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Hip Hop Halftime Makes History

George Burquest, Staff Reporter

Super Bowl LVI was historic: In addition to being the first Super Bowl appearance by the Cincinnati Bengals in over 30 years, it was the first time hip-hop had been put on center stage in the iconic halftime show.

Continuing a tradition that began in 1967 during the very first Super Bowl, the halftime show has changed a lot over the years. Originally featuring college marching bands, it was not until 1991, when the 90's boy band New Kids on the Block performed at Super Bowl XXV, that pop music made its way onto the halftime show stage.

The Super Bowl halftime show has been the home of some notable performances, as well as mishaps over the years. Artists such as Michael Jackson, Prince, Beyoncé and Katy Perry have taken center stage at the halftime show. As a result, the performance has been an encapsulation of American pop culture.

However, there has been a major aspect of American cultural and musical identity that the NFL has chosen not to represent since its rise to popular culture during the '80s and '90s—hip-hop. That changed this year with a Super Bowl lineup of Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, Kendrick Lamar, Eminem and a surprise appearance from 50 Cent.

In total, these artists have 44 Grammys between them, yet for the NFL, this performance was about more than just star power. Starting arguably since the inception of the league and being brought into the spotlight more recently thanks to the bravery of players like Colin Kaepernick, the NFL has a long history of racial controversies. Today, there are only two Black head coaches in the NFL, while close to 60% of players are Black.

While people of color have certainly performed at the Super Bowl before, there has never been a platform for rap and hip-hop as apparent as this year's show.

"It's crazy that it took all of this time for us to be recognized," Dr. Dre emphasized at the NFL's official news conference a week before the game, noting that the NFL essentially chose to wait until hip-hop had become oldies music.

Seattle University Second-year Anthropology and Spanish major Luke Smytheman isn't normally an NFL fan, but the Super Bowl halftime show is something he stuck around for. Smytheman was especially interested this year as he is a fan of Eminem and Snoop Dogg, even though he is more familiar with them as public figures rather than current artists.

"It didn't really feel like it was aimed at our generation, but I could still appreciate the performance," Smytheman said. "To be honest, I didn't have any idea who Mary J. Blige was!"



Rachel Bentfield

Second-year Political Science major and avid San Francisco 49ers fan Isiah Martin Lopez, felt that this year's performance stood out from the rest. Lopez always tunes into the halftime show, and reminisced about some of his favorite past performances from Beyoncé and Bruno Mars.

"As a hip-hop fanatic, I was super excited for the lineup this year. I feel like it was the first halftime show we have ever had rap as the main thing," Lopez said. "Normally, it's always just pop or country music, so to see rap as a focal point was really a big positive change for me."

Taking place at SoFi Stadium, located in Inglewood, Calif., the night's performances took place right next to Compton, where Dr. Dre founded NWA, one of—if not the most notorious—hip-hop groups ever. In homage to the area's history, Compton was embedded into the stage's set up. From street outlines to notable landmarks, the set was built around the mecca of hip-hop.

"Even though Kendrick was great ... I think that for Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre, that's their city," Martinez said. "They were all great, everything worked so well together, the location, the set and the performers."

Second-year Civil Engineering major, Ian Woodley, who is also a San Francisco 49ers fan, was another big fan of the performance.

"My family loves to watch the game together, but at least 80% of the reason my mom will watch it is for the halftime show and the commercials," Woodley said. "They are more than just concerts, they really have to be described as full scale events."

Paying homage to hip hop's roots, the NFL took a long overdue step in this year's Super Bowl LVI halftime show. The performances by the all-star lineup of singers was received well as a change of pace, while still being incredibly entertaining. There is no telling where the NFL will move from here, yet what can be assured is that hip-hop has now officially entered into the league, where many hope it will stay.