

## Rap Sessions Study Guide

### *Race & Hip Hop*

By: Daniel White Hodge

---

Throughout the last several years of its 30-year existence, Hip Hop has revealed itself as a national cultural arts movement. Because of the mainstreaming of Hip Hop in American culture, race is entering our collective consciousness in new and interesting ways. Americans young and old experience this on a daily basis through Hip Hop lyrics and video images; through mainstream advertisements and fashion; through award-winning films like *Hustle and Flow* (2005); through popular television programming such as *The Boondocks*, *The Dave Chapelle Show* and the ever classic *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

Rap Sessions public dialogue on Race and Hip Hop focuses on the Hip Hop generation and their younger siblings, the millennium generation—the first Americans to live their entire lives in the post-segregation United States. Hip Hop intellectuals from various ethnic backgrounds discuss the issues at hand in this interactive town hall style meeting which looks equally at the way today's popular culture, the impact of the generation gap, and emerging trends in youth activism have all influenced youth perceptions of race.

This discussion seeks to help students look at Hip Hop culture as a cross-racial phenomenon that has its political and cultural roots in Black and Brown communities. At the same time, the Race and Hip Hop dialogue examines the possibilities for similar cross-racial political organizing.

---

This study guide seeks to go deeper into the issues of race and Hip Hop. The study questions here are listed to continue the conversation that was started during the Rap Sessions forum. This study guide works best when done in a group or community setting. The community based learning format is preferred because we tend to learn more when others share, interact, and engage with our thoughts and opinions. We recommend you go deeper as a group on this particular subject. [Start here](#) and view the Rap Sessions *Digital Stories* which will also help direct you through this study guide.

#### **For Starters...**

As you have now seen and witnessed, this public dialogue has provided a safe, public forum where youth can openly debate the issues of race and Hip Hop. To begin, answer the following questions to yourself:

- Is Hip Hop today's minstrel show?

- Is the appropriation of Hip Hop perpetuating racial stereotypes? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Now, take some time to reflect on your answers and share them with a friend or two.

Below are some questions that will help guide you as you now begin to broaden this discussion in a community type format. Begin by answering these questions in the group – make sure everyone has a chance to share:

- How are U.S. citizens who identify with Hip Hop culture viewing race differently?
  - How has the impact and influence of BET & MTV affected Hip Hoppers view on race?
- Is the mainstreaming of Hip Hop in American popular culture a help or hindrance to young citizens' understanding of race?
  - Is the commercialization of Hip Hop racially motivated do you think? If so how? If not, what role does commercialization play in Hip Hop?
- Can race escape its role as a means to divide and conquer in American politics and instead be used in this generation as a tool for social change?
  - Will this be the first generation to actually be “color blind” or is that still a “pie in the sky” ideology?

### **Probing Deeper...**

Let us examine each of these quotes by poignant scholars who have connections or roots in Hip Hop:

*"To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society--flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes."*

**(Cornel West Race Matters [1993:6])**

*Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals."*

***Letter from Birmingham Jail***  
**Martin Luther King Jr.**

*The earth's most expensive and pernicious evil is racism, the inability of God's creatures to live as One, especially in the Western world."*

**Malcolm X**

- How West's statement about American society having "...flaws rooted in historic inequalities and long standing stereotypes" connect with today's Hip Hop racial constructs?
  - How might rappers like Flava Flav, Trick Daddy, & even 50 Cent contribute to these long standing stereotypes?
  - Does commercialized Hip Hop talk about the inequalities that America has had since its inception? How might rappers
- Being that most of the major record labels are run by White men, how will the "Black Coon" and "Mammie" symbols ever be undone?
- Do you believe that Hip Hop is becoming De-Racialized? What I mean, is Rap / Hip Hop becoming White as you see how it is marketed and used by Trans-global corporations such as Carls Jr, McDonalds, & AT&T?
- Looking at Malcolm X's quote, how does racism begin to seep into the psyche of America when catastrophe's like Katrina hits? Moreover, what do you think Kanye meant when he stated that George Bush did not care about Black people? Was that to include Latinos, Asians, Middle Easterners, & Pacific Islanders too?

### **Examining Hip Hop's Racial Constructs...**

In May of 2007 CBS' 60 Minutes did a special on Hip Hop titled "Hip Hop Confidential." The special focused around the success of such Hip Hop moguls as Jay-Z, Kanye West, and Russell Simmons. You can watch clips and read the segment by [clicking here](#).

- How might racial stereotyping have contributed to the "Best rappers ever" poll?
- Does the "over all picture" of Hip Hop represent those who are in Hip Hop? Again how might race have played a part in this?

Watch this clip here from You Tube from the Bill Maher's show in which Cornel West & Mos Def discuss some serious issues on the socio-cultural climate in America. [Click here for the clip](#).

- Is "terrorism" and "police brutality" "apples & oranges" as stated by Bill?
- Does Mos Def have a point about 9/11?
- How does Cornel West's overall view of 9/11, race in America, and White America influence how he responds?
  - What does he mean by an individual not being able to "save America?"
- What about the 9/11 theory? How does it hold up within a Hip Hop ethos?

Films tend to expose many deep racial constructs that lie deep within the human mind. Films like *Crash* (2005) expose many known prejudices, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism within us

- How does White privilege play a part in films like *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2003) and *8-Mile* (2002) as it relates to White males "getting off easier" when it comes to films which engage the White element of Hip Hop?
- Do Whites like Justin Timberlake get racial "passes" when things go bad like they did when Janet Jackson was held in complete responsibility after the Super Bowl debacle?

Take a look at this [clip here](#).

- How does racial profiling play a part in the construction of race in America?
- How might Hip Hop's image of the "Thug," "Gangster," and Black and Brown male play into racial profiling?

Race & ethnicity are deeply ingrained into American structures and socio-cultural systems. It is not going away anytime soon. True Hip Hop begins the solid discussion of race, but it does not always provide all the answers. Understanding our own ethnocentrism and prejudices begins by us first understanding where we come from, and the question therefore remains, where do we get our own biases, prejudices, and stereotypes? How were they formed, and how do socializing agents such as family, media, peers, and schooling influence how we see the world/ people around us?

### For Further Reading

- Bell, Daniel. 1976. *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. London: Heinemann.
- Bennett, Lerone. 1993. *The Shaping of Black America*. New York NY: Penguin Books.
- Borstelmann, Thomas. 2003. Jim Crow's Coming Out: Race Relations and American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no 3:549-569.
- Boyd, Todd. 2003. *The H.N.I.C.: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop*. New York NY: New York University Press.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. 2000. *I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King Jr.* New York NY: Free Press.
- . 2004. *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*. New York NY: Basic Civitas.
- George, Nelson. 1998. *Hiphop America*. New York NY: Penguin Books.
- Gibson, Thomas. 2005. Letter to the President. USA: QD3 & Image Entertainment.
- Tate, Greg. 2003. *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*. 1st ed. New York: Broadway Books.
- Waller, James. 1998. *Face to Face: The Changing State of Racism across America*. New York: Insight Books.
- . 2000. *Prejudice across America*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Waters, Harry, Jr. 1992. Race, Culture, & Interpersonal Conflict. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 16 (4):437-454.

## Daniel White Hodge

Dan White Hodge is a dynamic speaker, scholar, Hip Hop theologian, Tupac Shakur scholar, & racial bridge builder that connects Urban Popular culture (*Including but not limited to Hip Hop, Race/ Ethnicity, class, socio-cultural concerns, The Black Church, & The Emergent Urban Church*) with daily life events. Having received his PhD from Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, his dissertation focused on the life, theology, and spiritual message of Tupac Amaru Shakur (TITLE: *Baptized in Dirty Water: The Missiological Gospel of Tupac Amaru Shakur*). Dan has been an active member of the Hip Hop Community since he was in first grade, and continues to not only study the culture, but live it as well. His unique perspective on Hip Hop and Theology challenges his audiences to look beyond the "outer surface" and go into the deeper parts of the culture. Dr. White Hodge is currently working on a book entitled "*Tha Hostile Gospel: Missionally Engaging The Theology of Hip Hop*." This book is being published by Inner Varsity Press and deals with the theology and spirituality of Hip Hop culture.