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Law enforcement officials now are trained to use rap lyrics to assist them in investigating crimes. The *New York Times* identified dozens of cases between 2012 and 2014 in which prosecutors attempted to introduce rap music at a defendant's trial. The American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey found that courts admitted lyrics roughly 80 percent of the time. Studies find that juries are more likely to believe that defendants who have written violent rap lyrics are capable of committing a murder than defendants who have not written violent lyrics.

Commentators familiar with the culture of rap music point out that the lyrics are not necessarily autobiographical and that gangsta rap is characterized by exaggeration and violent and sexual language. Artists remain in "character" even when not performing to persuade their audience that they are "authentic" and "credible." Commentators also note that law enforcement officials are able to distinguish between the reality and fiction when it comes to other forms of music but do not seem willing to make this distinction when it comes to young African American artists. Under what circumstances should rap music be viewed as evidence of criminal intent and motive rather than artistic expression?