The Black Arts Movement and Hip-Hop

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The Black Arts Movement and Hip-Hop

The past decade and a half has witnessed the emergence of the most recent "seed" in the continuum of Afrikan-American culture, rap music. Hip-hop music and culture have caused volumes of controversy and forged their way into a marginal position alongside that of popular culture. Through rhythm and poetry, hip-hop has endeavored to address racism, education, sexism, drug use, and spiritual uplift. Hip-hop criticism, however, has primarily focused on the music's negative and antisocial characteristics, and has rarely yielded information about hip-hop's relationship to its artistic precursors.

It is important that observers understand hip-hop in a context that reflects its aesthetic goals and the tradition from which hip-hop has emerged. Black Arts literary critic Addison Gayle, Jr., notes that Black art has always been rooted in the anger felt by Afrikan-Americans, and hip-hop culture has remained true to many of the convictions and aesthetic criteria that evolved out of the Black Arts Movement of the '60s, including calls for social relevance, originality, and a focused dedication to produce art that challenges American mainstream artistic expression. Conservative attitudes concerning hip-hop's irreverence for middle-class values—evident in slang, clothing, etc.—have impeded the process of critically analyzing an art form that, at its core, has proved to be a considerable force for social change through campaigns such as Boogie Down Production's "Stop the Violence." At the very least, hip-hop has brought much needed dialogue to issues affecting America's Black community in a manner that no popular art form has, prompting Public Enemy's Chuck D to refer to hip-hop as the "CNN" of the Black community.

In this essay, I point to three areas that show the ideological progression from the Black Arts Movement to hip-hop: (1) the elements of anger and rage in the cultural production of Afrikan-American art in the two movements being studied, (2) the ideological need for the establishment of independent Black institutions and business outlets such as schools and publishing and recording companies, and (3) the development of a "Black Aesthetic" as a yardstick to measure the value of Black art.

Black Rage, Anger, and Cultural Expression

The element of black anger is neither new nor, as Herbert Hill would have us believe, passé. The black artist in the American society who creates without injecting a note of anger is creating not as a black man, but as an American. For anger in black art is as old as the first utterances by black men on American soil . . . . (Gayle xv)

Addison Gayle, Jr., directs our attention to the prevalence of anger in the experience of Black Americans and makes
it clear that Black art cannot be divorced from this reality. Historical events in both the Black Arts and hip-hop eras include extreme examples of Black frustration and rage: Consider, for example, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and the riots that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968. "... anger—raw and unhollywoodish—is what we are talking about," writes Haki Madhubuti. "Anger for unfulfilled promises, anger toward legislators who back stepped on policies decided, passed and not implemented, anger pouring undiluted toward a rulership that feeds on greed and exploitation and views Black people as enemies or as necessary burdens to be thrown crumbs like animals in their latest theme park" (Why xiv).

Black Arts and hip-hop texts created amid the anger that is easily perceived in major historical events such as the L.A. rebellion and the riots of the late '60s reflect the rage the Black community feels. Amiri Baraka's "Black Art," for instance, illustrates the extent to which anger would dictate this poet's creative path:

... We want "poems that kill."
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys and take their weapons leaving them dead with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland....
Let there be no love poems written until love can exist freely and cleanly. (213-14)

Baraka establishes, in this piece, a link between social frustration and its influence upon literature. Hip-hop, which, according to author Tricia Rose, grew out of the South Bronx section of New York in the late 1970s and early '80s, has stayed within this tradition by actively addressing the role of anger and violence. In Black Noise, Rose examines the area that gave birth to hip-hop, an area that, "in the national imagination, ... became the primary 'symbol of America's woes' " (33).²

That those who pioneered hip-hop were offering artistic expression designed to cope with urban frustrations and conditions is evident in O.C.'s song "Word . . . Life":

Let the chime be a part of your mind
Let the rhyme intertwine like a vine
Work your mentally found intellect
I raise eyes like a sight of tec

O.C. establishes, in this song, as well as throughout his album, the ability and purpose of hip-hop to engage the mind in dealing with the problems of contemporary urban life.

Verses serve a purpose like workers yet there's clown making hip-hop circus

O.C. demonstrates with the title of his album the link between the word and life that manifests itself in his poetry. The two elements cannot be divorced. O.C. ends the first verse of "Word . . . Life" with "meditate daily I do so I sought / things I consider in my mind as deep thought."

In "Stop the Violence," KRS-One engages in a similar reflection on the context in which he sees everyday life:

Time and time again as I pick up my pen
As my thoughts emerge these are those words
I glance at the paper to know what's going
Someone doing wrong the story goes on
Mary Lou just had a baby, someone else decapitated
The drama of the world shouldn't keep us so frustrated
I look but it doesn't coincide with my books.

As these lyrics suggest, not every hip-hop artist deals with social frustration in a negative, anti-social manner; many strive to deal effectively with reality through art. They do not seek simply to draw pictures of the urban blight, but seek instead to stimulate thought and discussion concerning the issues raised in the music.

Failing to analyze hip-hop lyrics and ideology critically and intellectually may lead one to dismiss an art form capable of transmitting ideas to a community in dire need of positive solu-
tions. A Tribe Called Quest’s Phife addresses the critics, specifically the Rev. Calvin Butts, that have failed to understand hip-hop fully:

How can a reverend preach when a rev can’t define
the music of our youth from 1979
we rap bout what we see
meaning reality
from people busting caps to Mandela being free
not every M.C. be with the negativity
we have a slew of rappers pushing positivity
hip-hop will never die yo, it’s all about rap
Mayor Barry’s smoking crack
let’s preach about that (“We Can Get Down,” from Midnight Marangers)

Just as Phife, in his lyrics, calls for a move away from music dedicated to escapism and avoidance of daily realities, Larry Neal, in his essay “The Black Arts Movement,” opens with the idea that “the Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community” (62). Work of the Black Arts era and hip-hop both provide a distinct and conscious connection between artistic expression and the frustration of Black people existing here in America, and indeed in the world, as Phife’s allusion to Mandela shows.

Establishment of Independent Institutions

My discussion of the establishment of independent institutions during both cultural movements under study is primarily concerned with the effects such institutions have on cultural production. Although the issue of intellectual and artistic freedom has been of primary concern to Afrikan-American artists throughout history, the commercial concerns of contemporary record companies related to video and radio airplay have compounded this issue for hip-hop artists. Thus, it is necessary to examine the issue of cultural production within the context of a capitalist environment, and to consider the effects such an environment has on the development of aesthetic criteria for performance and analysis. The issue of appealing to mainstream audiences is a complex one, in part because it spills into the arena of aesthetic considerations.

The fundamental question raised by hip-hop artists has been asked since the Harlem Renaissance: Can one’s art go unaffected by commercial considerations, and are the effects of commercialism necessarily negative? The Black Arts Movement dealt with this dilemma by actively seeking not only outlets for autonomous cultural production in the form of theatre companies and publishing houses, but also by moving to independent education. Darwin Turner observed in 1991 that, although there had been some ingress of Black writers into the mainstream, Black writers were (and are) still not “totally free from restrictions that Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes complained about more than a half-century ago—the tendency of large commercial publishers to favor particular themes, subjects or treatments for Black artists” (65). The same approach can be observed in the sensibility displayed by recording companies in relation to hip-hop artists. As Ronald Jemal Stephens has observed,

... the commercialization of rap lyrics... undermines the importance of the African oral tradition. According to Anthony Palmer, the majority of commercialized rap lyrics are concerned with humor and mockery, a lighter version of rap that reduces it to another faddish new musical form whose newness... allows it a hearing from white culture while denying African Americans their cultural roots. (38)

Some hip-hop artists have come to realize the gravity of Stephens’s remarks concerning the process of undermining hip-hop’s importance as an Afrikan oral tradition and the implications that this process has for the future of hip-hop. Thus, the focus of core hip-hop artists has been to pursue alternative
commercial venues and the rewards that come with such a level of success, while at the same time regaining territory lost to commercially viable “pop” acts that have made their lyrical material and music palatable to middle-class, white audiences.

With record companies directing A and R (artist and repertoire) resources toward locating artists they feel will sell the greatest number of records (units) and allocating additional funds to those artists they believe have the greatest potential to garner the most sizeable monetary return, aesthetic concerns take a back seat. Current trends indicate that hip-hop's aesthetic has been largely undermined and replaced by one that has, at its root, chiefly commercial considerations. Busta Rhymes of Leaders of the New School addresses this trend in “Syntax Era”:

Ah man all of a sudden people say I be buggin'  
Rugged culture musical hip-hop I be lovin'  
Gimme, Gimme, Gimme somethin'  
'Gimme somethin' for nothin'  
Rich blood sucker of the poor I see you, hickory, dickory hey, watch out for the trickery  
What happened to creativity, dignity, integrity . . .

Understand that word and how you use it, rap is business music, hip-hop is cultural music

The cultural music of which Busta Rhymes speaks operates within a Black Arts aesthetic; it is a musical form intertwined into the fabric of his everyday life. Rhymes, through his designation of two separate fields within hip-hop music, also suggests that within the genre there is a struggle to define and refine the art form, to combat the attempted replacement of “real rap” with pop art. “Rap is not pop if you call it that then stop,” intones Q-tip (A Tribe Called Quest, “Check the Rhyme,” from Low End Theory), and Phife exclaims, “Like Chuck D, I got so much trouble on my mind / 'bout these no-talent artists getting signed they can't rhyme” (“Show Business,” from Low End Theory). These sentiments are echoed by numerous other hip-hop artists, who sense that the gap between commercially successful hip-hop and “real” hip-hop is widening.

The dilemma being posed to Black artists not only in hip-hop but in other genres as well is the question of purpose. Does an artist engage in any form of cultural production solely for the purpose of commercial gain, and, if so, how does this reality affect the development of cultural expressions such as hip-hop? Tricia Rose addresses the dichotomy hip-hop artists face:

Hip hop's attempts to negotiate new economic and technological conditions as well as new patterns of race, class, and gender oppression in urban America by appropriating subway facades, public streets, language, style, and sampling technology are only part of the story. Hip hop music and culture also rely on a variety of Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American musical, oral, visual, and dance forms and practices in the face of a larger society that rarely recognizes the Afro diasporic significance of such practices. It is, in fact, the dynamic and often contentious relationship between the two—larger social and political forces and black cultural priorities—that centrally define and shape hip hop. (22-23)

The existence of dominant commercial concerns has meant that mainstream successes have almost invariably lacked hip-hop's political, racial, and social consciousness, as well as being insensitive to many of the aesthetic principles such as vivid metaphors that are fundamental to hip-hop. The crossover successes of Public Enemy and Arrested Development have been notable exceptions to the more common pattern of popular black musicians pursuing crossover success at the risk of artistic integrity. Acts which do not provide sufficient amounts of "shock," or mythical ghetto flavor, are not perceived as being marketable in the same manner as acts like N.W.A. or Ice T.
Rose’s contention that “Black cultural priorities” fly in the face of larger socioeconomic and political forces is traceable in the literature of the Black Arts Movement. In his short essay “The Genius and The Prize,” Larry Neal enters this discussion by using the example of Duke Ellington’s not having been awarded the Pulitzer Prize in recognition of his work. Neal suggests that for Ellington to have pursued the recognition necessary to win a Pulitzer would, in effect, have required him to compromise his artistic integrity:

Should we really be concerned about recognition from a society that oppresses us, exploits us . . . ? Recognition from dominant white society should not be the primary aim of the black artist. He must decide that his art belongs to his own people. This is not to deny that there are some “universal” factors at work; but we are living in a specific place, at a specific time, and are a specific set of people with a specific historical development.

Neal is calling for critical specificity when dealing with Black art, but he also seeks an institutional framework within which art that ascribes to a “Black Aesthetic” can not only be produced but thrive. Here, aesthetic considerations become closely linked with the issues of artistic and economic autonomy.

In “Blackness Can: A Quest for Aesthetics,” James A. Emanuel explores the importance of power in the publishing arena and how it relates to Black Arts artists:

When black authors are allowed to profit from the black vogue, trade publishers either use more highly selective criteria in granting contracts, or otherwise alter their standards—the end result being invariably the exclusion of too many able black authors and critics . . . . The ignorance about black literature, combined with the duplicity and hostility in much of the white literary establishment, then, throws upon black America the burden of discovering and preserving its literary culture. . . . Further developments in black and black-front publishing, whenever they are merely mercenary responses to the demands of the grow-

ing black audience now extrapolated, might not rise far above exploitation. Black America’s cultural dilemma now is the eternal problem of the artist: the problem of material, purpose, and method. (202)

So similar is the situation Emanuel describes to the dilemma facing contemporary hip-hop artists that the parallels startle. Rapper KRS-One offers a “Black Arts” solution—cultural production outside white corporate influences in the form of independent recording companies:

. . . don’t wait for your company’s promo staff
promote yourself with your own cash
but this might mean ya’ can’t buy gold
ya’ might have to put that on hold
(“How Not to Get Jerked”)

The prevailing sentiment in both eras is that economic considerations have eroded aesthetic development, and that independent outlets must be established through which the artist can create and effectively stay “true” to his or her art and purpose.

At stake is the effectiveness and functionality of an art form, and in the case of hip-hop, the damage that has been done must be reversed. Hip-hop’s ability to sell not only records but burgers, soda, cars, and beer has attracted the attention of those attempting to profit from the music’s wide appeal. Some rappers, however, are recognizing and directing attention to the potential for commercial influences to destroy the genre. Prompting even more concern is that the “able” voices will, as Emanuel puts it, never be heard or, as KRS-One suggests, be shunned by audiences unequipped to recognize those artists who, in the eyes of informed observers, have mastered the art form:

Understand that rap is rebellious music
therefore only the rebels should use it
the pop artists abuse it
when the audience hears real rap
they boo it
see rap music is a culture and
every one outside that culture is a vulture
the vulture makes money on the cul-

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understand I ain’t trying to insult ya’
but you’re either using rap like the devil
or ya’ pushing rap to another level
(“How Not to Get Jerked”)

The dilemma facing hip-hop artists
today is the lessening influence of the
fundamental aesthetic considerations
to which all poetry ascribes—fresh lan-
guage, vivid imagery, etc.—
versus the rising influence of
commercial rewards attached
to record sales and crossover
success.

Artists in both the Black
Arts and hip-hop eras have
endeavored to overcome the
negative effects commodifica-
tion has on cultural produc-
tion. Tricia Rose notes that the
position hip-hop occupies in
the spectrum of pop culture is
complex:

To participate in and try to manipulate
the terms of mass-mediated culture is a
double-edged sword that cuts both
ways—it provides communication
channels within and among largely
disparate groups and requires compro-
mise that often affirms the very struc-
tures much of rap’s philosophy seems
determined to undermine. MTV’s
acceptance and gatekeeping of rap
music has dramatically increased rap
artists’ visibility to black, white, Asian,
and Latino teenagers, but it has also
inspired antirape censorship groups
and fuels the media’s fixation on rap
and violence. (17)

It will be interesting to see how mount-
ing frustrations and conflict between
exploited musicians and artists and
recording companies will affect the
future and direction of hip-hop.7

The research reported here points
to a widening of the gap between the
mainstream and the underground hip-
hop distributed by independent com-
panies. This underground swell, how-
ever, will continue to be the aesthetic
landmark for all rap and be responsible
for the majority of its innovation and
creativity. To continue growing, artists
in all genres will have to deal effective-
ly with the reality of cultural commodi-
fication; conversely, critics must under-
take the task of sifting through “pop”
material and dismissing work whose
primary goal is mass appeal. Critics
cannot continue to ignore the work
being done at the core of hip-hop
because it does not reach mainstream
audiences; rather, critics must actively
engage that work.

The gap between
commercially successful
hip-hop and “real”
hip-hop is widening.

Recreating the Black Aesthetic

At ground zero of the
thrust that propelled
the Black Arts Movement of
the ’60s was an attempt to
construct an aesthetic frame-
work in response to existing
racism in the literary estab-
lishment; “Black Aesthetic”
writers largely redefined and
reshaped the expectations of Black
literature. The ability of a particular
group of artists to be able to define
their own work is crucial to the de-
velopment of an aesthetic that allows
artists and their art to grow, as well as
a conceptual framework within which
the work can be properly engaged.
Larry Neal observed that “a radical
reordering of the nature and function
of both art and the artist is needed”
(66). While total agreement upon
the role of Black art was, by no means,
solidified during the Black Arts
Movement, the idea that art, at some
level, must resonate with a certain
amount of functionality serving to bet-
ter the condition of African-Americans
was and is rather consistent. Maulana
Ron Karenga, for example, argues in
“Black Art: Mute Matter Given Force
and Function” that “art for art’s sake”
cannot exist, since all art reflects
the value system(s) from which it comes
(478), but the most vivid artistic exam-
ple of this ideology is Amiri Baraka’s
poem “Black Art”:

Poems are bullshit unless they are
teeth or trees or lemons piled
on a step. Or black ladies dying
of men leaving nickel hearts
beating them down. Fuck poems
and they are useful, wd they shoot come at you, love what you are, breathe like wrestlers, or shudder strangely after pissing. We want live words of the hip world live flesh & coursing blood. Heats Brains Souls splintering fire. We want poems like fists beating niggers out of jocks or dagger poems in the slimy bellies of the owner-jews. (213)

“Black Art” is a poem that attempts to define, in specific terms, the purpose and criteria of Black art. That purpose, clearly, is to assist black people to survive in an environment that is hostile to them. But the existence of specific measuring criteria is much more difficult to pin down. Poet Haki Madhubuti believes that, “finally, the Black Aesthetic cannot be defined in any definite way. To accurately and fully define a Black Aesthetic would automatically limit it” (“Toward” 247). People need repeatedly to reinvent their cultural expressions through originality and the pursuit of relevance.

The process of defining an aesthetic has now been passed on to hip-hop. The hip-hop trio De La Soul opens its most recent album, Buhloone MindState, with the refrain “It might blow up, but it won’t go pop.” To “blow up” is black vernacular for ‘succeed,’ and De La Soul is conveying the idea that one can “blow up,” or achieve a level of artistic success, without achieving the high level of sales associated with crossover success, without going pop. De La Soul also has engaged this issue in an interesting manner on another song from Buhloone Mindstate, “Patti Dooke.”8 Posdnos, one of the members of De La Soul, exclaims that he won’t be “mending, bending / compromising any of my style to gain a smile.” This song is punctuated with a sample from the movie The Five Heartbeats, in which a record company first proposes that a white group record a black group’s song, substituting white faces for black talent, and then deletes a picture of the group from the record jacket because the firm doesn’t believe that the Heartbeats’ image will sell. In this way, De La Soul dramatically portrays the historical precedents for the image posturing that is fundamental to the contemporary music/hip-hop industry.

Other cuts that have been placed in the song are also significant.9 A line from Boogie Down Productions’ “Criminal Minded” repeats, emphasizing another means by which commercial considerations have entered the hip-hop arena: “And now, prevention against sucka M.C.s.” And the sample from The Five Heartbeats continues on:

Record Executive: We’ve decided to change the cover a little bit because we see the big picture. Negroes and white folks buying this album. Everybody’s going to know who this group is. We just felt that the picture wasn’t as important as it was that we succeeded in crossing over.

Five Heartbeats Member: Crossover ain’t nothing but a double-cross. Once we lose our audience we ain’t never gon’ get them back. They’re trying to change our style.

Later in the song, the refrain “It might blow up but it won’t go pop” returns, and the lyrics of the song are filled with references to how groups targeting the mainstream and attempting to crossover will change the style of the music:

White boy Roy cannot feel it but the first to try and steal it dilute it, pollute it, kill it I see him infiltrating to the masses.

De La Soul, in “Patti Dooke,” exhibits the same urgency that the Black Arts writers displayed in seeking to maintain an Afrikan-American aesthetic, regardless of mass audience considerations. The song focuses on the need to “shelter” Black art from the mainstream, and from the unhealthy influences commercialism has on Black cultural expression.

Hardcore rap respectability and a sense of trueness to the art have become major themes in contemporary hip-hop. Many of the records that I reviewed while preparing to write this article describe fictitious battles with M.C.s who somehow don’t measure
up, or are chiefly concerned with mass appeal. In fact, there is so much emphasis on addressing the rising presence of pop-oriented acts (including M.C. Hammer, Sir Mix-a-lot, 2Live Crew, and Wrecks-n-Effect) that the number of artists telling stories or writing songs with social relevance has declined.

Video commodification of artistic ideas has, in the end, compromised unfavorably the ability of, and the need for, the rap artist to convey through his or her art those images the rapper most wants to transmit to an audience, and it has also affected rap's emphasis on orality. I believe that the pre-eminence of literary skill—i.e., "having skills"—in hip-hop has diminished in proportion to the increased prevalence of video, since video has transformed an oral, linguistic, and sonic art form into one that includes a very influential visual component. We should recall that hip-hop was in its early days—and is even now—based around the battle, or competitive arena in which two M.C.'s vie against each other in the presence of an audience to determine lyrical supremacy. The historical evidence shows that the true essence of hip-hop centers around effective manipulation of language to convey vivid images. Freestyle lyrics are spontaneously created and often, as a consequence, carry light subjects. They are, however, a measure of an M.C.'s mental and verbal agility. Freestyling ability also comes into play at live shows when an M.C. must fill in gaps or bring relevance to a dated rhyme. The most prolific freestylers are those rappers that carry in their "written" rhymes weightier themes and more complex poetic structures.

The younger, more recreational (mainstream) rap audience that has emerged has found itself unprepared to deal with the vital, literary facets of rap (i.e., symbolic language, hidden meanings, and a rapidly evolving urban vernacular), preferring to extract a song's meaning from video airplay. As author Tricia Rose points out,

MTV's success has created an environment in which the reception and marketing of music is almost synonymous with the production of music videos. Fan discussions of popular songs and the stories they tell are often accompanied by a reading of the song's interpretation in music video. . . . The visualization of music has far-reaching effects on musical cultures and popular culture generally, not the least of which is the increase in visual interpretations of sexist power, the mode of visual storytelling, the increased focus on how a singer looks rather than how he or she sounds, the need to craft an image to accompany one's music, and ever-greater pressure to abide by corporate genre-formatting rules. (8-9)

Rose has her hand on the pulse of what has taken rap to its present state. If we take her progression a step further, we begin more fully to understand the emergence of acts such as 2Live Crew, Sir-Mix-a-lot, and Wrecks-n-Effect through "cheek" videos—videos filled with scantily clad women around beaches, pools, etc. There is more at issue here than the obvious sexist ramifications of having provocatively dressed women viewed as objects. There are other concerns about the ability of talented artists to get record contracts and to be successful in the face of multi-platinum hip-hop acts whose success centers around visual manipulation of images of physical and sexual violence.

The re-establishment of an aesthetic that will function to catalyze the growth and development of hip-hop is the aim of artists such as KRS-One (Return of the Boom Bap), Common Sense (Resurrection), and O.C. (Word . . . Life). These artists seek to counteract the commodification and trivialization of an art form they feel is powerful, dynamic, and functional. The establishment of aesthetic values specific to Black art was the legacy of the Black Arts Movement, and it has been passed on to hip-hop in a strikingly direct form.

The spoken word has long been an important element in Afrikan art. It is a deeply rooted tradition that has
manifested itself in a stream of poets that have served as clarifiers of the “ultimate realities” that Black people face. And so the fact that young Black men and women choose to express themselves through poetry over rhythms should not be surprising to anyone familiar with the tradition of Afrikan artistic expression. In his book The Death of Rhythm and Blues, Nelson George notes that, “in retrospect, rap or something like it should have been predicted” (188). The incorporation of the human voice with musical instruments goes back to the Afrikan heritage of welding together the two elements in the form of storytellers, or griots.

Unfortunately, hip-hop has been grossly misunderstood. Many of the criticisms that hip-hop has endured have been uninformed observations of a mode of cultural expression that would-be critics are simply unfamiliar with. Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) attempted in his book Blues People to link jazz and blues creatively. For Baraka, such a link is vital to understanding both forms better, but particularly to understanding the emerging music of jazz, which, upon its emergence, was as misunderstood as hip-hop is today. Hip-hop is the cultural expression, the brand of today’s black youth. Hip-hop is not, however, an art form that has emerged by itself, but is rather a form that shares creative and ideological connections with the Black Arts Movement. These linkages are by no means limited to the areas I have examined in this paper; indeed, I intend my remarks to serve as a station from which critics can further contextualize and analyze the diverse and powerful cultural expressions of today’s Black youth, keeping in mind the efforts of those that have worked before us and the world within which we create.

1. The spelling of Afrika with a k is symbolic of the effort to decolonize the intellectual conception of Afrika and its people. In many Afrikan languages, there is no c, and the k is substituted.

2. In Black Noise, Rose examines the economic and political transformations that the South Bronx has undergone, including the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway. “Like many of his public works projects, [planner Robert] Moses’s Cross-Bronx Expressway supported the interests of the upper classes against the interests of the poor and intensified the development of the vast economic and social inequalities that characterize contemporary New York. The newly ‘relocated’ black and Hispanic residents in the South Bronx were left with few city resources, fragmented leadership, and limited political power” (31, 33). KRS-One’s “South Bronx” also credits this area with the development of hip hop.

3. Rose writes: “Calvin Butts, black minister of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, has gone on a mission to rid the black community of rap music because of its harmful effects on today’s youth. His was not a call for open social criticism of some rap lyrics; it was a call for censorship. His book-burning-style, cassette-crushing publicity stunt was a disgraceful display of just how misguided black moral and political leadership is, and it certainly did more toward severing the fragile links between today’s black working-class youths and black middle-class religious and political leadership and less toward discouraging consumption of ‘morally degraded’ music” (183-84).

4. Rhymes’s distinction between the terms hip-hop and rap is somewhat unusual, since the terms are often used interchangeably. The idea he has engaged, and I have also used, is that there is a multi-leveled hierarchy to hip-hop that allows for a large degree of diversity within the genre. The term hip-hop tends to evoke the periphery culture involved with the music (i.e., clothing, dance, graffiti art, etc.).

5. See George, ch. 6, where he discusses the role of crossover consciousness in the late ’70s that caused a transformation in the production of R and B music. This process parallels the current situation facing hip-hop.

6. De La Soul’s Black middle-class poet image and the reflective, intellectual Guru of Gang Starr offer examples of artists that, in my opinion, are largely overlooked in academic discussions of hip-hop.
hop because of their relatively conservative images. References in the criticism to these groups and to other artists who deal with rather tame, less controversial material are quite limited, whereas provocative acts such as 2Live Crew, N.W.A. (Niggaz with Attitudes), and Ice T. are frequently the focus of conversation. It is my contention that record companies' insensitivity to aesthetic considerations and capital concerns are instrumental factors in removing these and other core acts from the center of attention given to hip-hop. Furthermore, the lack of access to mainstream audiences by core groups results in groups such as 2Live Crew being taken as representative of the hip-hop ethos.

7. The Large Professor's verse on Organized Konfusion's 1994 single "Stress" reflects his mounting frustration with the recording industry. The Large Professor is a well-respected producer and lyricist whose problems with record companies are well-known.

8. De La Soul consists of three suburban Long Island natives with an intriguing history. They emerged as an "alternative" rap act whose image was largely based on their Black hippie/peace persona. Interestingly, the group shed this marketable image with their second effort, _De La Soul Is Dead_; the implications for the future of their image is made quite obvious by the title of the album. While the group has struggled to regain the sales exhibited by their first album, their commentary on hip-hop, along with their production of extremely provocative material, has kept them at the center of hip-hop's pulse (see Tate 137).

9. _Cuts_ are sound bites taken from diverse sources, ranging from other hip-hop records to speeches and movie dialogue. The cut often parallels the footnote in literature by recalling another rapper's quote or using the dialogue from a movie that deals with the same idea. Sometimes, however, the creative or ideological link between a cut and the concept of the entire song can be somewhat abstract and indirect.

10. See Gang Starr, "Mass Appeal" (from _Hard to Earn_), a song which is highly representative of this idea.

11. Smith discusses the reaction from other hip-hop artists to Hammer's widespread commercial success.

12. The term _M.C._ is short for Master of Ceremonies. On A Tribe Called Quest's latest release, _Midnight Marauders_, a "tour guide" notes that "some people who M.C. don't know what this term means"—an apparent reference to the Tribe's belief that many of the artists who enter the rap industry are unfamiliar with the history of the art form to the point that they are unqualified to hold the title of _M.C._

13. This is a personal observation noted through my associations with and research on hip-hop. In hip-hop culture there are artists that are noted for being proficient in the area of freestyle, including KRS-One, Melle Mel, Dres (from Black Sheep), and Treach (Naughty By Nature). The practice of freestyling is predominantly an East Coast phenomenon (with the notable West Coast exceptions of Pharcyde, Souls of Mischief, and Freestyle Fellowship, all fairly new artists), in which lyrics tend to be more rapid-fire and complex. Most West Coast rappers tend to have a more laid back approach to delivery and subject matter. These are not steadfast rules, but rather trends in the establishment of regional aesthetic values.

14. See Common Sense's "I used to love h.e.r." (from _Resurrection_), which represents a creative take on the progression of hip-hop aesthetics through the eyes of a young fan and evolving lyricist as he recalls the seminal days of hip-hop's development. The song succeeds in pointing out the artistic, economic, and social forces that have been instrumental in the evolution of contemporary hip-hop.

Works Cited


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**Discography**