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Abstract

This article examines the influence of hip hop culture.

KEYWORDS: Framing Values, African American

Keeping It Real: Hip-Hop Culture and the Framing of Values for Contemporary African-American Students

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Preface

A recent editorial in *Newsweek* magazine touched off a volatile and on-going discussion about values among my students at Spelman and Morehouse Colleges that has taken on a life out side the academic classroom. The discussions, debate and controversy center around hip-hop culture and its effects on the value beliefs of contemporary African-American youth.(1) The editorial entitled "My Culture at the Crossroads" (written by former MTV "Real World" participant, Kevin Powell, who is also the editor of: *Step Into the World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature*, Wiley Press, 2000), maintains that hip-hop music (once defined by Powell as "vibrant, fresh and def") has been co-opted by Hollywood, Madison Avenue and Wall Street. The result of this co-opting, Powell maintains, is an assault upon the traditional values of African-Americans. He argues that "the formula for a hit record is simple: fancy yourself a thug, pimp or gangster; rhyme about jewelry, clothing and alcohol; denigrate women in every conceivable way, and party and b.s. Ad nauseam."(2) While my students argue with Powell's definitions of and commentary about hip-hop culture, they all agree that it is even more difficult to determine the total impact of the music on the values of contemporary black youth. This essay will place the debate over hip-hop culture and its musical forms within a social context on current conditions in the black community that has inadvertently given rise to widespread acceptance of the more questionable and alarming lyrics and implied values located within hip-hop music and culture. Also, it will address the way some black writers and groups frame the debate over values within the context of hip-hop culture.

Competing Value Paradigms

The framing of values among African-Americans begs a historical context. Robert Hill and others have argued that the traditional value bases for African-Americans has centered on values such as solidarity, service and spirituality. Expanding upon this framework, Hill outlines the benefits to the African-American community of the principles of *Nguzo Saba* (derived from West African tribal traditions) to which many black Americans continue to look as a marker for their belief systems.(3) (Indeed, the annual Kwanza celebration held around the country during December is emblematic of the importance that black communities place on these values.) Hill also points to other works from black activists and scholars such as W.E.B.DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, Hylan Lewis and Andrew Billingsley who identified five attributes of black families that complement the principles of *Nguzo Saba*. Those include strong achievement orientation, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong kinship bonds, and strong religious orientation.(4) As a result, the traditional value base for African-Americans stands in stark contrast to the dominant contemporary lyrics and messages of hip-hop/rap music.

In further contrast to this articulated historical paradigm, Cornell West believes that the value base for contemporary black Americans has shifted toward (what he describes as) the "gettin over" paradigm dominated by themes of power, property and pleasure on display in the lyrics of most rap artists(5) Thus, for West and other cultural critics, hip-hop/rap music, as represented by their lyrics, is an ascending and competing value paradigm over and

against the traditional value base of the African-American community.

This analysis has caused great consternation, especially among black college students. Some argue that many people do not understand the real meaning behind the lyrics and that most of what the rappers are describing is "words to establish who can integrate the most disparate cultural references into a fantastic story, while never losing the beat." (6) Thus, according to this view, much of rap music is a fantasy adventure for kids whom, in the words of rapper Chuck D are "not in control of their reality, (thus) fantasy becomes a bigger influence." (7) So, to properly understand much of rap music one has to realize that it falls in the tradition of African American rhythmic music transformed by contemporary technology. The lyrics are creative hyperbole in the spirit of an oral tradition received from West Africa and the Caribbean. They are not meant to be taken literally without a proper historical and cultural understanding of these traditions. (8) Rap music and other components of hip-hop culture are both materialistic commentaries (noted by Powell) on being black and poor in America that integrate contemporary renditions of black musical and oral traditions in which the beat and the lyrical battle are central.

Another form of rap critique comes under the form of "keepin it real". In other words, many of the lyrics (especially those derived from West Coast rappers) are representative of a black underclass rooted in the material conditions of black urban poverty, drug-infestation and violence. As Kitwana so vividly describes: "it tells a story of a world that consists of crime, guns, drug-selling and drug-using, sexual exploitation, irresponsible parenthood, Black-on-Black homicide, women as inferiors and objects, gang life, 40 ounce drinking as routine, and extreme materialism." (9) "Keeping it real" thus describes the realities of black ghetto life in America.

For my purpose here I would like to narrow the battleground to one of lyrical choice. While the fantastical argument over the use of violent images in rap music as an art form has some legitimacy, (and few can deny that the social critique of West Coast rappers has merit), I believe that the choice of lyrics that compete with the traditional African-American value base must continue to be explored and debated among the future leaders of the black community--- or, our college students.

The Loss of the Prophetic Voice

This debate has already heated up among black academicians and cultural critics, especially over the lack of black leadership in critical areas of black folk's lives. In his penultimate book entitled: *What's Going On*, former newspaper journalist and cultural critic, Nathan McCall argues that "music always reflects the times" and that gangsta rap music gained ascendancy in popular black culture because black leaders failed to counter the consequences of the overly conservative and perniciously racist policies of the former Reagan administration. The result was the rise of lyrics by West Coast rappers that described the rawness of life in urban ghettos. (10)

Echoing McCall is Stephen Carter's similar critique in *God's Name in Vain* (on the wrongs and rights of religion in politics); Carter bemoans the loss of the prophetic voice in America, but especially among the leadership in the black church. He argues:

"the black church (the historically prophetic voice of the black community) dares not articulate the messages that most challenge the dominant culture, for fear of losing its place; and those messages it does press, at least in public, tend to resemble press releases from the liberal wing of the (Democratic) party." (11)

Cornell West presents an even harsher critique of the crisis in black leadership:

"...most present day black political leaders appear too hungry for status to be angry, too eager for acceptance to be bold, too self-invested in advancement to be defiant. And when they do drop their masks and try to get mad (usually in the presence of black audiences), their bold rhetoric is more performance than personal, more play-acting than heartfelt..."(12)

Among many black cultural critics, the loss of the moral prophetic voice is starker when contrasted to past black leaders lives such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, W.E.B.DuBois, Franklin Frazier, Benjamin Mays, Anna Cooper and a host of others who led selfless lives of non-material devotion for the sake of the advancement of the black community. And, it is generally accepted among many black scholars that no one contemporary African-American leader has successfully picked up the mantle of prophetic leadership left by the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.(13)

Concomitantly, it is generally viewed among black social scientists that the long-term consequences of Reaganomics combined with the co-opting of rap music by music label owners and their sponsors has directly led to the current "getting paid" moniker made popular by black entertainers.(14) Patillo-McCoy, in her research on the black middle class, suggests, "black youth are conspicuous consumers. They watch more television and view it more favorably and realistic and they respond more positively to marketing stimuli, than their white peers."(15) As a result, in Patillo-McCoy's terms, those youth who begin the marketing process "thrilled" may end up "consumed."

The Loss of the Supportive Triangulation of School, Neighborhood and Church

Beyond rampant consumerism and the lack of a prophetic voice in the black community, the erosion of the triangular supportive base of public schools, neighborhood and church, in many educators' minds, has had the most severe negative impact on black family life and youth development.

Since the eras of school desegregation (1950's) and cross-district busing (1960's-70's), many black families have had to deal with distant and non-responsive public school systems across the United States. The typical formula for integrating public schools in the fifties was to close many popular and successful all-black schools and transfer black students (and their black teachers) to predominately white schools on the "other" side of town. By the era of the sixties and seventies, school lines were drawn by former coaches (turned into school superintendents) who found a winning athletic formula for their high schools: Bus black students from the poorest economic sector in town (whose black male population spent an inordinate amount of practice time in sports such as basketball) to predominately affluent white schools in a white neighborhood (whose white male population excelled in individual sports such as tennis and swimming) and you have an immediate "all-state" athletic program. The problem with this "winning" athletic equation was the fact that it had "losing" academic results for most black students. Most of these schools utilized an academic tracking system that separated black students from white students based on previous standardized test scores.(16) As a result, you had a *de facto* segregated academic and social environment masquerading, as it were, as an integrated school. The white-black academic gap never improved and social relations between the two predominate groups continued to be strained due to the lack of genuine social, academic and neighborhood integration.

While few would argue that the segregated all-black schools in the past were not *physically* inferior, there is recent evidence to suggest that some of these all-black schools were actually *academically* and *socially* superior to their all-white counterparts. Vanessa Siddle

Walker's recent research (which became an award-winning book entitled: *Their Highest Potential: An African American Community School In the Segregated South*) suggests: "...although black schools were indeed commonly lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence suggests that the environment of the segregated school had affective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards. Most notably, in one of the earliest accounting by Thomas Sowell, those schools are remembered as having atmospheres where "support, encouragement, and rigid standards" combined to enhance student's self-worth and increase their aspirations to achieve."(17)

The long-term consequence of forced integration to the black community was the loss of institutional identity [they] once felt towards public schooling. With their buildings closed (and their black institutional names removed), their teacher's transferred (along with their children); black families had no control over their previously local school systems. As a result, the first pillar of the historic triangular base of school, church and neighborhood cracked.

The losses of the nurturing neighborhood as a locus for black communal support and sustenance began to slowly deteriorate with the rise of public housing, drug trading, high unemployment and gang warfare. Many black families remembered the days when folk in the neighborhood looked out for one another and related to each other as kin. As neighborhoods were torn apart—physically and socially, the "hood" no longer resembled the social base that black parents could once depend on to assist them in raising their children in a safe and supportive environment. Added to this social dilemma is the increasing number of black families that have experienced poverty, divorce, separation, out of wedlock births, school delinquency, spousal abuse, child abuse, alcoholism, inadequate health care, and the rise of AIDS and suicide. And, of course, the most current disturbing trend is that thirty percent of all black males have been or are on probation, arrested, awaiting trial or imprisoned in America.(18) Thus, the second pillar of the triangulation---a nurturing neighborhood—belongs largely to a bygone era of black history.

Finally, the institution where so many black people have found faith, hope and charity has a few cracks of its own. The black church in many urban areas is a victim of its own success. Many "successful" black churches have gone the way of the mega-church model in America. Once content to be a neighborhood pillar, many black urban churches have moved out of the "hood" in search of greener pastures—(both literally and materially *green*). (19) These churches maintain that their ministries are larger than any one neighborhood and that their constituencies form a much wider geographical base. These arguments make sense on one demographic level. However, any time an institutional pillar of the neighborhood leaves, another stable one needs to take its place in order to preserve the sustaining partnership in black neighborhoods. Thus, you have many urban neighborhoods, like public schools, that have no churches in walking distance of their homes. (One feels truly old when they can recall "back in the day" when their school and church was within a mile of their homes. These memories of neighborhood schools and churches are becoming a thing of the past.) Thus, the loss of institutional faith in the traditional support networks of the black community that have stood as foundations for their traditional value base have a lot to do with the ascendancy of the "getting over" paradigm among African American youth.

The Values Framed

As we examine the major groups most affected by hip-hop culture and its music, we find a wide array of contrasting value bases. The five major groups and the values bases briefly characterized below are: 1) corporate labels and sponsors (i.e. Hollywood, Wall Street and Madison Avenue); 2) rap artists; 3) parents; 4) college students; 5) pre/adolescent youth.

The first group is comprised of mainly white upper-class men who control the production, labeling, marketing and profits of most of rap music. The second group is comprised of mostly black men who come from low-income backgrounds who are called rap artists.(20) The third groups are black parents and guardians. The fourth group is what I have preferred to label as, the future generation of black leaders, or, our college students. The last group is the one least researched and most affected by hip-hop culture/music: our pre-adolescent and adolescent black youth.

Corporate Sponsors ("*It's About Business*")

The values of corporate sponsors of most rap music labels are easily identified and agreed upon by most people. Their values center on the "bottom line" or profit. When asked why they produce rap artists, whose lyrics are unconscionably offensive and/or blatantly violent or destructive, they usually answer: It is what "they" want—as if "they" is some disembodied entity. Or, they reply: "If it did not sell, we would not produce it." Clearly, their value base is easy to understand. What has been almost breath taking is the cavalier and brazen manner in which they describe the profit motive, as if, they—the sponsors themselves-- are invisible to the whole process of value clarification in today's society. While they would prefer to be largely behind the scenes, except at awards shows, they are more than willing to admit: "It's about the money". In this case, rap artists know very clearly whom they are dealing with and the "rules of the game". Their attempt to stay clear of the debate on the morality of rap artist's productions is disingenuous at best. Chuck D. described it well in a recent interview:

The low road is easier to walk upon as a recording artist. A lot of rappers wouldn't get the time of day from recording producers if they weren't doing negative rap...There's a system that benefits from this...White corporations out there make a lot of money from rap; then they go off to their well-established communities, and black people are the casualties of the day."(21)

Rap Artists ("*I'm Getting Paid*")

It must be stated that the negative and self-destructive lyrics of hip-hop/rap music were not the norm at the breakout period of hip-hop culture. The emergence of early rappers such as Sugar Hill Gang, Grandmaster Flash, MC Hammer, Queen Latifah and others were a throw back to the days when black men recited the comical exploits of characters such as the Signifying Monkey, Shine and Dolomite. It was playful, fresh and "def".(22)

As was already noted, the growing economic and social disparity between class status and race was underlined during the Reagan era. As a result, the conditions of urban life in America were underscored with a *Godfatheresque* backdrop and fantasy combined with real-life violence. Unfortunately, some rap artists played out their video "fantasies" with deadly accuracy in the streets like Tupak Shkur, Biggie Smalls, Snoop Doggy Dog and a host of others. Equally unfortunate was that this "real life" display of deadly violence further legitimized (and valorized) gangsta rappers who were willing to "keep it real" to their impressionable audiences.

Again, cultural critic Nathan McCall describes the value base of many gangsta rap artists with his description of the late Biggie Smalls last video:

"...We see Biggie lying in bed conducting business on a cellular phone while two naked women, his hos, fawn on him. The message in this and similar videos is clear: You can lie in bed, operate your illicit business enterprises, and make millions—all by being a player, a slick gangster."(23)

He goes on to characterize the lame defense of many gangsta rappers (in the same vein as gun producers and the National Rifle Association):

"The music doesn't cause the violence. Rap is only words." Put another way, as another rapper stated (ala Charles Barkley): "I am not a role model. I am not paid to be a role model. I make music period. Parents should be role models. Just because I can rap doesn't mean I should raise your kids."(24)

As theologian Harvey Cox once wrote: "Values are rooted in narrative". To escape the responsibility of your words is like trying to escape from a burning building with a flammable jacket: It does not make sense within the context of clarifying one's values.

To believe that these artists are only the "messengers" of violence on the streets and not in any way culpable for their lyrics is to believe that no person's words have consequences. Words have started wars.

Contemporary Parents ("I don't want to be a hypocrite")

It is much more difficult to assess this group's values, especially towards rap music, and their perception of its impact upon their children. There are a couple of adages heard time and again, however. The baby-boom parents are the ones whom, in one comedienne's line, "the sixties were good to". For many black parents of this generation, the cultural defining moments of the sixties and seventies was one of drug and sexual experimentation, rebellion against racist authority, protest against the Vietnam War (whose U.S. government drafted an inordinate number of black men overseas to fight), racial explosion as seen in the Detroit and Watts riots coupled with the rise of the Black Power movement. Also, there was a newly found freedom in musical expression and lyrics that were no longer "coded". While the songs of the sixties and seventies never approached the rawness of rap music (coupled with the absence of scintillating music videos), contemporary parents look back with a certain nostalgia about rebelliously listening to Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing", Roberta Flack's "Reverend Lee", Red Foxx's "boom-boom" club tapes, and viewing more sexually explicit films with black actors like Jim Brown in tight pants and Pam Greer in mini-skirts. As a result of their wider exposure to a more permissive era, they tend to give their children a wider discretionary choice of music and entertainment than their parents allowed. One parent summed up the attitude: "How can I tell my children to stop listening to rap music when some of my forms of entertainment at their age were just as provocative?"

Another attitude that I believe is emblematic of many parents attitudes towards their children's choice of entertainment is summed up by a recent conversation I had with one mother concerning her son's "extra curricular" activities outside their home. After a long discussion on this topic she surmised: "There are some things I don't need to hear." This quote is telling: It implied that the child may be engaged in activities that are not in line with their family's value base. However, she avoided a confrontation with her son for fear of either alienating him or causing a much deeper conflict over values that she is not prepared to discuss honestly and openly. This cavalier attitude also carries into children's personal space, or, their bedroom. While most reasonable parents agree that their children need some personal space, they do not need to acquire personal "apartments" with separate locks and entrances during their younger adolescent years. In short, parents are reluctant to enter discussions of values because of the inconsistencies of there past.

Finally, some parents detest rap music so much that they do not even listen to the lyrics. They find the beat unbearably repetitive and they cannot understand the words very well either. As a result, they do not take the time to either read the lyrics on the CD's or ask someone for assistance in finding what they are really "saying". In another recent conversation with one of my students, we discovered that we were both fans of Toni

Braxton. I told her, however, that I could not understand all her lyrics because her voice sounded like she was singing under water during certain songs. She asked me to give her an example of one those songs and after I hummed the tune in my head, I replied: "You're Making Me High". She laughed: "It's because she (Toni Braxton) heard her preacher-daddy's voice in her head while in the studio saying: 'Girl, have you lost your mind' and she quickly started mumbling some mess." (This is akin to our children's changing television channels when we walk into their room unannounced!)

College Students ("I only hear the beat")

Because black college students are the cohorts that I teach and interact with most often, I am concerned about how they translate and process the values they hear in hip-hop/rap music and culture. I am especially concerned about their value base because I am a member of a college community that does take the education of a future generation of black leaders very seriously. Even though we have a group of students who are extraordinarily committed to the advancement of black communities, their attitudes run the gamut of human thought on the issue of hip-hop culture.

When confronted with some of the more self-destructive lyrics of rap music, some of my students maintain that they don't really hear the lyrics. They (the lyrics) are not that important anyway and (it) are a form of entertainment to cruise to while on their way to the "booty club". We need to "chill" and not take these forms of rap entertainment too literally or seriously. Some will vigorously maintain that even after they understand the lyrics, their value base is not influenced by their messages.

The other dilemma, especially for many black men, is that they do not want to distance themselves too far from hip-hop culture. Indeed, make one field trip to the Atlanta University Center and one will find some of our collegiate men dressed as "thugs" and "wanna be "gangstas". When confronted with this fashion "statement", they relate that they have to go back home during holidays and summer breaks and (they) do not want their friends in the "hood" to think that they are "too good" for them. This dilemma reminded me of Carter Woodson's characterization of the "double-bind" dilemma of black educated men in the early twentieth century: Their largest fear was non-acceptance by both races once they became formally educated.(25)

Others relate that the music is a legitimate form of free expression guaranteed by the First Amendment and that the lyrics are not the issue: The real issue is censorship (and blacks have had to face this demon more than they care to historically-count.) Therefore, rap music needs to be protected and if their values are endangering the black community, then, the community will handle "their business".

Finally, I have some students who admit to me that they openly listen to and enjoy "questionable" (or down right "nasty") rap music even though the lyrics conflict with their value base. They maintain that once they enter the "real world" (after graduation), they will eliminate forms of behavior and entertainment that is not consistent with the value based handed down to them by their parents or the moral framework they reconstructed during their college years. But, until then, they do not want to be confronted with this value contradiction: They just want to have a good time and de-stress from their college workload.

Youth ("What does that mean—again?")

In the absence of long-term research, there have been few studies that have measured the

affects of music such as gangsta rap on the values of young adolescents. Some professionals like Dr. William Byrd, a black clinical psychologist has observed: "When you bombard someone with that (gangsta rap) messages, it causes conflict, even within those young people who may have been taught other values. With these rap messages, not only are they being bombarded with radio, they also get videos. So, it's what you hear and what you see. It confirms that these are acceptable values in a subculture. Children reason that if society as whole doesn't accept it, then they wouldn't put it on the air."(26)

Another obvious problem is one of defining and translating lyrics to young or pre-adolescents: Who translates the lyrics to these children? In other words, who tells them what the lyrics mean? Usually the answer lies in the same genre as discussions about sex: It is learned in the streets by some "older" adolescent who fills in the gap with some sensational and inaccurate information. And, even if they give them a correct clinical definition of a word, they rarely place it in a context that offers the young child a way to place it in a moral lexicon consistent with their parent's values. Their other medium for understanding the lyrics is through music videos that literally leave nothing to imagine or define: They do it all for impressionable youth.

Conclusion

As Kevin Powell stated in his editorial, the debate over values in the black community over hip-hop culture is at a critical crossroads. Nathan McCall stated it in much more expedient terms:

" When I think about the insanity of gangsta rap and consider its powerful influence on our young, I'm haunted by the feeling that for African Americans, time is running out. When this party is over years from now, when we look back on these times, we're going to have to answer for why we didn't rescue our children for themselves..."(27)

Rapper Chuck D. agrees:

" We don't have control of our community because we don't have the courage to confront the young people. You have a lot of black adults who are straight-out afraid of young people, so young people feel they've got more power than the adults...We really need black adults in the community to do something rather than stand back and be spectators..."(28)

I believe it is equally clear that teachers have a role to play in this debate.(29) One of the most effective pedagogical methods remains Socratic dialogue. By asking students relevant and probing questions about the meaning of words, clarifying their value base and challenging their thinking when it is apparently either illogical or fuzzy, we assist their parents (and others who care for them) in challenging young people about principled decisions and encouraging them to develop a moral framework consistent with the values they espouse. While we cannot control nor dictate the values they inherit, we do have a professional responsibility to ask them to ground their values in a moral framework that morally and spiritually advances their families and communities.

Footnotes:

1. The definition of hip-hop culture is as elusive as an inclusive definition for feminism: It does not exist. For my purposes here, I define hip-hop culture as a cultural movement derived from the Caribbean and West African oral and musical traditions and copied in America by mostly African-American rappers as a unique and appealing form of musical expression. However, cultural critics have recently argued that it has been co-opted by Wall Street, Fifth Avenue and Hollywood and is now marked as "materialistic, hedonistic,

misogynistic, shallow and violent..." (especially in the mediums of film and music.) Kevin Powell. "My Culture at the Crossroads". *Newsweek*, December Editorial, 2000. A notable exception to this analysis are the views of Kevin Chappell, *Ebony* magazine writer and rap apologist: "For the first time in its 25 year history, rap music participants seems to be somewhat content---and the world seems content with it. The music is being celebrated in museums, studied at universities, honored at award shows, listened to in every suburb in America..." Kevin Chappell. "The CEO\$ of Hip-Hop and the Billion Dollar Rap Jackpot", *Ebony*, January, 2001, pp. 116-122.

2. Kevin Powell. "My Culture at the Crossroads". *Newsweek*, December Editorial, 2000.

3. Robert Hill. *The Strengths of African-American Families: Twenty-Five Years Later*. University Press of America, 1999. Hill outlines the principles of *Nguzo Saba* as: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

4. W.E.B. DuBois. *The Negro American Family*, The MIT Press, 1909. E.Franklin Frazier. *The Free Negro Family*, Arno Press, 1932. Hylan Lewis. "Culture, Class and Family Life Among Low-Income Urban Negroes." Pp. 149-72 in *Employment, Race and Poverty*, ed. Arthur Ross and Herbert Hill, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967. Andrew Billingsley. *Black Families in White America*. Prentice-Hall, 1968.

5. Cornell West. *Race Matters*. Vintage Press, 1994. The "getting over" paradigm is suggestive of a more Euro-centric value based centered on materialism, individualism and hyper-competition based on merit and privilege.

6. Mary Patillo-McCoy. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*. University of Chicago, 1999. P. 121.

7. Nathan McCall. *What's Goin On: Personal Essays*. Random House, 1997, p. 48.

8. For a more comprehensive understanding of this interpretation see: Tricia Rose. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture In Contemporary America*, Wesleyan University Press, 1994. And, David Toop. *The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip-Hop*. Pluto Press, 1984.

9. Bakari Kitwana. *The Rap on Gangsta Rap*. Third World Press, 1994. Pp. 50-51.

10. McCall states: "white folks constantly give rappers lots of ammo to support their case. The get-tough anti-crime and prison movement—which produced the wholesale jailing of so many young black men---provides the beaucoup, white villains for rappers to point fingers at. The conservative leaders on Capitol Hill, who spearheaded this movement, stand as convincing proof that white conspiracies do, in fact, continue to exist." Nathan McCall. *What's Going On: Personal Essays*. Vintage Press, 1994, p.55.

11. Stephen Carter. *God's Name in Vain: The Wrongs and Right of Religion in Politics*.

Perseus Books, 2000. p. 36.

12. Cornell West. *Race Matters*. Vintage Press, 1994. p. 58.

13. Michael Eric Dyson. *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

14. "Getting paid" is a ubiquitous term used by numerous entertainers who espouse a highly materialistic motive for achieving any objective in life.

15. Patillo-McCoy, p. 146. See also, George Moschis. *Consumer Socialization: A Life-Cycle Perspective*. Lexington Books, 1987.

16. For a more comprehensive understanding of the pernicious use of tracking used by public school systems read: Jeannie Oakes. *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*. Yale University Press, 1985. The typical tracking pattern occurred in the arts and sciences courses. In these classes, there were usually three academic tracks offered: a) **vocational**—students who would either drop out at sixteen in order find early employment or were later placed in co-op programs where they were able to skip half of their senior year due to a vocational internship; b) **terminal diplomas**---students who were intent on obtaining a high school diploma and then enter the work force or vocational institutions; c) **college bound**—those academically "gifted" students who would obtain their diploma and go on to college.

17. Vanessa Siddle Walker. *Their Highest Potential: An African American Community School In the Segregated South*, UNC Press, 1996. p. 3. See also: Thomas Sowell. "Black Excellence: The Case of Dunbar High School," *Public Interest* 35, Spring 1974, 1-21.

18. Hill, p. 15, Patillo-McCoy, p. 59.

19. Public Broadcasting Network sponsored a television series on this growing church phenomenon in the nineties entitled: "Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory" based on church historian and Barnard College Professor Randall Balmer's book of the same name. (See: Randall Balmer. *Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory*. Oxford Press, 1989.) In brief, the mega-church model was conceived at Willow Creek Church in suburban Chicago in the late seventies where a few ex-business men (headed by Pastor William Hybels) surveyed (mostly white) people in the suburbs in order to ascertain what they needed/wanted in a church. The result is a mega-church built around the needs and interests of mostly middle-upper class white people who enjoy attending a church that meets their social, economic, spiritual and entertainment interests. The physical plant resembles a shopping mall with food courts, gyms, academic classes, libraries, studios and a huge auditorium that can easily accommodate modern church concerts and contemporary Christian bands. For an example of the way that one black church copied this plan see Creflo Dollar's 35,000 members "World Changers" interdenominational church in Atlanta. Rodney Kreider. "Rezoning Denied For Large Church," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 15, 2000, Section IA.

20. Although the presence of female rappers is on the rise, (especially the popularity of such female groups as *Destiny's Child*, *Salt and Pepa* and *En Vogue*), the rap market continues to be dominated by black men. Most cultural critics agree that black men have been most negatively affected by the conditions of postindustrial America and by years of systemic racism and, thus, can testify of these conditions from an authentic voice. See: Todd Boyd. *Am I Black Enough For You? Popular Culture From The Hood and Beyond*. Indiana University Press, 1997.

21. McCall, p. 61.

22. For a more comprehensive understanding of this tradition see: Henry Louis Gates. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Oxford Press, 1990.

23. Op.cit. P. 59.

24. Boyd, p. 33.

25. Carter Woodson. *The Miseducation of the Negro*. AMS Press, 1933.

26. McCall, p. 60.

27. Op.cit. P. 73.

28. Op.cit. pp. 74-75.

29. See: George Marsden's recent essay in *The Hedgehog Review*, January, 2001, "The Incoherent University". Briefly, Marsden, a Notre Dame historian, suggests that universities are the place where arguments about the presence, or absence, of moral coherency should take place. See also: George Marsden. *The Soul of the University*. Oxford University Press, 1994.