

Racism and the Lynching of Hip-Hop

Written by Bro. Tony Muhammad ID1906
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Have you ever thought about how Hip-Hop music will evolve in the next 10 years? I remember many older people in the 80s telling my generation that Hip-Hop and rapping was just a phase and was not going to last long. Well, it has proven otherwise. Yet, many of us who grew up in that era now find ourselves in the middle of a crisis because we find it hard to relate to the negative elements found in much of the popular music of today's times. Rap music today is at the status of Rock music back in the mid to late 80s. Rock music itself, originally started by Black American musicians in the 1950s, became the main artistic inspiration to many middle class white youths for several decades, peaking during the early days of the media giant MTV. The messages and images in Rock were relatable to a white middle class way of life and served to fill a void in its "ready to rebel" attitudes. While Hip-Hop also represented rebellious young attitudes, it related to the lifestyles and realities of young Blacks.

In the past fifteen years, the popular expression of the music has evolved, mainly due to corporate molding. It is now very common to travel to any major city in the country and be able to listen to "Hip-Hop Radio," sometimes on several stations. Along with this, the content has almost entirely drifted away from providing critical commentary on inner-city life. If anything, it has become more materialistically driven than ever in association with the great success the music has achieved. Unlike the typical white Rock star from the 1980s, however, far too often we hear about rappers of today being involved in violent crimes and offenses. Unlike how older white Rock stars have been cross-generationally idolized and respected, Rap artists of the past are typically disrespected and considered irrelevant. Truly, cutting off our past is like cutting the roots off of a tree. The fate of the tree is inevitably a rapid death.

So, what is to be expected from Hip-Hop in ten years? Without question, it will evolve and continue evolving; however, perhaps even further away from the control of Black artists. If anything, as a reflection, Black artists will be stereotypically blamed for the violence, ignorance and sexism that they are associated with today. The fact that American culture itself has, since its origins, been violent, ignorant and sexist becomes a non-issue. This is likewise with the huge disconnectedness between new artists and the legends of the past. A music industry commentator remarked in a recent Hip-Hop documentary on VH1 that "Hip-Hop has a short attention span," in which case artists quickly come and go and are easily forgotten. Note how the reference is towards "Hip-Hop" and not American pop culture in general. The popular Hip-Hop of today's times and a good portion of its Black audience will more than likely be blamed for other cultural and industry related problems that it truly has no direct influence over, such as illegal internet downloading, copying (burning) of CDs and bootlegging. The issue of drugs may also be raised as an issue, even though it has always been in and around the entertainment world.

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Who will be replaced as the main artists? Probably the best answer can be found among Hip-Hop's largely white middle class underground "back packers," who are the quickest to criticize and create clear distinctions between themselves and the more popular artists and their fans. In their rebellion, they typically portray themselves as Hip-Hop "purists" and gravitate towards old school and political artists, including those who have traditionally expressed Black Nationalism in their music. Yet, schizophrenically, they speak against any form of Black pride on the part of Blacks and desire Hip-Hop to become a "melting pot." Legendary artist KRS-One has increasingly adopted this philosophy since having several negative experiences with different Civil Rights organizations and the Congressional Black Caucus back in the early to mid 90s. In my own experience, I have to admit it felt rather scary to be in the crowd of an August 2004 concert in Miami when KRS-One himself said "I'm not going to call myself Black or African American!" Many white fans cheered loudly while Black fans stood still and stayed very quiet. The feeling was that the white fans who were cheering had an aggressively different understanding than KRS-One himself.

Increasingly problematic is the rise of racist Hip-Hop. Just like its Punk and Rock counterparts, it has an underworld type following. You may recall last year The Source magazine exposing the controversy surrounding Eminem spitting racist lyrics on a recording that surfaced from the 90s. Regardless as to what The Source's intentions were in exposing this issue, what is clear is that while Hip-Hop has greatly played a part in bringing diverse groups together, personal sentiments on a larger scale continue to be unresolved. In Europe and remote parts of America, believe it or not, neo-Nazi Hip-Hop is beginning to receive considerable notice. A reader of the European fascist-leaning Rock magazine Rocknord is quoted in saying "If the masses are listening to hip hop, then why not?" Another fan said, "I hate hip hop like the plague, but I'd welcome it, if the raps went along with "right" way of thinking."

Next issue I will focus on possible solutions to this growing problem as well as reflect on our past and present views of "race" in America and the need to develop new methodologies addressing "race pride."

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