

Hip Hop's Judgement Day

Written by Min. Paul Scott ID4624
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For everything there is a season; a Day of Reckoning; a Judgement Day. Now it's Hip Hop's turn.

On March 15th in Harlem NY, some of the greatest Pan-African thinkers will gather to put to rest once and for all, the matter of, "Is Hip Hop Good for Black Folks?"

While the issue of the positive and negative nature of Hip Hop has been discussed for over 20 years, rarely has this topic been entertained from an Afrocentric point of view. Therefore, most Hip Hop discussions have never ventured far beyond the topics of "dirt words" and "young men pulling their pants up."

Consequently, the view of Hip Hop through an Afrocentric prism has been clouded by the European concept of morality and its many contradictions.

While some may blame the failure to tackle this issue on black youth, in actuality, the reason for this breakdown in communication is multifaceted.

First, while writers such as WEB Dubois wrote extensively about the duality of race and the idea of being both African and American, simultaneously, they never had to deal with members of a "Hip Hop Generation," who have to struggle with the concepts of being "Hip Hop," African and American even when these concepts are diametrically opposed to each other.

Secondly, the elders of the community greatly underestimated the cultural impact that Hip Hop would have on the world during the early days of its conception. What many people considered noise or just a temporary fad in black music in the early 80's, within a decade had morphed into a cultural juggernaut that began to eclipse both the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. What was thought to be a passing phase had now begun to shape the perception of African people, globally and had moved from the arena of entertainment to become a major social, economic and political force.

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Thirdly, although many in the black community misjudged the longevity of the pseudo-culture, corporate entities latched on to the Hip Hop movement and turned what began as two turntables and a microphone into a multi-national billion dollar business. While during the early 80's there was a possibility to appeal to the consciousness of the early practitioners of the art form, by the mid 90's the seductive lure of Capitalism had made the success of such appeals improbable.

Perhaps most troubling is the fact that the Pan African community has not held a plebiscite to construct an official position to define Hip Hop from a Pan Africanist point of view. Without a solid consensus, there was no scale available to weigh in the balance the deeds of Hip Hop artists versus the key attributes of African culture/spirituality. It was allowed to become all things to all people and since the majority of those financially supporting the art form were white middle class Americans, Hip Hop began to reflect either their world view or their warped perceptions of what it meant to be black in America.

In 2009, the black community finds itself at a crossroad. Where we go from here culturally, economically and spiritually depends on the outcomes of events like the Great Harlem debates.

On March 15th, we raise the issue, "Ss Hip Hop good or bad for black people?"

The answer we give will determine the destiny of a generation.

(The Great Debate 4 "Is Hip Hop Good for Black folks" is sponsored by CEMOTAP and will be held at 3PM March 15th at Salem United Methodist Church in Harlem, NY. For more information contact (347) 531-8936

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