

Rap and Hip-Hop Monopolized By a Few

Written by Robert ID1465
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Dave Mays, founder and publisher of The Source magazine, the bible of hip-hop; has been speaking out. Mr. Mays speaks against the modern minstrel show of hip-hop and rap music, the violent, degrading words and images that dominate so much of the radio airwaves and cable television shows. He shouldn't be the only one. More insiders need to step forward and address the current crisis in the business of culture.

"We don't respect these sellouts dominating our industry," says Dave Mays, "The violence and negativity the public perceives in hip hop is not due to the music or all of the artists." The music business, Mays says, "is being monopolized by a few labels."

Mays is right. In recent years, executives at a handful of record labels and radio stations, (the list includes Vivendi Universal, Emmis Communications and Clear Channel), have deliberately chosen to sell the world a false vision of black America as a bleak, desperate, violent and immoral place.

Passing over raft-loads of talented young musicians, they put millions of marketing dollars behind a tiny band of handpicked minstrels, many of them former drug dealers.

Vivendi Universal, for instance, an entertainment conglomerate headquartered in France, owns Interscope, Shady and Aftermath, labels that record and promotes Eminem, 50 Cent and G-Unit, the top-selling acts in hip hop and rap music.

The hired help quickly learn not to break from the script, spinning endless, profanity-laced fakery about the inner-city badlands for a mostly white and suburban audience. There's plenty of money to be made by selling images of black female prostitutes and black men as criminals. That's been true for a hundred years.

"When you see all the negative imagery, remember it wouldn't be this way if hip hop had been allowed to evolve," says Mays. "When I started The Source, my vision was that hip hop can revolutionize the world."

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Mays is under fire these days, a former editor of his magazine is suing the company for alleged sexual harassment, but that hasn't stopped him. Month after month he is exposing, and criticizing, the business practices of big record labels and radio stations.

In recent Source issues, Mays' magazine has decried the practice of payola, in which record labels make under-the-table payments to radio station employees to have them play a handful of favored artists over and over. Payola is illegal, which is why state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer is probing the matter, and has issued subpoenas to record companies and radio stations.

One reason for the laws banning payola is to avoid exactly what we have today: a small number of distinctly mediocre performers who get endless airplay, at the expense of new, fresh voices.

The Source is one of the few music journals to print reviews and interviews with small, little-known artists who are trying to break into the business.

According to Mays, The Source has paid the price for going after the entertainment giants, losing advertising from record companies and radio stations it criticized. "It has hurt our business. We've lost millions," he says. "But we're still here."

What's needed are more publishers, artists, journalists, deejays and other industry insiders willing to take chances and start naming names. Only by exposing the corporate puppeteers and their shady practices will we take back the music.