



It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation

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In *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop*, M. K. Asante, Jr. looks at the rise of a generation that sees beyond the smoke and mirrors of corporate-manufactured hip hop and is building a movement that will change not only the face of pop culture, but the world.

Asante, a young firebrand poet, professor, filmmaker, and activist who represents this movement, uses hip hop as a springboard for a larger discussion about the urgent social and political issues affecting the post-hip-hop generation, a new wave of youth searching for an understanding of itself outside the self-destructive, corporate hip-hop monopoly.

Through insightful anecdotes, scholarship, personal encounters, and conversations with youth across the globe as well as icons such as Chuck D and Maya Angelou, Asante illuminates a shift that can be felt in the crowded spoken-word joints in post-Katrina New Orleans, seen in the rise of youth-led organizations committed to social justice, and heard around the world chanting "It's bigger than hip hop."

It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation Details

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Chi Chi says

A pretty good read, if not all that objective. He brings up some good points about thinking about the big picture and not placing issues within hip hop in a vacuum. The last chapter was a little disappointing in his assumptions about who is listening to what kind of hip hop. Overall, though, I liked it.

James says

I pulled this book at random off the shelf at The Strand bookstore in Manhattan. I thought it was going to be a sort of overview of hip hop to get me up to speed on things.

There is some of that, but there is so much more. This is an important and necessary book that deals with hip hop in the larger historical and cultural context of African-American resistance to oppressions of all sorts, from slavery to mass incarceration (which is a popular talking point now, post-New Jim Crow, but a decade ago when this book came out, nobody was dealing with this in the mainstream yet).

Asante is an excellent writer, a poet and academic as well as a careful student of the topic. The text bristles with references and touchpoints. To make his points, he bends and blends genre -- there are interviews with real and imagined people, narratives, histories, rhymes, clips, and more. The guy clearly is a master craftsman.

The bibliography and filmographies at the end are excellent and worth pursuing at length.

Read this book.

Morgan says

Asante makes some very good, valid points, but his writing isn't very refined or sophisticated, and he covers some of the same ground in multiple chapters. I also felt like he was trying to prove something--he frequently mentions or refers to his age (he's young, around my age) and I wonder if he's not trying to say, "Look! I belong in these academic discussions, too!" by making too many references.

Erin says

the ideas in this book have a lot of potential, but the way in which it was written just drove me crazy. i could get deep into the stance taken and why it got infuriating, but that would be a term paper.

Jason Gordon says

Instead of discussing white supremacy through the lens of institutional racism -- i.e. political and economic policy implemented by whites to dominate, police, exclude, and subjugate non-whites -- MK Asante discusses white supremacy through its ideological lens.

The purpose of this book is not necessarily to unpack the ideology of white supremacy, but to tell us how such an ideology is packaged and disseminated through the mass media -- particularly black entertainment (hip-hop). It is here, the reader sees the intersection between capitalism and white supremacy. Capitalism facilitates the dissemination of white supremacist ideology through hip-hop by depriving non-white artists the means to control their cultural expressions and how they are disseminated to the larger public.

This lack of control or alienation is further compounded by very subtle forms of censorship. For example, rappers who do not play into the stereotypical representations of black culture and address important social, political and economic issues are labelled as conscious, political, or alternative rappers -- "tags that sling them into categorical ghettos and place them outside the earshot of the masses."

The book also discusses how white supremacist ideology is disseminated via the press (for e.g. television news' manic focus on crime/criminal activities to instill a sense of fear in white suburbia or its focus on drug busts in the ghetto due to the fact that urban slums are easier && cheaper to access than gated communities in the burbs -- both of which play an important role in the criminalization of black life) and education (for e.g. the wholesale excision of non-white contributions to history, philosophy, economics, politics, science, medicine, and art).

White supremacist ideology, MK Asante argues, is internalized by both whites and non-whites. On the one hand it is internalized by whites in order to refine or moderate (perfect?) their practices of domination and subjugation against non-whites. On the other, it is internalized by non-whites as a means of control where non-whites end up policing or criminalizing themselves and each other -- essentially fulfilling the expectations of white society.

Asante does not shy away from the practical elements of white supremacy i.e. institutional racism. He provides examples of how this packaging and dissemination of white supremacist ideology informs and refines the institutional practices of a society built on domination.

I highly recommend this book because it discusses what is often neglected in studies of racism and white supremacy: conceptual frameworks or ideology. While dismantling racist institutions and replacing them with just ones is quite important; what is far more important is decolonizing our hearts and minds -- replacing harmful ideologies with humane ones that can inform and refine institutional practices in a just society.

Kevin Eleven says

"It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop" by M.K. Asante Jr. turns out to be more than what is expected from a supposed "hip-hop" book. Asante's writing is captivating as he proves to be a stalwart in Afro-American history. He

demonstrates this by citing and referencing pivotal moments within the black archive that many of us aren't too familiar with in today's modern society. His writing alone reveals that IT IS BIGGER THAN HIP-HOP! WAY MORE as he effortlessly shows his versatility upon an abundance of topics. The most compelling subject matter that constant appears within the book is its poignant take on black oppression, as it often speaks upon the disenfranchisement of black Americans through culture, history, entertainment, media and the most controversial of all, race. With his voice, Asante is clear, concise and articulates the detrimental effects that many of these things have upon minorities in general, whether they are black, latino/a and/or of Asian descent. Lastly, what is most refreshing about "It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop" is that Asante depicts himself as being a highly intelligent young man who fully comprehends what it means to be black in America which essentially means being human. The author speaks with such a sharp tongue that the reader is bound to hang on to his every last word.

Mark Isero says

Great book by an excellent writer. I see my ninth graders reading Buck first and then graduating to this book.

Chapter 11 was my favorite, in which Mr. Asante calls on young people of color to be activists, that there is no such a thing as a mirror.

Trevon Davis says

It's Bigger than Hip- Hop by M.K. Asante, Jr. is a novel that opens eyes and minds together. Because I do not want to spoil the wonderfulness of this novel I will only tell a brief summary. This novel is about how the genre hip-hop has a deeper meaning besides raps, clothes, and culture; it tells how times from slavery to modern life effect the environments. The narrator uses his job and his plain knowledge to talk to others about this concept.

There are several quotations especially that I like about this novel. The author quotes many people in the beginning of each chapter to get just to get a hint of the chapters meaning. There are several topic that have been looked at differently that will make you stop and think. Whatever the chapter is about there is a background that leads up to current events like oppression. Asante goes around spreading the word about what is bigger than hip hop.

Besides the historical events, the narrator goes through events with his family members that help him get a better understanding of how hip hop has something to do with it. The historical events added up when the author tried to make a point. This is what kept me interested in the book. Another reason is that everything that was said is true about hip hop, and this is coming from a fan of hip hop

Jimmie Natee says

It's bigger than Hip-Hop by M.k. Asante, Jr is a book about Hip-Hop and how it all started. Also its has effect generation.Asante tells about the post Hip-Hop generation and how "rapper" always thinks that they have to live the lifestyles they rap and talk about.

There are several things i like about this book. The story is very straightforward and every chapter is about a different thing that affected Hip-Hop and made it what it has turn into today. For example, one chapter he

talk about how/why the Black Panther was created and how most people in today generation really don't know as much about the Black Panther as they think they do. Another thing I like about this book is that the author always starts a chapter with a quote that has something to do with that chapter. I would highly recommend it's bigger than Hip-Hop. I think anyone who likes Hip-Hop will also appreciate it. I will definitely read the next book in the series when it's released.

Craig Werner says

There's a smart core to this book by the son of famed Afrocentrist Molefi Kete Asante, but ultimately it comes close to collapsing into rhetorical overkill, near-cutesy stylistics and half-thought through analysis that winds up contradicting itself. First, what works. Asante begins with the premise that his generation--now in its 30s--is no longer part of what Bakari Kitwana described as the "hip-hop generation," itself defined largely by not being the civil rights/soul generation. When he says that hip hop no longer speaks for/represents him, he's articulating something I've been encountering among my students for a few years now. Second, Asante's absolutely on target when he says that we need to understand hip-hop (and whatever comes next) as part of the continuum of black music that goes back through soul and jazz and blues and gospel to the conditions faced by Africans in the new world. And he's right to tie what's happening musically today with the terrible conditions in poor black (and non-black) communities, especially in urban areas.

But he doesn't really follow through. When he's actually writing about hip-hop his tone is either "take it to the barricades" activist--lots of quotes from Dead Prez, for instance--or, more problematically, "down with the thug life" assertive. He never really engages the sexism in hip-hop, which is a. not part of the whole picture; b. corporate fueled; and c. still a big damn problem. He's trying to have it both ways--totally down with the street, convinced hip-hop's progressive. Yes and no; Trish Rose has pushed the case in *The Hip Hop Wars* in clearer form. It's a confused and confusing situation and I don't really blame Asante for not working out problems that certainly feel intractable. But I get a bit tired of the celebratory rhetoric--it's pretty much a "telling truth to power" defense of what he's tagged "activism." That shit's been old for a couple of decades. Stating your outrage and speaking from a position of self-righteous superiority didn't work in the 80s and it won't work now. There are flashes of unprocessed Afrocentrism mixed with bits of cross-racial solidarity, especially between black and brown. Ultimately, though, like a high percentage of hip-hop, it's sound and fury.

For all that, a call to be heeded. The trap for Asante will be/is getting sucked into the media-based game which will reward him for speaking but won't leave him time to do the deep reading and study he needs to do to take this to the next, truly post-hip-hop, level.

Mat says

This book is so much bigger than hip-hop. The author, who was a professor at 23 and just 26 at the time of its release, shows a better understanding of the material he samples and mixes into his work than most professors twice his age. Little wonder has been described as "a rare, remarkable talent that brings to mind the great artists of the Harlem Renaissance". The book is repetitive in parts, but the reader may get the feeling that the author is well aware of that, using repetition like a catchy hook to hammer his points home. Here are some quotes I liked:

When you make an observation, you have an obligation.

Post-hip-hop is an assertion of agency that encapsulates this generation's broad range of abilities, ideals, and ideas, as well as incorporates recent social advances and movements... that hip hop has either failed or refused to prioritize. How can one, for instance, dialogue progressively about gender issues within a space dominated by sexism and phallocentrism? Or take seriously notions of cooperative or participatory economics within a space that espouses guerilla capitalism? Or talk seriously about the end of war—over there and right here!—within a space that promotes violence?

When we consider hip hop's origins and purpose, we understand it is a revolutionary cultural force that was intended to challenge the status quo and the greater American culture. So, its relegation to reflecting American culture becomes extremely problematic if one considers the radical tradition of African-American social movements—which have never been about mirroring dominant American culture.

Saul Williams, a poet whose musical combination of hip hop, rock, techno, and a cappella Black oration might be called post-hip-hop, asks us, "So what is hip hop? Well, with Public Enemy and KRS-One, hip hop became the language of youth rebellion. But now, commercial hip hop is not youth rebellion, not when the heroes of hip hop like Puffy are taking pictures with Donald Trump and the heroes of capitalism—you know that's not rebellion. That's not 'the street'—that's Wall Street."

Today, young people have been tricked into seeing their acts of consumerism as acts of rebellion.

[S]ociety's stereotypes function not as errors, but rather forms of social control. In my brother's case, this prison of image led him to multiple stints in prison proper.

[T]he images produced by and for whites to justify Blacks' oppression, images of savages, of laziness, of pimpism and gangsterism, have been embraced by Blacks. It means that the images that taught white people to hate Blacks, to oppress them, have ultimately resulted in Blacks hating Blacks.

The reel becomes the real.

As writer William Jelani Cobb, in *To the Break of Dawn*, writes, "'Real' is to the rap industry as 'All-Natural' is to the fast food supplier, as 'New and Improved' is to the ad agency. As 'I Solemnly Swear' is to the politician."

"I'm trapped between me as a person and me as J.O. the rapper," Baltimore emcee John Jones, who has just come home from serving jail time, tells me. "When I was inside [prison], I was rappin' a lot more positive. But now that I'm out, my rhymes is more on some negative stuff because that's what people want to hear. It's a different kind of prison," he explains.

So why do we continue to stay in these boxes? Perhaps it's because of the American golden rule: those with the gold make the rules. So, essentially, white teenage boys, the primary consumers of rap music, spend billions of dollars on images and music produced by white corporations that reinforce these stereotypes.

This process of white consumerism, which is age-old, has taught Blacks that there are hefty profits to be made by living down to white expectations.

Often in predominantly white educational settings, black males put on their ghetto minstrel show as a way of protecting themselves from a white racialized rage. They want to appear harmless, not a threat, and to do so

they have to entertain unenlightened folks by letting them know “I don’t think I’m equal to you. I know my place. Even though I am educated I know you think I am still an animal at heart.”

“I was furious,” said William Jones, ODB’s father. “You know, that story about him being raised in the Fort Greene [Brooklyn] projects on welfare until he was a child of thirteen was a total lie,” he added. When Jones talked to his wife about their son’s bogus claims of ghettoship, her response was simple: “He did it for publicity.”

Poet Saul Williams reminds us that “Right now, we are unable to imagine world peace. Why? Because our imaginations have been stolen from us. We can imagine World War III because we’ve seen it in every movie, every TV show, etc. We cannot imagine world peace because we’ve never seen it before.”

[W]hen President Abraham Lincoln was killed, Andrew Johnson, his replacement, revoked Sherman’s orders. The very few Blacks who had already received land had it quickly taken away. Abolishing slavery with no restitution is like opening the door to a prison cell, while leaving all other exits bolted, chained, and locked, and telling an inmate that “they are free.” The cell door, although perhaps the most confining, is but a multitude of forces that keeps the prisoner imprisoned.

For every ten homes that they destroyed, they only built one new unit in the projects—institutional overcrowding.

When companies don’t go overseas, they use prison labor instead of creating real jobs, which is, in essence, slave labor. I mean, the rates they pay prisoners rivals what they might pay a child in an impoverished country... American Airlines, Boeing, Compaq, Dell, Eddie Bauer, Chevron, Hewlett-Packard, Honeywell, IBM, JCPenney, TWA, McDonald’s, Microsoft, Motorola, Nordstrom, Pierre Cardin, Revlon, Sony, Texas Instruments, Victoria’s Secret, and Toys “R” Us, to name a few.

I mean, in America, the richest nation in the world, on any given night, 562,000 American children go to bed hungry.

Didn’t Frederick Douglass say that “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

[M]ost people who live in me [the ghetto] are not addicted to drugs or alcohol, don’t engage in criminal activity, and are not on welfare... I mean, Bush is as responsible for his wealth as most of my residents are for their poverty.

What we are experiencing is the manifestation of what President Richard Nixon told his chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, “You have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.”

For the students who thought the [Black] Panthers’ goals were utopian, we summoned the words of Emma Goldman who told us that “every daring attempt to make a great change in existing conditions, every lofty vision of new possibilities for the human race, has been labeled Utopian.”

Consider the disparity in federal sentencing laws between crack cocaine (primarily used by Blacks) and powder cocaine (primarily used by whites):

5 GRAMS OF CRACK = 5 YEARS IN PRISON

500 GRAMS OF POWDER = 5 YEARS IN PRISON

[T]he mainstream has hijacked ideas like Malcolm X's "by any means necessary" and applied it to guerilla capitalism, hence: Get Rich or Die Tryin'.

When the weeds of doubt creep into our minds and tell us that we are too small, as individuals, to make a difference, let us remember what the Ghanaian proverb says: Try sleeping in a small room with a mosquito.

James Brown records "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud!" and "Funky Drummer;" the latter would become one of the most sampled tracks in hip-hop history. Brown would also record "Get on the Good Foot," a song promoting very high-energy, acrobatic dancing that Zulu Nation founder Afrika Bambaataa asserts led to break dancing.

Old white man after old white man, blazer after blazer, gray head after gray head, and striped tie after striped tie, I was shocked to discover that hip hop's decision makers weren't hip hop at all. I quickly came to the realization that hip hop, this urban Black creation, was something that urban Blacks (or even just Blacks) didn't control at all.

Are we to believe that the removal of one of the only songs, and certainly the first song by a mainstream artist, to challenge the corporate sharecropping in hip hop [Mos Def's "The Rape Over"] was purely coincidental?

Despite the perception that Black entrepreneurs like P. Diddy, Russell Simmons, Jay-Z, Cash Money are moguls, they are, in actuality, the children of their respective parent companies.

The logical, necessary, and vital next step for the post-hip-hop generation is simple: ownership over its cultural creations.

The courts have become a universal device for re-enslaving blacks.
— W. E. B. DUBOIS

Nixon—who once told Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, "Henry, leave the niggers to Bill and we'll take care of the rest of the world," and complained to Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John Ehrlichman that Great Society programs were a waste "because blacks were genetically inferior to whites"—would take office in January 1969...

As the Los Angeles Times concluded, "Although it is clear that whites sell most of the nation's cocaine and account for 80% of its consumers, it is Blacks and other minorities who continue to fill up America's courtrooms and jails."

We used to run around tryna' get money and power
Look at us now, gettin' fuckin' twelve cents a hour.
— OSCHINO, "JAIL LETTERS," BEST OF OSCHINO

"Prison labor is like a pot of gold. No strikes. No union organizing. No health benefits, unemployment insurance, or workers' compensation or pay," explains Linda Evans, a prisoner in California. Since the Supreme Court's 1993 ruling that inmates did not have the right to minimum wage, corporations such as American Airlines, McDonald's, Microsoft, Victoria's Secret, and Toys "R" Us have exploited and continue to exploit prisoners to meet their bottom line. Prison labor allows corporations to boast "Made in the U.S.A." while paying paltry wages that are even lower than the slave wages doled out in Southeast Asia, the Pacific Rim, and Latin America.

Put another way, the prison industry hires more people than any Fortune 500 company, with the exception of General Motors.

It's "impossible to run an election campaign without advocating more jails, harsher punishment, more executions, all the things that have never worked to reduce crime but have always worked to get votes," concludes George Gerbner, former dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication and one of the nation's foremost experts on the media.

Frederick Douglass warned: "Find out just what the people will submit to and you have found out the exact amount of injustice and wrong, which will be imposed upon them..."

In France, the Black and Arab youth scream "Police partout, justice nulle part!" meaning "Police everywhere, justice nowhere."

Take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

— ELIE WIESEL

Take a look around and be for or against
but you can't do shit if you ridin' the fence.

— THE COUP, "RIDE THE FENCE," PARTY MUSIC

Education should liberate, not enslave. And eventually, in the long run, liberate the whole world.

- AFRAR AFRIYA, STUDENT — LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

It's important to understand that challenging the mainstream school system is not antieducational, but actually, the contrary.

Consider that self-education implies self-motivation as opposed to grade-motivation and careerism...

I shared with them an edict that Paul Robeson once made: "The role of the artist is not simply to show the world as it is, but as it ought to be."

The African-American tradition of activism reaches back to the djeli tradition of West Africa. Known in French as "griots," djelis were traveling poets and artists who not only included, but focused on the politics of the day and the condition of the people as a primary function in their work.

How will history, and our children's children, look upon the arts of this dark era? An era where we are under attack by those who degrade life. This war—between those individuals and institutions who seek to destroy humanity and those individuals and institutions who resist that destruction—places all of us in a crucial position in which we must choose between obliteration and restoration, life and death.

If our art does not challenge and confront, fight and tussle, wrestle, grapple and stand up against oppression, then our art is actually aiding that oppression.

If you ain't sayin nothin'
Then you the system's accomplice.

— THE ROOTS, "DON'T FEEL RIGHT," GAME THEORY

Any strategy that sees race, Black or white, as more important than ideology is a failing one... We must come to grips with the fact that symbols of progress are not substitutes for progress.

Eisenhower's logic was simple: material possessions, be they [swimming] pools or twenty-two-inch rims, nullify and trap the middle class, thus preoccupying and preventing them from challenging the status quo.

When one combines a vulgarly individualistic society with lack of historical understanding (that is: how history affects the present), the result is a flimsy attack on poor people that overemphasizes "personal responsibility." ... This is not to say that personal responsibility isn't important, but we must recognize that without proper social justice, personal responsibility is impossible to exercise.

The word "hip" comes out of the Wolof language, spoken by the Wolof people in Senegal, Gambia, and Mauritania. In Wolof, there's a verb, "hipi," which means "to open one's eyes and see." So, hipi is a term of enlightenment. My first name means "to see or to be enlightened," ya dig... Honky. It comes from the Wolof word "honq," which means "pink man."

[A]s Malcolm X said: "If a cat has kittens in an oven, that doesn't make them biscuits."

My music is ghetto music—period... Yet, the part of me that the honqs dega [honkys dig] is the shit that, just like back in the day, never calls their oppression out.

Man, discussin' corporate radio—Hot this, Jammin' that, Q this, Blazin' that—is like debating the pros and cons of rape.

Look at the freedom songs during the Civil Rights Movement. Those songs were the soul of that movement; the fire and fiber they needed to keep on keepin' on. Those songs were designed for one purpose: to invigorate and call to action. To prepare people for struggle, to elevate their consciousness. You've got these big powerful voices singing, "Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom," I mean, that's revolutionary. Or, even "We Shall Overcome"—that's a declaration of victory. Those songs inspired people to challenge oppression, ignited their feet, and united them for a common cause. The music was the fuel. The music was the weapon. Even Dr. King himself admitted that "through this music, the Negro is able to dip down into wells of a deeply pessimistic situation and danger-fraught circumstances and to bring forth a marvelous, sparkling, fluid optimism. He knows it is still dark in his world, but somehow, he finds a ray of light."

Thomass says

eh, just couldn't really get into it. I think it might be a great book for an audience that isn't already familiar but for me, i've read sooooo much along these lines that it doesn't really have much impact on me. Granted i only got about a quarter of the way through it i can't really judge it on a whole. I do hope it inspires others out there.

Rosemari says

M.K. Asante, Jr. is an intellectual like his father, Molefi Asante, the father of afrocentricity. This book comments on aspects of African American culture especially as it relates to appropriations and exploitation by dominant American society. Asante is emerging as a strong writer, observer and critical thinker. I saw his presentation at the Free Library in Philadelphia this year and I was impressed with the pure energy he brings to the arena of critical commentary. I feel momentarily hopeful about the future when I read new voices like M.K. Asante's (as opposed to wanna bees like Toure who is more marketable than authentic. What's wrong with being marketable? True, we must be both, but authenticity (being earnest and committed to the cause as long as we're still in this ghetto) must be unquestionable). M.K. Asante, Jr. is now officially on my must read the next book list, along with his father.

Megan says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, though it is so packed with insights and content, I had to take it slow. My one critique was that the author seemed to write the book for young adults at points, then switched to writing for an older audience. I think it's admirable to try and write for all generations, but the language used did not necessarily lend itself to that. Overall, excellent read and definitely a must for anyone truly engaged in the world! 4.5 stars

Gabriel Rodriguez says

This book took me on a much needed journey into the depth of a generation that created for the most part, the culture we are enjoying today. As the title suggests, the author explains how a single generation, aided by creative outlets, can change the trajectory of this country. But the work is far from finished. M.K. Asante Jr. also points out the dangers of today's disregard of music's influence on our young minds, and suggests we need to be more conscious of our power to create culture and use that to better strengthen our culture's core in order to move towards a more balanced socio-economic structures.
