

The Corporate Takeover: Perpetuating Stereotypes and Stifling Counterhegemonic Ideas In Rap

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Introduction

Rap music has become a major music genre that has evolved, like many genres, over time. However the evolution of rap is very different when compared to other genres. Initially, rap was an outlet for people to be able to protest about political issues, or provide a platform for people to talk about their life. It has transitioned into something that is focused much more on substance abuse and violence than it does counter hegemonic views. As an increase in alcohol and violence was mentioned in songs, there was also an increase in corporate involvement in music, which includes both record labels and businesses (via advertisements). This led me to the question of, “In what ways does the corporatization of rap music perpetuate negative stereotypes and stifle counterhegemonic narratives?”.

Stereotypes

Black males are often associated with violence, drugs, and as very sexual. Black women are stereotyped in music as well.

- Artists like Mick Jenkins go against these stereotypes, for example in his song “1000 Xans” he says, “In some circles misconceptions make ‘em think my inspiration’s herbal, it’s not”.
- Rapper and record producer, 9th Wonder has say, “the media has demonized hip hop in the past 10 years; so many black Americans tend to shy away from the picture that the media has created for hip hop.”
- Beyonce came out with her album “Lemonade, which was very progressive. Had she released something like this when she first started out she would have been called an “angry black woman”, but she wasn’t due to her strong following.

Methodology

- Due to this being a very new topic there was very little research on it.
- I looked at the work of researches like Tricia Rose, who interviewed black males as well as looked at trends.
- I looked at advertising campaigns that rappers were typically associated with (Nicki Minaj with Myx Fusions, DJ Khaled “I’m The One” music video).
- I analyzed many different rap songs from different different genre’s within rap over time.
- I analyzed Hip Hop’s Billboard “Top 10” from 1989- 2015 so that I could see the change in the topics rapped about

Background

- Rap rose in popularity in the late 1970’s
- Rap was initially used as a form of rebellion and protest
- Around the mid 2000s the rap industry became highly commercialized and portrayed in a negative way
- The rap industry generates 10 billion dollars per year

Counterhegemonic: a confrontation and/or opposition to existing status quo and its legitimacy in politics, but can also be observed in various other spheres of life, such as history, media, music, etc

Impact of Labels

- A record label controls what an artist releases, so what an artist may want to write is changed based upon what the label wants.
- Labels have control over how the client is portrayed, yet nothing is being done by major record labels.
- Independant artists such as Chance the Rapper choose to not be signed on a label so that their content can be as genuine as possible.
- Through research rap artists that have counter hegemonic views are either independent, or are on record labels owned by men/women of color, such as Top Dawg Entertainment(Kendrick Lamar, Isaiah Rashad).

Conclusion

- Over the years, rap has become much more of a source for money rather than as a form of expression and protest.
- I plan on attending “Black Space” as well as interview the founder, Pierce Freelon so that I can learn more about the change he is making through Black Space.
- I plan to interview 9th Wonder so that I can get further insight on the issues of the corporatization of the rap industry from an artist's perspective.

