

Hip Hop Directions

by nashid fareed-ma'at
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Once upon a time there was music. A language of sound not made for the sake of sound itself. Rather to serve more important purposes. Such as to convey lessons that have proven their worthiness over time, gifts to us from our ancestors. Such as to retell (over and over again so people come to know) a family's / people's lineage and the contributions past and present members made to one's community. Such as to dramatically portray the stories of great beings (from honorables to spirits to humans to animals) to impart wisdom and understanding. These are some of the sacred purposes music served in traditional Africa¹. Yet, when I listen to much of the music of today, these purposes seem far, far away.

I start with this point because this essay is an explicit, subjective attempt to have people discover and embody such purposes into what we now call Hip Hop music. Although some, over time, have claimed Hip Hop's connection to these purposes, a closer analysis will reveal that a very small group of Hip Hop artists have incorporated such into their music -- or, as some would say, incorporated their music into these greater, longer-living purposes. But the fact remains, Hip Hop music (as a whole and the majority of its sub-groups) has not embraced these purposes. Just as I refuse to allow the mainstream, corporate - commercial genres of "Hip Hop music" to define its whole, when I look beyond these genres most Hip Hop music has failed to embody these purposes. Perhaps it is because few artists have sought to do so. Yet, the blatant co-optation (some say destruction) of Hip Hop music as well as its state of stagnancy (if not a state of death still within the reach of resurrection) may call for such. This has been part of my personal journey: seeking ways to create music that moves the Hip Hop musical art form *forward*, and more specifically, in directions that will contribute more strongly to the upliftment and freedom of people of African descent in America and throughout the world.

Also, a word of clarity regarding the aim of this essay: My intention is not recruit people to my ideas regarding a direction for (some) Hip Hop music to pursue, although I will boldly share my thoughts and welcome those who agree with me. More importantly, I will share observations and questions that challenge some commonly held positions regarding Hip Hop music, positions I feel are serving as barriers to our music moving forward. Some of these positions are philosophical issues, and readers may disagree with some points I share, which is the nature of philosophical discourse that differing ideas are part of such exchange. But hopefully, any points of disagreement will not prevent you from seeing the deeper purpose of this essay, which is: to encourage Hip Hop music artists mature and

¹ I define traditional Africa as Africa in its state prior to the periods of conquest by Arabs and Europeans and their corresponding trade of enslaved Africans. Although some aspects of traditional Africa have survived such political, social, economic, and cultural conquests, much of Africa as it exists today is different than Africa in its self-determined traditional state.

move our music forward in a multitude of ways, particularly ways that embody traditional African values.

Also, know my words are written specifically for Black people in America. This does not exclude its relevancy to other peoples (particularly listeners of Hip Hop music), but they should keep this in mind as they read this essay.

WAS IT REALLY A GOLDEN AGE?

I once held to the nostalgia that described the late 1980s to the early 1990s as the Golden Age of Hip Hop music. As a teenager splitting time between The Bronx (New York City), Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), and Rochester (New York), the new freedom of expression Hip Hop offered young people was engaging. For me, Hip Hop has always been about more than just the music: the dance, the style of dress, the slang's attempt to explore more unique and colorful ways of expression, were unified into a "movement." (I was not much into graffiti although I totally saw its place in these other elements of what we call Hip Hop.) I put "movement" in quotes because there was not a prevailing set of political or social aims in early Hip Hop other than the exploration and continued experimentation of these "new" modes of expression. Although some tried to project a set of chosen aims upon all in Hip Hop, and others tried to construct a set of aims from common hardships we were facing (i.e., police harassment and brutality, an increase in urban violence), the truth is there was no platform for Hip Hop. That is why Hip Hop functions included people who were political activists and those who were street crews without any political agenda. There were people who embraced Hip Hop music as an aesthetic art and others who just saw it as party music or something to dance to. There were people who embraced a "Back (or Black) to Africa" approach and others who were intent on finding a place for Hip Hop "products" (music, art, fashion) in corporate and mainstream America. There were those who rhymed to display lyrical gymnastic skills, others who rhymed to spread a message, and others who rhymed for street bravado and a Hollywood thug (tough guy - action hero) image. The presence of these factions, without any faction really seeking (or some say succeeding) to exclude others, created a visage of "balance" -- I will address this claim of balance later. Having a space for a very wide range of perspectives prevented Hip Hop, and particularly Hip Hop music, from being identified with a clear, defined set of objectives.

Although this "pot pourri" served a purpose for Hip Hop's early existence, it does pose some questions as to if it is really a Golden Age. Usually the term Golden Age refers to a place of ideal happiness, prosperity, progress and achievement. It speaks to communities or civilizations that reached such a high state of development they should be emulated -- thus, the basis for being held in high esteem. For example, when I refer to Kemet (some call ancient Egypt) as having a Golden Age, I can refer specifically to its spiritual practices, its social / political / community organization, its scientific and mathematical discoveries, its architecture, its agricultural advancements, its visual and physical (i.e., craft, jewelry) art, and more. All these components were lived in a harmonious nature, designed to assist and guide its people to attain and cultivate a pure heart which would grant them the ancestral key to the realm of eternal life. When we use the term Golden Age for Hip Hop music, what are we

specifically referring to? What aspects of Hip Hop music are we living with the intent of attaining what, becoming what?

One of the more common justifications for labeling the late 1980s to early 1990s as a Golden Age for Hip Hop music is the freedom of expression at that time. Even if this is a correct statement, is freedom of expression really a justification for Golden Age status? Is the ability to say anything a trait to be glorified (as opposed to looking at what is actually being said and seeing if that is worthy of praise)? Some may respond yes to these questions, leaving me and such persons at a point of disagreement. But I would say, such a description for this period of Hip Hop music is an overstatement. The fact is, by the late 1980s Hip Hop music was already into its commercial phase. Even for me, as a youth growing up in the Bronx where Hip Hop originated, my first exposure to Hip Hop music was on the radio -- specifically a couple of major commercial FM stations. This is probably the case for most who were introduced to Hip Hop in this period, and certainly afterwards. The route for artists getting played on the radio was (and remains) major record companies (and their subsidiaries) and a limited number of independent record companies who operate in the majors' realm. Record companies in America have a staunch history of being very selective about what music and artists they contract with to produce the products they sell (as music albums). So even from the beginning of the "Golden Age," Hip Hop music was filtered through major record companies and commercial radio stations to much of the Hip Hop music audience. Record companies and radio stations (who also have a selective process) have never practiced a true freedom of expression, even if they present the facade of such. In their criteria for selecting music, artistic expression always falls secondary to what they can and choose to sell. And, by the terms of recording contracts, they are almost always the final authority on what songs are placed on albums and, via their relationships with radio stations, constitute the majority of songs receiving radio play.

Let us not confuse a wider range of expression with freedom of expression. There is a strong temptation to do so, particularly coming from an extended period of time when we (Black young people) were given no expression in mainstream media outlets. Even the revolutionary, pro-Black Hip Hop music that was given radio play and packaged on commercial albums fell within the acceptable range of expression to these commercial entities, even if within the controversial yet profitable edges of this range. Artists who created music that fell outside of this range understood such music would not be included on albums produced by most record companies -- and even less likely to be played on radio stations. Thus, such artists were challenged with a traditional dilemma in American music: stay within the acceptable range of mainstream expression values to attain the status of a "recording artist" (as validated by being heard on the radio and a wider audience being able to buy "your" album at a record store) or not limit your expression to this range and be limited to a much smaller audience. Already by the late 1980s, the block parties that fueled the early spread of Hip Hop music in New York City were a fading occurrence. In many respects, non-commercial Hip Hop music (that which was not produced / owned by record companies or played on the radio) was limited to a select group of clubs in New York City. Also, by now the accepted route for a Hip Hop artist was to graduate from a status of street cred (reputation) to an artist who signs with a record company, even with the common knowledge of "Industry Rule Number 4080: record company people are shady." Viewed through the prevailing values of the Hip Hop community, the artist who

never signed with a record company was like the phenomenonal basketball player in the 'hood who never "got his shot" to play in the NBA (National Basketball Association). And for those who study the NBA, they know certain aspects of street ball are utterly unacceptable and outright denied entry into the "hallowed" courts of organized basketball in the NBA and college ranks.

So freedom of expression in this period amounted to freedom of the press in America -- such freedom exists for those who have the resources (wealth) to own the press: newspapers, television and radio stations, publishing houses, and other media and advertising outlets. Many Hip Hop artists in this period (as well as now) were not in such positions of ownership, and the recording contracts they signed were designed to keep things that way. Yet, this power relationship (corporate dominance and control) was not the only factor in the equation of this pseudo-freedom of expression. Some of the elements of Hip Hop music itself are limiting.

One such element is the practice of sampling. I have great appreciation for this practice realizing that without sampling Hip Hop music, as we know it, may not have come into being. The removal of music classes throughout public schools in New York City placed many of the Hip Hop originators in the position of seeking music from other sources since they were denied the opportunity to learn an instrument and thus create their own sounds (via bands). Yet, the choice of material sampled tended to be limited to commercial R&B (Rhythm and Blues), Soul, Disco, and Funk acts -- and to a lesser extent commercial Jazz and sometimes Reggae. (Note: other types of music such as African music were basically ignored when it came to sampling.) The commercial elements of these musical genres fell very much into the blueprint of American Pop music, a blueprint designed to maximize profits not creative expression. Thus, most of the songs adhere to pre-designed structural templates, such as: verse - chorus -verse - chorus - bridge - chorus - end -- sometimes with an opening prelude. The acoustic components tend to emphasize drum and bass parts with a simple melody part (simplified for accessibility) by another instrument to compose a mono-rhythmic product -- as opposed to a poly-rhythmic approach evident in much African and African-influenced music. It was virtually an unforgivable sin to do a song that broke out of the 4 beats over 4 measures time paradigm. And even the lyrical approach (not content) of Hip Hop, which claimed relationship to poetry (some say to African griots, I will address this later), used the most mainstream of all poetic approaches: where each line ends in rhyme. For a musical form that claims to not be commercial in origination and proclaims a freedom of expression, you would think we would not so drastically limit the musical art form to rhyming. Yet if you do a song and the lyrics do not rhyme, it is often considered wack. (In fact, most people in America cannot even conceive of vocal songs where the lyrics do not rhyme whereas music in other parts of the world are not bound to such device.) The musical language of Pop music, and correspondingly commercial R&B, Soul, Disco, and Funk is very limited. Thus, many songs sound like other (previous) songs (in composition, content, style) creating a dynamic of repetitiveness in the music. A strong factor in this is that record companies like to use formulas of past hits on present songs: it made money before, it will probably do so again.

When we sampled music that fell into these pre-existing conditions, we inherently placed many of these same conditions on Hip Hop music. And sampling became a defining mark in Hip Hop music: sampling not only specific audio but also pre-existing drum patterns, bass lines, and other sound

elements.² A deeper analysis will reveal that more than just the musical elements of Pop music can be found in much of Hip Hop music, but also some of its values. Pop music, designed to collectify a mass mainstream White American audience, has traditionally limited its content for the sake of being acceptable to as wide an audience as possible. It avoids content that would alienate portions of its mass audience and instead focuses on romance (including bad relationships), party - good time music, dance tracks, or other “things familiar” that can appeal to (or at least not offend) almost “everybody” (in White America). The exceeding majority of Pop music is politically bland, conservative in experimentation, and neutral in regards to social controversies (even if sometimes performed by controversial persons). These traits are clearly visible in most commercial R&B, Soul, Disco, and Funk music, as well as most Hip Hop music: only a small portion of Hip Hop has gone against these values. There is an old first world principle that states: sounds -- and specifically music and language -- are not separate from the cultures (and their values) that create them. Sampling has implanted some, if not many, of the values of Pop music (via commercial R&B, Soul, Disco, and Funk music) on Hip Hop music. This practice further impedes a full freedom of expression.

Unless you are willing to argue that the full range of our expression fits completely within these limits, I think we can see that “freedom of expression” was not as free as often portrayed. I do not hold this to be negative since it was an evolving period in Hip Hop music, but it is not a Golden Age I would seek to emulate. There are things to be celebrated in this period, coming from a previous place of much more limited expression. Yet, I would challenge those who anoint this period for its “freedom of expression” to work toward a full reality of this, or at least a more free expression than corporate forces and sampling allows. These have been strong barriers to Hip Hop music moving forward. From our pursuit of record company contracts and radio play, to our sampling of commercial music, we have inherently placed limits on the expression of Hip Hop music.

Another kudos ascribed to the “Golden Age” of Hip Hop music is the proclamation of balance: that the destructive (negative) elements of the music did not dominate the more beneficent (positive) elements. That music stores made as much space on their album shelves for groups like Public Enemy as they did for groups like N.W.A. (N****as With Attitude). That songs containing Black Pride and Africa-embracing messages were heard on the radio with songs about how to get rich or get the “pretty girl.” Such a concept of balance falls in alignment with traditional Western European concepts of balance: a state of equality between opposing forces, in this instance between the beneficent and destructive elements of Hip Hop music. Yet, in most Golden Ages it is the dominance of beneficent elements over destructive factors that elevate a period of human existence (and achievement) to such status. To give an example, when Western Europeans idealize the Golden Age of Greece for its philosophy, this adoration of philosophical advancement is not praised for being in balance with ignorance and stupidity; it is the triumph of philosophy over ignorance and stupidity that makes this time a Golden Age in the eyes of some. I wonder if some who hold accolades for this Hip Hop period's apparent “balance” have lowered their standards too low: to praise a period where

² This has spurred the creation of music programs and devices that come loaded with pre-designed templates, MIDI clips, and groove clips. A number of these programs and devices are marketed specifically to Hip Hop music creators.

beneficent music coexisted with destructive music, as opposed to reserving such honor to a time when beneficent music reigns with its corresponding benefits.

Let us look deeper at the detriments of such “balance.” I assert that the present state of Hip Hop music (in 2007) as being dominated by destructive music is, in fact, a direct result of such “balance.” To be clear, I use the term “destructive music” to refer to songs that present and / or guide people to harm one’s self or others (i.e., injury, death, self-hatred) without clearly bringing these people to beneficent outcomes.³ Most “Gangsta Rap” would fall into this category: music which portrays the urban (understood as usually Black) male-oriented “gangsta lifestyle” as perpetrating crime (usually selling drugs), reducing women to sex objects, glorifying materialism and capitalism (you get rich while the majority remains poor), and using acts of violence (namely Black-on-Black violence) to attain these “cherished treasures” for personal gain or that of a small group (such as your crew). This genre promotes the stereotype of the exceeding majority of Blacks in urban America (if not all of America) as being poor people who overwhelmingly pursue crime as a way to escape the horrific conditions of the ‘hood; and, if they are not successful in being criminals -- or rappers -- they cycle in and out of prison for crimes they almost always commit in pursuit of material wealth. (This, of course, contributes to the prevailing perception that Blacks are guilty upon arrest and certainly none are innocent in jail or prison -- but that is a topic for another essay.) The presence of commercial Gangsta Rap has been accompanied by an even more concentrated expression of misogyny and (Black) female sexualization, including the spread of Dirty South “Stripper Rap.” If anyone can argue the uplifting merits of these genres, they probably should stop reading this essay right now.

The foundation for these genres of music were laid in the early days of Hip Hop music, which had a very open door policy for content. Songs such as *Gangster Boogie* (1984 Single) and *P.S.K. What Does It Mean* (1986 on *Schoolly D* Album) by Schoolly D and *9mm Goes Bang* (1987 on *Criminal Minded* album) by Boogie Down Productions (featuring KRS-ONE) are among songs that lay the root for the components of Gangsta Rap. Meanwhile, songs such as *The Freaks Come Out at Night* (1984 *Escape* album) by Whodini, *Dear Yvette* (1985 *Radio* album) by L.L. Cool J, *Treat Her Like A Prostitute* (1988 on *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* album) by Slick Rick lay the root for the growth of misogyny and the sexualization of Black women in Hip Hop music.⁴ In fact, these themes were found in the musical genres Hip Hop sampled as well as the American entertainment industry as a whole. From the runaway (African) slave to the modern day criminal gangsta, the popular American image of dangerous Black men have entertained this country (and the European world) long before the release of films such as *Birth of A Nation* (1915). A similar history accompanies the American legacy of sexually objectifying Black women in mainstream American entertainment. So with these

³ From a traditional African perspective, beneficent outcomes manifest personal and collective health, which includes the well-being of our physical, mental, spiritual, and energetic bodies. It would not include acquiring fame, material wealth, or oppressive power over others although fame and wealth can be obtained through beneficent means. I also would not include self-defense in harming others.

⁴ For those not familiar with these songs, I have included their lyrics in the appendix of this essay except for *Gangster Boogie*. I was not able to obtain the lyrics for this song, but know the chorus consists of repetitions of the refrain “Gangster Boogie,” very much like a chant.

themes having an “equal” space in Hip Hop music along with beneficent songs, it was only a matter of time before the entertainment industry (which knows very well the trends of its racist history) *sampled* these destructive elements of Hip Hop music to become part of the continuing legacy of American entertainment. In fact, the American entertainment industry has historically returned to these themes as using proven profit-making formulas to make money again.

There is another fallacy of supporters of beneficent Hip Hop music revering such a concept of “balance.” If I may, let me present this issue in the classic guise of the fight between good and evil. If we may use the word “good” to refer to beneficent Hip Hop music and “evil” to refer to the destructive music: historically, evil only cooperates with good to maintain a situation of co-existence *until* it is in a position to dominate good. With the engagement of mainstream commercial entities (major record companies, radio stations, etc.) and their choice to return to traditional racist formulas for the sake of profit, evil (destructive music) now had the means to dominate good. Rare is the Gangsta or Stripper rapper who genuinely relishes the “good ol’ days” of Hip Hop when evil shared space with good; and those rare few who may say so in an interview do not take action to produce such a situation. Why would evil wish to share the millions of dollars they make (or more accurately, are made in their names) producing destructive music when they can steer that money to just themselves -- which is what they have done, with the support (some say guidance) of the commercial entertainment industry. Evil has always sought to destroy good, and the evil forces in Hip Hop now have the assistance of mainstream corporate commercial entities to do so. So while some supporters of beneficent Hip Hop music talk about balance, the evil usually say nothing on the matter as they dominate and seek to destroy all remaining presence of beneficent Hip Hop music to expand their market and profit.

I encourage the forces of “good” in Hip Hop to realize the reality of the situation, and not compromise to a concept of balance that leaves us vulnerable to the dangers of making space for those who work to destroy us and our music. It is in essence a challenge to create means to support, promote, and share beneficent music beyond the evil tendencies of mainstream corporate commercial entities. Let me emphasize, these entities are not evil because they are mainstream, corporate, and commercial. They are evil because of what they have historically done and continue to do today to make increasing profits in a society that supports racially demeaning, destructive entertainment.

I also encourage those who see (or saw) value in the Western European concept of balance to examine traditional African concepts of balance. Instead of seeking a state of balance among opposing forces, in traditional Africa balance seeks *a state of equilibrium within an unified purpose*. For example, if the purpose is to embody beneficence, balance from a traditional African approach would seek a state of equality among the various ways one takes to attain beneficence. This may include balance between action and rest, between work in the spiritual realm and the physical and mental realms, between listening to others (usually those who have attained or moved closer to beneficence) and self-exploration (such as meditation). This approach to balance does not make or tolerate space within such purpose for things that are contrary to it. If we had taken such a balanced approach to

making Hip Hop music a beneficent art form, it may not have been so easily co-opted to the state it presently exists within.

IN SEARCH OF NEW DIRECTIONS

There are other defenses of the Golden Age for Hip Hop position, but the freedom of expression and balance arguments are the most common. Also, much of what I would say against other defenses are included in my responses above. So let me turn my attention to thoughts about a “new” direction for Hip Hop music, which is really a “new” direction for us.

I no longer regard the late 1980s to early 1990s as a Golden Age for Hip Hop music. I regard it as part of the early history of Hip Hop, and more specifically the beginning of Hip Hop music’s commercial success: procuring a designated space in the mainstream American entertainment industry by selling a significant amount of records, obtaining commercial radio play, and garnering attention in other mainstream media (magazines, movies, advertising, fashion, etc.) There are certain benefits associated with this commercial success but in no way should it become the guiding force of Hip Hop music. Much of what will move the music forward lays beyond the realm of commercial control and influence. And such “movement” is not limited to one or a small selection of ways. There can and should be a number of approaches to continue the growth and maturity of Hip Hop music. I will spend the rest of the essay discussing part of the approach I have chosen (and continue to work at).

Much of my approach is summed up in the opening paragraph of this essay: looking back to traditional African values and purposes of music. One of the foundational understandings of this is that *music is sacred*, something held in the highest of regard. There are many reasons for this in traditional Africa. One is how music is used to convey communal history, values, and lessons. Things people now read a history book for, go to a spiritual / religious service for, watch a self-improvement program on television for were conveyed in songs, many which were common knowledge in various traditional communities. But there is also the power of music, the power of a good song to literally *move* people. For this reason, many traditional African languages have one word that incorporates the words “music” and “dance” as they are seen as one and the same. Another revered power of music is its opening and receptive qualities: that a song can be received from spirits in its “creation” and, in turn, open listeners to the spiritual realm and other realms not consciously encountered in everyday life (in this society).

For me, this is the first gateway to walk through in regards to music. Reverence and respect for its sacredness must be present in the artist before their first musical word or sound is uttered. In traditional Africa, such respect was present in the community and taught to children as part of their social values. It was further developed in prospective musicians through the process of apprenticeship. This cultivated sense for the sacredness of music was an essential factor in being someone who led the community in music, and most notably in the musical components of rites, celebrations, and ceremonies.

It is my hope more Hip Hop artists will bring such sacredness to their music. This goes beyond the superficiality of making affirming statements about Africa and Black people. It also goes beyond imitating or incorporating elements of the African sound without also embodying the purposes and understanding that create / receive such sounds. It requires a way of life, which the music serves. Elementary embodiments of this principle will seek to make music that embraces a practice of sacredness. More developed and deeper embodiments of this principle will be to make (or receive) music that fits within and serves this much greater legacy of Africa's understanding of the sacred.

Many have ascribed a relationship between Hip Hop music and Africa's oral tradition, and in particular the griottes (females) and griots (males) of Western Africa. (Other parts of Africa had different approaches and traditions for keeping oral history.) Yet, few have looked beyond the superficial to what griottes and griots do and why. Some things in Africa are beyond definition but not description. One reason for this is that certain things done are beyond words and ideas to convey them. Another reason is that roles in society, while based on traditional foundations, are subject to respond to the particulars of the present, and thus not be bound by the current limits of tradition. In briefly exploring the roles of griottes and griots, I want the reader to keep this in mind.

One description of griottes and griots is "keeper of words and music." (Some would say keeper of sounds, of which words and music are the more commonly used but that is embarking into a much deeper and esoteric discussion than necessary for this essay.) It is through these means that many peoples in West Africa keep the stories of their families and communities (history) as well as the (magical) songs and words used in rites and ceremonies. The road to becoming a griotte and griot is one of many years, which is why the lineage of these roles is often tied to families where parents are griottes and griots. In this way, the parents can groom their children to pursue this path from birth, later supplemented by special schools and study under the guide of personal teachers (apprenticeships). The preparation for these roles involve extended study of language and the (often large) volume of traditional songs. Prospective griottes and griots study music (including learning different rhythms and melodies), composition, various instruments, and playing techniques. Spirituality is a prominent part of their studies, particularly learning how to empower words and sounds (instrument play) to better serve the purpose of their performance (or how to connect words and sounds with greater powers). Performance and story-telling skills are also taught, as well as learning (to memory) the histories of their people (familial and collective). The years of study enable them to not just perform a vast catalog of traditional songs (including what we call a capella poetry) but to be able to compose new songs when called upon to address present situations -- just as past griottes and griots composed songs to respond to the situations of their days, some which became part of the traditional canon. They also learn the power of sound, as renowned griottes and griots were known to move and touch crowds in ways that were often unforgettable. This long road of preparation makes them revered persons in communities, and enables them to serve as advisors, given the breadth of knowledge and wisdom they acquire.

Most people who cite Hip Hop music in relation to griottes and griots do not make such citation in regards to the wholeness of what griottes and griots do. Yet, griottes and griots encompass all of the above and often more, as all that griottes and griots do is not openly revealed. For this reason, I feel it

is inappropriate to link Hip Hop music with the griotte and griot *unless* Hip Hop artists are going to embody all (or most) of their roles. Just as most would think it foolish to link praying regularly with being a priest, minister, or imam, we should not link Hip Hop music with the legacy of griottes and griots simply because Hip Hop music does (or aspires to do) some of the many things griottes and griots do.

Yet, I welcome the commitment of serious-minded Hip Hop artists to embrace the path of griottes and griots, or a path seriously structured like theirs. This would require a commitment by artists to embrace a multi-year journey of education and preparation *before* they start performing. This would involve those who grew up on beneficent Hip Hop music cultivating their children's knowledge of such in the home, instead of leaving commercial radio and television stations (via radio play and music videos) to be the introduction to and continuing provider of (mostly destructive) Hip Hop music. This would mean the establishment of groups, institutions, organizations, and apprenticeships to seriously study language and how to use it in a wide a variety of ways to suit differing purposes. This would involve studying and learning traditional music, preferably traditional African music, to learn the songs past musicians created / received and performed to fulfill their purposes in their time. (Such would certainly broaden the limited scope of today's Hip Hop music by (re)introducing us to a wider range of African rhythms, melodies, lyrics, instruments, compositional approaches, musical techniques, and more.) This would incorporate the study of spirituality, preferably from traditional African approaches since they already know how to empower words and sounds -- or better, to connect our words and sounds with greater powers. (I emphasize traditional African [prior to the conquest of Africa] spiritual paths because these remain among the most ignored of spiritual approaches in America, such that even interfaith and multi-faith religious / spiritual perspectives often exclude them.) This would include studies of performance and story-telling skills: the days of out-of-breath rappers yelling incoherent lyrics on stage could possibly see its end. And all of this would prepare artists to write the songs (poems, stories, etc.) that need to be written today, in a way that combines purpose and performance to deem such artists worthy of the title *keeper of words and sounds*.

And if our music was of such caliber, I am sure we would not only be sought as advisors, we could utilize the wisdom and knowledge we acquire to better our situation and finally truly liberate ourselves...

This is the path I am on, and I continue my studies to be better able to fulfill this purpose. Such a journey, if embraced by other artists, will certainly move Hip Hop music forward. So much of what we need to address our (oppressed) situation can be found in traditional Africa (which goes beyond Western Europeans' portrayal of Africa). We can utilize gifts that worked for our ancestors to resolve the challenges we currently face. In many ways, I see the pro-Black / Africa-embracing Hip Hop music of the late 1980s to early 1990s as a first step to a much deeper and involved process to elevate beneficent Hip Hop music. Who knows what great outcomes will come from this work once achieved. But I do know some of the current problems in Hip Hop music would be resolved by this approach. Misogyny and sexism would certainly be a thing of the past since the values of traditional Africa abounded in respect and high regard for women and the feminine force. So too would self-destructive music, since traditional Africa relished in the cultivation of love (Ma'at). Materialism (bling-

bling) was also absent in traditional Africa: even in places of great material wealth, the pursuit of riches was not made a top priority for life. The n-term and others words of that nature did not exist in traditional Africa, and neither did the perturbed (oppressed) perspective that seeks to transform a word which is literally the fecal matter of white supremacy into a term of endearment. Even the inter-generational gap (some say conflict) that presently exists among us would not exist if our parents adhered to traditional African values and, from early on, were deeply involved in teaching and assisting our exploration of music -- a warning for us as we embrace the responsibilities of parenting. And lastly, many of the problems connected to becoming and being a commercial artist did not exist in traditional Africa, because music -- regarded as sacred -- was not allowed to be reduced a commercial product and the accompanying (less mature) values that emerge when you sell music for profit.

We should not forget, in the days of old (prior to the slave trades) people not only came to Africa for trade but also to witness our powerful music. This legacy is available to us if we are willing to embrace it, which means embracing the path of study and development required to bring Hip Hop music into the fold of traditional African music.

For those who are on or interested in this path or compatible paths, feel free to contact me at love@blueantelopeproductions.com -- make "Hip Hop Directions" the subject of your note. I am very interested in looking at ways we can collectify our energies and work to grow beneficent Hip Hop music now.

APPENDIX

All of the below lyrics were obtained by Internet searches so please excuse any minor errors contained. I have not edited any profanity and offensive language contained in the lyrics.

P.S.K. What Does It Mean (1986)

by Schoolly D

CHORUS

PSK, we're makin that green
People always say, "What the hell does that mean?"
P for the people who can't understand
How one homeboy became a man
S for the way we scream and shout
One by one I'm knockin you out
K for the way my DJ kuttin
Other MC's, man, they ain't sayin nothin
Rockin on to the brink of dawn
I think, Code Money, yo time is on

REPEAT CHORUS

Drivin in my car down the avenue
Towin on a j, sippin on some brew
Turn around, see the fly young lady
Pull to the curb and park my Mercedes
Sayin, "Fly lady, now you're lookin real nice
Sweeter than honey, sugar and spice"
Told her my name was MC Schoolly D
All about makin that cash money
She said, "Schoolly D, I know your game
Heard about you in the hall of fame"
I said, "Mama, mama, I tell you no lies
Cause all I wanna do is to get you high
And eh - lay you down and do the body rock
To the wall, to the corner," got into the car
Took a little trip to a fancy bar
Copped some brew, some j, some coke
Tell you now, brother, this ain't no joke
She got me to the crib, she laid me on the bed
I fucked her from my toes to the top of my head
I finally realized the girl was a whore
Gave her ten dollars, she asked me for some more

REPEAT CHORUS

Clinton Road one Saturday night
Towin on a cheeba I was feelin alright
Then my homie-homie called me on the phone
His name is Chief Keith, but we call him Bone
Told me 'bout this party on the Southside
Copped my pistols, jumped into the ride
Got at the bar, copped some flack
Copped some cheeba-cheeba, it wasn't wack
Got to the place, and who did I see
A sucker-ass nigga tryin to sound like me

Put my pistol up against his head
I said, "Sucker-ass nigga, I should shoot you dead"
A thought ran across my educated mind
Said, man, Schoolly D ain't doin no time
Grabbed the microphone and I started to talk
Sucker-ass nigga, man, he started to walk

REPEAT CHORUS

9MM Goes Bang (1987)

by Boogie Down Productions
(featuring KRS-ONE)

La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la
La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la

Buck! Buck!

CHORUS

Wa da da dang
Wa da da da dang (Ay!)
Listen to my 9 millimeter go bang
Wa da da dang
Wa da da da dang (Ay!)
This is KRS-One...

Me knew a crack dealer by the name of Peter
Had to buck him down with my 9 millimeter
He said I had his girl, I said "Now what are you? Stupid?"
But he tried to play me out and KRS-One knew it
He reached for his pistol but it was just a waste
Cos my 9 millimeter was up against his face
He pulled his pistol anyway and I filled him full of lead
But just before he fell to the ground this is what I said...

REPEAT CHORUS

La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la
La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la (SAY TWICE)

Seven days later I was chillin in the herb gate
But seven days too much when the gossip has to circulate
Puffin sensemilla I heard "knock knock knock"
But the way that they knocked it did not sound like any cop
And if it were a customer they'd ask me for a nick
So suddenly I realized it had to be a trick
I dropped down to the floor and they did not waste no time
They shot right through the door so I had to go for mine
They pumped and shot again but the suckas kept on missin
Cos I was on the floor by now, I crawled into the kitchen

Thirty seconds later, boy, they bust the door down
The money and the sensemi' was lyin all around
But just as they put their pistols down to take a cut
Me jumped out the kitchen, went "buck! buck! buck!"
They fall down to the floor but one was still alive
So I put my 9 millimeter right between his eyes
Looked at his potnah and both of them were dead
So just before he joined his potnah this is what I said...

REPEAT CHORUS

La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la
La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la (SAY TWICE)

I gathered all the money and I ran up the block
I said "This is a perfect time to meet with Scott LaRock"
But Scott is either psychic or he has a knack for trouble
Cos Scott LaRock showed up in a all-black BMW
I jumped inside the car and we screeched off in a hurry
And Scott said "What is wrong? Relax, tell me the story"
I said "You remember Peter? Well his posse tried to kill me"
I'm all right now because the sensemi' fill me"
Scott just laughed, he said "I know they're all dead
And just before you pulled the trigger this is what you said..."

REPEAT CHORUS

La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la
La la-la la-la la-la la...la...la...la (SAY TWICE)

The Freaks Come Out At Night (1984)

by Whodini

CHORUS

The freaks come out at night
The freaks come out at night
The freaks come out at night
(the freaks come out)
The freaks come out at night

Discos don't open till after dark
And it ain't till twelve till the party really starts
And I always had to be home by ten
Right before the fun was about to begin
Crowds of people lined up inside and out
Just one reason, to rock the house
But in the day time the streets was clear
You couldn't find a good freak anywhere, 'cause

REPEAT CHORUS

Now when freaks get dressed to go out at night
They like to wear leather jackets, chains and spikes
They wear rips and zippers all in their shirts
Real tight pants and fresh mini skirts
All kinds of colors runnin' through their hair
And you could just about find a freak anywhere

But then again, you could know someone all their life
But might not know they're a freak unless you see them at
night, 'cause

REPEAT CHORUS

Now the party's jumpin', the place is packed
And when the crowd's like this, I'm ready to rap
But before I could bust a rhyme on the mic
Freaks are all over me like white on rice
Freaks come in all shapes, sizes and colors
But what I like about 'em most is that they're real good lovers
They do it in the park, they do it in the dark
But most freaks are known for breakin' hearts
You could never tell what a freak was thinkin' of
And you may never catch a freak without at least one glove
And they don't walk, when they step, they strut
And nine times out of ten they drive you nuts
But take my advice, you don't stand a chance
Freaks are so bad they got their own dance
So if you wanna live a nice quiet life
Do yourself a favor, don't come out at night, 'cause

REPEAT CHORUS

Hut one, hut two
Hut hut hut

REPEAT CHORUS

Dear Yvette (1985)

by LL Cool J

Yo Yvette, theres a lot of rumors goin around
They're so bad, baby you might have to skip town
See something's smellin fishy and they say it's you
All I know is that you made it with the whole damn crew
They say you're a man-eater during the full moon
Mascot of the senior boys' locker room
They said Yvette walked in, there wasn't too much rap
Her reputation got bigger, and so did her gap
Cuz girl your momma shoulda taught you better
I'mma sit down and write you a long letter

CHORUS

Dear Yvette (SAY FOUR TIMES)

I'm glad you aint my sister, then again if you was
I'd have to treat you like you was my distant cuz
I'm not a news reporter, I don't mean to assume
What should I think? I seen ya comin out the men's bathroom
You wasn't in there alone, wasn't usin' the phone
The door was locked for twenty minutes, all I heard was
moan

REPEAT CHORUS

I don't really know if the story is so
I can either ask curly, or larry or moe
Or earl, shabazz, lou, mookie or joe
Like santa claus said, you're a ho-ho-ho
In every disco you say hello
Like you're a little angel, but we all know
Since you was eleven you been actin' this way
You always got in bed when you wanted to play
You're a freak, you think you're lady godiva
Some freaks are live, but Yvette you're liver

REPEAT CHORUS

You're a back-seat queen, a elevator pro
A high-powered body makes your levis grow
See the stories I've heard, they could amaze
I heard she did it on a motorcycle back in the days
So calm down freak, get a G.E.D.
That's a general education on decency
One day you'll see, and agree with me
Unless you're gonna be a freak until you're 93
For you there's no fee, everything is free
This is from me to you, not you to me
Every night is your night, your leather pants are tight
You try to shake your butt with all your might
I don't really wanna dis nobody
You might think I had a little too much bacardi
But that's not the problem, the problem's Yvette
How bad can a girl's reputation get?
See she's the kinda girl all the homeboys met
If you're desparate ask Yvette, cuz she'll say bet

REPEAT CHORUS

B-boys are hard on the boulevard
The reverend at the church said you was barred
Homeboys on the block love you a lot
You're a real famous freak whether you like it or not
So before you start walking and your beak starts squawkin'
Let me explain to you who is talkin'
I'm L.L. Cool J from around the way
You boogie down to my records almost every day
Go a hundred miles an hour when you're standin' still
You're faster than my caddy when it's goin' downhill
Won't forget that day in the y.m.c.a.
The guy at the desk said it was ok
For you to come inside cuz he knew you'd stay
Greg G. and Garfield yelled hooray

REPEAT CHORUS TWICE

Treat Her Like A Prostitute (1988)

by Slick Rick

Here's an oldie but goodie
Hit it

Excuse me
What?
Can I have your attention?
Mn-hmm
There's just a few things that I've got to mention (Uh-huh)
There's girlies out here that seem appealing
But they all come in your life and cold hurt your feelings
I'm telling you
As Rick is my name
I wouldn't trust no girl unless she feels the same
Treat 'em like a prostitute (Do What?)
Don't treat no girlie well until you're sure of the scoop
'Cause all they do is they hurt and trample
Listen up close, here comes my first example

Now ya been with your girlfriend for quite a while
Plans for the future, she's having your child
Celebrate with friends drinking cans and quarts
Telling all your friends about your family thoughts
One friend was drunk so he starts to act wild
He tells the truth about the kid
It's not your child
Acting like a jerk and on his face was a smirk
He said, "Your wife went berserk while you was hard at work"
And she led him on and tried to please him
She didn't waste time, she didn't try to tease him

Treat 'em like a prostitue (Do What?)
Don't treat no girlie well until you're sure of the scoop
'Cause all they do is they hurt and trample
Listen up close, here comes my second example

It's your wife
You buy the tramp jewels and clothes
You get sentimental and bring home a rose
Give her everything 'cause you swear she's worth it
All your friends tell you, "The bitch dont' deserve it"
Love is blind, so there goes your wealth
Until one day, you see things for yourself
Came home from work early, Mr. Loverman
You had a card and some candy in your right hand
There's the mailman, he was short yet stout
He went inside your house and didn't come back out
Bust it
Just a friendly stop, come on, is it?
The mailman comes and he pays your wife a visit?
The thought alone makes your temperature boil
You say to yourself, she might still be loyal
You open up your door and stand in a trance
You see the mailman's bag and the mailman's pants
Came home to party
At work had a hard day

Look around your house and you say, "Where the hell are they?"
Run upstairs up to your bedroom
You look inside your room, you see something brewin'
Cover your mouth because you almost choke
You see the mailman's dick way up your wife's throat

Treat 'em like a prostitute (Mm-hmm)
Don't treat no girlie well until you're sure of the scoop
'Cause all they do is they hurt and trample
Listen up close, here comes my third example

Now your girl, she don't like to have sex a lot
And today she's ready and she's hot, hot, hot
As you open up the door she says, "Get on the floor"
She wants to try things she's never tried before
She takes off your drawers and works you over
She calls you Twinkles
And you call her Rover
Next thing you know, the ho starts to ill
She says, "I love you, Harold" and your name is Will
That's not the half 'til you start to ride her
Take off your rubber and there's one more inside her
It's not yours-who can it be?
I think it was a slick rapper, his name is M.C. Ricky

Treat 'em like a prostitute
Don't treat no girlie well, treat no girlie well
Treat no girlie well, until you're sure of the scoop

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