

Hip-Hop Needs a Messenger

Written by Hector Gonzalez ID2629
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Hip Hop Needs a Messenger Story by Hector Gonzalez

Rap music now a day is in the worst phase that it has ever been in. I can't think of one song on the radio that is worth listening to a second time. Rap careers seem to come and go and not many rappers that have come out since 2001 have made it past a third album, and even when they do, their albums are anything but memorable. With the exception of Jay-z (99 problems), Nas (I can) , the Game (Dreams) , and Kenya West (Jesus Walks), every other rapper getting radio play can be thrown out the window. Rappers are all about the money and have lacked to consider the power that they carry by simply sending a message so powerful that it could literally change the history of this country forever.

What hip hop needs is a messenger, it needs another Tupac (2Pac).

I'm from a generation many times referred to as the "hip hop generation," I grew up listening to it and have been a part of it since a young boy. I would like to believe that hip hop is more than just entertainment; as having the potential to lead a movement for our generation. Back in September Friday the 13th of 96" when Tupac was pronounced dead after being shot 6 days prior, I was in 8 th grade. Back then I didn't really understand the importance of 2Pac. It actually took years and even adulthood to fully understand his words and importance to society as a whole.

Thug Life

He was the son of a Black Panther, who not only claimed to live a 'Thug-life" but also claimed that the injustices of this country is what made him a thug. Thug life was a movement in which there were 26 points to the code of a thug, the term "THUGLIFE" itself was an acronym for Tupac. It meant The Hate U Gave Little Infants Fucks Eveyone.

Tupac was more than just a rapper, he literally was a messenger because he was able to tap into a whole generation by his words and conviction. No other rapper has had the same magnitude because no other rapper has mastered those elements. In the days following his death I saw countless footage of people all over America mourn for Tupac. A class at the

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University of Berkeley was introduced whose curriculum was solely based on Pac's lyrics, murals of his face were painted all over America, and countless youth still wear the image of Pac on their shirts throughout the streets of America. In the Bay Area, a social worker by the name of David Inocencio asked incarcerated youth to write about how they felt about the death of Tupac, the writing was so powerful that it became a weekly publication called the Beat Within where incarcerated youth write about their lives.

Tupac was ahead of his time. If he were alive today he would be the biggest threat to President Bush, I think even far greater of a threat than Osama. This is because in this country there is the spirit of millions of people waiting for a leader to speak to them. Tupac was becoming this voice for the people. When Tupac was alive he would spit on T.V. cameras, flip off courthouses and even dis" politician like Bob Dole and Dan Quayle.

A rapper of this magnitude is needed now more than ever, we are living in a politically tense time, the prison system is growing, no jobs, and Hurricane Katrina was a reminder that people of color are still second class citizens.

Conscious Rap

Hip Hop thinkers have always talked about the value of the music but never about how to tap into the heart of the listener.

I've heard people like KRS One (Rapper, philosopher and founder of the Temple of Hip Hop), Afrika Bambaata (Founder of the Hip Hop organization Zulu Nation) Davey D, (Radio Commentator for KPFA and columnist for the Mercury News) talk about Hip Hop being special because it is the voice of the ghetto and that rap music allowed rappers to deliver a message to their community. In the documentary "Soundz of Spirit," a film on hip hop and spirituality, Davey D actually compared rapping to preaching and although I would agree with him 100%, there are such things as bad preachers and the rappers of today are bad it. Considering that all of these important figures to hip hop are saying that rap is the voice of the ghetto, and that rap music has a message, then it would be completely rational to say that because rap now a day isn't delivering a true message, then rap is no longer special nor important if rappers like 50 cent (Window Shopper), Bow Wow (Like You), and Dem Franchize Boyz (I think they like me) are taking the shine. Even the cliché analyzes people give rap by saying that it is the reality of the black youth is a false one because most of the black youth and other youth of color are not living the life style that 50 raps about. I hate to say it, but the rap of today sounds pretty dumb.

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Many "conscious" hip hop activists make the claim that people like Common, Mos Def, Tali Kweli and Dead Prez are able to tap into the youth and perhaps lead a conscious hip hop movement because those artists are generally considered positive. Although I would agree that they are, that is not what this generation needs. The conscious scene, although it educates, ignores and leaves behind the people who are truly suffering in America. It may not do it intentionally, but it does it regardless. Going to a Dead Prez show is like going to a Hip Hop hippie concert. Dead Prez's 'Revolutionary But Gangsta' album by no means has the potential to tap into the hearts of the poor youth across America. What makes rap so beautiful is that rap allows people to reflect on their lives, so although Wu-tang Clan are perhaps the better lyricists, NWA will always get more respect, because people were able to relate their lives to the realities that NWA was talking about. It's the same for people like Dead Prez, they definitely educate and are talented, their following consists of college students, activists, and coffee-shop hip hoppers, while Mike Jones for example- in his line 'back then they didn't know me/ now I'm hot they all on me' is more relatable because poor kids, including myself when I was in my teens, would fantasize about getting paid so that girls would jock.

Many rappers, although maybe spreading good messages, have not been able to tap into the anger of this generation. This anger comes from the frustration of feeling trapped with the mentality of a hustler, because hustling seems to be the only form of escaping out of the ghetto for youth in America. This anger and frustration is real and authentic, it is not fake like most rapper's trying to claim to be gangsta's and not fake like 'conscious' rappers trying to get everyone to be activists.

The hip hop generation of today is lost and confused and doesn't seem to know where it's going except to feed the multi billion dollar industry that is ultimately being controlled by old white males in office boardrooms. The underprivileged youth of America are ready and prepared for war; all they need is a leader to finish what Tupac started.

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