

## **Flawed Philosophy: KRS and 'Being Hip-Hop'**

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Blastmaster KRS ONE,

For the last few years I have watched you write or speak about the merits of "being Hip Hop" and alluding to some spiritual core power within Hip Hop itself. While Hip Hop does indeed command more power than any other musical art form before it, too much weight is being put on its true power and potential. I believe that your idea on "being Hip Hop" while sounding and feeling good, is in truth weak. I think it is dangerous for those who truly love Hip Hop culture authentically. Following this concept gives the illusion that Hip Hop can and should be equal to other cultures and faiths like African, Latino, Japanese, Buddhist, Judaic, Islamic, or Christian.

The sub-culture of Hip Hop is not built to support people in the manner that one can "BE" of other dominant cultures or faiths. The richness of the contributions of other faiths and cultures to Hip Hop are what MAKE Hip Hop great. I submit that Hip Hop is a subculture. Being a sub-culture, Hip Hop is not meant to facilitate such things. It is meant to absorb things that exist already and re-frame them in a contemporary urban environment.

To not realize this point, is to mistake the scaffolding of a building for the actual foundation. I love Hip Hop! But I will not pile cultural and spiritual bricks to its structure (especially when I KNOW it was not meant to support such weight).

One of the more disturbing ideas proposed in your philosophy is that in order to BE "Hip Hop" one should consider giving up who they originally claimed themselves to be (African, Jewish, Irish, Japanese, Christian, Native American etc.) . However, almost everything "Hip Hop" now is something else from some other culture, that was deemed "Hip Hop" later.

Think about it. Were Technic 1200's turntables, Adidas shelltoe shoes, and Kung Fu flicks, made with Hip Hop in mind? Or did those who claim the sub-culture of Hip Hop embrace them, thus "making" them "Hip Hop"? From this perspective, what is and is not "Hip Hop" is merely an issue of consumerism.

Further, was the African oral tradition HIP-HOP?, The martial arts fighting system of Capoeira? The African American political ideologies of Malcolm X? Were the Black Panthers created specifically FOR "Hip Hop"? Or, were these movements and ideals MADE "Hip Hop" by the Hip Hop community?

Imagine Hip Hop without the Black nationalistic infusions of Public Enemy and Paris? How different would Hip Hop be minus the Latin flavor of Cypress Hill and the dance movements of Pop Master Fabel? Can you imagine Hip Hop without the eastern philosophical insights from Wu-Tang Clan or Afu-Ra? What would Hip Hop be without

the strong beauty of songs like Kanye's "Jesus Walks" or Talib Kewli's "The Proud"? Hip Hop has never and will never stand on its own.

With or without Hip Hop's support, approval or understanding those technological advances, clothing lines, movements and philosophies will continue to exist.

What is and is NOT Hip Hop is usually co-opted by those in the Hip Hop community from an outside source. Very little in Hip Hop has been "invented" by "us". However MUCH has been re-mixed and re-framed to fit the Hip Hop subculture. We must be honest about this fact if we truly wish to see our true selves. To do so does not negate the greatness of Hip Hop.

Also, racially and culturally speaking, a friend of mine in the U.K., Kevin Sekweyama made a very salient point. "Let's say the mother is German and the father is Australian. If the kid's father is a B-boy is the kid supposed to say 'My mother is German, and my Dad is Hip Hop'?" The mere suggestion sounds ridiculous!

KRS, I know you must see how this kind of thinking spirals toward the insane. You must acknowledge the myopic mind state you've suggested.

We must not get so emotionally caught up in the moment that we mistake Hip Hop for something that it is not. The music of the civil rights era was soul, and R&B...But no one from that era says "I am soul". We must remember that the MOVEMENT was the source of the music and not the other way around.

Further, to paraphrase Hip Hop children's book author of "Turntable Timmy" Mike Perry. He noted that Chicano low rider culture is a major force in the community. But no one would ever say, 'I am no longer Chicano, I am a low rider'.

After heard your statements I would like to formally challenge you, KRS ONE, to a debate on this subject in a public forum. Know that this challenge is not intended to be physical or on wax- but rather a purely philosophical one . I further assert that nothing in the so-called "Gospel of Hip Hop" will have new concepts. I submit that everything in the so-called "Gospel" will be a previously "eastern" or "western" concept framed in a Hip Hop context. Rather than do that, why not just give those who seek knowledge the real roots of the paths you expound upon (Buddhism, Rig Vedas, Taoism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism etc.)? Isn't that more honorable than masking other faiths with the veil of Hip Hop? Simply changing the context does not make it new.

Is Hip Hop possibly the world's greatest sub-culture? No doubt. Has it given many people a new passion for politics, their own sense of self and a new found love for spirituality? No doubt. But it's nothing for us to "be". It is for us to love, nurture, and nourish with truth as we grow. You should also know that these positions are my secondary reasons for denying the "I am Hip Hop" philosophy. I'd rather tell you the rest in person.

KRS ONE, I would like to debate you before the end of 2004 at the Riekes Center for Human Enhancement, located in the California Bay Area. Ideally, any weekend of your choice in October 2004 would be best for me . But any month before the year's close is fine. I propose that we each compose a team of two individuals including ourselves to present for twenty minutes each.

I do not want this to be just about you and me. Or about you being from the east coast and me being from the westside. I am not alone in my position. There are others from all over the world that agree that the cultural and spiritual values of Hip Hop culture are being oversold in this philosophical doctrine. Teams make the debate more lively. Let's raise the bar on Hip Hop debates in a civilized manner in 2004.

I also propose that this event not be done for money. Any proceeds from the event should go to non-profit organizations of our choosing to be stated at the time of the debate. Know that I make this challenge not out of remote malice, or ill intent. But I do this because you taught me through your records and lectures to speak the truth and think for myself. So now I wish to bring the truth to you on a subject that we both care so much about.

I also encourage others in the Hip Hop community world- wide think about what it means to "be Hip Hop". I pray they discuss what it means to negate their ancestry, racial affiliation, spiritual base, etc., to "be Hip Hop". Let's talk about it.

Do not shortchange yourself, and the seekers of knowledge by denying this request. If you feel confident you can defend your statements and the so-called "Gospel", respond within the next 30 days to set an actual date for the "Great Debate". If you make your points manifest, I will concede that you are correct. However, if I am able to prove my points, I ask that you concede flaws in your theory of "being Hip Hop" before the world. I look forward to hearing from you soon and having a passionate public debate in the near future.

Peace,  
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