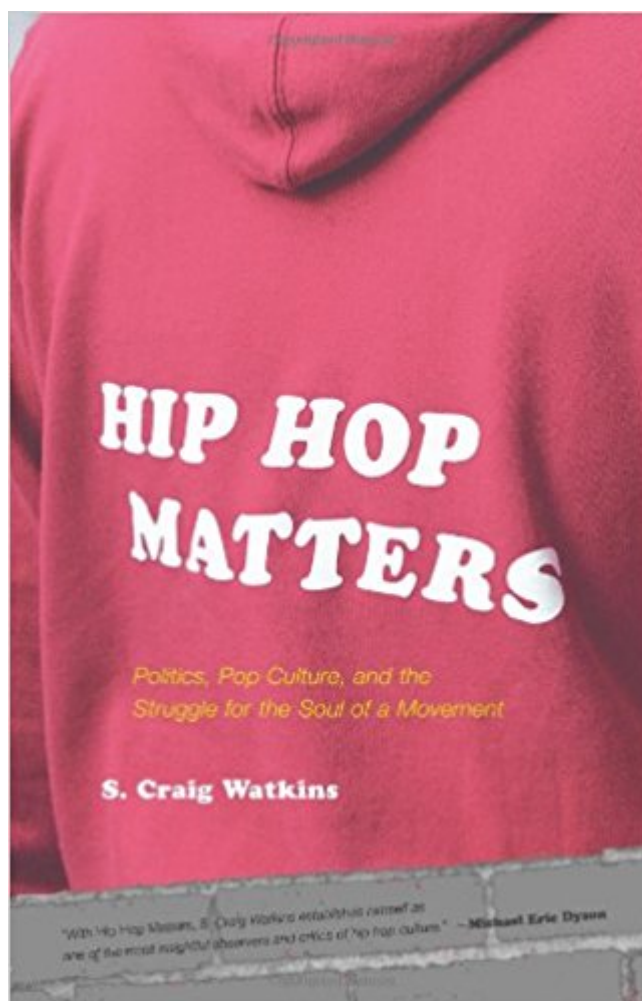


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Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, And The Struggle For The Soul Of A Movement



Synopsis

Avoiding the easy definitions and caricatures that tend to celebrate or condemn the "hip hop generation," *Hip Hop Matters* focuses on fierce and far-reaching battles being waged in politics, pop culture, and academe to assert control over the movement. At stake, Watkins argues, is the impact hip hop has on the lives of the young people who live and breathe the culture. He presents incisive analysis of the corporate takeover of hip hop and the rampant misogyny that undermines the movement's progressive claims. Ultimately, we see how hip hop struggles reverberate in the larger world: global media consolidation; racial and demographic flux; generational cleavages; the reinvention of the pop music industry; and the ongoing struggle to enrich the lives of ordinary youth.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press (August 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807009865

ISBN-13: 978-0807009864

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #425,878 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #176 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Rap #1025 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Urban #1346 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > History & Criticism

Customer Reviews

Beneath the glitz and glut of mainstream hip-hop, there's an underground movement of "conscious rap," political angst and an anticapitalist ethos that would make even Bill Gates throw his hands in the air. That conscious rap is what Watkins, an associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin, champions in this solid book. It's an ambitious attempt to cover a culture that began in the late '70s and is now an almost universal influence on global youth. Watkins wisely chooses to focus on what has not been said—like that it was a 43-year-old woman who produced hip-hop's first hit, "Rapper's Delight," or that hip-hop lit is one of the fastest-growing markets in book publishing. He tells his version of hip-hop's history in lyrical prose, often mirroring the rhythms and wordplay of the music he's discussing. He doesn't assert an overt thesis, but it's clear he believes that the more conscious, political hip-hop (think Common instead of Fifty Cent) is what has the potential to

revolutionize youth, and by extension, America. This is undoubtedly a book for fans, but it is also an intriguing look at how hip-hop has become part of a universal cultural conversation. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Watkins considers hip-hop a "vital source of creativity and industry for youth," one that has developed a "reputation as a spectacular cultural movement committed to defying the cultural and political mainstream" while representing "the voices and experiences of a generation of marginal youths." He assesses the social and political aspects of the movement and the music, duly noting the irony of how hip-hop's "livelihood . . . [depends] almost entirely on its ability to sell black death" and requires its performers to "immerse themselves into a world of urban villainy." In service of inquiry, he also surveys "the communities, constituencies, and currents that make up the movement

again. another book i purchased for my daughter. college prof assigned it. she is also studying communications and hip-hop within the youth today. she liked it. and still has it. years later.

When comedian Michael "Kramer" Richards went on his infamous November 2006 'racial tirade'--spewing venomous racist epithets, notably the 'n-word,' at two Black hecklers--an explosion of video downloading and heated debate ensued around the world. Within the Black community the 'n-word' was once again put under our cultural microscope. Not only did we look to Black comedians and civic leaders like Rev. Jesse Jackson for guidance, we also looked to hip hop and our beloved rappers. Counsel was sought from various members of the hip-hop community, including the deceased where even Tupac's n-bomb-filled lyrics were scrutinized. If hip-hop's elite--the tastemakers and trendsetters known for perpetuating the use of the 'n-word' in pop culture--could agree on the fate of the 'n-word' the issue would be settled. Perhaps this assumption oversimplifies a complex debate, but it justifiably recognizes hip hop has a voice. Hip hop has power. Hip hop matters. In his latest critical analysis of hip hop, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*, author and associate professor S. Craig Watkins further advances this message of hip hop's importance and influence. Far from a dry chronology through the history of hip hop, *Hip Hop Matters* is a passionate study of hip hop's rise to power and what those within the movement and beyond have done (and in some cases, have not done) with that power. Watkins' well-executed mixture of hip-hop nostalgia and historical facts makes his text poised for recommended reading for both pop culture enthusiasts and hip-hop

activists. In Part One: Pop Culture and the Struggle for Hip Hop, Watkins illustrates how hip hop and its breakout star, rap music, went from underground obscurity in the late 70s to a dominant musical and cultural force by the late 90s. Rap quickly became an economic boon and hip hop was uprooted from the streets to corporate suites. Hip hop gained commercial success, but at what cost? Part Two: Politics and the Struggle for Hip Hop unearths the more serious social responsibilities of hip hop and the inherent challenges of hip hop as a political movement. The hip hop movement includes people of all ages, races and economic standings--the very things that typically segregate people when it comes to politics. Hip hop does not have one voice, so ultimately, what causes does it speak for and on whose behalf? Hip hop continues to struggle with identity issues, including misogynistic lyrics and soft-core porn imagery that have become so customary of the genre. Through it all, Watkins remains hopeful of hip hop's future. Hip hop is the music of the youth--influencing how they speak, dress, think and live. Watkins is confident that hip hop matters and will always matter because hip hop culture will continue to inspire youth to change their world.

An excellent primer on all aspects of hip hop, from the early history to social and political context of mid-2000s. A follow-up volume would be great to continue through to today. Is hip hop fading? Some of the areas of tension Watkins identifies, between the older R&B generation and the young rebels of rap, or racial tension that surfaced around the rise of Eminem, are arguably no longer in play. Rap has been picked up by alienated youth the world over, from Russia to South Korea to Italy, with each culture shaping the wordstream around their own issues. It would be interesting to have a look at that, see how far from the roots rap has gone. At any rate this book was very helpful to me in preparing part of my class on History of Music and Social Change (Sciences Po, Paris).

While this is a writer from the world of academia, the book does a good job at presenting hip hop as a socio-political movement that has been overshadowed by hype and controversy that did not generate from the core values of the movement. Sort of like judging Christianity by looking at Jim Jones and saying he represented Christian values.....

This book is a cerebral discussion pertaining to a variety of issues within the world of hip-hop. The author gives the reader thorough insight into the history of hip-hop as well as pertinent information on things that are extremely important to the world of hip-hop and beyond.

I'm going to be critical of this book, if not negative. For one thing, of the exactly 50 sources listed in

the bibliography, not a single one of them is from the political right. There's no excuse for this, as Bernard Goldberg pointed out in his book 'Bias', there are a number of special interest groups on the right that are simply a phone call away from any reporter writing a story. This book does have the air of a work of Journalism. There's an exception to this omission in Hip Hop Matters, Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam is quoted several times here. He's urging peace between rival factions of rappers, or urging a kinder gentler hip hop at times, if I remember right. There's a fair amount of something similar to irony in much of the book. For example, the author dismisses (it's not really right wing criticism to begin with but what the author must imagine it to be) right wing criticism, in it's very brief only inclusion here, being dismissed, and then in a following paragraph he brings up legitimate criticism of hip hop that sort of makes what the 'right wing criticism' ring true. He writes a chapter discussing the rise of crime and violence coinciding with the crack generation, and then follows it up in a manner that can only make the reader conclude that the rise of hip hop itself had something to do with it (something I'm not sure I believe) if it was not the single mitigating factor. The 'irony' in the book was most obvious for me in the chapter on rapper Eminem (not Sure it was intended here). For me it was just odd, that in a discussion of hip hop, rap and gangster rap, racism and misogyny are not discussed until the entrance of Eminem, and then placed on his head. He does hint at a legitimate criticism of Eminem as a racist or at least as race conscious. I guess that's where the whole "Chopping up Dre and putting him in the freezer" comes in. He quotes Eminem saying, "In the suburbs... the white kids have to see black people liking you or they won't like you". Eminem is dangerously close to playing a white victim, something often/ironically consider the most racist act imaginable. It could threaten to take away from the real issue, perhaps. For my own views. . . I liked rap when it came out and I still like rap and hip hop, but I do wonder - it is just speaking to music - I wonder if maybe people like it because it's blacks speaking or when done in a 'black' style. The author even writes, from his position as black studies professor, of whites engaging in a culture of (hip-hop) theft. I like the song Monster Mash myself. . a song I would claim as the first rap song, so there goes my own theory/thoughts out the window. Eminem gets a bit too much coverage in this book. There's a brief history of hip hip and then a focus on a few individual performers such as Grandmaster Flash, Jay Z, Eminem and Public Enemy. Throughout the book Watkins does a good job (a fair one) quoting Other figures he doesn't necessarily agree with either. When he quotes Russel Simmons, formerly of Run DMC and now a music producer, he also features quotes, not taken out of context, but that seem to put him in the best possible light. The author notes there is a split in hip hip between the corporate interests, represented by Simmons, and the underground represented by Public Enemy and Sister Souljah, or at least that those

underground want to make their own noise and take their own political stands. Watkins seems to side with the underground. The author further suggests that corporate hip-hop, corporations, are responsible for most of the negative aspects of rap and gangster rap while acknowledging that gangster rap, and one might add, sexual rap, is what often sells best. He seems to feel that if only academics, or the 'concerned' people control rap it can be a more positive force. I do think censorship is coming. That even an 'UnAmerican Activities Commission' may have a final say instead of the endless number of petty tyrants we have now who mostly leave just a confused, and scared? public. The smart money would be on this being some kind of censorship from the left. Of course, if it is the left, it won't be called 'censorship' but something like 'free art' run by a 'Tolerance Commission'. As for myself, I'd rather see a drunken wino at the controls than the academics, but I do suspect it is coming. The author spends the most coverage in this book on the rap group Public Enemy something I thought was sorely misplaced. In my opinion, they just don't sound that good. He describes Public Enemy as sort of Hip Hop Punk, something I had never heard before. It might explain why I don't like them much. I'm not keen on bands who can barely play their instruments and then spit out left wing propaganda, whose main selling point is it's 'authenticity'. I generally dislike most of the punk groups, no matter how many magazine covers you put them on, or articles you write about them, and Public Enemy were given many a photo shoot. Public Enemy may indeed be underground now, as he points out they are no longer with a major label, but it's certainly my opinion, in their own day they were pretty much a corporate creation. If the promotion of young rappers is about helping young people feel good about themselves, it stands to reason rap needs young effective journalists to put a good face on it. In this regard Craig Watkins does a good job. He spends the first third to half of the book chronicling hip hop's rise to prominence. It's almost a re-creation of what must have been a thrill for a young rapper experiencing success. Some of the success may be exaggerated here, tho. He writes a good deal about how, when the music industry switched over to recording music sales by bar-code (of select stores) instead of by survey (of select stores), hip hop music jumped up to having something like 9 of the top 20 albums. It was interesting (and sort of disproves this) that at the same time, rap albums were near the middle or at the bottom of the black music chart. It would be impossible for both sales figures to be true. I can explain this. . . Personally, I'm a conspiracy theorist. To me, we live in something like a world like that portrayed in 'The Matrix'. A world seemingly dedicated to the control of information (if you're wondering if I took the blue pill or the red pill, for me it was the red one). So, all the figures were simply made up or created. He does note that hip hop was slow to catch on with older rhythm and blues fan and established industry types. From my own memory, I remember a lot of people saying

'I can listen to one rap song (at a time, or one in a row)'. I think they generally liked it, although some people (probably a small minority of urban listeners) genuinely never took to it. I did feel the author should have at times just come out and said what he wanted to say, tho sometimes you can make a good guess at where he stands. Perhaps if he did the book wouldn't have sounded so cool, who knows? He does understand his critics. Near the end he shows he has a good understanding of how many rap fans view academics who cover rap, so I'll scratch one criticism off my list (I do sound like a know-it-all myself, too, and I should admit that, obviously, the author knows much more about rap and hip hop than I do). It was almost humorous to note: the book focuses a bit on the political prospects and activism of the rap generation (and again the author is genuinely honest with his facts and figures), and profiles the nation's first hip hop mayor of Detroit, yet it completely misses Barack Obama and his upcoming election about 3 years after the publication of the book, on the very next election date. And just to do a (perhaps unfair) cheap shot at the book/author. . . no doubt, if prodded, the same author would have wrote pages about the restrictions keeping an African American out of the oval office or saying this reality is the one thing keeping African American's down, etc. On to something new I guess. It's a living. For an omission in his History of Rap, aside from Monster Mash! is that when rap first broke world-wide mainstream, it was with the rap Video Walk This Way done by Run DMC and the rock band Aerosmith. Rap did have all kinds of fans before this, and rap was a going to be a major force regardless. In my opinion the collaboration was a nod to Aerosmith and hard rock instead of being a boost done for Run DMC (although it may have appeared the other way around). In my opinion (I'm somewhat of a heavy metal fan) both genres, metal and rap, really seem to share many of the same characteristics. It's rap, tho, that seems to transcend other genres. There's country rap, I'm sure classic rap, metal rap. It seems rap, and even just atmospheric sounds of hip-hop, can add to these other genres. Also as an omission, maybe, this book focused entirely on the USA and the Caribbean. Hip hop and rap may have an even larger influence outside the US, in Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. But the one omission that cannot be forgiven is no mention of Whodini. The three leather clad bad boys from Brooklyn. The beloved bad boys from Brooklyn. The band or it's members are not once mentioned anywhere.

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