

Beginning in 1946 and ending in 1963 the construction of the cross box express way ripped the Bronx in half. Urban planners and developers lead by **Robert Moses** showed little concern for people who lived in the borough and displaced thousands of residents and small business owners leaving in its wake a poor devastated community with little outside help from politicians... the culture and the energy that came from that was a very improvisational energy a very reclaiming energy that young folks through dance, through rapping and DJ and so forth, that's how the culture took hold. It was a willed response to systematic violence in the community. And when I say violence I mean [things] like destroying homes. Imagine someone putting a high way through your neighbourhood, then you can understand hip-hop.

in 1987, the NAACP conducted an investigation into the recording industry investigating 'widespread racial discrimination in the American recording industry' titled, *the Discordant Sound of Music: A report on the record Industry*, addressing the following four questions

1. Are blacks receiving a fair share of the economic opportunities generated by the industry
2. Is there racial discrimination in the industry, and if so, to what degree is it present?
3. Are blacks equitably employed in behind-the-scene jobs?
4. Do black artists use their influence to promote and provide opportunities for other blacks?

Evidently, the report answered all of these questions negatively, addressing the white orientated industry domination, which, when considering the sheer size of the vast entity known as the music industry, is a finding which, in terms of its ramifications, ranks in as astonishing:

Unlike other industries, where the various parts form a well integrated structure, the record industry is made up of a number of different autonomous entities, including major record companies, independent labels, recording artist, managers, agents, promoters, distributors, radio, television, and retailers. They cooperate with each other, but at the same time they retain their separate identities. (p 45)

As the report soon continues, examining the make-up of the industry 'it is apparent that blacks are grossly under-represented at the professional and managerial levels' going on to put this into context by explaining the make-up of the industry

It becomes somewhat easier to understand the status of blacks with the record companies by looking at the structure of a typical record company. There are several major departments – Artists and Repertoire (A&R), Business, Business Affairs, and Marketing. The last encompasses record promotions, publicity, merchandising, and product management. Under the A&R departments are the Black Music Division (Rhythm & Blues) and the Popular Music Division (Pop). Black artists enter through the black music division where there is normally less money available for promotional purposes than in the pop division, which handles white artists. (p 46)

As the report continues, although there are some black managers and executives, their salaries are somewhat less than those paid to their counterparts, whilst 'black executive with the record companies are tightly restricted in their exercise of authority' perhaps slashing this idea that men in suits are a step above being treated as "boys". Further, their budgets are smaller, when controlled, and are mostly confined to the black division, with it being the case that even where they cross-ver 'they are often assigned to staff positions such as personnel, as opposed to line positions' with the report continuing

None of the major record companies has an affirmative action program to recruit black employees or increase their representation in management and professional

positions. The pattern of exclusion found in the top-echelon jobs also extends into other areas, with very few blacks being employed either on staff or under contract as photographers, promoters and salve representatives, make-up artists, art directors, sound engineers and publicists (except for black media) ...[they fail]to encourage the development of black businesses...

It was thus, once of the conclusion of the article that 'the record industry is overwhelmingly segregated and discrimination is rampant' however, rather than labour this dead horse, or even entertain its recommendations - which if those made in the classic *Kerner* report weren't taken, will have unlikely been taken anyway. I will turn, much rather, to an interview at *The Hip Hop Elementary Roundtable*, a discussion between Lord Finesse, Mr Dave, Wendy Day and LS one, moderated by Adam Mansbach and Danny Rudder, (*How Not to Get Jerked!*) in which it was suggested that artists, misguided, sell themselves short, whilst all the time, getting "pimped" by their labels. As Lord Finesse argued

Artists fall victim to the materials. Nine out of ten times, artists sell themselves short because they don't know what their true value in the game is. When you deal with a label, you gotta tell them straight up what you expect from them, and they'll tell you what they expect from you. You can't make any assumptions ... if you go in there and you start assuming, then at the end of the date your royalty check don't look right. It's about knowin' when you're gonna get paid; how you're gonna get paid, where your next paycheck is comin' from. The industry is ruthless. People come up to me saying, "I love to rap." Man, f**k rap. You got to know the business. Most artists don't know the business... [most artists] don't care. They're selling their publishing rights, selling everything at the drop of a dime. [...] your lawyer should explain fully to you what your contract is about... all the twists and turns in the contract. Most artists get a lawyer who knows they're broke, but he don't really care... they can't sympathise with what you're going through ... when the rent is due, the rent is due.

Our problems remains as being the ability that white power structures have to govern and dominate our lives, and it was the failure to see this which Yvonne Bynoe condemned in her article *Money, Power and Respect: A Critique of the Business of Rap Music* in which she argued

Ironically, it is the Black elites in the industry who most zealously promote the virtues of "keepin' it real" to the Hip Hop community. Many middle-class Black executives, like their White counterparts, have fetishized the ghetto as the domain of "authentic" blackness, continuing to dig deeper into its bowels to satisfy hipsters looking to be down. It suffices to say that depicting Black youth as "normal" is not a marketable concept... although the 1990s slogan "keepin' it real" was originally a call to remember one's roots; it has been transformed into an ethos that disdains education, self-improvement, public decorum, and personal responsibility. Curiously enough, these characteristics are antithetical to the habits that successful Black executives have adopted themselves.

Yvonne Bynoe, however, does not end there in her crusade, stopping at looking at the "affected" – or perhaps more rightly termed "disaffected" members of the society, instead, turning attention to the external structure in which youth themselves live, by pulling up older people, black businesses and community structures which seem to be as complacent as they are redundant. Bynoe writes:

Black-owned businesses that impact the Hip Hop industry could encourage young people to pursue education, obtain capital, and craft plans to implement their own visions – aspirations that are not promoted to Black youth in expensive and slick rap videos. The greater "Black community" has also fallen short by not providing

alternative messages to those espoused in rap music content. The traditional institutions of the “black community” (i.e., the churches and civil rights organizations) have virtually abandoned their youth, allowing hedonistic consumerism to usurp the meaningful values and ethics that for generations have fortified Black Americans. If their communities were instilling Black youth with more vision for their future, perhaps they would be less apt to see rap artists as their leaders and role-models. (p 234)

As **April Silver** states, in her essay, “*Hip Hop: from Cultural to Corporate Entertainment*” (p 220)

While black scholars seem to be asleep at the wheel, some whites are at least cognizant of the issue of commercialisation and exploitation of music and its creators... this absence of scrutiny by black intellectuals of the political economy of black music allows hip hop to be treated as another “black problem” or something that needs to be contained through efforts by moral commissars. How the music industry is structured, and the role of blacks within it, is never openly questioned or subjected to debate or critical inquiry.

[H]ip Hop’s expansion into the global marketplace, coupled with its phenomenal profitability, is tantamount to a ripple effect in a disturbed pond. Although our voice has been signalled across the world and our presence has been announced, our conditions remain virtually unchanged. Black and Latino people are still disenfranchised politically, economically disadvantaged, and socially marginalised.¹

¹ Quoted in *Rhythm and Business*, edited by Norman Kelly