

## Black Feminists and Hard-Core Rap Music

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

*I remember seeing a magic act when I was little in which the magician would repeat over and over: "The closer you get, the less you can see." And oddly enough, it was true. The people in the front row couldn't see through the deception; they were so close, yet they were looking for the wrong thing while the trick was being pulled right before their eye. – Veronica Chambers, *Mama's Girl*, pp. 75-76, quoted in *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*, by Gwendolyn D. Pough.*

Hard-Core rap is one of the most popular genres of music in the world. What is of particular interest to me in this piece is the genre's *misogyny*. However, I must first point out that unlike hip-hop culture and rap music per se, hard-core rap was not created with and for girls and women. It was created by angry, violent, woman-hating young males. Though young Black females are among its most ardent fans, hatred of women in the genre is par for the course.

*This* is what makes hard-core rap unique. Indeed, hard-core rap music practically *begs* to be demonized. In no other genre of music – R&B, jazz, disco, funk, rock and roll, classical, country, electronica, reggae, world music, new wave, punk, heavy metal, house, polka, you name it – is misogyny par for the course. (Even rap music per se is not inherently and uncompromisingly misogynistic.) One can certainly name some songs from other genres that have sexist messages and sexist performers. However, there is nothing inherently misogynistic about those other genres.

It is therefore not true that people are picking on "rap." The misogyny in hard-core rap goes far beyond economics. People complain that rap music provides an alternative for poor Black males to make a lot of money. However, entertainment has always been a vehicle for poor Blacks. Yet that did not mean Black males had to anchor their music in misogyny. This is certainly not how the blues, jazz, rock and roll, funk and R&B were created.

Many young Black feminists raised on hard-core rap want to reform it. However, do they understand what they are up against? It seems as unlikely a task as trying

to reform racist rock music. In fact, hard-core rap came to be just as racist rock came to be. It is rooted in misdirected rage against some of the most vulnerable members of society. Just as racist rock is based upon hatred of Blacks, hard-core rap is largely based upon hatred of women. Indeed, racist rock and hard-core rap are, ironically, very close musical neighbors.

Feminists that want to eliminate misogyny from hard-core rap are like religious feminists that want to rescue certain religions from patriarchy. However, it should be clear by now that religions such as Catholicism, conservative and moderate Islam and the Southern Baptists cannot be saved from patriarchy. It seems that the wiser course for religious feminists would be to embrace progressive religions – preferably humanistic religions like the Society of Friends, aka the “Quakers,” and the Unitarian Universalists. There is also Wicca, and there are various forms of goddess worship.

Young Black feminists that defend hard-core rap claim that critics of the genre come down too hard on the rappers. After all, they are “only entertainers.” However, was Al Jolson, who gained fame and fortune in black-face routines, “only” an entertainer? Were other Whites who performed likewise only entertainers? Were the Whites who performed “Amos n’ Andy” on the original radio show only entertainers? When Amy Schumer enrages young Black women with her parody of Beyonce’s “Formation” video, is Schumer only an entertainer? How about Stepin Fetchit? At some point, as the great Paul Robeson once pointed out, the artist must make a choice to serve or harm his or her people. Indeed, *everyone* must be held accountable for his or her actions.

As the Black male feminist and humanist Sincere Kirabo has stated, “Culture is a hell of a drug.” Moreover, people will fight to the death to defend their culture no matter how destructive it might be to themselves or others. Just as Whites have defended Jim Crow and apartheid in the name of their cultures, some Black feminists are ready and willing to defend or downplay the worst aspects of their own culture.

However, just as Jim Crow and apartheid had to be abolished, so should be the case with hard-core rap. It seems that the proper feminist response to hard-core rap should be protests, boycotts and the like. As some Black feminists have

pointed out, the mainstream music business would never tolerate music in which racism was par for the course. Why, then, do they tolerate misogyny?

Defenders of hard-core rap use red herrings, wondering why people do not spend more time battling sexist messages in other areas of entertainment. That can be a legitimate question. However, hard-core rap is the creation of *Black people*. It is something that we should be trying to control. We cannot necessarily control what others do, though we can try to influence them.

I hope that those feminists that want to reform hard-core rap succeed. Such a victory could only bode well for the human race. However, the skeptic in me doubts they will win. In hard-core rap, women will probably always be considered bitches and hoes, and men will continue to try to be players and pimps. And our deeply beloved popular culture will continue to slowly kill us.