

Title:

Hip Hop Potency

Word Count:

649

Summary:

The art of Hip Hop has been degraded by the commercialized representatives of rap.

Keywords:

hip hop, rap, gangsta, music,

Article Body:

The success of rap music as the main expression of hip hop has elevated it beyond a cultural movement but to the status of financial powerhouse. Started in the 70's by innovative DJ's, rap has become a world wide phenomenon. The organic growth of the music has established the identity of rap music as a political tool for the underprivileged. It has been the voice of the oppressed and underrepresented. Today's rap, however, has changed. The forces behind hip hop are no longer focused on the art and message. Instead rap has become a commercial boom to be used for profit. The hyper commercialization of rap music has led directly to the degrading of its potency as a form of pure art.

The rap industry posted revenues in excess of 1.5 billion dollars in 2005. It's a far cry from the roots of rap, perfected in east coast ghettos some 25 years ago. Today, the industry of hip hop is run with the efficiency of major corporations. Potential rap stars are plucked from obscurity with the public psychology in mind. Businesses pour millions of dollars of advertising revenue into artists such as Nelly and Eminem to shill for their clothes and shoes. Music industry corporations have fully accepted and promoted gangsta rappers like 50 cent, leaving violence and sexism in their wake.

The over commercialization of rap has spawned a litany of pretenders hoping to strike gold. The use of controversy to garner attention is widespread. Involvement with a shooting, being associated with a gang or getting arrested for weapons charges can add "street credibility" to your image. It follows that in order to gain millions of dollars many artists may stage a shooting or purposefully get arrested. This misuse of violence is matched with a high degree of sexual exploitation of women. Females are valued for their physical attributes only. Video after video show us herds of women dressed in porous

outfits dancing aimlessly. Rap lyrics reveal a general perception of woman as whores and liars. Sexist and violent mainstream rap no longer holds the position as the enlightened voice of a struggling generation coming to grips with the harsh realities of an unfair world.

The quality of the music itself has been diluted. Rappers who do make it tend not to produce great albums like we saw with the likes of Run DMC. Instead they focus on producing "hits" hoping to experience a windfall from the impulse buying public. Never mind about elevating the art craft, let's get paid, now. The market is flooded with one hit wonders and fools pandering to target audiences. Meanwhile, the public is left with the bad taste of weak albums hurriedly slapped together in anticipation of advertising deadlines. The revolution that was rap is now a business model for hustlers.

Rap is not dead, yet. There are some bright stars. Artists like Kanye West and the more obscure Jurassic 5 have had success in the face of the emergence of commercialized rap. They represent a side of rap that can still be cutting edge but more responsible and socially aware of the consequences of their actions. They are conscious rappers who are concerned by more than their bottom line. Afrika Bambaata was the first to identify hip hop as a cultural movement. Rappers like Common have carried that torch by not selling themselves through controversy or promoting violence. They use words to stimulate thought, discussion and hopefully change. The commercialized rapper will answer these charges by pointing out that violence and sexism is reality and he is just testifying. There is truth to these comments. But where is the responsibility to your community? Why not uplift the people with your music? The answer is not up to him but rather to us to reverse our bad habits with buying gangsta rap and establishing a commitment to our communities with our music choices.