

Hip Hop Canada Clean Up Rap Lyrics

Written by Jesse Plunkett ID3662
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Hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons has called on the music industry – more specifically, rappers – to clean up their lyrics by banning the words “bitch”, “ho” and the “n-word”. Simmons, who has made a fortune off music containing these same words, cites the need for increased, music industry wide, corporate social responsibility. The media, who take shots at hip-hop every opportunity they get, have rallied behind Simmons’ idea, but quickly morphed it into a full-blown drive to “clean up hip-hop” as opposed to cleaning up the entertainment industry more generally. It’s no secret that rap makes the most use of vulgar language but what makes its use of “bad words” any worse than when they are used in other genres of music or within a movie’s dialogue? One of Hollywood’s latest DVD releases, “Alpha Dog”, contains scenes with harsh racial slurs, drug trafficking, nudity and 367 instances of the “f-word”, yet it goes critique free as far as its social responsibilities go.

Freedom of speech remains the key. If we’re going to continue to send our troops abroad under the guise of defending these fundamental liberties, we should certainly be defending them at home. Freedom of speech is protected in Canada by Section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The 1st Amendment to the United States Constitution provides these same rights to our southern neighbors. I would argue that lyrics are covered under both legal documents.

However, if there is a general consensus that banning words is the way to go, then my next concern is making sure it applied to all forms of art and not just hip-hop. If it's not ok for a rap song to contain the word ‘bitch’, then it should also not be ok if it's used in a movie or even a different form of music. Besides a lack of consistency and fairness, society will be no stronger if we silence only one form of art, only to allow others to carry on with its usage. These double standards have to stop.

And where do we draw the line? The novel “Lolita” by Vladimir Nabokov depicts a middle aged man obsessed with a pre-teen girl. Not only are this character's actions considered taboo in Western culture, they are also illegal. Another example is the 1976 Academy Award nominated movie “Taxi Driver” starring Robert De Niro, which influenced would be assassin John Hinckley Jr. and Kimveer Gill, the Dawson College shooter. Yet, with two clear examples of these works of art having a negative impact on our society, they rightfully remain accessible and unchallenged.

It’s disappointing that the media largely chose to ignore countless numbers of previous demonstrations to ban the n-word. Only when shock jock Don Imus attacked a winning sports team did the media decide to take on the virtuous role of attacking hip-hop. Even though this

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was just the latest occasion that Imus had uttered racially charged comments, somehow it was all hip-hop's fault. Who are you kidding? I'm not saying it's right to degrade women with the use of words "ho" and "bitch" and I'm not saying its right to use the "n-word" either. But, if we're going to start telling people which words they can and cannot use, it needs to be done in a manner that doesn't single out one group of people. In the end, unfortunately, we are just giving way to the possibility of even more censorship.

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