

Researcher Cites Negative Influences of Hip Hop - The Response

Written by Natalie L. Ozeas ID4397
Thursday, 19 June 2008 01:53 -

This is a response to an article titled "Researcher cites negative influences of hip hop" By Kathy SaeNgian, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Focus on the positive: I wish that I had had the opportunity to share several recent experiences with Carolyn West, quoted in "Researcher sites negative influences of hip hop." For the past six years, I have been the director of a Professional Development for Urban Music Educators Project that particularly focuses on the middle school grades. Through an attitude survey, we learned that more than 85 percent of the students in the participating schools in Pittsburgh and Wilksburg listened to the same hip hop radio station. To be successful in engaging these young people, we had to respect and learn their language.

From the beginning, our project has included rappers who were students at Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh. Public school students have found this art form to be a natural and creative form of expression.

One seventh-grade girl in a music class wrote lyrics explaining why crying for her friend who had been killed was "not a waste of time."

In another project, supported by the Center for the Arts and Society at Carnegie Mellon, public school students and young adults worked with young professional rappers and recording technicians from the Pittsburgh area in the Arts Greenhouse. In the end of the year celebration, they were joined in performance by Jasiri X, a Pittsburgh rapper and community activist, and Queen Gods, from Brooklyn, a graduate of Vassar who performed rap songs with a strongly positive message. Participants had become comfortable on the Carnegie Mellon campus and had gained skill with technology, poise and confidence. Even though they represented the realities of their lives, there were no degrading messages in these lyrics.

Early blues lyrics, jazz rhythms and the Beatles were all considered threats to the establishment. Certainly, there are rap lyrics that are inappropriate, but helping young people find the positive messages, and to critically evaluate what they hear is a far more rewarding and achievable goal than to condemn the art form and try to prevent young people from listening.

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****'Researcher cites negative influences of hip hop' published**

Friday, June 13, 2008 By Kathy SaeNgian, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The full article can be read here

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/08165/889550-51.stm>