Searching for a pragmatic aesthetic: the rhetorical strategies of gansta rappers--myths, rituals, and dramas of an outlaw music


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Dr. Jack Kay

Abstract
In a world where impoverished urban black youth are under attack from all political factions, rap music lies at the heart of their cultural epicenter. More specifically, Gangsta rap music has taken center stage, dominating the pop charts, moving from the streets of the ghetto to the homes of white suburbia. Studies of Gangsta rap messages and the politics of reception have facilitated the alienation of many youth from mainstream culture. Critics charge Gangsta rap focuses on violent, racist, misogynist lyrics and calls for the censorship, rejection and condemnation of this sub-genre abound. This exploration considers alternative communication perspectives which emphasize the culture created and maintained by the music via use of the dramatic rhetorical elements: myths, rituals, and social dramas. Using Burkean methods of identification and exploring elements of hierarchy, this essay analyzes the rap lyrics of four of Billboard's top selling artists: Ice Cube, whom Dyson calls, "Gangsta Rap's Visionary"; Snoop Doggy Dogg, Dr. Dre, and 2Pac. Cultural communication perspectives discover a variety of realistic, mythological, and social dramatic elements, embracing complex thematic messages regarding the identity of the black community. Investigating a diverse set of issues, Gangsta rap artists wrestle with questions of survival in urban America via promotion of narratives steeped in the harsh language of the streets. Through rhetorical exploration of metaphors, similes, contextual figurative logic, rappers engage in ritual and myth-building to develop narratives. In the end, examination of the repetitive themes invoked by Gangsta rap lyrics produces a depth of understanding surpassing more simplistic analysis of offensive language choices. Examination of Gangsta rap lyrics concludes that Gangsta rap epitomizes Siluestman's pragmatic aesthetic, via gaining authenticity of the target audience (poor, inner-city youth) through identification with the symbols and language embodied in the culture. Scholars interested in understanding the complexities of Gangsta rap, are well-served by choosing not to impose the standards of standards developed and maintained within the cultural being studied. In the case of rap music, the nature of dialogic criticism serves to counter the dis-empowering possibilities that negative language offers.

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Big Pun. Biggie. Rare picture to see three great legends together.