As Ronald Reagan’s conservatism spread throughout the U.S. and Ed Koch pulled New York out of its mid-70s bankruptcy and into greed-is-good 80s’, three middle-class kids were taking refuge in a musical rebellion. Mike “D” Diamond, Adam “MCA” Yauch and Adam “Ad Rock” Horovitz formed a band called The Beastie Boys. All three members came from wealthy middle-class Jewish families in New York. Adam Horovitz is the son of the late Doris Keefe Horovitz, and distinguished playwright-screenwriter Israel Horovitz. He is a Brooklyn Tech dropout who later enrolled in New York’s City As School (CAS) work-study program for problem pupils. Horovitz was also head of a punk group called The Young and the Useless. Adam Yauch was enrolled at the Elizabeth Seeger School in Greenwich Village and is the son of an accomplished architect and New York City school system administrator. Mike Diamond, the founder of the Beastie Boys, grew up in the Upper West Side of New York, what we call the “ghetto”. His mom is a noted interior designer and his father was an art vendor who died when Mike was sixteen years old.

As three impressionable adolescents born in the mid-sixties, they decided to start a band for the primary reason that all their friends had bands. They started gigging at all the major clubs on the Upper East Side, playing their own brand of hardcore punk rock to a small but faithful audience. They were considered a loud obnoxious joke band. They began writing
rhymes and beat-driven absurdities like “Poly Wog Stew” and “Cookie Puss” based on a prank phone call the group made to Carvel Ice Cream shop. Essentially a joke hip-hop record, it attracted the attention of the rap community and was embraced by the downtown club crowd. The single was an important turning point for the group. By 1984 they had abandoned punk and turned their attention to rap. They joined forces with producer Rick Rubin who founded Def Jam Records with his fellow New York University student Russel Simmons, who saw potential in the boys and signed them on. After producing one of the first rap and heavy metal combinations on record called “Rock Hard” they played black rap clubs. The producers figured if the group could make it there, they could make it anywhere. Being white boys in a predominately black rap game had most doubting their abilities. But in 1985, the Beasties scored an opening slot on Madonna’s Material Girl tour. The trio taunted the audience with foul mouths and flying Budweiser cans and was generally poorly received. The teenage wannabes in Madonna’s audience hated them, but the Beastie’s loutish commotion had made an imprint on a generation that wasn’t easily forgotten. The band received a warmer reception as the openers for Run DMC on the Raising Hell Tour in the summer of 1985. Playing in large arenas to a predominately black audience with Run-DMC and LL Cool J. Both of these tours were very important to the growth of the band. They presented the group to vast audiences who had never heard of them, and in doing so, put the Beastie Boys in the position of having to win the crowd over every night. They followed this with the biggest-selling rap album of the eighties, “Licensed to Ill,” which appealed to the predominately white middle-class kids. “Licensed to Ill” spent seven weeks at #1 on the pop chart and reached #2 on the black charts. It was the fastest selling record in CBS record history, and it sold over five million copies worldwide to
date. This labeled the Beastie Boys as the first white rap group of any importance. Their debut album was met by unprecedented acclaim with headline reviews that read “Three Jerks Make a Masterpiece”. Their lyrics were violent, sexist with sly frat-boy rhymes about beer, girls, breaking parental rules and generally not caring. Much of that success was due to a single “Fight for Your Right to Party” which became a huge crossover success. The band then embarked on their first headlining tour, selling out across the USA. The show included live go-go dancers in a cage, and a huge six-pack of Budweiser tall-boys. They made headlines everywhere they went and even inspired some laws to be passed. Throughout their 1987 tour they were plagued with arrests and lawsuits and were accused of inciting crime. Headline reviews read “Beasties Rock as Vice Squad Watches”. Because of their rebellious lifestyles and crude on stage presence they painted an image of themselves as outlaw menaces which resulted in banishment of their concerts by local authorities. After a dispute with Def Jam and Rick Rubin, most thought that the Beastie Boys would never be heard from again, but they followed up with the CD “Paul’s Boutique” with new producers, the Dust Brothers. The record was declared a disaster. Mike decided to head in a different direction, he founded his own record label “Grand Royal” and produced the most diverse record yet called “Check your head” which alternated between old school, hip-hop, raw amateurish funk and hard-core punk. This record helped make them hip again on college and on alternative rock radio stations. They made a few more albums and then they concentrated on their record label and political causes. In 1996 they released “Aglio E Olio” a hard-core instrumental soul-jazz funk collection. Finally “Hello Nasty” appeared during the summer of 1998.
Hip-Hop culture emerged as a source for youth to form an identity and social status. Rap music is a social form that voices many of the class-gender and race-related forms of cultural and political alienation. Black music has always been a primary means of cultural expression for African Americans, particularly during difficult social periods and transitions. Rappers speak with the voice of personal experience. They rap about how to avoid gang pressures and still earn respect, how to deal with the loss of several friends to gun fights and drug overdoses and they tell violent tales of male sexual power over women. The Beasties success came from being observers and emulators of rap culture, privileged white boys looking in from the outside, as they did as teenagers, running around New York clubs. The Beasties evaded most of the racial tensions inherent in white hip-hop by never pretending to have ghetto roots. They were always clowns, evoking suburban mischief rather than urban anger or depression. As I listen to their music, I hear lyrics boasting about all the fun their having; driving around, smoking pot, getting girls, making records. The Beasties had been born into one side of a microcosmic culture war-the split between radical liberals and those like their parents who tried to place their good intentions on their suburban-bred children. The boy’s education was a steady diet of anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-greed. These boys never marched for high ideals, had never been mugged, never been called a wop and never had to fight for “any” right. They never knew anything beside power. These boys were an eruption from the Id. Three white guys with a stage show that featured women dancing in cages (an adolescent male fantasy), and giant cans of Budweiser (also an adolescent male fantasy). We watched these three boys grow through adolescents (discovering, experiencing, and exploring) to a social and political presence. The Beasties Boys (“Boys Entering Anarchistic States Towards Internal Excellence”)
are just a group of carefree kids from New York City who have street smarts and school smarts which give them their obnoxious identity.

The song (Fight for Your Right to Party) is clearly adolescents expressing their desire for independence. (Line 8) They also have a hair trigger for hypocrisy, and find any inconsistency in adult values to be particularly abhorrent. (Line 7) The development of identity involves the discovery and the trying-on of various attitudes, beliefs, and social identities. This accounts for the sudden shifts in teens’ entire lifestyles. (Line 6) The lyrics referring to clothes, hair, and music is three precocious teenagers bent on meeting the challenge of rebelling against rebellion-proof parents. (Lines 10-13) The song projects an image of teenagers wanting to live an adult lifestyle without adhering to the responsibilities that come along with it.

Since these New York natives got together about a decade ago they have transformed from destructive teenager adolescents to mature men with a social and spiritual voice who fought for their rights and succeeded.