

Violence and Hip Hop

Written by Sister Nandi White & Brother Salim Adofo ID3476
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Political Prisoner of War, Imam Jamil Al-Amin (then known as H. Rap Brown) once stated, "Violence is American as cherry pie!" If one takes a brief look at American history, one can see the validity in that statement

The founding of America began with the rape, plunder and pillage of the indigenous people and the kidnapping, torture and enslavement of African people. In colonial times women were killed, if they were accused of being a witch. There was (and still is) the domestic terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nation and The White Citizens council, supported by many local government agencies, committed against African people. Then there is the constant force of brutality committed against African and Latino people, by American police agencies. Another factor that one should consider is the ever-increasing military industrial complex and operations carried out by the armed forces of the United States against people of color, throughout the world. With all of the above mentioned, is there any wonder why a musical genre from the victims of American generated violence, would reflect anything but the violence it is surrounded by?

Could it be that the violence in America is the cause for the Violence in Hip Hop?

No one can deny that mainstream Hip Hop music has a large amount of violent images, lyrics and persona to it. Many of the popular songs are about Black men killing other young Black men. A large number of the videos and album covers show the artist as someone that is engaged in war & not as a musician. This type of imagery can have a very damaging effect on the mind of a child who is unable to differentiate between what is supposed to be entertainment & what is reality. As a result she or he may try to handle real life situations with make believe ideas.

Once again the question must be asked is Hip Hop the blame for this. Yes, Hip Hop artists must take responsibility for the content of their lyrics; however they are not the sole blame for the "violence" that exists in the Hip Hop community.

A factor that is rarely taking into consideration is the social and economic conditions that many of the artists come from. As a consequence of 500 years of white supremacy, systematic & institutional racism, the Black community in America has become destitute and dismal.

Broken homes, drug infested neighborhoods, lack of well paying jobs, police misconduct &

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inadequate educational facilities are the standard for many of the communities that Hip Hop artists are from. Is it possible that many Hip Hop artists are a reflection of the institutions in their environment?

Looking further into the economic side, sex and violence are definitely profitable subjects' areas in today's society. The more sex and violence, the greater ones chances are of selling. If many Hip Hop artists are from extremely low economic backgrounds, can the artists be blamed if they make songs about sex and violence to secure the financial success and achieve the American dream?

Arnold Schwarzenegger, the governor of California, played in the movies "Terminator" & "Conan" in which he made millions of dollars. Those movies have a tremendous amount of violent scenes. However, he is not subject to the same ridicule and scorn as Hip Hop artists for using entertainment to make money.

Many heavy metal & rock bands have extreme lyrics and fixations with death.

The parties that they sponsor, known as "raves" are widely known for its drug use and violence. Yet they are not blamed for violence as much as Hip Hop is. It is important to mention these specific instances, because the above are primarily organized and geared toward white America. Which poses the question; could nationality be a factor when associating violence with Hip Hop? At what point do the White owned corporations, retail stores, radio stations & other media outlets that continue to promote, sell and profit billions of dollars because of these violent images, take some responsibility.

When one puts everything together, there is not one specific cause for the violence in Hip Hop. The social and economic conditions that many Hip Hop artists are exposed to during the formative years of their childhood are violent. The current state of America's international affairs and foreign policy are violent.

Thus, Hip Hop is only a reflection of the violence it is surrounded by. What can be done to help eliminate some of the violence in Hip Hop?

Instead of focusing on what is considered negative Hip Hop, the media should give more attention to the positive and progressive Hip Hop artists that promote community development and peace. Artists such as the Houston based rapper Zin, the Kansas City, MO based rap group Black Front Soldiers and the NYC based Hip Hop group Liberation Family are strong examples of such. Political Prisoner of War, Dr. Mutulu Shakur (father of Tupac (2Pac) Shakur) has worked with the Hip Hop community through forums and workshops to help bring about gang truces and peace in & out of the prison system. Organizations such

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as the National Black United Front, the Nation of Islam and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement have consistently worked with the Hip Hop community to stop the violence in Black and Latino community.

To help bring about a change in the Hip Hop community it is imperative that community leaders embrace young the Hip Hop community and not accept the stereotypes of mainstream media.

In the words of Public Enemy "Don't Believe The Hype!"

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