

Hip hop



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Hip Hop Has a culture lost its authenticity when it has been commercialized? As Cook so astutely puts in his chapter on hip hop, one of the main tensions inherent in this musical form is the way it has dealt with success. Hip hop began as a form of resistance and rebellion. It sneered at authority, especially the police, and celebrated a life of crime. It romanticized gangsterism, murder and mayhem. The rapper could only depend on himself and his crew, and only made money by robbery, not by entertaining people or working at a day job. These men were the rebels of the day. But as hip hop has become more popular, its stars have become brands and multimillionaires too. They do not commit crimes because it would reduce their brand value. Instead, like Michael Corleone, they try to become legitimate businessmen. In the process, they sell their music as entertainment. They become the fat cats and authority figures that they once railed against. In early times they would talk about how hard their lives were and how impoverishing the ghetto was—but now they told such stories from their Manhattan penthouses. This tension causes a real problem for hip hop. The answer to the above question must be “no.” With commercialization, hip hop has lost much of its authenticity. It is no longer a product of the street, but is instead a product of the businesses and record people who sell it at Walmart. Record labels can try to fabricate and market street cred, but that does not make it authentic (Watkins, 2). Authentic hip hop still exists in clubs and among the undiscovered, but it has lost something over the years. It is no longer as real as it once was. What does the transformation of the “hood” from an inner city location to a consciousness allow artists like Jay-Z to do? Through his music, Jay-Z is capable of transforming a physical location or state of poverty into

something much more inspiring. He talks about the streets and the things he learned there and how they can apply to a more sophisticated world. More than anything though he embodies a kind of black pedagogy: a way of learning on the street that can be adapted to many avenues of life. Jay-Z grew up as a drug dealer in New York where he learned to be a man, learned to negotiate and handle himself. Those entrepreneurial skills, seen by some as rudimentary and uncouth, in fact translated well to the business world. Jay-Z celebrates his versatility and his being in the hood throughout his music. It is a kind of consciousness that doubles for profound personal experience. His knowledge of the streets and his self-discovery there represent to him a kind of empowerment (Cook, 187). His celebration of the hood and of the men and women who grow up there is a powerful antidote to some of the negative attention the hood traditionally receives. This message, sometimes delivered with swagger, resounds through Jay-Z's music. The hood has evolved from a place of entrenched poverty to a proving ground or launching pad for something bigger and better. It became a place where the dreams of a whole generation were played out to the music from a beat-box (Watkins, 4). Work consulted Cook, Gil. "The Culture Industry." In Julius Bailey, ed. *Jay-Z: Essays on Hip Hop's Philosopher King*. MacFarland, 2011. Watkins, S. Craig. *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.