

Hip Hop Culture Who Says Niggaz Can't Read

Written by Minister Paul Scott ID2960
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Hip Hop Culture: Who Says Niggaz Can't Read?

Who Says Niggaz Can't Read: The Ghettoization of Black Literature by Min. Paul Scott

"You don't know me like that, playa".

That was all it took to set it off. Chairs started flyin", 40oz malt liquor bottles flew through the air as the crowd just started wilin". It took the bouncer to bust five shots in the air before normalcy was restored. This didn't take place at the Three 6 Mafia after party. Naw, this scene was straight outta tha Brookhaven Cultural Book Fair.

With the current state of Black culture you knew that it was only a matter of time before the "gangsta-ism" of commercial Hip Hop crept its way into the sacred realm of Black literature. While Black literature used to be like a meal from a five star restaurant off of which Black folks could feed for generations, the literature of today is more like the two wings and a biscuit deal from Church's Chicken. This new flavor of the month literature is commonly referred to as "urban literature" and it can be found any where books, magazines or malt liquor is sold.

Walking through one of those bookstores in the mall, you would be hard pressed to find even one book by Dr. John Henrik Clark or one of our other great Afrocentric scholars but it seems that any negro who can pick up a pen has their whole catalogue proudly displayed at even the most lily white book store.

The sacredness of the word has been a part of Black culture since the beginning. From the writings on the walls inside the pyramids to the Bible and other religious texts our ancestors knew the value of preserving culture for future generations. This is what makes the transformation from hieroglyphics to "Ho" stories so disturbing. In America, Black literature has not only chronicled the freedom struggle of Black people but has been the force that sparked movements. Where would we as a people be without WEB Dubois' "Souls of Black Folks" or the "Autobiography of Malcolm X" .

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While music may have played a great role in our struggle it was the written word that was the foundation that gave the symbolic sound substance. The powerful music of the "conscious" Hip Hop era was not only layered with beats and samples but also with book quotations and liner notes that you could use to not only feel the music but research the facts.

The European oppressor also knew the power of the written word so that for many years they would kill you for even trying to get a little education. Even today they treat a Brotha with a book like he was holding a gat. How many times have you been chillin' in a corner by yourself not bothering anybody and some annoying white person comes up to you and starts giving you the third degree. "Sooooo whatcha reading, Buddy....What's it about....How do you feel about...you like to read, huh, huh ????????"

So the trick has been since I can't stop you from reading, I'm going to control what you read. Although we have constantly been told how "black books don't sell" the cultural gatekeepers make sure that urban smut is in the hands of every man, woman and child.

The purpose of reading is supposed to be to expand your horizon not sentence your mind to a sensationalized hollywood inspired ghetto prison. This is especially important today when you have more Black men in prison than in college. This is perhaps the reason for the success of the various "street magazines." Although they have some very interesting articles, the over abundance of "booty shots" is mainly to service tha Brotha in prison who may not see a Sista for the next 10 years to life. One mag even has a section called "sticky pages."

The other purpose is supposed to be to relay pertinent information that will help you make positive changes in not only your own life but the world, as well not trap you in some ghetto bizzaro parallel universe where the liquor is always pouring, the rims are always spinnin' and the strip clubs never close.

"You can tell a lot about a culture by what they are reading. What is it saying about Black culture when for every book celebrating the glorious history of Afrikan people you have 10 books all saying that "n***z ain't *****." Although, Lil' Tyrone is often criticized for knowing the words to the latest Hip Hop jam before he learns his ABC's; what about Lil Tyrone's mama who will sit down and read a book about "no good, triflin' Black men and the Ho's who love them" but can't name five famous Black people ?

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I just hope that those authors that have something positive to offer to Black culture don't sell out and dumb down their messages just to sell a few paper backs. I can see it now; a thugged out, gold toothed Maya Angelou goes on Oprah to promote her new book "Tha Bitch in Me Luvs tha Thug U" with a special intro by Superhead and then stage dives into the audience.

Is this the angry rant of an unappreciated, underground writer playa hatin' on commercially successful writers?

YA DARN RIGHT!!! But that's beside the point.

There is something intrinsically wrong with a society when BoBo "tha fool" Williams author of "Hung Like a Horse" is poppin' bottles of Moet with rapper Killa Rob J in the back of tha club while Dr. Shabazz Afrika, author of "Survival Skills For Black Children" is in the back of the unemployment line sharing an iron grilled cheese sandwich with rapper Knowledge Cypher Devine.

Let's see, maybe if I get shot nine times by my baby's mama and write a book about it.....This is TRUTH Minista Paul Scott signing off from exile....

Min. Paul Scott is a writer and activist based in Durham NC. For more information on the "Notes From a Hip Hop Refugee in Exile" project/lecture series visit <http://www.hiphoprefugee.blogspot.com>

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