

Stanley Crouch on 'Rap

Written by Robert ID676

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For the most part, rap has not been called on the carpet for its content because its makers and producers have been clever in manipulating ethnic issues, class insecurities and rhetoric about artistic freedom.

Since the major figures in hip hop have always been black, anyone repulsed by the material was dismissed as either a racist or too middle class. Or it was claimed that these were the voices of the black community that had been silenced and that listeners were getting "reports from the brothers in the street." (One wonders, of course, if a brother in the street ever went inside.) A performer's authenticity was intensified by an arrest record. Thugs became appealing.

There is a long American tradition of loving the bad boy, and there is a fantasy attraction to anarchy in the world of rock that makes it fairly easy for the thug rapper to present himself in what has become the new minstrelsy of our time. This was true as long as the violence stayed at a distance. Believe me, had any major white rock star met the fate shared by Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls, rap would have been folded up and rolled out of the business.

But with the violence taking place exclusively among the "natives" from the urban jungle, the white males who buy four out of five rap recordings could enjoy taking an audio safari.

The blacks who succeeded in the field were obsessed with not selling out - rejecting black culture in favor of white. Part of it was the perverted legacy of black nationalism. Consequently, listening to thug rappers meant embracing a criminal culture as though it were black culture. Drug dealers and pimps were supposed to be black heroes. Their code, which was only incidentally black, was championed relentlessly: If it made money, it was good. If it didn't, it was bad.

The initial attacks on the rap idiom and the recording industry by Delores Tucker were rejected by black people because she was associated with William Bennett, and one could not under any circumstances take arms with Republicans against "black culture."

But now the most successful black women's magazine, Essence, is on the case. It got striking responses to its recent reader poll on rap. Just over 72% of more than 1,200 respondents said what they hear on urban stations "makes me cringe."

Apparently, there has never been a response of such fire and clarity. One can see for oneself in the dozens of E-mails posted at www.essence.com.

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Essence has a year of activities planned on the issue of rap. The moguls and the pimp rappers are in for the fight of their lives this time. As with the civil rights movement, it's foolish to bet against the women.

[Source](#)