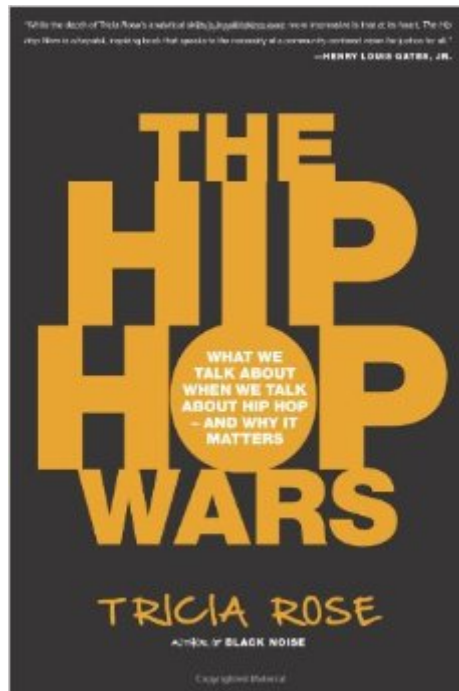


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The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters



Synopsis

Hip-hop is in crisis. For the past dozen years, the most commercially successful hip-hop has become increasingly saturated with caricatures of black gangstas, thugs, pimps, and â™hos. The controversy surrounding hip-hop is worth attending to and examining with a critical eye because, as scholar and cultural critic Tricia Rose argues, hip-hop has become a primary means by which we talk about race in the United States. In *The Hip-Hop Wars*, Rose explores the most crucial issues underlying the polarized claims on each side of the debate: Does hip-hop cause violence, or merely reflect a violent ghetto culture? Is hip-hop sexist, or are its detractors simply anti-sex? Does the portrayal of black culture in hip-hop undermine black advancement? A potent exploration of a divisive and important subject, *The Hip-Hop Wars* concludes with a call for the regaling of the progressive and creative heart of hip-hop. What Rose calls for is not a sanitized vision of the form, but one that more accurately reflects a much richer space of culture, politics, anger, and yes, sex, than the current ubiquitous images in sound and video currently provide.

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Customer Reviews

There are very few people I know who look at hip hop not just with a critical eye, but with such a far reaching all encompassing perspective. Tricia Rose will flip how you have ever viewed (and listened to) hip hop, leaving you wondering how you could have missed it all along, while at the same time wondering what you can do about it: as a reader and/or an artist. As a brilliant author and professor, allow her to teach you about hip hop...4 real. Its nice to have such an astounding critically thinking

woman in the game!

Black Noise was a very interesting, poignant analysis of the development of hip hop. Tricia Rose provided insight on the social, political, technological, and economic factors that contributed to the creation of hip hop. It appears, however, that Rose is no longer a hip hop expert. If anything, she is only an expert on the early days of hip hop (up to the 90s) but her ignorance to recent hip hop developments is painfully obvious in this book. I don't believe that she has listened to hip hop seriously in 10 years nor do I believe she understands the sentiment of young (16-28 year old) hip hop fans and followers. The people who buy 50 cent, TI, Lil Wayne or Jay-Z cds and understand their music as "autobiographical" are the same people following Us weekly's coverage of Britney Spear's mental breakdown with schadenfreude-istic pleasure, or buying Mylie Cyrus cds and fighting to the death to attend her concerts, naive consumers whose reductive understanding of culture feeds their need for sensational media. The parents of these idiotic consumers are the only ones who are causing all this political concern (them, and the bougie blacks like Bill Cosby who are overly concerned with what whites think of us). Most rappers are aware and vocal of the fact that they are producing a persona, a character. Jay-Z, TI, Lil Wayne and even Cam'Ron have all explicitly said in one interview or on their albums / mixtapes that they draw a distinction between who they are as people, and the character that they are crafting in their music for entertainment purposes (interviews Rose does not cite). Why does Jay-Z get shot at the end of his 99 problems video? It was supposed to represent the death of Jay-Z the character and rebirth of Sean Carter the person (didn't last long...but that was the point). Watch 50 cent's video for In Da Club. We see Eminem and Dr. Dre doing physical tests and experiments on 50, in essence, creating 50 cent, juxtaposed with his resulting club/market persona. Most serious hip hop fans understand this divide, and the most successful, perennial rappers are the ones who consciously and creatively craft their persona in contrast to their real selves. The reality is, hip hop was party music to begin with. It is no surprise, then, that hip hop functions mainly as party music in popular culture. People like Kanye West, Common, and Lupe Fiasco provide a much needed alternative, but I would hate for them to be the only hip hop archetypes. What we see in a lot of discussions around hip hop is an anxiety around what others (mainly whites) think about black people. A fear of reinforcing stereotypes and "airing our dirty laundry." This is the psychosis of the Baby Boomer/X generations that most young people reject but that Rose proves herself incapable of overcoming. That is not to say that racial stereotypes do not manifest themselves anymore, or that these stereotypes do not negatively affect black people's status in America. Rather, I argue that young black and white people are tired of the

monomaniacal fixation with the politics of positive/negative racial representations. We are willing to be aware of our biases and attempt to judge individuals accordingly. The bottom line is, black people are people like anybody else with diverse sentiments and opinions. If white people want to pay black people to market themselves as thugs, this should have no bearing on black people's overall consciousness. Instead of promoting exclusively "positive" representations that appeal to white/bourgeois standards, we should promote a consciousness around persona and blackness in America (one which acknowledges the difference between the perception of black life and the reality of black life) that seeks to exploit the market, rather than change it. Until race and culture no longer serve as capital to be commodified and sold, I believe the market will not change. Consumers want what they expect and will pay handsomely for it. Let's take advantage of that, while being conscious of who we are and our potential as a people. Instead of simply saying "I'm gettin' mine" we should say "I'm gettin' mine for us"...which many rappers do (see the philanthropic ventures of TI, Cam'ron...etc). Ultimately, Tricia Rose provides more of the same arguments we've been seeing for the last decade, and, even in her progressive section, offers nothing new to the discussion.

“Hip Hop is not dead, but it is gravely ill. The beauty and life force of hip hop have been squeezed out, wrung nearly dry by the compounding factors of commercialism, distorted racial and sexual fantasy, oppression, and alienation. It has been a sad thing to witness.”

Rose's survey on the current state of the hip hop industry is a dazzling display of contemporary cultural probing and criticism. The *Hip Hop Wars* dissects the music industry, particularly the sphere of hip hop music, and puts it through a methodical and impassioned analysis from the inside out. Two-thirds of this work uses the framework of Critics vs. Defenders, exploring each side of the arguments presented, which allowed for an extremely dynamic and diverse examination of the subject. Simultaneously, Part Two: *Progressive Futures* offered solutions to the “problem” that hip hop and the African American diaspora, as the community and identity surrounding it, are confronted with. The format itself was refreshing, as it endeavored to offer as comprehensive a view of the industry's landscape as possible, while also offering solutions to the problems, rather than simply proselytizing to the masses from a perch on a soap box. No, this was a down-to-earth work in that way, in that the author was clearly writing from the concerned standpoint of one entrenched in the soul of the very wounded creature that they seek to heal, rather than from an outsider's view, hovering above the culture and taking stilled snapshots from their safe locale outside of the battle field, away from the dangers of getting their own hands dirty. Rose reaches into the heart of the new technologies and music markets that now

shape and affect this music, as well as the gaping mouth of the corporate Goliath poised to gobble up this once-expressive art form like the Cookie Monster. She examines the who, what, when, where, and, most importantly, the why of the disintegration of this form of artful story-telling and the complicit-ness of the artists and its consumers in the demise of their own culture, their own music, their own outlet and venue of true personal expression. Neither rappers, nor music moguls nor radio stations are spared in this introspective and insightful survey. Unemployment, the drug trade, and even affordable housing and white consumption, feminism, sexism (all the isms, really), even Shaft and Foxy Brown's roles in the foundation, intent and culture of hip hop music are examined and explained to create an entire picture of the hip hop music industry and its players. While I loved *The Hip Hop Wars* and the passion and thorough research with which Rose displayed her arguments, there were times where she managed to nearly push me off the bandwagon—well, maybe not off, but to the edge. Some of her arguments seemed a bit overwrought and exaggerative, and there are several places in my notes—believe me, this one was highlighted and marked up like schoolwork—where I wrote that I thought she was overdoing it a bit. However, her overall argument really grabbed me, educated me and entertained me. I felt that I came away with something that I didn't have before, when I finished the last page and closed the book, and that is what reading is all about; that is what a good argument should do. I would absolutely read this one again and suggest it to anyone considering giving it a whirl. This one proved why we can't just sit by and watch an art form crumble, watch a culture be commercialized, packaged and sold with such deformities that it no longer represents the subject that it depicts at all—all for the sake of capitalism and mass exploitation: "The term 'street' became a euphemism for a monsoon of profanity, gratuitous violence, female and male hyper-promiscuity, the most vulgar materialism, and the total suppression of social consciousness. That is not what black culture is about, though it is the way that it is portrayed on the radio and in pop culture. *The Hip Hop Wars* brought to the forefront where it all went wrong, and how we can take it back again. True hip hop is not gentrified or yuppified; it isn't Barbie-doll packaged and ready for shipping, complete with a thong and gold teeth. It isn't the minstrel show that it's become today, and Tricia Rose helps us to both remember and explore that. 4.5 stars ****See more reviews from The Navi Review at [...] and follow the blog on Twitter @thenavireview

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