



Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America

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Our national conversation about race is ludicrously out of date. Hip hop is the key to understanding how things are changing. In a provocative book that will appeal to hip-hoppers both black and white and their parents, Bakari Kitwana deftly teases apart the culture of hip-hop to illuminate how race is being lived by young Americans. *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop* addresses uncomfortable truths about America's level of comfort with black people, challenging preconceived notions of race. With this brave tour de force, Bakari Kitwana takes his place alongside the greatest African-American intellectuals of the past decades.

Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America Details

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From Reader Review Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America for online ebook

Mikal says

Interesting perspective on race relations in the United States as viewed through our popular culture. I am not really comfortable with many of his assertions, which seem at best wildly optimistic and pie in the sky with little substance. While some of what he discusses is occurring, as far as I've read it fails to really reflect a true and full view of the idiosyncrasies with race and the younger generation. In other words, his general assertion of hip hop being a civil rights "kumbaya" moment fails to address the difficulties and complexities of mainstream America's full acceptance of racist stereotypes and how seeing young black men through that lens in reality has adversely affected their welfare and well being. Sadly, the book is devoid of little academic research, but lays its foundation largely on conjecture and opinion. A hopeful book that is founded on very little data to ultimately have his points withstand the litmus test of what is actually occurring on the ground in America.

Benjamin says

Is there a 'new reality of race in America'? I'm not convinced, although that Barack Obama is not Jesse Jackson is pretty self-evident. It would be nice if hip hop's appeal to white kids spread to create a politics in the USA that actually gave a shit about cities, that was ready to end the war on drugs and get some harm reduction going, that was ready to talk reparations... but first of all... fat chance. go check out that documentary called 'black out.' second of all, if voting really changed anything, it'd be illegal. still, Kitwana's optimism is infectious and if his book gets the Wankstas and Wiggers thinking about it then mazel tov.

Lauren says

I expected a more searing analysis of white kids who are into hip-hop when I started this book, but was pleasantly surprised to see Kitwana take a broader, more generous approach to this topic. While he does take the reader through the history of hip-hop and highlights the various ways white record executives and artists have attempted to hijack the genre, he also asserts that this is a multiracial movement that has room for more than just black folks. I gave it four stars because he gets fairly political at the end of the book, which begins to feel dated given that Obama was barely a Senator when the book was published. Yet, for anyone interested in the complicated racial politics of hip-hop, it's a fast and thoughtful read.

Mike says

So this is not the greatest book. The early stuff didn't do much of anything. It seemed like most of the observations were building towards this moment where he would talk about "the new racial politics." So then I get to the end of the book, and it's not there. So I'm not sure I buy the entire premise of this book, that hip-hop is realizing a new racial politics. However, there is a little bit of good stuff at the end on not letting the hip-hop block get coopted, and how it needs to exert pressure and not get stolen. I think a lot of analysis is

missing in this book and just sort of gets assumed as a framework. However, Michael Eric Dyson gave this a very positive review, so maybe I'll have to reread this thing.

Oh yea, some of the interviews he does are pretty good, but there's not much illuminating about them either. It's just interesting to hear what some white hip hop activists that are deeper in the scene have to say.

Natalie S. says

I had such high expectations for this book, and I walked away so, so disappointed. My primary complaint: Kitwana doesn't spend much time talking about why white kids love hip-hop. She establishes that white kids do, indeed, love hip-hop; she discusses the methods by which white society popularized hip-hop; she speculates about the future of politics because white kids love hip-hop. But her discussion regarding the reasons white kids seek out, listen to, and engage with hip-hop and hip-hop culture is superficial at best.

So why do white kids love hip-hop? According to the author, it's because Gen X and Millennials are experiencing true multiculturalism and are seeking out hip-hop as a way to reject old racial politics. She claims that hip-hop's popularity and universality, especially during a time of economic crisis, are allowing white kids to take part in the black experience, reject antagonistic racial politics, and engage in cross-cultural understanding. In Kitwana's own words, "That American youth across race have embraced hip-hop culture... is a testament to American youth incorporating the founding fathers' 'all men are created equal' rhetoric into their worldview." In some cases, this is certainly true. However, I sincerely doubt that white kids are putting Chris Brown and Drake on their iPods as an act of political solidarity.

The crux of my critique of this book can be summed up by a note I made at the bottom of page 5 of the introduction. I wrote: "makes white people seem so accepting and black people seem so fussy." This was in response to an anecdote the author included about a planning committee meeting for a "major hip-hop political event" in which a "young Black man" stormed out after hearing that "the event would be multicultural." I wish I was over-simplifying this part of the text, but I'm not. I literally had the image of a bunch of people at a round table breaking the news to this guy. "Brad, brace yourself. The event will be... multicultural." Cue storming out. End scene.

Skip this read. The argument is plagued by over-simplification, assertions without evidence, and sometimes offensive characterizations of both black and white youth.

papafawn says

an interesting collection of essays that cover the political, in particular racial, aspects of hip-hop culture. bakari both critiques and celebrates the appropriation of hip-hop by white people, particularly white youth, with a clear understanding of the class struggles both races share. no vapidty here: tellingly, many of the other reviewers didn't read more than one or two essays!

Mel says

I don't know what I expected. But it was more than what I got.
I have been to one or two of Bakari Kitwana's forums here in NYC.

That may have been the reason why I had higher expectations.

I live in NY. I've always had friends of different backgrounds. People's reasons for loving hip hop (or music in general) are different. Or the same. But mostly, music moves you and resonates in a way nothing else can. Even if you cannot relate to the lyrics.

He had a whole chapter dedicated to Eminem. But never touched on House of Pain. Or 3rd bass.

He quoted figured, and stated supposed facts. But I think that if you are really looking for an answer to the question on the cover? You should look elsewhere.

2.5 stars.

Mat says

Any book that tried to give concrete answers to a premise as subjective as "Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop" would be open to ridicule. But the author, a former editor of "hip-hop Bible" The Source, takes a more intelligent approach than that. He even casts doubt on the widely accepted notion that hip-hop's primary audience is white. He concludes that if white kids - who are increasingly disenfranchised - really are engaging in huge numbers with an art form perpetrated by oppressed blacks, then hip-hop could be the "last hope" for a global political system that enriches a tiny elite while seeking to divide and conquer.

Here are some quotes I liked:

Coming out of the gate in 1991, Soundscan was tracking approximately 7,300 retail outlets, mostly chain stores in the suburbs. Before Soundscan, the majority of stores that reported sales were freestanding stores in urban areas. This discrepancy was one of the earliest criticisms of Soundscan - its data pool was lopsided to begin with, hence the seeming overnight shift of hip-hop's audience from the hood to the suburbs.

In 1963 Malcolm X discussed the "Black revolution and the "Negro revolution" with a poignant analogy to coffee: "What do you do when you have coffee that's too Black? You weaken it with cream." The idea of a white primary audience became hip-hop's cream, ready, willing and able to dilute what was considered by many Americans far too Black and far too influential.

[Quoting hip-hop scholar and author Murray Foreman]: "The real test of white kids and hip-hop is what happens with police brutality when the white officers policing Black and Latino communities are the same young whites who grew up on hip-hop?"

[Quoting Bomb the Suburbs author Billy Wimsatt]: "I'm horrified by the aspect of the white hip-hop thing where you can be a white hard-core underground hip-hop kid in, say, Minnesota, and not know a single Black person. Their whole social circle is white. Their favourite rappers are white, and they're trying to put out their own CDs, and so on. This is shockingly and violently decontextualised from what hip-hop came from and what it's about."

[Quoting white writer Jon Caramanica]: "As a white boy in hip-hop, you gotta have someone on the scale below you. First, it's all the corny white kids, then the ones new to hip-hop. The ones trying really hard. Clearly you're cooler than that. But then you start measuring yourself up to the black kids, thinking surely you're cooler, more hip-hop than the ones who don't seem to wear hip-hop on their sleeve, the ones who you perceive as corny. Then you start thinking you're more hip-hop than they are."

[Quoting Hakim of hip-hop group Channel Live]: "Rap music is what you hear on the radio and see in music videos. Hip-hop, on the other hand, is how we survived the anti-youth public policy of the '80s and '90s."

White hip-hop activists fall into two main categories: (1) those who were activists first... and (2) those who moved in the opposite direction...

For some white hip-hop activists, it was the lyrics and oppositional politics of hip-hop artists that were directly responsible for waking them up to American democracy's many brutal contradictions.

"[White] Billy's activism is based on what he *sees* as unjust. [Black] Donna's is based on what she's *lived* as unjust."

[Quoting Harlem Renaissance writer Alain Locke in the "New Negro" more than 50 years ago]:
"[F]undamentally for the present the Negro is radical on race matters, conservative on others, in other words, a 'forced radical'..."

Where is the national debate on issues that matter to the hip-hop voting bloc? The need to create full employment with living-wage jobs and repeal mandatory minimum sentencing (which criminalizes hundreds of thousands of young people) is never debated on Capitol Hill...

[W]hites voting for Obama aren't necessarily moving away from the old racial politics but in fact reinforcing it.

Hip-hop is the last hope for this generation and arguably the last hope for America. The political elite has done an exceptional job of polarizing the country - liberal versus conservatives, Blacks versus whites, underclass versus elite, heterosexual versus homosexual. On every issue, mainstream electoral politics follows a strategy of divide and conquer. This is what allows our electoral system to function unchallenged as a private piggy bank for the rich.

Lisa says

Not a smidgen of a mention of all the MARIJUANA that brought these races in hip-hop culture together in the first place! I like how the author capitalizes the word "Blacks" but not whites. Just another opinion on this never-ending race issue. This book is from 2005, and It's not the white (sober) rapper Eminem the author should focus on anymore. It's this fucking thing called dubstep. (Oh and he misspelled Adidas on page 97)

Oswaldo says

Let's say three and a half stars.

I appreciated Bakari Kitwana's approach in this book, and his attempt to have an open approach to the possible positive meaning of the involvement of white kids in hip hop culture and their love of hip hop music, while remaining historically grounded in the realities of cultural appropriation, and unjust economic compensation in the music business.

I even appreciated his attempt to rehabilitate the role of Eminem to some degree (even if I think Eminem is vastly overrated) and found his argument that Marshall Mathers is *not* the hip-hop Elvis (meant in as disparaging a way as you can imagine) is compelling, given that despite the in-roads he and other white artists have made in hip hop and R&B, for the most part the music is still created and performed by black performers to a degree that does not and likely will never parallel what happened with rock n' roll.

That said, I do find his ultimate conclusions overly optimistic, and don't think hip hop music has the opportunity to accomplish the kind of political possibilities ascribed to it both for black youth and for youths of different races. The folk cultural origins of hip hop are long gone, strip-mined as a way to sell black urban cache without the remotest need to understand or digest the historical and cultural realities of black and brown people in America.

Graeme Hinde says

I wasn't feeling Henry James tonight, so I picked this book up and read the first 60 pages. Here is the typically vapid sentence that made me cast it to the pit with a groan:

"This tendency to go against convention and go beyond the expected has long been a part of hip-hop's history, and most certainly is a characteristic of many white kids who love hip-hop."

Maggie says

Ambitiously, this book raises quite a few questions about the role of hip-hop in youth culture, race and identity politics, and American popular culture. While his writing is intelligent and accessible, Kitwana falls short in answering the questions he poses. Too much of the book is him disproving statistics that aren't that relevant to his argument to begin with or presenting anecdotal evidence that's not always convincing. Most of all, it seems his discussion of the music itself gets lost beneath too many other topics. Still, the questions he raises are excellent ones--even if he fails to convincingly answer them himself.

Adam says

This book has some interesting points but mostly it is a black guy talking about how the white man is trying to steal his culture. If you try to filter out all the bull about that then you can find he has some decent points. I went into this book open minded but came out feeling like I wasted my time. He tries to make excuses for all the problems in the black society. You might want to read this if you would like a black person's perspective of hip-hop when concerning white people, but it is probably what you expect.

Ubalstech says

Bakari Kitwana was, at one point, a writer for The Source. As others have pointed out before me, this book is not solely about white kids and hip-hop. Rather this book is a collection of Kitwana's essays around hip hop in popular culture today and the implications of its influence.

To answer the question of the title, white kids love hip-hop, in Kitwana's opinion, because they have moved beyond the racial definitions of their parents. Their world is more multi-cultural than those that have come before. It is Dr. King's vision realized. He also feels that the white youth of America have far more in common with the black youth, unemployment, sub-standard education and poverty, than they do with their

parents.

Perhaps the most interesting essay in the book is the one that looks at the ongoing war against Eminem lead by Benzino and Mays, the founders and publishers of The Source and Kitwana's former employers. While he does not condone the racist lyrics that Eminem was being attacked fore, Kitwana certainly sees selfish and jealous motives as the source of his former employers fury. Given his job history, Kitwana has an interesting point of view on the issue. And an interesting bias, that he does not really do much address.

This is a good collection of essays, although the last one on the political influence of hip-hop is a little dated given that it was written before Obama's election.

kevin says

Kitwana challenges many of the prevailing stereotypes about White kids and hip-hop. Unfortunately, because very little useful data exists, his argument relies heavily on anecdotal evidence. As a result, Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop weakens notions of a White fandom based purely on exoticism, opens potentially fruitful avenues for future investigation, but cannot answer the question implied by its title.

Deserving of least an afternoon's attention for anyone studying teenagers, hip-hop, and race, Kitwana makes a notable early step toward a better understanding of the complex relationship between identity and popular culture.
