop slang (for instance, Alonzo Westbrook's *Hip Hoptionary*TM and Lois Stavsky's *A 2 Z: The Book of Rap and Hip-Hop Slang*). Both the number of people who use this slang and the number of terms it includes are far greater than is the case with the subcultures in this book, and hip hop is more a worldwide phenomenon than simply a subculture. With all that in mind, here I present some of the most common and fundamental hip hop slang terms, together with a brief introduction to hip hop culture.

Before I begin with that, though, I should mention that hip hop slang routinely uses words that are considered offensive in "Standard English." These words generally have different and milder associations in hip hop slang, and they come up regularly. Because of this, the following contains a good deal of profanity, which I've tried to steer clear of in other sections. Persons of particular refinement or of delicate constitution may prefer to skip this appendix for that reason.

The hip hop subculture includes two different groups: people interested in creating hip hop music, including rappers and DJs; and the enormous number of people who listen to hip hop music.

Rap as a style of music grew out of the work of DJs in dance clubs who would manipulate vinyl records to mix together samples from different songs and produce unusual sounds, like the "scratch." As DJs played this music,

MCs (Masters of Ceremonies) would speak rhythmic, often rhyming lyrics over the music, these lyrics being known as a "rap." MCs--also called rappers--came into the spotlight as rap music became more popular. Over time, different forms of rap--East Coast, West Coast, Gangsta Rap, etc.--developed. The music became common in urban areas where most of the population was black, and the rappers, who kept the lyrics true to the language of the streets, invented new turns of phrase that caught on in popular speech.

As far as street slang is concerned, hip hop is really only a layer on top of the urban, primarily black slang that preceded it. This dialect, which has been called Black English and Ebonics, includes not only a wide range of terms not found in "Standard English," but slightly different grammar and pronunciation as well. But don't be fooled into thinking it's a separate language: it's a dialect, a variation on the English language like Australian, Scots English, or so-called "Standard English."

So urban slang plus rap terminology plus terms coined by rappers plus terms from other subcultures (like drug users and lowriders) come together to make hip hop slang.

There's no shortage of local terms in hip hop. For instance, on the West Coast the word "clique" is used for what people in other parts of the country call a "crew." Local hip hop terms also come up as place names ("The Big O." for Oakland, California; "Illtown" for East Orange, New Jersey; etc.). Yet nationwide broadcast of rap songs has made hip hop slang more similar from one location to another than would otherwise be the case.

Because hip hop slang is a general use slang, applied to every kind of life situation (as opposed to the more limited uses covered by the subculture slang in most of this book), it contains a lot of words for things like sex, drunkenness, social relationships, and other situations that aren't specific enough to warrant special terms in most subculture slang. After all, why would a drunk circus clown need a different word than a drunk stamp collector?

Spelling in hip hop slang isn't entirely fixed. Words that end in *er* are sometimes written in hip hop slang with either an *er* or an *a*; for instance, gangster/gangsta. The letter "z" is sometimes substituted for "s," and words ending in *-ing* are written to end with *in'* or *in*. Overall, the written form is less predictable and more phonetic than Standard English.

Additional unfamiliar terms come from some unusual word transformations. For instance, one type of hip hop slang places the syllable "iz" before the first vowel in some words (so that, for instance, "house" becomes "hizouse." A similar type uses only the first letter or two of a word and replaces the rest with "izzle", so that "fo' sure" or "fo' sho'" becomes "fo' shizzle" or even "fashizzle". These kinds of transformations can sometimes operate as fads and can quickly become outdated. They also can easily be overused, and it may be best to avoid using them unless you're very familiar with the speech.

Hip hop slang has a strong vocabulary for referring to extremes and for labelling things as good or bad. In a strange way, some of these terms have grown over time to mean their own opposites: for instance, both "cold" and "ill" can mean either "very desirable" or "completely worthless."

Terms

187: Murder. From Section 187 of the California Penal Code which covers homicide.

411: ("four one one," not "four eleven") Information.

5-0: (five-oh) A policeman; derived from the television series *Hawaii 5-0*, and/or because some police cars are 5.0 liter Ford Mustangs.

all that: Top shelf; high quality; very good of its kind. Often used to describe people.

ass: Among other uses, "ass" can be added after an adjective for emphasis. It doesn't

change the meaning of the word it modifies, but simply draws attention to it while changing the rhythm of the sentence, something that can come in handy for rappers.

When written, "ass" used in this way is often a separate word ("bad ass gangsta"), but can also, less often, be hyphenated ("bad-ass gangsta") or even connected to the end of the word ("badass gangsta").

"I really think this is and was a lame ass battle."

baller: A man who has money, respect, and attention from women.

banger: A dangerous gang member.

bank (*synonyms: cheese, chips, cream, duckets, ends, mail, paper, scrilla or scrillah*): Money.


see also: flow

battle: (as a noun) A contest between rappers, who take turns rapping and trying to cut each other down and build themselves up. The winner gets recognition and respect.

(as a verb) To participate in a battle.

battle record: A vinyl record compiled with a variety of music samples and sounds designed to provide material for a DJ to scratch with.

bend: A prostitute.

 **bitch:** 1) A prostitute.

2) A girlfriend. Not necessarily derogatory.

3) An insulting term for a man, implying he's weak or cowardly.

bite (*synonym: xerox*): To steal another rapper's lyrics, beats, etc.

"You're dumb anyway if you did bite off of him, cuz he ain't that good."

bling bling: Jewelry. More generally, wealth or expensive things.

bomb: 1) (adjective) Very good; desirable

2) (noun) Something very fine.

3) (noun) Marijuana laced with heroin.

bone: 1) (verb) To have sex with.

2) (noun) The penis.

3) (noun) One dollar.

see also: to the bone, bone out

bone out (*synonyms: bounce, jet, roll out*): To leave.

boo: Darling, honey, sweetheart, baby. Term of affection for a significant other.

booster: 1) A shoplifter.
2) A car thief.
3) A thief of any kind.

booty or bootie: 1) (as a noun) Backside.
2) (as an adjective) No good; worthless.
see also: butt

bounce (synonyms: bone out, jet, roll out): To leave.

break: 1) (noun) A rhythmic section of a hip hop song with no rap over it.
2) (verb) To break dance.
3) (verb) To leave or go somewhere quickly.

buddy: (as a noun) A sexual partner.
(as a verb) Seeming good at first, but later revealed as worthless; e.g., a pair of shoes, a friend.

bug: To act crazy or act out.
see also: ill, wack

*"I was about to order that sh*t last night with the Sweetwater Bill Me Later sh*t, but moms was bugging because I'm not 18 and don't have a 'credit history.'"*

bust slugs: Shoot bullets.

busta: An unreliable person; a fake.
see also: bitch

butt: (adjective) No good; worthless.

cap: A bullet.
see also: bust slugs, capped

capped: Injured with a bullet; shot.
see also: bust slugs, cap

"But it goes deeper than "he was black and rapped, and got capped" like all the other authors."

cheese (synonyms: bank, chips, cream, duckets, ends, mail, paper, scrilla or scrillah): Money.

chill: (as a verb) To calm down or relax.
(as an adjective) Relaxed or in control.

chips (synonyms: bank, cheese, cream, duckets, ends, mail, paper, scrilla or scrillah): Money.

chrome (synonyms: glock, steel, strap): A gun.
see also: piece

clique: (pronounced "cleek") The friends a person spends time with. This is a West Coast

word; in other parts of the country, crew is more common.

see also: crew

cold: 1) Dangerous.
2) Intense.
3) Very cool.

come correct: To do right; to do something in the proper way.

*"You all are funny to the point where clowns got notepads in their hands. Come correct, b**ches."*

crazy: Many, very, a lot.
"My grandpa got crazy rich from trading stocks."

cream (synonyms: bank, cheese, chips, duckets, ends, mail, paper, scrilla or scrillah): Money.

crew (synonym: posse): The associates a person spends time with and depends on.

see also: clique

crib: A person's living space.

crunk: 1) Relating to having a very good time, often in the context of "get crunk."

2) Drunk, or high and drunk. This is a more recent usage and is not necessarily implied when the word is used in the first sense.

3) A particular type of energetic, dance-oriented, southern rap music.

cuh (synonyms: cuz or cuzz, cuzzo): Friend; "cousin."

cuz or **cuzz** (synonyms: cuzzo, cuh): Friend; "cousin." Used especially among Crips.

cuzzo (synonyms: cuz or cuzz, cuh): Friend; "cousin."

dawg (synonym: dog or dogg): A friend or member of a person's crew.

def: Very good; excellent. This word is dated and not as widely used as it once was.

dime: A very attractive woman; i.e., a "ten."

"Damn, she a hottie for real, a straight dime. I never seen a girl like her on the net ... so far she at the top."

dis or **diss** (synonym: disrespect): To disrespect; i.e., treat a person badly.

dis record: A recording of rap music that taunts or belittles another rapper. Not to be confused with a battle record.

disrespect (synonym: dis or diss): 1) (as a verb) To treat a person badly.
2) (as a noun) Bad treatment.

DJ (synonym: turntablist): (as a noun) Short for "disc jockey," a person who is expert at using vinyl records on turntables (and more recently, CDs on specialized equipment) to create a range of sounds and pull together music samples. Rap music originated with DJs manipulating records to make dance music. A Master of Ceremonies (MC) would often speak over parts of the mix (i.e., rap). Over time, rappers rather than DJs have become more prominent.

"DJ" is both a noun and a title.

(as a verb) To manipulate vinyl records so as to make music out of samples of existing songs.

see also: mix, scratch

dog or dogg (synonym: dawg): 1) (as a noun) A friend or member of a person's crew.

2) (as a form of address) A friend, or sometimes a neutral acquaintance. A particularly close friend can be called a "road dog."

3) (as a verb) To act insultingly toward someone.

see also: crew, homeboy, dis

"Wasn't feeling ya verse, dogg."

dome: A head.

dope (synonyms: fat, phat, live, slammin'): Excellent; very good.

see also: cold

down with: 1) Willing; having no objection to.

2) Part of; accepted by.

"Don't front, a lot of you who remember them were down with Terrible T. and Sweet L.D., even though we may not have been down with MC Hammer."

drop a dime: To inform on someone to the police.

drop knowledge (synonym: drop science): To show knowledge or skill.

drop science (synonym: drop knowledge): To show knowledge or skill.

*"I haven't worked this hard to be pigeon-holed by any dumb f*ck racists that act like they can drop science, when they really as ignorant as any Adolf Hitler wannabee."*

duckets (synonyms: bank, cheese, chips, cream, ends, mail, paper, scrilla or scillah): Money.

emcee (synonyms: rapper, MC, Master of Ceremonies): An artist who speaks rhythmic rap lyrics over hip hop or rap music.

ends (synonyms: bank, cheese, chips, cream, duckets, mail, paper, scrilla or scillah): Money.

fade: To suppress or disregard.

fat (synonyms: dope, phat, live, slammin'): Excellent; very good.

flow: 1) (verb) To rap with continuous rhyme.

2) (noun) A section of a rap that rhymes continuously.

3) (noun) Money.

fly: Attractive; sexy; very fine.

freak: 1) (verb) To have sex.

2) (verb) In reference to a woman, to dance provocatively.

3) (noun) A woman who is very sexual.

freestyle: (as a verb) To improvise a rap.

(as a noun) An improvised rap.

fresh: 1) New; innovative.

2) Fine; high quality.

front: To pretend to be other than you are, especially to pretend to be tough.

"Did they agree? If yeah then it's cool, but if they never then no, 'cause I don't want 'em think we frontin'."

game: Real life, as opposed to things that aren't true or don't matter.

see also: playa

gangsta or gangster: 1) A gang member.

2) A criminal.

3) A formidable rapper.

gank: To steal from or otherwise cause harm to.

gat or gatt: A gun, especially an automatic.

get busy: To have sex.

ghetto bird: A police helicopter.

ghost: (as an adjective) Suddenly gone.

(as a verb) To disappear.

glock (synonyms: chrome, steel, strap): A gun.

go Federal: To make it big; to become famous or very successful (figuratively, across the entire country).

"He is getting a lot of attention and has genuine street cred without going federal."

grip: 1) Rapping ability; refers to the rapper's grip on the microphone.

2) Money.

3) A gun.

hard: Tough; dangerous.

hardcore: Truly represented; real; straight.

hawk (*synonym: scope*): To stare or watch.

heat: A gun.

hella: Much; very; a lot of.

"They started coming to my events and showing me hella love."

hip hop or **hip-hop:** Rap music or rapper culture. Hip hop encompasses DJing, rapping, dancing, the hip hop music club scene, and the street culture of people who listen to hip hop music.

The term "hip hop" is more closely associated with the dance/club scene than the term "rap." "Rap" also has other meanings.

see also: rap

homeboy or **homegirl** (*synonyms: homey or homie, homes*): A friend or relative.

homes (*synonyms: homeboy or homegirl, homey or homie*): A friend or relative.

homey or **homie** (*synonyms: homeboy or homegirl, homes*): A friend or relative.

hood: Short for "neighborhood."

1) A person's neighborhood, usually only used in reference to poorer areas.

2) Poorer neighborhoods in general.

hype: (as a noun) Media spin, advertising, or promotion.

(as an adjective) Very good; excellent.

ill or **illin'**: 1) Strange; weird; crazy.

2) Really good; fine.

3) Bad; nasty.

see also: bug, wack

jack: (as a verb) To steal or steal from.

(as a noun) Nothing, or nothing worthwhile.

jakes (*synonym: one-times*): The police.

jam: A rap song.

see also: mix

janky: No good, or fake.

"You know I'm not some janky ass newbie."

jet (*synonyms: bone out, bounce, roll out*): To leave.

live (*synonyms: dope, fat, phat, slammin'*): Excellent; very good.

loc: (pronounced "loke")

1) (noun) A term of address for a friend or acquaintance.

2) (adjective) Crazy.

3) (adjective) Cool; admirable.

mad: Very many; a lot.

mail (*synonyms: bank, cheese, chips, cream, duckets, ends, paper, scrilla or scillah*): Money.

marinate: To hang out and relax.

"While I was just marinating a few days ago, this thought popped into my head."

mark: A sucker; someone who's an easy target. This word is borrowed from con artist and carnival slang (see separate sections).

Master of Ceremonies (*synonyms: rapper, MC, emcee*): An artist who speaks rhythmic rap lyrics over hip hop or rap music.

MC (*synonyms: rapper, emcee, Master of Ceremonies*): An artist who speaks rhythmic rap lyrics over hip hop or rap music.

mix: (as a verb) To time, combine, and manipulate music played on turntables as a means of making hip hop music.

(as a noun) The music (rather than the rap) of a hip hop song.

see also: DJ, jam

money: A name used for a friend or acquaintance. The word is also used in its traditional sense of "currency," but there are many other hip hop slang words for "currency" (for instance, bank).

see also: homeboy, bank

motherfuckin': A word used for emphasis before a noun or verb. The meaning of the noun or verb isn't changed, but more attention is drawn to it, and the rhythm of the sentence is changed, which can be useful to rappers.

see also: ass

move on (*synonyms: step to, step up*): To provoke someone.

🚩 nigga or nigger: 1) General use, non-derogatory term to use when addressing a friend or acquaintance.

2) An appellation for any person who understands the street and acts authentically.

Despite the widespread use of the word "nigga" in hip hop culture, the term still carries its history of persecution of blacks by whites, so non-blacks and even blacks who are considered to be more a part of mainstream culture than of street culture can't necessarily count on using the word without giving offense.

OG or Original Gangster: A title for a person who has knowledge and experience of gang life and is looked up to by gang members.

off the hook: Wild; really exciting; impressive. "Your flow was off the hook."

old school: Outdated or retro.

one-times (synonym: jakes): The police

paper (synonyms: bank, cheese, chips, cream, duckets, ends, mail, scrilla or scrillah): Money.

peace: (as an interjection) Goodbye (or less often, "hello").

(as an adjective) Relaxed; calm; in control.

peeps: People, specifically in reference to those from the same area or same culture as the speaker.

phat (synonyms: dope, fat, live, slammin'): Excellent; very good.

piece: 1) A gun.

2) Sex.

see also: chrome, heat

play: 1) To be part of, especially in the phrase "play that."

2) To try to deceive.

playa or player: Someone who's successful in life; e.g., a person who can get money, respect, and sex.

"Keep on going Jeremy. You taken da game to a new height, playa."

playa-hata or player-hater: A person who speaks insultingly of people more successful than himself.

point blank: Right now; here in this situation.

posse (synonym: crew): The associates a person spends time with and depends on.

props: Gratitude or recognition; short for "proper respect."

punk: A person who isn't worthy of respect; a coward.

rap: (as a verb) To speak lyrics rhythmically, as a rapper does.

(as a noun) A rap song, or the lyrics to a rap song.

rapper (synonyms: MC, emcee, Master of Ceremonies): An artist who speaks rhythmic rap lyrics over hip hop or rap music. The lyrics may be memorized or improvised. As a rule, rap artists don't perform other rappers' work.

raw: True; real; straight.

represent: Stand up, or stand up for.

"This is for people who are serious, people that are loyal, people who will represent to the fullest."

ride: A car.

see also: whip

roll out (synonyms: bone out, bounce, jet): To leave.

roll with: To be part of a group; to hang out with.

see also: down with, crew

scope (synonym: hawk): To stare or watch.

scratch: (as a verb, in reference to a DJ) To spin vinyl records back and forth to produce a scratching sound sometimes used in rap music.

(as a noun) Money.

scrilla or scrillah (synonyms: bank, cheese, chips, cream, duckets, ends, mail, paper): Money.

scrub: A lazy or worthless person.

serve: To defeat or outface.

shife: In regard to a person: new, inexperienced, contemptible, or inconsequential.

shorty: 1) A younger person or child.

2) A woman, particularly one who looks to be girlfriend material.

*"Folk, I'm callin' Alicia Keys ... I give a f*ck who you are, shorty claimed by me from now on."*

slammin' (synonyms: dope, fat, phat, live): Excellent; very good.

smoke: To kill, especially with a gun.

steel (synonyms: chrome, glock, strap): A gun.

step off: To back off or stop provoking.

step to (synonyms: move on, step up): To provoke someone.

see also: step off

step up (synonyms: step to, move on): To provoke someone.

straight: True; real; all right.


strap (synonyms: chrome, glock, steel): A gun.

stupid: 1) Funny or creative.
2) Very or extremely.

tax: To steal.

tight: Very good; fine. The word suggests that things are in order, that everything is in its proper place.

to the bone: Completely; all the way.

 **trick**: A insulting term for a woman.

turntablist (synonym: DJ): A person who is expert at using records or CDs to create a range of sounds.


wack: Crazy; freaked out. A negative term, as contrasted with ill, which can be either positive or negative.

"You wack, yo. You gotta be kiddin' me, kid."

see also: bug, ill

whip: A fine car.

see also: ride

 **wigga** or **wigger**: A derogatory term for a white person who tries to be a part of black street culture but is not accepted by it.

word or **word up**: 1) That's the truth; I agree.

2) A general-use greeting.

"Word up" used to be used widely, but now "word" alone is more common.

word is bond: An expression of trust or a guarantee of honesty.

*"Yeah, it's very decent, word is bond. Supreme mad props on that sh*t."*

xerox (synonym: bite): To steal lyrics.