

Two Hip Hop Icons Square Off on the Question of Race

Written by Davey D ID3100

Tuesday, 31 October 2006 07:29 -

Two Hip Hop Icons Square Off on the Question of Race From Davey D's Hip Hop Blog

The White Rapper Experience: MC Serch vs. Sage Francis

Can a White Rapper Be a true Emcee if He Never Performed in front of Black people?

This is the provocative assertion MC Serch of the legendary group 3rd Bass put forth in a recent blog. He goes into detail as to why he made his remarks and puts white emcees on blast for not seeking out a Black audience. Serch basically notes that any white emcee who avoids performing in front of the hood is faking the funk. He notes that one can never remove the hood from true Hip Hop.

Sage Francis responds to Serch's remarks by tearing what he describes as anew @#%\$. He completely disagrees with Serch and pulls no punches explaining why. He accuses Serch of living up to the "I'm the Only Cool Whitey" complex that was laid out in William Upski's book "Bomb the Suburbs".

I'm glad Serch raised this issue and Sage responded. there's alot to be said on both sides of this topic. Also race is far too often the big white elephant in the living room that needs to be honestly discussed but is often avoided. Peep what these tow gentlemn wrote and weigh in with your own thoughts. May the games begin...

Davey D

MC Serch's Letter

Peace peoples:

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As always I hope this find you in good health and spirits. As many of you know and many of you who do not, I shot a TV show for VH1 called "Ego Trips: The White Rapper Show". The premise is that we take ten white MC's and put them in the South Bronx and teach them about Hip Hop. Due to contracts that hold up my paper I cannot tell you anything more except that there is an interesting thing I have discovered. The White Rapper experience. Many of you may not be familiar with this but I can speak from first hand knowledge that it is very interesting. The premise of being a white rapper has gotten so white washed. I met white rappers, and please do not be afraid for what I am about to tell you, but I have talked to and dealt with white rappers who have...ready...NEVER PERFORMED IN FRONT OF BLACK PEOPLE!!!!. How is this possible? Are the black people so hard to find for white rappers? Are white rappers not going to black people to seek their approval? HOW CAN WHITE RAPPER BE WHITE RAPPERS IF BLACK PEOPLE HAVE NEVER SEEN THEM RAP.

Here is a message for many of you that might have grown up on hip hop being an over saturated image driven music that dominates the charts and the screens. Hip Hop culture is Black culture....period. You can take the hood out of Hip Hop but you can't take the Hip Hop out the hood. I would like to make a statement to all those white rappers who read this or those who have to tolerate a white rapper when they come around. A white rapper cannot be considered a white rapper until he rips in front of a crowd of black people.

I am not saying they all have to be black. You can have some spanish, some multi-racial kids mixed in there for flavor, I would even say Asian people. But if you are a white rapper that performs in front of a white crowd then you are not a rapper at all. You are a guy who is simulating what it feels like to rock a crowd. And I might go as far as to say that even if an all white crowd shows love to a white rapper and there is no black people in that crowd, he did not rock that crowd. White people will usually applaud anyone who has the balls to step on stage. I have seen tremendously wack rappers get in front of white people and because they heard a few words that rhymed, gave them love.

To be a white rapper you must rip in front of a black person so hard that the black person leaves the show and says "That White boy ripped that @#%\$!" Now you are a white rapper. You have gotten approval from the people that started and built this culture. As much as I love my lack of melanin brothers and sisters, you cannot claim what you do not own. I can remember many a day that the only white face I saw at a party was mine or my reflection. And this has nothing to do with how I came up and in what era. Em did the same thing in Detroit. We seeked out black audiences. We looked for them to respect us and acknowledge us as rappers, as MC's. Non Phixion is in this group as well as Everlast and a host of others (Paul Wall get a shout out here too).

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Some of this, well most of this as I am sure you know is tongue and cheek but lets be real. If a brother or sister don't give you the thumbs up, then you are faking the funk on way too many levels and it's time you went back to Wall street or college or the bowling alley or the Klan meeting. White Rappers, don't call your self white rappers until a black person calls you it first. And trust me when a black crowd shows you love, you rise above all other white rapper into the sphere of being just a plain old rapper. And probably a great one at that.

Be sure to watch my TV show Ego Trips: The White Rapper Show airing Monday night at 10pm starting in January on VH1

LONG LIVE THE WHITE RAPPER

MC Serch

Sage Francis's Letter in Response to Serch

Dear MC Serch,

Pardon the length of this letter, but I took my time to make sure that your new @#%\$ would be top of the line.

As a melanin-deficient emcee who began his hip-hop journey in the mid 80's, I've always been interested in what people's take are on white people in hip-hop. How do I fit in? What are my limitations? I've been lucky enough to see some people do it right and some people do it very wrong, and these are lessons that have carried over into many aspects of my life through the years. One golden rule in particular is this: exploiting anything incidental about oneself is pathetic and ultimately self-defeating.

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Hip-hop is my lifelong craft and it has been an incredible learning tool for me, so I would be remiss to not contribute as much to this art form as I have received. All I can give is myself though, and if all I am composed of is standard hip-hop wisdom then all I would be doing is recycling other people through my music. Fortunately, I have my own particular perspective, style, technique, quirkiness and subject matter to channel through this medium. There is no success I've enjoyed that has been earned overnight, and I am grateful for that. I did it the hard way. And as overused as it is, there is a lot of merit in the term "keep it real" when it is said and heard by the right people. Let me keep it real for you right now.

One of the first white rap groups I was exposed to was 3rd Bass, via their "Steppin to the AM" video on Yo! MTV Raps. I am not ashamed to say that I was highly excited to see white rappers doing what it is I hoped to do one day. White rappers were a great rarity, which made me view them (and myself) as the underdog, so here I was cheering on a group who was giving me hope that my pursuit in the hip-hop game was not futile. In retrospect, that's a really silly way to think of things because white people are not the underdog by any means in this world. But hey, I was a 10 year old with a dream.

The last I heard of MC Serch is when I saw Non-Phixion perform at NYC's Rock Steady and one of the members said, "@#%\$ MC Serch!" Non-Phixion being one of the white groups who was first put out on Serch's label, I thought that was pretty interesting. The old 3rd Bass fan in me grimaced and decided to ignore the comment. I mean...gosh darnit... you helped kick open the door for all of us swell white folk!

Almost ten years later I received a few emails from a guy who was approached to be a contestant on MC Serch's "White Rapper" show for VH1, as he divulged a bunch of reasons why this program was complete bullshit. I told him if he had any respect for his career and his art that he would stay far away from that show and he did. I wish he had gone on the show so I could have had more fire to play with, but there's no need really. Let me just look at MC Serch's blog about "The White Rapper Experience":

"The premise is that we take ten white MC's and put them in the South Bronx and teach them about Hip Hop."

Later on in the blog we learn that...

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"If you are a white rapper that performs in front of a white crowd then you are not a rapper at all. You are a guy who is simulating what it feels like to rock a crowd."

Using this logic I have deduced that if a white person is teaching you about Hip Hop then you are not being taught at all. You are merely SIMULATING a learning experience. Also, if you are black crowd that is watching a white rapper then you are not a crowd at all. You are a bunch of people who are simulating what it feels like to be a crowd. And we don't take kindly to posers in hip-hop, you got that?

What would be a REAL learning experience is if Ice-T came to your rich, private school and taught you how to "keep it real" by switching up who you really are. Then he could take you to the South Bronx while we all laugh at the way you try to hype up your classmates by doing exactly what you are told to do in front of Grand Master Caz and Melly Mel. Boom fire.

"Due to contracts that hold up my paper I cannot tell you anything more except that there is an interesting thing I have discovered. The White Rapper experience."

This contract must have been holding your paper since the late 80's. Very interesting.

"I met white rappers, and please do not be afraid for what I am about to tell you, but I have talked to and dealt with white rappers who have...ready...NEVER PERFORMED IN FRONT OF BLACK PEOPLE!!!!."

Woah. WOAH! OK, hold on though...really? Do they live in the freaky corn fields of Iowa? Where is this scary scary place where white kids live around other white kids and never get to travel outside of their comfort zone much? I can't take it. Is it...is it most parts of America? Jesus, If you promise me everything will be OK, then maybe I will watch your TV show. The only thing that reassures me right now is that period mark after the four exclamation points.

"Are white rappers not going to black people to seek their approval"

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Well, according to Ice-T and his private prep-school teachings, being "yourself" is what Hip Hop is all about. So do these little white dipshits have to get approval from little black dip shits in order to get approval? Or is it older black dipshits they need approval from? Do older WHITE dipshits like yourself hold any credibility? If not, then I have no idea why I am listening to you at all. Moving on...

"HOW CAN WHITE RAPPER BE WHITE RAPPERS IF BLACK PEOPLE HAVE NEVER SEEN THEM RAP."

Was that a question? Well...why is the sky blue. Why is water wet. Why is a period mark following these long unanswered questions. If a white rapper cries in front of a black crowd and no one posts it on youtube, is he still emo? If it IS posted on youtube and a black person watches it...does that make him an official rapper? If your group was manufactured by someone who wanted to put two white rappers together and hopefully exploit the race situation...and then someone named Vanilla Ice comes around and gets exploited even BETTER than you...and you beat down a Vanilla Ice impostor in the video to a song that actually makes its way onto commercial charts... are you street? Are you hood? Are you an honorary black person if you co-opt enough black culture? How's that high top fade doing these days?

"Hip Hop culture is Black culture....period."

OK. Now what? So is rock and roll. So is jazz. Now what? Is this when we get into a discussion of culture and how it is an exclusive thing that separates groups of people forever and ever? If so, I'm sure glad it hasn't stayed exclusive. It has crossed over many boundaries because PEOPLE see value in it. Artists see the artistic value. Business types see the commercial value. Some people see no value in it at all, and they are the people we collectively hated back in the 80's. If all of these people remained stubborn in their ignorance and hatred of hip hop then maybe you could have developed a TV show called "Why Don't White People See the Value in Hip Hop as Genuine Art Form?" And then 20 years from then someone could have developed a corny reality TV show called "The White Rapper Experience." Maybe that show would be responsible for developing the first EMINEM! Instead, you'll have to settle for being the show that tried discovering (err...developing) the NEXT Eminem, as you tie them into a bunk recording contract.

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It's not out of the hood, but Hip Hop HAS been taken out of the hood. It's gone to a place called VH1. Remember VH1 from way back in the day? Yeah, that's the station that wouldn't touch a rap video (or any black person except for Tracy Chapman) with a 10 foot pole. NOW look...you have a job again! Amazing.

"A white rapper cannot be considered a white rapper until he raps in front of a crowd of black people."

Well, thankfully I started rapping during a time when a majority of people going to Hip-Hop shows were black. I'm officially a white rapper! Never thought I could be proud to say that, but you've helped me feel secure. Now... now I'm feeling so secure I think I can go one step ahead and claim that a white rapper who performs in front of an exclusively black crowd actually becomes a real rapper, not just a white one. And...ummm...if the black crowd throws their hands up in approval you then become an honorary BLACK rapper. @#%\$ yeah. man. (Note: shaving the name of your rap group into the back of your head does not win you any extra points.)

"I am not saying they all have to be black. You can have some spanish, some multi-racial kids mixed in there for flavor, I would even say Asian people."

Even Asians??? You're too generous. Are you sure, though? Even Asians count as a possible flavor?

"White people will usually applaud anyone who has the balls to step on stage."

Haha. Ahhh. Yes. Only white people do this. Ahhh man. Yes! So much to say here, but mainly I just have to tip my hat and say, "Sir...you are a @#%\$ genius. Don't worry about that hit MC Hammer put out on you. The black crowd is totally there to save your pale ass."

Now that I think of it, you neglected to mention the Beastie Boys in your list of rappers who got approval from a black audience. As you know, they were the other white group who came up

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around the same time you did. In fact, you shared the same DJ as them for a while, Sam Sever. You pointed the Beasties out as fakers and tried to discredit them as if you guys were real...and they were fake (wasn't it the Beasties who just received hip hop honors last week on... *gasp*... VH1?) Were they too white for you, Serch? Did their fakeness take on any cooler effect when three black rappers covered songs from License to Ill as Rakim, Bambaata and Wu Tang bobbed their heads to the music? I guess anyone who was white and not down with you way back then was a fraud. I believe Upski has a good chapter about this type of "I'm the only cool whitey" complex in his Bomb the Suburbs book. Check it out.

"Some of this, well most of this as I am sure you know is toungue and cheek but lets be real."

OK, let's. The term is actually "tongue IN cheek" and maybe that's where you should keep yours from now on. Yes, it is very important to respect and understand the origins of one's craft. It is also very important to respect and understand people in general...until they give you a reason to do otherwise. I didn't want to help promote your TV show, which was the reason for your blog in the first place, but I can't stand by while people like you perpetuate massive falsehoods that do nothing but make Hip-Hop look like a 30 year old child. I respect it too much.

Sincerely,

Sage Francis