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## VIDEOS

# Can a Rap Video Make Fort Wayne Cool?

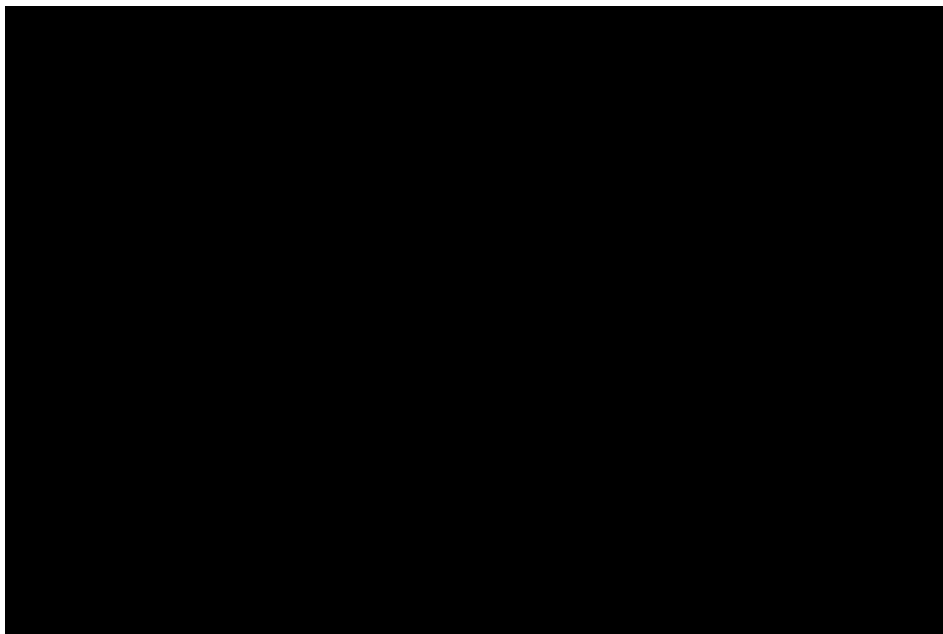
DEVON HAYNIE MAY 31, 2012 9 COMMENTS

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Fort Wayne, Indiana, a heartland city of 254,000, is [haunted by top ten lists](#). It was named the dumbest city in America by *Men's Health* in 2005, and has since experienced the dubious honor of being named one of the fattest cities in the country as well.

So it's no surprise that local leaders have spent the past few years trying to give the city's image a makeover. They've expanded its trails system, invested in math and science education, and marketed the city as among the country's safest, most family-friendly places to live. Still, [college graduates leave in droves](#).

A nonprofit group called [A Better Fort](#) is trying a different approach—one it claims is the first of its kind in the country. Last fall, the group gathered 12 of the city's hip-hop artists together to record a rap video called "My City":



If it sounds like a cheesy concept, it is. The tone is unabashedly optimistic and the rhymes

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occasionally groan-worthy ("I was born in Indiana, so listen when I say there's more than corn to Indiana"). But there's also something kind of ... awesome about it. The video is filmed in iconic locations throughout the city and features back-up singing by Fort Wayne's Voices of Unity, an award-winning children's choir. The producers hoped the song—played on local airwaves—would instill pride in the city and encourage young people to stick around after college.

So far, more than 165,000 people have watched the official video on YouTube. The rappers say some of their most ardent fans are middle school students, who fawn over them as if they were Jay-Z or Lil' Wayne.

"My City" is the brainchild of 25-year-old Alex Smith, who co-founded A Better Fort in 2006. His group sets up young people with volunteer opportunities throughout the city, hoping they will forge a deep connection with Fort Wayne that will make them want to stay.

A year ago, Smith wanted to do something big that would expand his volunteer base and boost the city's image. What better way to make Fort Wayne seem cool, he wondered, than to get a dozen leading hip-hop artists to rap about their love for the city?

Smith's team reached out to the community and held dozens of auditions before it found 11 rappers who made the video cut, along with Voices of Unity. The music video took about eight months to produce. And by the time it was finished, about 200 residents, including college students, business people and community leaders, had contributed to the project.

"The younger generation, they need to see people who are not much older coming together and taking pride in where they're from," says Dinero Moneybagz, a 25-year-old hip-hop artist who appears in the video. "When you're in a smaller town, pride is everything. ... You have to take responsibility for your own greatness."

Keywords: Marketing, Fort Wayne, Music Videos

Devon Haynie is an Indiana-based newspaper reporter and freelance writer whose work has appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune* and other publications. [All posts »](#)

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Meryl Dolan

Great article! Very inspiring song!

21 hours ago

Like Reply



markjohnsonchi

Way to go Fort Wayne! I'm a native that now lives in Chicago but I still appreciate all of the work being done in the local scene. There definitely needs to be more collaboration like this. I look forward to a trip back home very soon!

3 days ago

Like Reply



Austin Fossey

I love that song. Fort Wayne's got more soul than a sock with a hole.

3 days ago 1 Like

Like Reply



Alex Smith

Great article Devon! Thanks for taking the time to cover our project and hopefully we can expand our collaborative efforts to create more organic projects such as #HipHop4theCity ...

4 days ago 1 Like

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**Andy Welfle**, Pencil blogger. Social Media and Content Strategist. Nonprofit arts and cult...

As a resident of Fort Wayne (and friend of the filmmaker), I love it. Cheesy, yes, but not quite as cheerleader-y as some of the other marketing efforts in town. I'd love to see more of these kind of things!

4 days ago 1 Like

Like Reply



**Brooke Fossey**

I love this! What a catchy song and what great hometown pride. I think a lot of other midsized cities--and even bigger cities--could learn from this video. Great branding, and so nice to hear such positive words. I haven't been to Fort Wayne yet, but now I want to go.

4 days ago 3 Likes

Like Reply



**Ellen Anderson Cutter**

I'm a Chicagoan who moved here a year ago due to my spouse's job. We love it here -- rust belt living at its finest. Amazing old houses for cheap, big city amenities, with the grit you don't find in rapidly gentrifying bigger places. Whether or not this video is a bit cheesy, it definitely speaks to the arts scene here. Fort Wayne: who knew? Definitely a city worth a look.....

4 days ago 1 Like

Like Reply



**Jackie Fuller Dobson**

catchy tune!!!!

4 days ago

Like Reply



**Dale**

I'm an old fart college graduate who can't relate to rap encouraging college graduates to stay anywhere. It doesn't compute for me. However, all my young college grad friends and relatives certainly relate to it. It's tough getting old. Maybe I'll move to the Fort and liven up a bit.

4 days ago in reply to Jackie Fuller Dobson 1 Like

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