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The Critique of the Black Nation

M. K. Asante Jr. the author of *It’s Bigger Than Hip Hop The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation,* has a subtle approach to hip-hop and black culture. His title is an eye catcher but as far as it being effective in the book it falls short. He feels as if he can write about this touchy topic because he is a part of this very generation that he speaks of. He has some credentials to write about what he has researched, because he is interviewing and talking about how his peers are represented in this arguement. He could have taken a different approach to the ways he introduces and tackles specific topics that speak to the hip-hop nation and black culture. He tackles the issues of real vs. reel, who owns hip-hop (old white men), and conquering the division between the generations, why we cannot come together as one musical nation. His interviews and stories connect to the stereotypical status that black people are labeled through hip hop. These situations continue to fester causing it to be bigger than hip-hop; making it a cultural issue. Asante’s book is a critique of how the black nation is seen, not heard.

Identity is what defines self. Your identity is who you are on the outside as well as the inside. When you hide behind this fake identity who are you fooling? You are fooling yourself and you are letting down the people that really do know the real you. In chapter two of *It’s Bigger Than Hip Hop,* Asante talks about keeping it real vs. reel. I think he expresses this issue very well. He tells of this story about brothers who use names to associate their different identities. At home they are known and answer to the names that their mother has given them. In the streets they feel they have to answer to the names that make their image tough. It’s a false identity that they answer to. “Uzi, you’s a real-ass nigga, man” (15). In the story the older brother goes by Uzi on the streets and his brother Malo says that he knows for a fact that his mother would disapprove of the name. Keeping up this identity on the streets is a performance; no one lives the way they say or portray themselves. The stereotypes of the black culture still exist and we allow it because we praise not being ourselves and having these alter egos. It is like not being ourselves is good enough these days. Being somebody else is the right image to have. This is wrong being you at all time is what should be promoted and praised. Asante does a good job in this chapter showing how to and how not to keep it real with yourself and others. The next question would be is that who keeps it real in the hip-hop business?

Does hip hop have an owner? Is it the people who listen to it or the people that manufacture and sell it? According to Asante’s finding old white men that own the record companies own hip hop music. They control what we as consumers listen to. It is like an artist is a sell out to their own music. They can only record what is approved and able to sale through mainstream. I personally like the analogy that Asante uses stating that “the hip hop community equals the streets, the hip hop industry equals Wall Street, and the hip hop community does not equal the hip hop industry.” (pg. 104) I agree in the corporate world of hip hop black people have no input of the business. The old white man that is the CEO of the record company owns hip-hop music. He decides what is produced and how it is produced. It is a business that makes money off of black culture and how it is expressed. In this chapter I like how Asante uses Mos Def’s song “The Rape Over” to express his point. This is where you really see where hip hop connects to what he is talking about. This is one of the chapters where he uses the music to explain his point and it works where it is. If music is a business especially hip-hop music being a cash cow then why aren’t the white men who control the business trying to bridge the gap between old hip-hop and new hip-hop? There would be a lot more money made off of the two generations.

Music is supposed to be timeless throughout the generations but it is yet divided amongst its listeners. Music progresses and changes over time; sadly the people do not. From one generation to another; music has always been part of the argument, especially black music. In the chapter “Conquering the Division,” Asante tells of the ongoing argument between Tupac Shakur and C. Delores Tucker, about “gangster rap,” he feels that she is not supporting the black man and that her rallies were bringing them down instead of building them up. “Tucker was a staunch believer that this subgenre of rap was a form of genocide and was destroying the minds of Black children, exploiting women, and glorifying gang and criminal culture.” (pg. 227) This is true in certain elements, gangsta rap does not lift up how a black child should grow up and be. It is not uplifting but it is not suppose to be, gangster rap shows what it is like to live in west coast black society. The children that listen to it are living that life already or headed down that path. There have been artist of the pre-hip-hop generation and of the post-hip-hop generation that have rap artist that send positive messages and political messages. Not all of the post-generation music is about sex, cars, and money. In order for pre-hip-hop to understand our generation and our music they have to wait until it is finished evolving. The post-generation is just taking old music and making it new with their style and twist to it. Black music evolves as the black culture evolves.

Asante’s book is a guide through the world of hip-hop. His book is very effective but some chapters are left out or should not be included in this guide. Asante should have had a chapter dedicated to the pre-generation to the post generation. In order to understand one generation you have to evaluate the previous one. Older generations say that we do not understand their music and in addition they do not understand this generation. For Asante to analyze music and the impact it has on society he should have included the music that inspired our music and our cultural stereotypes. He does include a hip-hop timeline that shows events in history that had an impact or happened because of the music. The timeline is from 1965-1991 so it is not the post-generation timeline, in all actuality that would be the timeline of the pre-generation of hip-hop. Where he placed this chapter of timelines does not fit well either. He placed this timeline between “It’s Bigger Than Hip Hop” and “Old White Men (or, Who Owns Hip Hop).” These three chapters do not flow together. He explains why the issues are bigger than hip hop but then he writes of events that happened in hip hop that contributed to some of black people’s issues.

Another chapter that does not fit in this book is the chapter entitled “Universal Language.” It talks about the struggle that our brown brothers and sisters had to go through and how we united to help the cause. It was a good chapter to show how blacks and Hispanics are treated and how they come together to overcome it. The universal language is struggle. I felt as though this history lesson should have been on the black struggle instead of a Hispanic struggle but it was still a good example of what it means to truly struggle in a society that does not want you there. What it is like to be the minority all the time. This whole book shows our cultural struggle as black people. It also shows how we use our music as an outlet from the world we live in. It may cause the drama but sometimes the music heals the dramatized situations we are forced to deal with.

Asante had some good topics to discuss and how they could connect to the music. I think that most of his points are not well read. They are implied so therefore his audience is people of higher learning. People that can comprehend and read between the lines because he does not come right out and say what he means on specific topics. His titles insinuate what is to be explained in the chapters. If you can understand what his titles of the chapters mean then you can understand where he is coming from in the chapter when he explains it and how it is bigger than the hip-hop music itself.

Hip-Hop is forever part of this nation. Whether it is good or bad, happy or sad, it is here to stay. The critique of black music is in all actuality is the critique of black culture, its history, and its people. Asante tried to explain to generations what hip-hop is and isn’t doing for our black people. He did a good job of portraying what the music is doing to our youth but he is the youth and his portrayal of our post-hip-hop generation is incomplete but it has not yet finish developing. His argument is yet one-sided because he is showing the negative stereotypes of black culture and the way he portrays it is one-sided and bias. He should have interviewed people from all walks of life in the black culture to explain how the hip-hop music really affects the people that listen to it. Not everyone is from the ghetto and not everyone goes through the drama of living a hood life. Yet they still listen to the music and it still affects them in some way or another. Most of his chapters spoke to being black in the ghetto. I am black and I listen to hip hop music. I am a part of the post-hip-hop generation. I in no way let the music influence me and my decisions however. He had some great point of views, testimonies, and creative antidotes but it was just not for everyone in his audience that it should have pertained to. I would have liked to have seen a broader view of work, he had great interviews and stories to tell but he did not tell everyone’s story. I do agree his arguments in this book are way bigger than hip-hop the music; not hip-hop the culture.

This is still a great read for a first year student. It would help them identify themselves in their culture and walk of life. This book is about identity and where you as a person of color belong in this post-hip-hop generation. It could be very helpful and it is a good read for those who need an understanding of the African-American struggle and the music that inspires it.

Work Cited

Asante, Jr, M. K. *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2008. Print.