

Pimps Up Ho's Down Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women

Written by Robert ID3554

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Young Black Women are consistently portrayed in hip hop music and videos, as sexually greedy hoochies willing to debase themselves for the privilege of even the shortest ride on the music industry party train.

Still, Young Black females play an enthusiastic part in hip hop culture, as do youth of all races who continue to make hip hop a worldwide occurrence.

A Vanderbilt University professor, young black woman, former model, feminist and a hip hop fan, Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, has researched this paradox and responded with "Pimps Up, Ho's Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women."

The book, published by New York University Press, offers an insightful look into the strip clubs, groupie culture and other aspects of hip hop that have given a voice to the disenfranchised while raising troubling questions about what those voices are saying and doing.

"As disturbing as I find some of what's going on around gender in hip hop, there are also things that we need to celebrate," Sharpley-Whiting said. "It's the soundtrack of black life in the United States, and it's absolutely astonishing that it became such a cultural force globally.

"We have to revel in that kind of creativity coming from such a marginalized group."

"Pimps Up, Ho's Down" features chapters on the maneuvers of groupie-rap star relations, the sexual abuse of black women and strip club culture.

The book paints a complex portrait with one constant: Black women always at the bottom of any pecking order.

"That doesn't mean I find hip hop depressing," Sharpley-Whiting said. "I find the state of gender

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and race relationships depressing. Just because aspects of hip hop may be misogynistic and sexist doesn't mean that misogyny began with hip hop. Hip hop just happens to be the youth culture of the moment and therefore takes the wrath on a lot of issues."

Any solutions will involve changing society rather than stifling hip hop's blunt articulation of what's going on, Sharpley-Whiting said.

"I do urge young women to be more politically conscious about the choices they make and the opportunities they take," she said. "They've become reducible to dispensable and exchangeable commodities of sex and beauty in commercial hip hop, and I hope that space can be created for opportunities beyond that."