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## **Colorado Police Link Rise in Violence to Music** By DAN FROSCH

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/03/us/03hiphop.html>

COLORADO SPRINGS, Aug. 30 - The D.J. puts on the popular song "No Problem" by Lil Scrappy, and a sea of young men and women rush the dance floor.

As the party anthem bursts through the speakers and Lil Scrappy drawls, "But you don't want no problem, problem," the crowd swerves in a sweaty, liquor-soaked rhythm. The scene, heavy with the sweet smoke of cigarillos and exploding with hip-hop's unmistakable pounding bass, could be almost anywhere: New York, Chicago, Memphis, Oakland, Calif.

The only sign that this is Colorado Springs is that two churches sit adjacent to the club, La Zona Roja, in an empty strip mall.

The club is part of a thriving hip-hop community that has grown as Colorado Springs, known for its military installations and evangelical groups, has grown. But not everyone is happy that hip-hop has taken root here.

After a spate of shootings, and with a rising murder rate, the police here are saying gangsta rap is contributing to the violence, luring gang members and criminal activity to nightclubs. The police publicly condemned the music in a news release after a killing in July and are warning nightclub owners that their places might not be safe if they play gangsta rap.

"We don't want to broad-brush hip-hop music altogether," said Lt. Skip Arms, a police spokesman, "but we're looking at a subcomponent that typically glorifies, promotes criminal behavior and demeans women."

The actions of the police have angered the hip-hop community here, mostly blacks and Latinos, many of whom live in this city because of ties to the Army and Air Force bases here.

"If we were talking about a rock bar or a country bar here, none of this would be happening," said James Baldrick, who runs a local hip-hop promotions company, Dirty Limelight.

"This city wants to shut down hip-hop," said Mike Cross, 26, who was outside Eden Nite Club, a popular downtown venue that plays hip-hop, with a group of friends on a recent night. "They don't want it to survive."

Calling the police's approach ignorant, a group of club promoters and rappers in Colorado Springs organized a night of hip-hop performances and music at La Zona Roja last month, seeking to prove that such events could occur without incident.

"When two cowboys got into an argument at a saloon, went outside and had a draw, nobody blamed the music that was playing at the saloon," said a local rapper known as B. Serious, who performed at the event.

But with 19 homicides already this year, compared with 15 in 2006, the police insist on a correlation between gangsta rap and violence, and point to three recent shootings.

On April 17, a stray bullet killed a taxi driver during a fight between two groups who had left Eden Nite Club. After a fight at a concert at a local park on Memorial Day, a man was shot to death in a nearby liquor store parking lot. On July 9, a former high school football star, Diontea Jackson-Forrest, was shot and killed. The authorities said the suspect was involved in an altercation at Eden before the shooting.

Two days after Mr. Jackson-Forrest's death, the police issued a news release blaming the violence on gangsta rap. The release mentioned an event planned at Eden, called a "Pimp, Thug and Ho Party," as the "type of behavior that causes concern." The club's owners called off the party.

Mr. Baldrick noted that the shooting after the Memorial Day concert, which his company sponsored, occurred two hours after the event, yet the police linked the two. He said that since the authorities began speaking out against gangsta rap, there had been a drop in attendance at events promoted by Dirty Limelight, down to 200 from about 700 per event.

But Lt. Thomas Harris, who leads a unit that deals with gangs, drugs and guns, insisted there was a link between the violence and the music.

"When you have music that says it's basically O.K. to treat women poorly, to steal things and to confront and shoot police officers," said Lt. Harris, "you'll attract a small percentage of the population that wants to lead the thug life."

Others here say the police are focusing on hip-hop instead of addressing the growing pains of this largely white, conservative city, home to the evangelical groups Focus on the Family and New Life Church.

Since 1990, the metropolitan area of Colorado Springs, which sits south of Denver, has swollen to nearly half a million from 397,000. Though outright racial tensions, which led to marches here in the 1970s and '80s, are largely of the past, there remains a sense of benign neglect toward minorities, said Dr. José J. Barrera, former director of ethnic studies at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. That neglect has translated into a chasm between the city and its minority youth, Dr. Barrera said.

"If you examine the history of ethnic and race relations in this community, you will detect a pattern of ignorance of minority cultures and problems," Dr. Barrera said. "No serious observer believes that current manifestations of youth culture and pop culture actually fuel criminal activity."

At the recent hip-hop showcase at La Zona Roja, the genre's positive side eclipsed all else.

After the show, the crowd tumbled out of the club. Young men politely chatted up a group of women. A couple tried to coordinate a ride home. Two men exchanged solemn stories of prison.

The only sign of trouble was a flat tire on someone's customized sedan.