The 21st Century Hip-Hop Minstrel Show
Are We Continuing the Blackface Tradition?

By Raphael Heaggans

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THE 21ST CENTURY

HIP-HOP
MINSTREL SHOW

ARE WE CONTINUING THE BLACKFACE TRADITION?

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I am so thankful to God for His many blessings. Without Him, I am nothing. I have been through some tough times in my life, but I am grateful to Him for my family and loved ones who stood with me through the thick, thicker, and the thickest. It is part of my destiny to have written this book.

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A SPRINGBOARD FOR EXAMINING HIP-HOP THROUGH A CRITICAL LENS

Do we seek to produce any more generations of African Americans who, regardless of any achievements they can personally claim, go on to produce more people who hate who they are?

—Katherine Bankole

The alchemic ingredients of the recipe Jim Crow’s Hip-Hop Surprise is quite simple. The objective of baking this recipe is to make a socially unconscious hip-hop song or video. For starters, it must include several packages of breasts, hips, and buttocks. Socially unconscious hip-hop music is the opposite of conscious hip-hop music. Socially unconscious hip-hop music has themes of misogyny, oppression, drugs, pimping, sex, and other false portrayals of Black manhood and womanhood. Such music perpetuates stereotypes and distortions of Black people and does not uplift the masses. It does not focus on social justice and consciousness for all people. Socially conscious hip-hop music, much like rap music, has themes related to the social injustices among Blacks and Latinos, while still appealing to the masses and incorporating, fun, romance, and unity within it.

[i] Socially unconscious hip-hop music is the opposite of conscious hip-hop music. Socially unconscious hip-hop music has themes of misogyny, oppression, drugs, pimping, sex, and other false portrayals of Black manhood and womanhood. Such music perpetuates stereotypes and distortions of Black people and does not uplift the masses. It does not focus on social justice and consciousness for all people. Socially conscious hip-hop music, much like rap music, has themes related to the social injustices among Blacks and Latinos, while still appealing to the masses and incorporating, fun, romance, and unity within it.
thighs, bitches, hos, and tricks, preferably well beaten physically, mentally, and/or spiritually; several cups of finely chopped nig-gas, and lightly beaten chickenheads; mix in slabs of sex, baggy pants, prisons, bling blings; then add blunts, ghettos, fine cars, spinners; then finally sprinkle it with a computer-generated beat. This recipe—unbeknownst to those White and Black youth who deem it a culinary experience to treasure—is filled with all-purpose dour specifically designed to enslave them psychologically.

*Jim Crow’s Hip-Hop Surprise* is now the blueprint by which hip-hop is a job made to order for its Black hip-hop artists. These artists are given the recipe to keep the dollars heavily flowing in the pockets of the record companies they pay obeisance to. Part of the Black male hip-hop artist’s servitude includes exuding lyrically and attitudinally patriarchal ways of thinking through lyrics and attitude that contradicts his history. He takes on the role of the oppressor by objectifying and dehumanizing women; he forgets how his ancestors were falsely imprisoned for trumped-up crimes, yet he celebrates prison culture in style, attitude, and nuance. His insouciant attitude helps him to disregard the Black and White youth who may mimic him by adopting his fashions and acting out scenes from his lyrics, not realizing the consequence.

Many of these artists often have fans, whether they are 5 or 35 years of age, eating out of their hands, reciting their in-your-face lyrics and imitating their styles and persona without knowing how to critique what they hear and see. This naiveté contributes to the mis-education of Whites and Blacks about the Black experience and Black history. But while the sauciness of socially unconscious hip-hop appears to leave a savory taste in the mouths of White and Black listeners who eat greedily from *Jim Crow’s Hip-Hop Surprise*, these youth—with every swallow—intensify stereotypic perceptions of all things Black.
The challenges faced by our African ancestors\textsuperscript{ii} and their triumphs over various forms of oppression are forgotten or unacknowledged in unconscious hip-hop music. For without the African ancestors and White abolitionists’ fight for equality, we would not enjoy the privileges of recording music, enhancing better race relations, voting, reading, having a family, obtaining an education, exploring opportunities for achieving wealth legally, and the list goes on.

Despite those advances, some of hip-hop acts as the antithesis of everything our African ancestors fought for. Stereotypes about Blacks abound in the genre (i.e. ignorant, ostentatious, irresponsible, drug users, misogynistic, ghetto dwellers, sex driven, and so on). Hip-hop acts portray this monolithic image of the Black experience just to make a quick buck, forgetting the lessons we should have learned from our ancestors. It seems like the only time we want to exhibit that we have some semblance of ancestral home training is when we “get up at the MTV awards and \textit{thank and praise my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ}”\textsuperscript{3} for getting an award for the song: \textit{Da Stupid Bitches in Da Hood Smokin’ Crack}.\textsuperscript{4} But hip-hop’s beginnings did not start out this way. Before it became known as \textit{hip-hop}, socially conscious \textit{rap} music addressed the social injustices faced by Blacks and other ethnic minority groups\textsuperscript{5}; a discussion on the difference between \textit{rap} and \textit{hip-hop} is forthcoming. Much of hip-hop music, on the other hand, has become so commercialized that it is no longer about social equality, but about a celebration of drugs, sex, guns, ghetto life, and money. These messages to Black and White youth propel them into their mis-education about

\textsuperscript{ii} The reference to \textit{our African ancestors} refers to all persons since I argue that all of us can trace our lineage and find African, Native, Irish, British, and a host of other ethnicities within it.
Black culture. It does not take a virtuoso of hip-hop to articulate this message—hip-hop videos oftentimes demonstrate it at every turn. A lifestyle of sex, drugs, big money, and crime is inculcated in the minds of many youth who grew up listening to hip-hop but not necessarily to those who grew up listening only to rap.

I’m Just Keepin’ It Real: Celebrities and Hip-Hop Music

There seems to be a growing and prescient concern about hip-hop culture. Don Imus drew the ire of some in the hip-hop industry when he suggested that his reference to the Rutgers Women as *nappy headed hos* is no worse than how hip-hop artists treat Black women. Michael Richards, aka “Kramer” of *Seinfeld* fame, went into a tirade using the *n-word* as a means of attacking a comedy club’s Black hecklers. Their comments drew more attention to the sad state of affairs of hip-hop artists who degrade African Americans. The April 16, 2007 episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* served as a catalyst to a discussion about the ways in which hip-hop is shaping the world’s perceptions of Blacks. The women from Spelman College—a private, independent, liberal arts, historically Black college for women, founded in 1881—who were guest panelists on the show, charged that they are tired of the misogynist images in hip-hop. Nelly, a hip-hop artist, has been under fire by the women at Spelman College for his *Tip Drill* lyrics and video where he swiped a credit card down the derriere of a Black woman. Even Oprah’s guest panelist, Stanley Crouch, stated that hip-hop may have become a minstrel show.

“Hip-hop’s recent love affair with dance friendly tunes, light-hearted lyrics and questionable imagery have many wondering—have we become a minstrel show?” asks Demetria Lucas from *The Source*, a hip-hop magazine. She raises a good point as some
hip-hop tunes and video have beats and images that originate from minstrel shows.

It may be for this reason that Nas, a rap artist, suggests that the hip-hop industry should be destroyed. Lucas and Nas’ viewpoints to the community-at-large represent the need for a book that addresses how much of hip-hop music has become minstrelsy in nature and what we need to do to bring hip-hop back to meeting the tenets of rap.

Unconscious hip-hop has become markedly minstrelsy in nature. Minstrel shows—performed heavily during the 19th century by Whites in blackface—consisted of comedic skits, music, and dancing that portrayed the Black person as ignorant, misogynistic, lazy, greedy, and buffoonish. The minstrel show entertained Whites who watched actors in blackface portray stereotypic notions of Black culture. The actors earned hefty bucks for their interpretations of keepin’ it real on what’s going on among enslaved Black folks. Many Black male hip-hop artists follow the same prescriptive misogynistic, misanthropic formula that keeps White suburbanite youth begging for more since they are the largest buyers of hip-hop music. It gives meaning to the adage “The more things change, the more they remain the same.” There appears to be few differences between the stereotypic Black man and woman portrayals during the minstrel show’s heyday and the consequential abstractions of the bitches, niggas, hos, lazy, juvenile, and ignorant-acting persons portrayed in hip-hop music today. Songs peppered with such formulations should remind us of the old proverb: Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

The derogatory language used by Imus and Kramer used mirrors the language used in much of hip-hop in the past 15 years. Does it take a White person—by however means necessary—to bring heavy media attention to what Black hip-hop male artists
are saying about Black women to get people to become incendiary about it? The universe is inside every woman that ever lived, is living, or will live. And all hip-hop can say about the great contributions of the mothers that preceded them, that live among them, and will come after them is Ay Bitch! Wait til you see my dick. Imma beat dat pussy up. Too many African queens have been dethroned, and the Black bitch is becoming nomenclature for Black women that come after her.

The chorus of Blacks who called for the immediate dismissal of Imus should ask what is the difference between a White male who earns a good living from degrading Black women and calls it shock radio and a Black male who earns a good living from degrading Black women and calls it hip-hop? Does Black America have a patent on taking liberties to demonstrate hatred towards itself while getting vehemently pissed off when White America take the same liberties? For instance, the term nigga is used among Blacks within Black communities. If White persons used the same term, many Blacks would scream, holler, protest, whine, cry, picket, sue, and demand an apology.

This complacency is a blatant backpedaling against the Civil Rights Movement where Blacks, Whites, Jews, and gays fought for equality and social justice. Rosa Parks, Bayard Rustin, Paul Robeson—and other seminal figures in the fight for Black equality—were not niggas and bitches, and for hip-hop music to embrace this term shows how much we have yet to learn about our true selves in Black history. For the very people rap music once sought to heal have now become in part a hip-hop target, and therefore, a source of the hurt African-Americans are experiencing today. Further, “major record labels, owned and controlled by Whites—the same labels that once ignored hip-hop completely—now control the direction of hip-hop. Record companies have learned what the
White masses want to hear—stories of Blacks killing Blacks, or occasionally Latinos killing Latinos; gangster artists who rap about ghetto violence are being signed by the thousands, with no regard for the effects on Black youth while the biggest consumers of it are suburban Whites. It is clearly an injustice, and an injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere. Civil Rights Activist Al Sharpton argues that some of the hip-hop artists who denigrate Blacks, and the patriarchal corporations that pay them, may take the stance that Civil Rights are something that occurred back in the day. For you are still ‘back in the day’ any time Black hip-hop artists are still referring to Blacks as niggers, and Black women as hos, bitches, and tricks. You are still in the day. It will take all of us to make Martin Luther King Jr’s dream come true in continuing to promote race relations positively within North America.

Barak Obama’s election to the presidency marks a significant stride in the history of race relations. And Obama had the backing of some hip-hop artists who made songs relevant to him. It was during this period that elements of rap manifested itself in hip-hop. But the preponderance of mainstream hip-hop artists—even at this time of this writing—do not understand that a problem only exists if there is a difference between what is actually happening in the ghetto (hood) and what the artists’ desire to be happening in the ghetto (hood). How do the artists’ stories about the hood translate into what the artist desires to happening in the hood?

The Argument’s Focus

The 1712 Willie Lynch Letter serves as the theoretical basis of this text. It has been purported that Willie Lynch was slave owner who endeavored to educate White slave owners on how to maintain
slavery of Blacks even after legalized slavery is over. Below is a portion of the letter that serves as the theoretical focus of this text:

In my bag I have a full proof method of controlling Black slaves. I guarantee every one of you, if installed correctly, it will control the slaves for at least three hundred years. My method is simple, any member of your family or your overseer can use it. I have outlined a number of differences and I make them bigger. I use fear, distrust and envy for control purposes. These methods have worked on my modest plantation in the West Indies and they will work throughout the South. Take this simple list and think about it. On the top of my list is age, but it's only there because it starts with an A. The second is color or shade. There's intelligence, sex, size of plantation, status on plantation, attitude of owners, whether the slaves live in the valley or on a hill, north, east, south, or west, have fine hair or coarse hair, or is tall or short. Now that you have a list of differences I shall give you an outline of action. But before that, I shall assure you that distrust is stronger than trust, and envy is stronger than adulation, respect, or admiration. The Black slave, after receiving this indoctrination shall carry it on, and will become self-refueling and self generating for hundreds of years, maybe thousands of years. Now don’t forget, you must pitch the old Black male against the young Black male, and the young Black male against the old Black male. You must use the female against the male, and you must use the male against the female. You must use the dark skinned slave against the light skinned slave, and the light skinned slave against the dark skinned slave. You
must also have your White servants and overseers distrust all Blacks, but it is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect and trust only us. Gentlemen, these keys are your keys to control. Use them, never miss an opportunity, and if used intensely for one year the slaves themselves will remain perpetually distrustful. Thank you, gentlemen.11

The Purpose of this Text

The Willie Lynch letter, which appeared on the Internet during the 1990s, contains obvious anachronisms considering some words did not come to be until well after 1712. In fact, some people argue that the term lynching comes from an eponymous descendent of Willie Lynch, while others argue that the letter is just an Internet hoax designed to disrupt the healing process that ethnic minorities are still undergoing due to the effects of slavery and racism. Whatever the case, this work does not endeavor to prove or disprove the authenticity of the Willie Lynch letter, nor to provide any background information relative to Lynch’s actual or imagined existence. This work only endeavors to examine motifs that pervade most of hip-hop in connection with the information contained in the so-named Willie Lynch letter, whether or not the letter is historically accurate. The intent is NOT to degrade any hip-hop artist, group, or affiliates. This work does not seek to air out Black and White folks’ dirty laundry, largely because it makes no sense to air out a dirty garment without first getting to the root of how to clean the dirt. We have to confront the dirt of complacency where Blacks call other Blacks and their children nigga, bitch, ho and trick while our White youth are helping to throw the dirt not realizing the impact it has on their viewpoints of Blackness. I am glad that
New York City made a resolution to ban the usage of nigger; I am glad that the NAACP had a funeral service burying nigger and its descendants: cousin nigga, uncle niggrah, and aunt negress. But these collective actions have only killed the body not the soul. This legacy of nigger, bitch, ho, and trick has to die a slow death, and we will have to train all of the youth that come after us how to dismantle its hold and destroy it once and for all. So when they air out the laundry, it won’t be soiled with self-hatred but freshened with self-love.

So the purpose of The 21st Century Hip-Hop Minstrel Show: Are We Continuing in the Blackface Tradition? is fourfold: 1) to initiate dialogue on how minstrelsy and oppression have become dominant motifs within much of mainstream hip-hop music; 2) to present how the elements within the Willie Lynch Letter are used within hip-hop music as a method of keeping Blacks psychologically enslaved; 3) to argue that hip-hop music appears on the surface to enhance Black and White race relations when in actuality, White youth via Black hip-hop music are adopting hip-hop verbiage and clothing styles without knowing the historical significance behind what they say and what they wear. Thus, once these White youth become adults, they have stereotypic knowledge of Black people that they will inevitably pass to their children. If then they are accused of being racist or sexist for repeating what hip-hop has taught them, they are oblivious as to the source of their acts of racism or sexism. White children acquire racism as a matter of course through observing and internalizing the values within their environment and act accordingly. Many of the misogynistic and Black self-hatred themes within hip-hop confirm what some Whites might have been taught about Blacks; and not by their own volition, they perpetuate the cycle of racism and sexism. And the last purpose of this text is 4) to offer what Black and White lovers
of hip-hop can do collectively to start dismantling the remnants of slavery to contribute to the racial healing process. For starters, Bankole poses:

How can African people talk about [social justice, equal opportunity, and race relations] or attempt to effectively operationalize these concepts when there is the instance of (though often understated) self-hatred? Another question is, how are we to unify and progressively address the major problems in the Black community, which are consuming the masses of our people, if we cannot (once and for all), consolidate the fact of who we are? Is it any wonder then, that some of our people, believe … that the word ‘nigger’ actually can and should be used as a term of endearment among Black people? This includes the overarching pimp/prostitute theme in U.S. popular culture: the terms ‘bitch’ and ‘ho’ to refer to Black womanhood; and ‘gangsta’, ‘G’, ‘mack’, ‘player’, and ‘dog’ to refer to Black manhood.12

Such themes have become a part of the cavalcade of Black masculinity. In accomplishing this purpose of discussing how some themes in hip-hop music curry favor with motifs of slavery, this text addresses the following components of the Willie Lynch letter: age, intelligence, east versus west, status on plantation, Black males versus Black females, and slaves who trust and depend on us.

Disclaimers

Hip-hop music has the potential to empower youth to make a positive difference. All hip-hop is not negative. There are several
hip-hop artists who are giving back to the community. The intent of this text is not to take a negative slant to hip-hop music. It does seek to initiate honest dialogue on how niggas, bitches, hos, and tricks are consequential identities of hip-hop, and why there is a negative slant on what is being portrayed in hip-hop. This text does not advocate for the censorship of hip-hop music; every person has a constitutional right to free speech. Neither is this text an attack on Blacks, Whites, women, men, teens, or youth. Black is beautiful; but so is White, Asian, Mexican, Latino, and any other race. We have failed Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream if we do not recognize that brothers and sisters come in different colors. This text is meant to challenge all readers to consider assessing how unconscious hip-hop music negatively affects the healing of race relations in North America and how it exacerbates racial hatred in other parts of the world. Further, those of us who are socially conscious cannot make the mistake of trying to coerce social consciousness upon others we consider naïve. Today, we cannot look to comedians, hip-hop artists, or ball players for political direction since their role is to entertain. However, this book endeavors to begin a dialogue that may act as a springboard to get entertainers, leaders, school teachers, preachers, thugs, gangstas, wankstas, the general public, and you meaningfully engaged in analyzing the images shown via hip-hop. And it asks the community to wield their resources to serve the masses. The job is not hip-hop artists alone; it is yours and mine. Black people may be a rock’s throw from destroying everything our White and Black ancestors have taught us. It takes a village to raise a child. We must become the village that raises our youth as representatives of the royal lineage to which they are successors. This book, The 21st Century Hip-Hop Minstrel Show: Are We Continuing the Blackface Tradition? is just part of my contribution to this effort.
Chapter One

CHAPTER ONE: HIP-HOP’S ADULTEROUS AFFAIRS WITH THE MINSTREL SHOW

History repeats itself: first as a tragedy and then as a farce.\textsuperscript{13}

—Karl Marx

Use your brain! It’s not them that’s killing us; it’s us that’s killing us.\textsuperscript{14}

—Tupac

In the Willie Lynch Letter, which made its grand debut on the Internet in the 1990s, Lynch describes how to keep Blacks enslaved long after slavery has officially ended. We know little about Lynch; we do not even know if he ever existed. We do not know if the Letter is authentic. However, the infamous Letter should give White and Black America pause to consider exactly how applicable the Letter is to the musical aspects of American society, more specifically mainstream hip-hop. Some corporate recording companies, the real driving force behind unconscious hip-hop music, are following the Letter’s blueprint to keeping
Black youth psychologically enslaved while mis-educating White youth.

Unconscious hip-hop is the most influential force that governs youths’ behavior, style, mannerisms, attitudes, ideologies, and dress around the world. What youth see in the hip-hop videos is what they are subject to becoming and/or imitating. Unconscious hip-hop music synthesizes false attitudes and thoughts about Blacks into a visual pattern reflective of corporate America’s power to perpetuate Black stereotypes and skew reality. The sprinkling of linguistic gems such as bitch, ho, pimp, and nigga within hip-hop music give delineations of Black culture worse than the racist slur Sambo, more offensive than Jim Crow, and far more destructive than Uncle Ben and Zip Coon. The source of these themes is the minstrel show.

Minstrel Shows in Its Heyday

While the Willie Lynch Letter was allegedly delivered in 1712, the minstrel show made its debut in the late 1700s. The English actor who donned blackface would perform the role of Negro to White audiences. The actor would make a parody of the Negro using patter, dance, humor, and song to convey the Negro’s dialect, inability to read, treatment of women, childishness, and attempts to educate self and fit in with Whites. By the 19th century, the minstrel theater had become incredibly popular in America; minstrel shows represented the national consciousness of America.

The popularity of minstrel shows is attributable to Thomas Rice, Bill Whitlock, Dick Pelham, and Dan Emmett who were among the first group of minstrels. Thomas Rice’s Jim Crow had a song and dance—and era during segregation—that kept White audiences in derision at the expense of Blacks. Later, Whites wished to have
a more authentic representation of Blacks by having Black actors wear blackface and perpetuate exaggerated stereotypes of Blacks. Instantly, the minstrel show, making mockery of the cultural and stereotypical aspects of Negros, “transformed regional differences of language into signs of racial inferiority.” These shows caused White audiences to erupt in even greater gales of giggles. And today, they are giggling all the way to the bank as they make money off the hip-hop artist who is pitching age-old messages of ignorance, hate, crime, and juvenile behavior all in the name of representing the ghetto (hood).

Jibbs, a teenage hip-hop artist, had a smash hit in 2006 entitled *Chain Hang Low*. Jibbs asserts that he got the beat to his single from “… the ice cream truck. The Mister Softee truck was always riding around my block in St. Louis and the kids sang it everyday.” In fact, the beat was borrowed from a minstrel show entitled *Zip Coon* with a song and character of the same name. *Zip Coon* was a one-dimensional Black minstrel character who mimicked Whites’ speech and dress. He often donned flashy jewels and chased women for the purpose of adding to his female repertoire. Stepin Fetchit, a stage name for Black comedian and actor Lincoln Theodore Perry, further popularized this image in the 1920s. The song *Zip Coon* morphed into the song *Do Your Ears Hang Low*. The 1928 cartoon *Steamboat Willie*, where Mickey Mouse made his debut, also featured the tune.

Perry’s success was largely due to Whites swallowing his act as the accurate representation of Black people. Hip-hop has sold this representation to White and Black hip-hop youth. When White youth adopt Black hip-hop styles, they can easily disown them without stigmatization. To add, Melvin Donaldson told Bakari Kitwana, author of *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop* (2005):
With blackface you can take it off. White hip-hop kids can turn their caps around, put a belt in their pants and go to the mall without being followed. Black people have to deal with oppression, but also character types that the hip-hop industry has created with the music by continuing the thug and gangsta stereotypes about Blacks. White hip-hop kids can pick and choose without repercussions and the full weight of stereotypes.

White students at Tarleton State University in Texas celebrated the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday by hosting a campus party inviting Black stereotypes to serve the liquor, play the music, and provide visual entertainment. The kids dressed as Aunt Jemina, wore dreadlocked wigs, donned bandanas and baggy clothing to give an image of gang and hood life, and took pictures in various poses honoring the malt liquor. The kids charged that the party was not meant to be racist; rather, they wanted to get to know the realities of other Black kids.17

In a similar fashion, law students from the University of Connecticut held a Bullets and Bubbly party where the future lawyers donned baggy clothing and held guns. In a similar fashion, the University of Colorado's Ski and Snowboard club advertised a gangsta party. The theme was fostered on fliers with pictures of hip-hop artists bearing fake bullet holes. Not to be outdone, Clemson University held a party with a similar theme where a White student added cushion in her pants to make her derriere appear wider while another student wore blackface. When hip-hop music presents such images, no fuss is made about it. However, when White college kids imitate such images, Blacks see it as a problem. It is a problem regardless of what race is placed on it.
Brief History of Rap

Rap music was born at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, South Bronx, NY in the 1970s. Rap started with deejays replacing disco music. Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Kool Herc were just some of the pioneers. Bambaataa music incorporated elements of the civil rights movement with Malcolm and Martin's speeches overshadowing the instrumentals (much like the songs hip-hop artists recorded in honor of their support for Barak Obama). Grandmaster Flash was an expert in mixing and remixing beats; he is credited with inventing the sampling machine. Kool Herc threw block parties that centered on consciousness raising and having a good time. Chic’s “Good Times” and Sugar Hill Gang’s “Rappers Delight” were among the first major rap hits.

Five elements of rap music are: deejaying, graffiti, b-boying/b-girling, emceeing, and having knowledge, culture, and overstanding.

Deejaying

A disc jockey is better known as a DJ. This person may play albums or compact discs at clubs, parties, radio, or concerts. Deejaying is one foundational element of rap. Clive Campbell, aka Kool Herc, was deejaying at his party in 1971 at the Sedgwick Avenue Community Center. This community was known for gang violence and sociopolitical and socioeconomic decline. This party was about bringing peace within the community through rap music. The music healed gang relations; Herc got the gangs to focus on what they were hearing. He mixed the break sections of a few selected records together in sequence without playing the beginning or ending of each corresponding song, fading one song directly into the next.
**Graffiti**

Youth in the inner-city during the 1970s and 80s used graffiti on various kinds of property to express their concerns, wants, and needs for their communities. These youth believed graffiti was one way to communicate with adults who otherwise would not listen to them. Youth used walls, trains, subways, bridges, almost anything stationary to spell out their messages and to show adults their intelligence and talent.

**B-Boying/B-Girling**

Dancing was a major part of rap culture. Self-taught dancers would incorporate floorspines, acrobatic gestures, and fancy footwork as part of their repertoire. The urbandictionary.com suggests that the ‘B’ in *b-Boying/b-Girling* stands for *break*. The *break* had no vocals, just instrumentation. The boys and girls break danced while the instrumentation was played. The double-dutch and the electric boogie are examples.

**MCing**

The MC’s responsibility during the early days of rap was to assist the DJ and to keep the crowd engaged in the music. In doing so, they might tell a story or command the crowd to chant phrases. Some notable MCs, or master of ceremonies, are Kurtis Blow, Kool Moe Dee, and Queen Latifah.

**Knowledge, Culture, and Overstanding**

Afrika Bambaataa and the Universal Zulu Nation charge that collectively *knowledge, culture, and overstanding* is the fifth element of
rap music. Bambaataa advocated for rap to hold fast to the collective consciousness that was its foundation to the culture. Rap music articulated knowledge to its listeners about the struggles members of the culture were experiencing. As rap evolved into hip-hop, financial gain became more paramount than knowledge, culture, and activism. Bambaataa did not wish to see this evolution. He coined the term overstanding which has roots in the Rastafarian ideology of nonconformity.

Where is the presence of all five of these elements in hip-hop music? If they are not present, then how can hip-hop and rap be used interchangeably? Socially conscious rap has become vestigial while mainstream hip-hop reigns ubiquitously.

**Rap’s Evolution into Hip-Hop**

Rap music’s beginnings held an international influence. DJ Kool Herc was born in Jamaica (as well as Sandra “Pepa” Denton of Salt-N-Pepa). Doug E. Fresh, known as the human beatbox, was born in Barbados; Richard Walters, better known as “Slick Rick” is from London, England. Afrika Bambaataa and DJ Grandmaster Flash, while born in the United States, have cultural roots in Barbados. Rap music was not born in Jamaica, Barbados, or London; but in Bronx, New York out of circumstances of poverty and marginalization in the United States. These groundbreaking artists provided the foundation of making rap, and later hip-hop, international.

During the second wave of rap came Run DMC, LL Cool J, Kool Moe Dee, Big Daddy Kane, Fat Boys, UTFO, and Roxanne Shante. Run DMC’s “Walk the Way” with Aerosmith launched rap’s crossover into the White market. Music by these artists was characterized by partying, machoism, and dissing.
Following this wave came political or message rap by artists such as Public Enemy, The Last Poets, Queen Latifah, and MC Hammer. The prevalent themes in their music were African culture, self-respecting, and societal ills against ethnic minorities.

Around the early 1990s, gangsta rap emerged. Gangsta rap was a product of gang culture and street wards of South Central, Compton, and Long Beach. The music’s message was delivered by NWA (Nigga Wit Attitude), Geto Boys, and Ice-T. This music was characterized by forty-ounce malt liquor, killing, hypermasculinity, and blunts.

From gangsta rap, booty rap emerged. The group, Two Live Crew was a forerunner. Duice’s “Daisy Dukes” and Tag Team’s “Whoop There It Is” set the thematic tone for songs of this genre to be characterized by an obsession with sex and eroticism, visually backed by scantily clothed women, heavy base beats, niggas, and beeyatches. Luke’s song “Asshole Naked” guarantees that he serves as the narrator of the salacious action viewers see in his videos. Hip-hop artists at this point moved on a pendulum swing from using elements of rap’s early beginnings to moving increasingly to criminal and sexual themes. Later, Ludacris, Nelly, Snoop Dogg, and 50 Cent got into the act, seemingly competing to compete for which videos would contain the most bodies that some wet dreams are made of.

**Difference Between Rap and Hip-Hop**

The civil rights movement provided Black and White America with a voice that spoke eloquently to the masses. We had Martin, Malcolm, Mary, Maxine, Rosa, Fannie, C. Dolores, Thurgood, Jesse, Frank, Andrew, Michael, Al and countless Jews and Whites who spoke on social injustices at the risk of being jailed, threatened,
persecuted, and/or killed. The privileges Blacks have today are thanks in part to these civil rights pioneers, and these privileges we have today were not provided voluntarily. Our ancestors and pioneers encountered resistance that caused them to be spied on, lied to, criticized, and killed. After the civil rights movement ended in the late 1960s, social injustices in the Black community were not completely assuaged since injustice was still rampant in many of the communities.

Rap music’s initial purpose was to be a platform to entertain and educate the United States on the social and political realities that still plagued the lives of Blacks and Latinos. Some of their realities included discrimination, poverty, police brutality, and racial profiling. Some of rap music’s earliest artists were Afrika Bambaataa, (who is the founder of Zulu Nation, an organization built upon principles of love, peace, and unity), Grand Master Flash, Sugarhill Gang, Kurtis Blow, The Sequence, Whodini, UTFO, and the Fat Boys. Chuck D from Public Enemy asserts that rap—which is socially conscious—is “about attacking the status quo” whereas hip-hop—much of it is socially unconscious—is a marketable entity where some record corporations exploit what they believe are stereotypical aspects of Black culture; they profit from it at astronomical heights at the expense of the Black hip-hop artist. Rap music in its infancy addressed Black pride, poverty, dancing, and social injustice, and thus “is a form of oppositional culture that offers a message of resistance, empowerment, and social critique.” This message is a part of preserving the cultural past of West African slaves who used oral traditions and set them to music.

However, Black Entertainment Television (BET) does not show multi-dimensional videos about the Black experience nor does it provide its youthful viewers with varied hip-hop musical choices.
The main reason lies in that it is camouflaged via BET’s *106 N Park’s* Top 10 countdown where viewers have to call in for the best songs and pay a fee. A former BET producer contends that BET is aiding and abetting in the destruction of hip-hop. This producer notes that the call-in aspect of the show is a waste of time since BET determines what order the videos will be played and ranked. He adds that almost every hip-hop artist is a caricature of the thug image.24

For example, Tupac was the first rapper to use the term *thug life* in his lyrics which was his acronym for: *The hate u gave little infants fucks everybody*. But this meaning was redefined after record corporations saw this image as a cash cow. Tupac was a socially conscious rapper who was not taken seriously until his work became less about social consciousness and more about corporate gain. Tupac was captured on camera spitting, modeling bling, bling, displaying money, and disrespecting women. But youth adopted what they believed was Tupac’s style and persona at this point. It was part of the record exploitation process. Even Afeni Shakur, Tupac’s mother, stated: “You are not going to be in the hip-hop industry and not be exploited.”25

**I Know You Not Gonna Play THAT Song:**
**Civil Rights and Hip-hop**

C. Delores Tucker, a civil rights political activist, vocalized in the early 1990s that obscenities in hip-hop are subtle forms of genocide for African-Americans. In the wake of the Imus slur, William Tucker, husband of the late activist, noted that Imus’ comment “brought about a revival of the struggle she waged, literally, by herself for the past fourteen years.”26 More Blacks are beginning to re-evaluate the civil rights leader’s prophetic message. But the
civil rights pioneers cannot celebrate that Blacks have overcome if the hip-hop generation has no idea how to build on the rights now afforded to them. To many youth, John Hope Franklin, Maxine Waters, Maya Angelou, and Dorothy Height combined are less regarded than Lil Wayne, Ying Yang Twins, Lil John, Flava Flav, and Lil’ Kim. People of African descent should engage in a blitzkrieg effort to help Black and White youth take advantage of our accessible collective histories, which will aid them in a critical analysis of hip-hop lyrics that contradict those histories.

No longer focusing on matters of poverty, police brutality, and infiltration of drugs within inner-city communities—a baton that was passed to hip-hop—rap emerged into hip-hop in the early 1990s. It was during this time that rap was incapacitated by the power of financial greed—an avarice that diminished its political heft and apparently left its capacity for empowering the masses quite scathed. The themes of “pimp, pimping, pimp juice, pimp paraphernalia like goblets and canes, the pimp lifestyle, ethos and ‘code of honor’ have permeated hip-hop culture and beyond.”

From this pimp ideology, television viewers can choose from a number of pimp-themed flicks to tickle their fancies: Pimp My Ride hosted by Xzibit, Lil Pimp with Ludacris and Lil’ Kim about a nine-year-old White suburbanite boy who takes up pimping, and Muthafuckin’ P.I.M.P. as 50 Cent calls himself in his video. And there is Nelly’s Pimp Juice that may quench the appetites of viewers who salivate like Pavlov’s dog during the showing of any soft-porn hip-hop video. If that is not enough, there is Bishop’s Pimplicious voice tone and screen saver and Three Six Mafia’s “It’s Hard out Here for a Pimp.” And to finish this multi-course meal, one can relax in an NPA—National Pimping Association—T-shirt. We cannot help but ask ourselves after listening to the motherlode of these less-than-ear-delicious themes: Did Martin Luther King Jr.
die a martyr so we can spread the message to White America via its record companies about pimping when the reality is that Black mainstream hip-hop artists are being pimped? These artists are convinced of their genius and ability to degrade self while degrading Black history and the Black race. And many young Black girls and Black women endure a ceaseless barrage of acrimony from them, ignoring how the hip-hop artists’ tabloidesque persona and marketable story—true or no—are what makes the record company—not the artist—a boatload of dough. Sadly, the money made hardly ever gets used to build up the downtrodden communities often referenced to in hip-hop.

Chuck D adds that many hip-hop artists have to foster the stereotypical aspects since they believe it is the sole way to “become megastars” in “presenting themselves in a negative light.” Further, “African American record executives, from Russell Simmons to P. Diddy to Suge Knight, have unashamedly had as significant a hand in peddling stereotypical images of Black Americans as their white counterparts, even as the major labels hold the most influential cards. … So whether, say, Dr. Dre is in Ruthless Records, Death Row or Aftermath clothing doesn’t sway the final outcome. He’s still advancing images of Blacks that reinforce stereotypes at the same time as they reveal an emerging new Black youth culture.”

For example, Tupac’s earlier rap albums dealt with issues of pro-Blackness, social injustice, and poverty. It appeared that the masses were not paying attention to what he had to say. Hence, he shifted to a ‘bad boy’ image, which garnered him hip-hop celebratory status, and the more he exuded this ‘bad boy’ image, the greater his fame. Tupac’s new image is the antithesis of his background since he was strongly influenced by the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and the Black Panthers.
Many rap artists in the early to mid-1980s had middle-class backgrounds; Kitwana (2005) adds that some even were college educated. This shifted dramatically by the 1990s, when many of the big-name rap stars to emerge had origins in poor and working-class communities. This fact helped give voice to the early 1990s expression ‘keep it real.’ Although the trend of rising incarceration began in the mid- to- late 1970s, it isn’t until the late 1980s that we began to see the lines blur between prison culture and hip-hop culture, given the numbers of young Black men entering and exiting the criminal justice system. So the shifting content of hip-hop lyrics from the mid-1980s era, when the content seemed more diverse, to the 1990s street culture—dominated lyrics and so-called gangsta style was not strictly coincidental. Additionally, the terms ‘nigga’ and ‘bitch’ in reference to young Black men and women in hip-hop didn’t gain significant frequency until the early 1990s. This has more to do with prison culture than with class. …

Growing up in the 70s and 80s, it was not in my realm of consciousness to deem any person a nigga or bitch. During that time, dems fightin’ words.

Hip-hop artist Ja Rule describes hip-hop as being commercial. He adds that “There is so much money in it now. Big companies like Nike and Pepsi see an opportunity to make money … so it’s just not as pure as it was.” He argues that hip-hop is about “niggas and beeyatches, power and money.” It is the antithesis of rap’s foundation. Hip-hop exchanged social consciousness for guns, gangs, violence, drugs, and niggas to capture the interest of suburbanites.
Hip-hop has become a capitalist mercenary designed to misrepresent Black culture and is being paid by corporations to do so. All of the five elements of rap are not present in hip-hop music, for they served as the instrumentalities that work in unison to generate the change that empowered Blacks en masse.

Darius Pridgen, pastor of True Bethel Baptist Church, suggests that hip-hop is not akin to civil rights. From his perspective, hip-hop has become a vehicle by which youth act out what they see in videos while those persons who engineer hip-hop are watching more jails being built for those youth. These same persons are financing the hip-hop artists so that they may have big pools, houses, and jewelry, but in return the hip-hop artist must engage Black youth in self-genocide in the name of being angry—even though they may not know what they should be angry about—but masquerading as self-expression.

A noted feminist critic, bell hooks, adds that much of hip-hop is “expressive of the cultural crossings, mixings, and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes, and concerns of the white majority.” Luke, of 2 Live Crew fame, charges that part of what the White male majority wanted was to see more Black women with “big asses” in videos. For better or worse, sex is the driving force behind hip-hop. Peter Loewenberg is convinced that “when forbidden desires emerge in a white man, he can facilitate their repression by projecting them onto blacks or members of other racial minorities. In the unconscious of the bigot the black represents his own repressed instincts which he fears and hates and which are forbidden by his conscience as it struggles to conform to the values professed by society. This is why the black man becomes

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iii This interview was conducted with Pastor Darius Pridgen True Bethel Baptist Church, Buffalo, New York.
the personification of sexuality, lewdness, laziness, dirtiness, and unbridled hostility.”

Thus, while Blacks have created hip-hop culture, corporate America takes it and sells it back to Blacks and tells them: “This is what Blackness is.” Hip-hop may have turned “into a field where only those who have been shot, committed crimes and spent time in jail are … worthy of studio recordings.” Mainstream hip-hop artists’ feigned ignorance seems to know no boundaries. This statement carries the notion that hip-hop music has been reduced to synchronizing prison and music where “corporate [hip-hop] soundtracks promote lifestyles that are actually ‘deathstyles’ … and this helps foster the perception of lawlessness that leads to the criminalization of our Hip-hop generation.” It is part of the exploitation process.

But behind this criminalization are record companies. The modus operandi of some White-owned recording companies is to take control of the genres of music Blacks have created and profit from them. Elvis, who is still feted as one of the greatest singers who ever lived, reworked Black songs that became hits. Rock, blues, jazz, and hip-hop were an integral part of Black cultural entertainment but have become so commercialized that the true characteristics of the genres are unrecognizable.

In the process, many hip-hop artists may be achieving wealth but not using their influence to wield political power for all Black people. They are consistently braggadocio about how much they have versus how much other Blacks do not have (particularly in the form of houses, cars, money, and women; but yet the media sharing the news about the high number of foreclosures among the artists). Wise Intelligent challenges us to
Imagine for a minute if Harriet Tubman would have adopted this same selfish position, and after she ‘made-it’ to freedom, or after ‘achieving’ that freedom and realizing her ‘dream’ of being a free-woman, said ‘I can’t save the world’ and went shopping in Paris? Well, she didn’t and she knew that she could not ‘save the world’ but believed deeply that she could ‘save the BLACK WORLD’ so she ACTIVELY got involved and organized the ‘Underground Railroad!’ She is the ‘Poster-Child’ for a ‘sister’ who ‘made-it’ to freedom, became the ‘realization of a dream’ but understood that the ‘dream’ was not fulfilled unless it was shared by the ‘masses.’ Proper Education Always Counters Exploitation. …

The popularity of hip-hop music is fueled by some of corporate America’s desire to validate their preconceptions about most Black males. Mos Def argues that the derogatory lyrics and images in hip-hop are entertainment to Whites; “we’re adopting their morals like we them and we never been them. We don’t have the same struggle. Dudes is no more than 20 years removed from real poverty. For dudes to have this much access to money and it’s not translating to people power, it’s inexcusable.”

When rap’s themes advocated for justice and equality it was labeled as racist, tension-building, and destructive music. Groups like A Tribe Called Quest, Public Enemy, and KRS-One have experienced harsh criticism because of the content of their progressive music. However when hip-hop promotes the gangster, pimp, nigga, or ho of the week, it does not create any havoc.

Who is doing the promoting? Record companies have been influential in reshaping conscious rap—that told truths about the injustices Blacks and Latinos were faced with—into hip-hop that is
becoming more gimmicky in theme. Hip-hop has leaked a satchel of scenarios about how much money I got, how many bitches I’m sexing, how much bling, bling I got, how I come from the ’hood and other themes of buffoonery. Hip-hop is serving as the surrogate father for many Black male youth. This prodigal parent is teaching falsities about masculinity, women, education, voting, Black history, and sex education.

Simply chronicling the wreckage, these socially unconscious hip-hop artists strive for what they perceive as surrogate patriarchy by 1) hosting lighter-skinned females with bone straight hair in their videos; 2) treating women as second-class citizens; 3) serving as an oppressor of the Black race; 4) commercializing hip-hop only to increase hefty corporate America’s pockets while mis-educating and misleading youth; and 5) rescinding any responsibility for any youth who mimic their studio gangsta behavior; that is, to blame parents, community, and everyone else for the actions of youth listening to the music. The media take pains to insulate hip-hop from any wrongdoing, but the strongest argument made by unconscious hip-hop artists is, ‘The parents need to do a better job of monitoring what their kids are watching and hearing. If you don’t like the music, turn it off.’ If only if were that simple. Children and young adults aged 3–21 are accessing soft porn (ahem!) hip-hop music anytime and anywhere outside the home in this technologically-advanced society. Even if they could not access the music, they cannot help but be influenced by witnessing other kids engage in a day-in-and-day-out basis the clothing, language, tattooing, sexuality, fashion, mannerisms, and porn that have become the additional elements of hip-hop. The media has known for a long time that music establishes fashion and behavior trends; with this barometer, children decide what sayings and styles are in and what is out.
Corporate record companies are making big profits off of these false images of Blacks while commanding the Black hip-hop artist to continue such degradation of his people. It brings to mind how White men commanded Black men to beat Fannie Lou Hamer for attempting to register to vote. Mrs. Hamer remembered that one of the officers said to the Black inmates: “I want you to make that bitch wish she was dead.” He also threatened the black inmates that if they didn’t use the blackjack on her, “You know what I’ll use on you.” Mrs. Hamer asked the Black inmate: “You mean you would do this to your own race?” The inmate commenced beating her until she passed out; I surmise that those injuries were what eventually killed her at a swifter pace than her diabetes and hypertension.

Whatever is not helping you is hurting you. Unconscious hip-hop with its injurious references to Black women as bitches or piece of ass have taught a generation of youth to see these women in such light. If this trend continues, it will eventually kill the Black woman. Black and White youth do not have any experience to counteract the images they see in hip-hop videos and thus they act out what they see and hear without question. They interfuse reality and fantasy because while some adults in the record industry are feeding youth globs of sex, other adults are not taking the time to teach youth that they are being targeted. Then the question is often asked: What is wrong with our kids today? What is wrong is that we are talking about our kids but not talking to them about their history and legacy as citizens of the universe.

Hip-hop artists are the first to enjoy the labor of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement was a youth movement that changed discriminatory laws so that Blacks born during the 1970s had rights and privileges that were not immediately afforded to them. The ancestors that came before them provided the movement’s blueprint. Those youth who were
part of the movement knew their history; they knew the power of faith, prayer, civil disobedience, education, and perseverance. When the torch was passed to the rap artists in the 1970s, they created songs that were uplifting, that spoke about love, peace, unity, and equality. When the torch was passed to the hip-hop artists in the 1990s, it burned down to embers, a shadow of its former flame.

It seems only yesterday that our society was released from segregation, Jim Crow, Blackface, and racial oppression—and yet, while some of these societal ills have reared their ugly heads again, many hip-hop artists are being used as leaders to destroy everything our civil rights leaders did to provide all of us with rights never before enjoyed. A preacher changed the most powerful nation in the world. Martin Luther King Jr. followed his philosophy: “After one has discovered what he [or she] is called for, he [or she] should set out to do it with all of the power that he [or she] has in his [or her] system. … Do it as if God Almighty ordained you at this particular moment in history to do it.”

Thus, from my circumspective perception, I contend that rap spans from the late-1970s to the early 1990s; and hip-hop was born in the early 1990s. Some persons born after 1973 saw rap morph into hip-hop and were exposed as teens to visual and lyrical misogyny, degradation, and interracial oppression. During the 1990s, corporations saw potential profit for capitalizing on hip-hop more than they saw with rap music. They adopted this imperialist mindset in much of the same way the British Empire sought to take over Africa to profit from its wealth. They began to have hip-hop music initially target teens in the early 1990s to convince them to endorse and embrace being niggas, bitches, hos, gang bangers, or a combination thereof. These same teens were slated to get on the path of acting out said roles vis-à-vis their disregard of Black
history. At the time of this writing, these teens are now in their mid-thirties, and corporations have looked at the teens, twenty-somethings, and early-thirty-somethings as a massive domain to colonize using weapons of hip-hop films, music, clothing, and magazines. These corporations initially had nothing to do with hip-hop; but camouflaged their capitalist interest by using Black hip-hop artists to exploit other Blacks for major profit. Hip-hop artists now assume the marketing models used by corporations; corporate control of hip-hop is being used “to destroy African-Americans and particularly, African-American youth culturally, socially, and intellectually while reducing them to economic cattle ripe for exploitation.” This exploitation is guised as keeping in real while hip-hop artists are using degradation as a means to credentialize hip-hop and mistakenly calling it a socially empowering genre of music. Clearly rap music addressed great particularities about social injustice among Blacks while hip-hop presents gross generalities about stereotypical Blackness.

Youth Caught Under the Spell

The millennium generation of youth born between 1985 and 2004 was born into hip-hop. Much of this hip-hop audience is under hypnosis. And it is not their fault that they do not know about the importance of Afrika Bambaataa, Public Enemy, or Kurtis Blow. It is OUR fault, those of us who grew up listening to conscious rap music, learning about the continued struggles for equality. It is OUR fault, that our churches did not take the lead in commandeering efforts to empower our youth while the rest of the world was trying to convince our Black youth that they are bitches, niggas, and dogs. It is OUR fault, that we have an ADULT problem, not a youth problem. It is OUR fault that we have allowed OUR heritage
to be systematically expunged by the aiding and abetting of uncon-
scious hip-hop music. It is OUR fault that many of our youth are
innocuously perpetuating the stereotypes we have been trying to
overcome. It is OUR fault that many of our youth have embraced
a culture that does not have a vision for uplifting the masses; but
our youth are imitating them and are still directionless. We have
to ask our youth to forgive us for falling short. But we can begin
to work together to help us all do some unlearning about the very
stereotypes we have adopted, fostered, believed, or practice about
Blacks as perpetuated by hip-hop music.

**Stereotypes of Blacks for Sale**

Historically, stereotypes have been the vehicles that represent
patriarchal perspectives on Blacks. Some of the common stereo-
types of Blacks as presented in some hip-hop songs are: lazy, drug
sellers, drug abusers, ignorant, irresponsible, full of baby-daddy
or baby-momma drama, ghetto dwellers, criminals, destructive,
sexually unrestrained, womanizing, niggers (or niggas), prone
to Black-on-Black crime, among others. How many of these ste-
reotypes are sold within hip-hop music? How often do we hear
about Blacks protesting against these false images of Blackness?
These stereotypes are being sold to youth around the world who
imitate what they see; many youth do not realize that “whatever
you do **most** will be what you do **best**!”**46** Hip-hop artists make
a pretty penny exuding a misogynistic and criminalizing image.
Hutchinson points out that in a confessional moment Snoop Dogg
told interviewers that the lyrics of his gangsta rap did not depict
his life or reality. Snoop says he does it for the money. Even Snoop
realizes that $\text{MONEY} + \text{STEREOTYPE} = \text{MO' MONEY.}$**47**
But the major players who distribute, package, and sell these stereotypical images are Sony, Warner Brothers, EMI, MCA, BMG, and Polygram. Hip-hop critic Bakari Kitwana adds:

Often highlighted are those aspects of [hip-hop] which … do not threaten the status quo, reinforce negative stereotypes about Blacks, [and] manipulate those stereotypes to increase sales. … Countless artists in search of securing record deals report that they are often told that their message is not hard enough, that they are too clean-cut, that ‘hardcore’ is what is selling now. …

Record companies that produce this debasing merry-go-around are shafting mainstream hip-hop Black artists and their listeners all over the world with every gyration.

Blacks did raise quite a fuss about David Chang’s board game Ghettopoly, charging that it promoted negative images about Blacks. Some of the images of the Asian-American’s board game include 40 ounces of malt liquor, drug selling, carjacking, guns, rocks (of crack), and an insensitive mocking of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s I Have a Dream. Chang explained that watching MTV and playing video games taught him all he needed to know about Black America in order to create an authentic gaming experience any player would treasure. These stereotypes carry over in how mass media shapes our “image of the world and then tells us what to think about that image; essentially everything we know—or think we know—about events outside our own neighborhood or circle of acquaintances comes to us via our daily newspaper, our weekly news magazine, our radio, or our television. … For example, the way in which the news is covered: which items are emphasized and which are played down, the reporter’s choice of words, tone of
voice, and facial expressions; the wording of headlines; the choice of illustrations—all of these things subliminally and yet profoundly affect the way in which we interpret what we see or hear.”

Some of these hip-hop artists still insist they are just *tryna keep it real* while *reppin’ their hood* in the videos. These same artists do not convey that they go to their upscale homes and drive tony cars; and they do not hang around the ghetto—whether they are from it or not. Studio hip-hop artists are creating fictitious characters to enhance the salability of their records. Mos Def says, “Why are the East Side Boyz’ names Big Sam and [Lil] Bo? … What’s next, Kunta and Kinte?” Clearly, hip-hop music’s priorities have been weighed on the scales and been found wanting.