

Give Us Our 'Real' Rap Back

Written by Westside ID257

Tuesday, 26 October 2004 00:41 -

"I love rap, but it's hard to defend this s—," confessed Chris Rock before a hysterical audience in Washington, D.C., in his most recent HBO comedy special *Never Scared*. Rock's statement was comical not simply because of his brash delivery, but also because it adhered to the stand-up-comedy adage: Only the truth is funny.

The truth, for many African-Americans younger than 30 who invariably belong to the "Hip-Hop Generation," is that the rap music of today is inglorious. It's not merely because the lyrics are no longer about knowledge and pride disguised in urban pentameter, but also because today's rap betrays the very people who are part of the hip-hop culture. Young blacks, for example, are unjustly profiled as a result of rap's stigma.

While some hip-hop artists, such as P. Diddy and the Black Eyed Peas, are trying to bolster rap's image with mainstream activism such as get-out-the-vote drives, rap is a medium founded on the principles of rebellion. During the past decade, however, it has been lulled into a conservative instrument, promoting nothing remotely challenging to mainstream cultural ideology.

Rap music tends to blare out redundant, glossy messages of violence without consequence, misogyny and conspicuous consumption. As a result, rap's once-defiant message has slowly deteriorated.

Once an art form

I can remember the beauty-filled days when anyone, including politicians, teachers and parents, would have been met with maximum condemnation if he or she braved to criticize or minimize the art form, which informed our consciousness and voiced our maladies. It was a time when conservative commentators, such as linguist John McWhorter, would have been lambasted for writing an article titled *How Rap Retards Black Success* that concludes "hip-hop creates nothing." But today we scramble for rebuttals to defend our once-valiant claims that rap inspired and elevated our collective existence.

Those of us who fight for the integrity of our generation's music point to "political" — as opposed to "party" and "gangsta" — rap as an example of its potential. Its quintessence was epitomized in the late 1980s during hip-hop's "stop the violence movement" with the anthem *Self Destruction*, a collaborative effort by the era's most well-known rappers. They proclaimed "to crush the stereotype here's what we did/ we got ourselves together/ so that you could unite and

Give Us Our 'Real' Rap Back

Written by Westside ID257

Tuesday, 26 October 2004 00:41 -

fight for what's right/ not negative cause the way we live is positive/ we don't kill our relatives."

Political music

Traditionally, such songs as Self Destruction and more recently Dead Prez's Hip-Hop have exclusively occupied the "political" label because their unapologetic lyrics consistently challenged the dominant cultural institutions. However, now "gangsta" and "party" rap songs are being viewed as political, too, because they are bought by the mainstream. These are songs such as Grammy award-winning rapper Nelly's latest, Tip Drill (slang for multiple men performing successive, crude sexual acts on one woman), or Billboard chart-topper Lloyd Banks' Work Magic in which he boasts, "Its like we sell crack get caught head back to jail." That perception must change.

The answer, for those of us who belong to the Hip-Hop Generation yet feel misrepresented by its music, comes in the form of redefinition. The problem is, we've let a generation to be defined by a singular musical expression. Thus, we've confined our artistic, intellectual and historical capacity to rap by excluding anything outside of that expression. This narrow thinking creates purchasing conflicts for some one wishing to listen to jazz artists Miles Davis or Nnenna Freelon.

I spoke recently with Nelson George, acclaimed critic, filmmaker and co-author of Life and Def, the story of hip-hop promoter Russell Simmons. He reminded me that "hip-hop is not as multidimensional as black people are and that rap music only represents an aspect of the African-American experience."

Nelson is right. Chris Rock is, too.

Ultimately, the label "Hip-Hop Generation" is a brilliant corporate branding tool that has helped fuel a billion-dollar industry. But it has failed miserably in defining "the best minds of my generation."

M.K. Asante Jr., filmmaker, activist and author of the book Like Water Running Off My Back:

Give Us Our 'Real' Rap Back

Written by Westside ID257

Tuesday, 26 October 2004 00:41 -

Poems, is a graduate student at the UCLA School of Film and Television.

[Source](#)