

Immortal Technique Says Gangsta Rap Is Hip Hop

Written by Davey D, Immortal Technique and Collin Sick ID3200
Tuesday, 02 January 2007 02:15 -

We kick off the New Year with some compelling words from Immortal Technique and how he views the concept of gangsta rap. For many the introduction of gangsta rap has been seen as the reason Hip Hop died in the first place. Immortal breaks things down in this article and explains in great detail why such thinking is short sighted and just outright wrong. As I said in my last post, I'm glad the conversations we are having are now shifted away from meaningless chatter about beefs and onto ways in which will engage the culture and our communities.

One luv - Davey D

Gangsta Rap Is Hip Hop - By Immortal Technique

Contributed by: Collin Sick

The connection between Revolution and Gangsta Rap is not only unquestionable in my mind but also historically speaking. So much so that I'm forced to begin to elaborate on it now as I go to more prisons, juvenile centers and schools to talk with young people with uncertain futures about the industry. They ask me about the messages and images in the music. They ask about the origins of this street sound that seems to define what they see as their life and destiny.

It is therefore my duty to remind them the way I must remind myself and all of you that even though I'm in my twenties, I am old enough to remember being in grade school and hearing the Ice Cube albums, Public Enemy, NWA, The Geto Boyz, Ice-T, and others. They, and those behind the scenes at the time, created projects that defined their prospective region for their hard-core sound but much more so for their rebellious nature, storytelling and political discourse. Just like most of our originators (RUN DMC didn't start Hip Hop) Schoolly D is often overlooked as the person who in the mid 1980's actually carved a niche and started to include these hardcore gangsta phrases into his music. But the expansion of the type of sound he made and the vivid imagery of the streets created by others such as Melle Mel helped the 80's and early 90's Hip Hop Artists take these building block concepts and become master masons of words.

I personally always loved it-- curses, crazy concepts and all but I could see how some people

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who are not familiar with the culture of Hip hop could be apprehensive. They are filled with vulgarity, they're disrespectful to women, and they are horribly violent, but tell me isn't Revolution sometimes the same way? It's not what we would like it to be, because now more than ever it is romanticized and idealized. But even for the most just-cause there are innocent people that are killed or imprisoned and the theater of war always has a rape scene regardless of how beautiful the victory parade is weeks or year's later celebrating newfound freedom.

So please don't feed me Mythology and liberal bullshit about the nature of Revolution. It is often bloody and it's not always a surgical strike fueled by the political ego of a military coup. Many times it is done by the people themselves. Not "Professional Revolutionaries" rather, it's done by kids who are fed up with the world their parents and grandparents have left them. Sometimes these youth are manipulated altogether by other countries (ahem CIA) and special interest groups that see them as a way to gain economically and rise to power (ahem a correlation to Record labels)... But anger against the system and it's constant oppression is the cause of these words and actions. Gangsta Rap was another form of Revolutionary music-- it reached the unreachable, regardless of age, race, creed or gender. It taught the un-teachable. It made me (who at the time was hustlin", robbin" and stealing) truly listen because I felt like these people who were in the streets, who I could identify with, were talking about a world I could see but never had explained to me.

For example when I heard The Geto Boys' album We Can't be Stopped, Ice-T's O.G., Ice Cube's Amerikkka"z Most Wanted and KRS-1's Criminal Minded it made a strong impression of how the world really was. As I said before, it stated what I knew but could not articulate well yet. Also interesting is that Criminal Minded was considered Gangsta Rap (or as it was called then- "Reality Rap") at the time but now (like the rest of these albums should be) is classified as being Revolutionary.

Similarly, Public Enemy is renowned for being Revolutionary but is not considered Gangsta even though they had a violent and extremely aggressive attitude towards dealing with the government and its hypocritical foreign policy and urban domestic failures. Albums and artists like these and the works of people such as the legendary Kool G Rap who redefined wordplay though are not the face of gangsta rap today. Even the social commentaries that were found hidden among the genius musical works of Dr.Dre and Snoop Dogg are absent from the scene after the turn of the Millennium. And even though we always hear this theme repeated about the very nature of Hip Hop and how it has evolved or de-evolved some would say, if you look at Gangsta Rap now and then back then, the Revolutionary element is for the most part completely sanitized by the corporate structure.

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Although I named mostly West Coast and Down South Artists, the East Coast had just as many Gangsta Rappers only we looked at them differently because they were not as openly affiliated with any noticeable gangs such as the Bloods and Crips. After all, New York's Urban Empire was built upon street crews and educated hood syndicates such as the 5% Nation at the time much more than colored rags even though some had several ties to local organized crime. (i.e.: Just-Ice, Wu-Tang, DITC, Nas, Biggie, Mobb Deep Black Moon to name a few...) But just remember that all areas whether they were the East, West, South, or Mid-West that even their most brutal musical origin are inseparable from the ideological Revolution that spawned them in the minds of urban youth. A factoid of information probably purposely forgotten through the years is that before it was labeled "Gangsta Rap" by the industry itself it was called "Reality Rap" by those individuals that created it, therefore that being the point of origin there is no way it cannot return to that, it just has to be done correctly.

Reality Rap, or as we know it now Gangsta rap, can be very Revolutionary, although Revolution is very rarely a part of the BUSINESS side of any genre of music and more specifically Hip Hop. Revolutionaries work for the people. They take it upon themselves to dedicate their passion, love and hard work for the cause. But without the direction of a vision and those that would have grown any sort of true leadership skills they are essentially the horse from Animal Farm.

While the average Gangsta is not motivated by the community, but rather capital gain and avarice, the average rapper reflects the survivalist attitude often overblown and exaggerated into greed rather than any proletariat example. But it is because these young soldiers have no self identification and no knowledge of their people and that's why they cling to the imagery of 3rd world warlords, drug kingpins, and well known members of the Italian and Jewish Mafia. They emulate characters written by script writers and not the heroes of their own people. The argument can be made that they don't know them, but many times though they are familiar with the names of our Revolutionary heroes and have some idea of their impact they don't see their example as relevant in our daily lives.

Think about it... we can even name a Black basketball player or a Latino Baseball player before coming close to naming a Doctor or a Scientist of the same ethnic background. Our youth and young adults see these gangstas and other ruthless men as powerful beyond the scope of a government that holds them prisoner. People emulate their oppressor and worship those that defy him openly. That's why they don't respect a college graduate as much as a gang leader in the street or someone who survives prison unfortunately. They don't see assimilation within the system as the type of achievement that could lead beyond the scope. And even though we may reach for the stars, the glass ceiling doesn't even let us see the country around us let alone the world from the roof of our projects. All we see is the immediate route (which is wrong) and it becomes viable but understandable so, as this is not a criticism of young people today or people of color but of all OUR people today.

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Remember also that the average Gangsta in the streets is not a boss he/she is a mid level manager of a criminal industry in which they own no stocks. They would be more like a little piglet or a dog in animal farm, not a big hog like the people who embezzle billions out of Iraq, War profiteers, Stock scammers, Corrupt CEO's, Renegade Lawyers, Publishing Giants, Record Label Monopolies, Global Conglomerate executives, Senators, Congressman, and local politicians. These are not just real gangsters, they are the realest in the world, the most powerful, the ones who don't need to step to you in front of a Bodega or write a song about you because they ruin lives, crush families and whole sections of society with an ink stroke from the top of a huge building. In other countries like Colombia and Brazil there is such a division between this class of people and the average citizen that the economic aristocracy has to travel from rooftop to secured rooftop on a helicopter rather than go out in the street!!!

You can see that as good or bad, pathetic, indicative of society... but that's gangsta.

And Hip Hop is a reflection of that.

Because it's our culture where we are now, and though it may not be where we want to be, especially not the people who read this... but if we do not acknowledge where we are then there is no point of reference or origin as I stated before to get where we need to go. (I had an old movie on bootleg called Stargate and the beginning of it explains this concept simply.) If we have to change the petty image of a crack dealer being held in the highest esteem then you must have a replacement for our youngest adolescents, not just Malcolm and Che, because they don't have any movies out right now. And this society is built on fast moving, split screen, ADD causing imagery and sound.

Our true heroes don't have too many DVD's out and they aren't being blasted into the airwaves, why do you think Tupac is still canonized in the hood?!?!?!? Even though he's been dead for 10 years he still sells more records than most other artists because he was a Gangsta Rapper in the truest sense of the Revolutionary doctrine. He made Reality Rap and put forth the example of a people's legacy that went back beyond slavery and colonization where our history starts to get fuzzy. Our children should have heroes back home where we originate from, and ones that are prisoners of the system and fighting against it today. We should have people that are not glorified on T-shirts as often but who fought for independence celebrated more and studied, not just to examine their success but to learn from their failures.

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But real the reason we do not have them as an example is that those predecessors of Revolution today are not on the corner of our neighborhoods being marketed to us, that's why the average artist today no matter how manufactured their corporate bought thug image may be, are seen as legitimate by the youth.

After all you cannot just ask us to read a book, first we need to learn to read. I see that now.

Remember sometimes a Revolutionary has to do things that resemble a gangsta's behavior. I myself have done things of that nature, not to call that a positive thing but we cannot ignore the fact that a closed mouth doesn't get fed. And most of the people that talk about Hip Hop for the love and just for music are usually getting paid while they want you to do things for free for exposure.

We need to protect our people and sometimes we confront people who mistake us for ignorant hoodrats so my soldiers and warriors are strong and their resolve steadfast. I have often heard Frank Sinatra and others from that time criticized for having mob ties, but tell me who didn't back then? Whether the music industry likes to admit it or not, Gangsters did not come into play when Black and Brown people started talking about Violence the mafia has always played a role in the music business. Not to excuse his tactics, but when people focus on Suge Knight all the time (the quintessential criminal involved in music) that's laughable considering he wasn't half as connected, ruthless or well paid as some of his predecessors who were not Black or as high profile. That's not playing the race card son, that's real talk. The business of this music after all was not built for the faint of heart, the weak minded or those who lack the ability to make decisions that have consequences. For the latter is the true definition of power.

Therefore a Gangsta can become a Revolutionary. It is a progressive step and a life changing process that forever restructures an individual such as Malcolm X and founding members of the Zulu Nation. However, a Revolutionary that becomes a gangsta is usually one that has become corrupted by power. A gangsta is in the business of extortion, gambling, murder, and prostituting our greatest resource and the soul of our people, our women. This is often achieved through glorified violence rather than fighting bitterly against an opponent that keeps them locked in their petri dish of a life. So tell me; how could that not corrupt anyone? If the strategy of using our position to fight a real enemy with violent tactics is driven by capital gain it is even more dangerous with the focus of accomplishing altruistic goals. But even in failure and that fall from grace there is the inspiration for other to continue the work. After the warriors of old have past there must be the young among us that rise to become greater than we could ever imagine in the 21st Century. For true greatness revolves much more around being consistently good rather and take personal responsibility as a people. Power without that perception is

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meaningless.

Fight hard my people. And learn your true history.

I look forward to seeing many more of my young soldiers rise to mature and become Warriors of all kinds, those move past their egos of being famous for being rappers and singers and control aspects of the hardworking industry, distribution, radio work, printers, engineers, CD manufacturing, graphics, independent media published and especially on the web!!!, IF we embedded ourselves in all these things to favor the Hip Hop we see as addressing real issues HALF as much as these industry roaches suck dick for some fake shit to make a dollar, we would push our agendas much further and to carry forth the true meaning of Reality Rap that became known as Gangsta Rap which can never forsake its Revolutionary origin.

And so, to my Revolutionaries of all walks of life...

Peace & Respect in the New Year...

Immortal Technique