

## How Conscious Hip Hop Failed Us by Min Paul Scott

Written by Min. Paul Scott ID4319  
Sunday, 20 April 2008 09:01 -

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### Crisis of the Nigga Intellectual: How Conscious Hip Hop Failed Us by Min. Paul Scott

Here comes MC Revolutionary X, dressed down in his military gear with a Malcolm X t shirt, raising his black fist, vowing to strike down capitalist swine and anyone who benefits from this fascist system. (except his lawyer and accountant.) Yeah, Brotha spits a lot of game about fightin" the powers that be. But at the end of the day, he is the first dude in line trying to get a record deal from the same powers that he is supposed to be fightin"...

Back in 1967, Harold Cruse wrote a groundbreaking book called "The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual," in which he dissed (critiqued) everyone from the Civil Rights people, the Black Nationalists to the Black Arts Movement. Today, the issues that Cruse raised are still as relevant as they were 40 years ago, only with a Hip Hop soundtrack.

Most serious Hip Hop historians mark 1988 as the official start of the "conscious" Hip Hop movement with the release of Public Enemy's "It Takes a Nation to Hold us Back" followed by Boogie Down Production's "By Any Means Necessary." To jack a lyric from KRS, "these two albums started consciousness in rap."

For a four year period, it seemed that the prophesied "revolution" was just around the corner and the dreams of "Huey P" were about to be realized at any moment. However, 20 years later,

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we see that the promised revolution never came, replaced by a devolution of not only Hip Hop but black culture, in general.

In our never ending quest to get back to rap's "golden era" we have neglected to ask the fundamental question.

"What went wrong?"

Although, many look back at this period as "the good ol" days, as it is said, "the good ol" days weren't always good," as the failures of that period set a precedent for the Hip Hop of today. So, it is important that we study this period because if you don't understand the years 1988-1992, then you don't understand Hip Hop.

One of the flaws of this period was the failure of the conscious Hip Hop community to stick with the political Black Nationalist principals on which it was founded. It can be argued that, although celebrated, the Native Tongue and other successive movements actually were a well marketed deviation from the more political messages of Public Enemy; creating a movement of hippies rather than freedom fighters. Also with the rising popularity of MTV Raps and its crossover appeal, conscious Hip Hop became more Hip Hop-centric than Afrocentric.

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Also, even the most militant political Hip Hop artists refused to take a stand against the West Coast "gangsta invasion" with their visions of joint tours and collaborations under the universal banner of "Hip Hop" clouding their judgment. That is why "gangsta rap" spread like a plague because the conscious Hip Hop physicians refused to provide a cure. So we allowed the African "kings and queens" concept to spiral downward into a culture of niggas and bitches.

As scholars such as Harold Cruse and Kwame Ture have pointed out, the capitalist state has a way of absorbing all opposition by coercion or force, when necessary. So the force of "the system" was too strong for young black artists, many of whom just wanted to make music and move out of "the ghetto."

This is not to say, by any means, that this applies to all of them. There have always been those who have used culture as a means to an end and not an end to a means. Many of them found out the hard way the limits of "Hip Hop Nationalism" as a socio-political force.

Despite what power the conscious movement professed to have, it was unable to organize a defense for its casualties of war such as Professor Griff and, later, Sister Souljah. Also, although the Arsenio Hall show gave national exposure to many in the Hip Hop community, there was no mass movement of these same artists to defend him after his show was cancelled for having Min. Louis Farrakhan on the program. This is despite the fact that many artists were either quoting Min. Farrakhan in their lyrics or using his voice for samples.

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As it was during the Harlem Renaissance, according to Cruse, there was still an over dependency on elements that were hostile to anything with Black Nationalist overtones. However, the roles of white leftist and Euro-Jewish influence (and in the early to mid 1900's Communist) influence on black culture is too often a taboo subject where Hip Hop angels fear to tread. Some have even argued that the whole Harlem Renaissance was just a well financed ploy to divert attention from the Black Nationalist Movement of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

While some of the blame for the failure of conscious Hip Hop must be put on the shoulders of the artists, some of, if not most of the blame must be put in the hands of the Afrocentric scholars and lecturers. Many of the scholars did not see the long term value of Hip Hop in the context of the "movement."

Also, as the case is today, many are more concerned with selling overpriced books and DVD's and getting honorariums from college kids instead of organizing "the hood." While it was understandable before the popularity of the internet for them to claim that that was the only way to get their messages out, with the "net and and the various PDF files, youtube, podcasts, etc, there can only be one reason why these resources are not used to give critical information to the struggling masses of Afrikan people. The scholars and the rappers are both caught up in the tangled web of capitalism.

This brings us to where we are today where the "movement" for some has become just a marketing tool to pimp a record deal from a multi national corporation.

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The main and possibly the most destructive difference between the conscious movement of 1988- 1992 and today is the "dumbing down" of black culture in an attempt to capture the "gangsta market." Therefore, the over reliance on gangsta themes and the glorification of the "thug/nigga" concept has made the current direction of Hip Hop more European than African. The fact is often ignored that anyone who chooses to conceptualize himself as a "nigga" can never pose a serious threat to the power structure because embedded in the "nigga" concept is a psychological dog collar that prevents the wearer from ever biting his master, despite how loud he may bark.

It must be noted that most of those who are most impressed with the gangsterism of conscious Hip Hop are the left wing and anarchist white college kids who are a cash cow, often financing their college tours and Hip Hop summits.

Also, the cloud of capitalism prevents the Hip Hop audience from seeing that, for the conscious artist, it is the record company, itself that is "ground zero" for the battle for the minds of African people. But they rap about an external enemy when the internal, major enemy of Black Liberation is sitting in the boardroom two doors down from their recording studio.

In order for conscious Hip Hop and Hip Hop in general to survive, it must become what the system never really allowed it to be; a way to educate, inform and inspire Afrikan people to become involved in the betterment of their global communities.

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To borrow from Kwame Ture, at the end of the day white people (even the most liberal) are fighting for power but black people are fighting for survival.

And we "gonna survive America!"

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