



Institute for Children, Youth and Families  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824

Dr. Carl S. Taylor  
Editor  
[taylor36@msu.edu](mailto:taylor36@msu.edu)

February 2003

### **Beyond the Bling:**

## **A Look at Hip-Hop, African-American Leadership & The Black Church: Implications to African-American Youth Development**

**Reynard N. Blake, Jr., M.S.**

Institute of Children, Youth and Families  
Michigan State University

### **Introduction**

Hip-hop or rap, an art form and culture nearly thirty years old originating from The Bronx, New York, has provided a forum for African-American\* and Latino youth to express their respective cultures and speak on a number of issues. Today, hip-hop is a global phenomenon that appeals to almost all ethnicities and is synthesizing a new culture that goes beyond race, education, and income.

Despite the growing acceptance of hip-hop within white America and the middle class, hip-hop is also under siege. Consider the comments on rap or hip-hop by [Bill O'Reilly](#), popular talk show host on the Fox News Channel:

Did you know that in 1999 alone, 81 million rap albums were sold? . . .

When I confronted perhaps the most powerful rap and hip-hop executive in the world, Russell Simmons, about explicit lyrics that may be a corrupting influence on high risk children, he looked at me like I was from Mars. "These things need to be expressed," he said. "The plight of black kids is now much more vivid to the white world because of rap."

That may well be true. But what about those black kids trapped in ghettos with little parental supervision and guidance? Are rap themes going to help them get out of their dire circumstances? The answer is no.

If those kids adopt vulgarity in their speech, an anti-white attitude, and an acceptance of dope and violence, the only way they're likely to leave the hood is on a stretcher or in the back of a police cruiser. Hard work and discipline punch the ticket out of poverty. Thinking up rhymes about cocaine is not going to go far on a college admissions application.

The fatal flaw of the rap world is that it doesn't harness the legitimate rage that exists in the bottom end of our economic system in any positive way. Rap doesn't provide solutions; it provides excuses. And it denigrates the values that Americans need to succeed, like respect for others. You can't run around calling women "bitches" and expect to be taken seriously. If you do that, you're a fool. Yet those rap songs are loaded with coarse, hostile language that rappers say is cool and "reflects what's real."

Well here's some more reality for you rapper boys and girls: Many kids who emulate you are going to suffer. You are feeding them cheap, destructive images that will hurt them in the long run. And you're making big bucks doing it. So rap with that, my man. Reality is a bitch. [\\*\\*](#)

Clearly, O'Reilly does not listen to hip-hop; he only sees the negative aspects of hip-hop and does not admit that America has created the conditions for hip-hop and that white-controlled media corporations like the one he represents promote the negative aspects of hip-hop. He implies that there is something inherently wrong with black people and that if they bought into the American myth that hard work leads to success (the notion that hard work leads to success can be disputed by the fact that much of the working poor, regardless of race, do not have health insurance, can barely afford decent housing [unless they receive a subsidy which, is not easy to get] and work for or slightly above minimum wage), they, too, will succeed. Perhaps his concerns regarding hip-hop reveal that he is troubled by the increasing numbers of suburban white children listening to hip-hop. In short, O'Reilly and most of his generation just do not "get it." They fail to understand the cultural significance of hip-hop.

[Potter \(1995\)](#) highlights the dilemma of O'Reilly and others like him:

Hip-hop is all too conceived of by casual listeners as merely a particular style of music; in one sense they're right, though the question of style has far more political significance than they may attribute to it. For others - including many musicians and music fans - it is not music at all, but rather from-the-gut "street" poetry or as with many of the performers quoted in a recent issue of *Musician* magazine just so much mindless boasting. Leaving aside the historical ironies of middle-aged rock-n-roll fans using the same arguments their parents once used about the Rolling Stones (that's not music, it's noise), it is clear that hip-hop continues to pose a problem for the old categories of music; it has recently reached the point where country and soft-rock stations make "no rap music" part of their promotional campaigns. Despite the fact that its audiences today are more diverse in terms of race, class, and region than any other music, the reception of hip-hop continues to be a central element in highly polarized arguments about race from both white and black communities.

Music videos, one of the most popular and influential mediums for hip-hop, often depict black and Latino youth as ignorant, lazy, misogynist, and hypersexual. Beyond these negative images, probably the most damning image of hip-hop videos includes those that feature performers with the "bling, bling"--expensive jewelry that suggests prosperity, on one hand, and extreme materialism on the other. Granted, these images are part of hip-hop; no artist is forced to write negative lyrics, create negative videos, and perpetuate stereotypes. However, the negative videos and music within hip-hop do not represent the depth and breadth of hip-hop. Hip-hop speaks to all the major issues of the day--spirituality, leadership, crime, politics, economics -- and does so in a way that is entertaining, respectful, and prophetic.

Hip-hop has had and will continue to have a profound effect on African-American communities because it is a vehicle for self-expression, a rallying point for activism, and a means for positive youth development. Ultimately, the way hip-hop is presented to global society has political and social implications for black communities, because if blacks are portrayed as lazy or ignorant or hypersexual on compact discs (CDs) and videos, African-American youth will unfairly and unjustly be viewed negatively, especially if people from non-black backgrounds have few, if any, opportunities to interact with African-Americans and dispel the negative myths and stereotypes.

The purpose of this study is to dispel some of the myths surrounding hip-hop and show that it goes beyond the "bling, bling" image that is presented to the masses. Furthermore, this study will explore the relationship of hip-hop culture and black leadership and their effects on youth development. In order to do this effectively, we must define and analyze hip-hop and black leadership and understand its meaning and role in respect to the Black Church and future leadership development.

### **About Hip-Hop/Rap**

#### ***Hip-Hop Defined***

There are numerous definitions of hip-hop or rap. Hip-hop performer, historian, and journalist ["Davey D" Cook](#) defines hip-hop as:

...an art form that includes deejaying [cuttin' & scratchin' ] emceeing/rappin', breakdancing and grafitti art. These art forms as we know them today originated in the South Bronx section of New York City around the mid-1970s. Hip-hop has thrived within the subculture of Black and Puerto Rican communities in New York and is now just recently beginning to enjoy widespread exposure. From a sociological perspective, Hip-hop has become one of the main contributing factors that helped curtail gang violence due to the fact that many adults found it preferable to channel their anger and aggressions into these art forms which eventually became the ultimate expression of one's self.

Cook's perspective is significant because it suggests that hip-hop has a redemptive power, as it provides a medium for young people to use their energies to express their feelings, define their realities, and vent their frustrations in a nonviolent manner.

[Cook](#) also highlights other definitions of hip-hop on his website. For example, he interviewed "DJ Kool Herc," who is considered to be the creator of hip-hop. Herc also provides an early history of hip-hop:

Hip Hop...the whole chemistry of that came from Jamaica... I was born in Jamaica and I was listening to American music in Jamaica...My favorite artist was **James Brown**. That's who inspired me... A lot of the records I played were by James Brown. When I came over here I just put it in the American style and a perspective for them to dance to it. In Jamaica all you needed was a drum and bass. So what I did here was go right to the 'yoke'. I cut off all anticipation and played the beats. I'd find out where the break in the record was at and prolong it and people would love it. So I was giving them their own taste and beat percussion-wise...'cause my music is all about heavy bass...

#### **How Did the Early Hip-Hop Scene of the '70s Kick Off?**

It started coming together as far as the gangs terrorizing a lot of known discotheques back in the days. I had respect from some of the gang members because they used to go to school with me...There were the **Savage Skulls, Glory Stompers, Blue Diamonds, Black Cats** and **Black Spades**. Guys knew me because I carried myself with respect and I respected them. I respected everybody. I gave the women their respect. I never tried to use my charisma to be conceited or anything like that. I played what they liked and acknowledged their neighborhood when they came to my party...I would hail my friends that I knew. People liked that... I'd say things like...'There goes my mellow Coca La Roc in the house', 'There goes my mellow Clark Kent in the house', 'There goes my mellow Timmy Tim in the house'...'To my mellow Ricky D', 'To my mellow Bambaataa'...People like that sort of acknowledgement when they heard it from a friend at a party.

#### **What were the early rhymes like?**

Well the rhyming came about...because I liked playing lyrics that were saying something. I figured people would pick it up by me playing those records, but at the same time I would say something myself with a meaningful message to it. I would say things like:

Ya rock and ya don't stop  
and this is the sounds of DJ Kool Herc and the Sound System and  
you're listening to the sounds of what we call the Herculooids.  
He was born in an orphanage  
he fought like a slave  
fuckin' up faggots all the Herculooids played  
when it come to push come to shove  
the Herculooids won't budge  
The bass is so low you can't get under it  
the high is so high you can't get over it  
So in other words be with it...

Herc's perspective, commentary, and rhymes are extremely provocative and revealing because they feature the some of the inconsistencies endemic to hip-hop. In his rhyme, Herc gives respect and acknowledgement to women and his peers while deejaying, yet he talks about violence to homosexuals.

Hip-hop, like many other art forms, is filled with conflicting, often competing messages. [Dyson \(1993\)](#) highlights this trend:

Rap artists sense that as they are inventing a musical genre that measures the pulse of black youth culture, they are also inventing themselves. From the ready resources of culture, history, tradition and community, rap artist fashion musical personae who literally voice their hopes, fears, and fantasies: the self as cultural griot, feminist, educator, or itinerant prophet of black nationalism; but also the self as inveterate consumer, misogynist, violent criminal, or sexual athlete. It is this ever-expanding repertoire of created selves that invites up to interrogate the values and visions of rap culture, to perceive the force of its trenchant criticism of racism, historical amnesia, and classism, and to gauge its surrender to American traditions of sexism, consumerism, and violence.

The excerpt is significant because Dyson crafts an interesting argument; he points out that America created the conditions for the development of hip-hop and has given it its context. Moreover, hip-hop provides a forum to address racism and reinforce black culture. Most importantly, hip-hop has afforded African-American youth an opportunity to define itself based on its own terms. Lastly, hip-hop forces America to look at itself structurally in terms of race, consumption, and violence.

Despite the "in-your-face" style of hip-hop in presenting America's ills, America does not respond to hip-hop, as it should. Hip-hop, particularly through the use of videos, at times shows the bleakest of conditions for African-American and Latino youth, with dilapidated buildings, dirty streets, unemployment, incarceration, and violence. The images are disturbing; they are the antithesis of America's image of opportunity for all. Hip-hop videos also challenge the myth that anyone, if they worked hard enough, could experience the "American Dream." Based on the bleak images and themes presented in hip-hop, one would think that America would rally around the youth portrayed in the videos and address the poverty and social isolation from which many hip-hop artists originate. Unfortunately, America chooses to do very little for the youth and, for the most part, considers the violence and bleakness portrayed in the videos as common, everyday life for black and Latino youth.

There are other definitions of hip-hop. Hip-hop pioneer "[DJ Africa Bambaataa](#)" describes hip-hop as:

...the whole culture of the movement...when you talk about rap...rap is part of the hip-hop culture...the emceeing...the deejaying is part of the hip-hop culture. The dressing the languages are all part of the hip hop culture...the break dancing the b-

## Online Journal of Urban Youth Culture

boys, b-girls...how you act, walk, look, talk are all part of hip hop culture...and the music is colorless...Hip Hop music is made from Black, brown, yellow, red, white...whatever music that gives you the grunt...that funk...that groove or that beat...It's all part of hip hop...

This excerpt is noteworthy because Bambaataa is defining hip-hop as a multiracial, multicultural, borderless movement, with its own attitude, style and rhythm. Bambaataa's analysis is quite similar to Tate (1992) when he describes hip-hop as "like reggae in that the crowds flash as much (sometimes even more) star attitude than the stage acts."

[Bambaataa](#) also provides insight on the early days of rap and hip-hop culture:

Hip Hop has experimented with a lot of different styles of music and there's a lot of people who have brought different changes over time with hip hop...which have brought out all these funky records which everybody just started jumpin' on like a catch phrase...All these people brought changes within hip hop music... Unfortunately today a lot of the people who created hip hop...meaning the Black and Latinos do not control it no more...

Bambaataa, at the end of this statement, reveals the biggest challenge to hip-hop: its originators (black and Latino youth) are losing control of the genre.

On one hand, the diminishing control and role of hip-hop by African-Americans and Latinos is the natural progression of an international art form; as more cultures become part of hip-hop culture, they will add the uniqueness of their native culture to the art form. Conversely, as corporate media distributes hip-hop, they become gatekeepers that will increasingly define the art form, and only allow certain acts to reach the mainstream. Many of these acts can highlight the worst elements of black, Latino, and American culture: rampant materialism, aggression, misogyny, moral ambiguity, ignorance, and anti-intellectualism. This view is represented by [Altman-Siegal](#), when she writes about hip-hop culture in Japan:

Even if the Japanese don't understand all the political aspects of hip hop culture, the interest in black culture is loosening the insular fiber in Japanese youth. Stereotypical images of black Americans are disseminated throughout Japan, primarily through the media, but racism in the country is typically directed at gaign or foreigners, regardless of skin color. Americans, in general, are seen as violent.

"I think that the media has given us such wrong information," says Yugi, a rap concert promoter in Japan, "When the rap artists get here they are different [from what we expected]. They are much nicer."

[George \(1992\)](#) also comments on how multinational corporations have corrupted hip-hop by homogenizing it:

Most of the rules I learned as a child in the '60s and '70s have been corrupted or rewritten. Hip hop, just to take the most obvious example, has spread from the urban underground where I found it in my early story on Kurtis Blow (a hip-hop artist and pioneer- *my note*), to white-or at least well-heeled-suburbia. During this same period, breakthrough black superstars made more money than ever in history-most of it helping to subsidize multinational corporations that reconfigure black artistry into reproducible formulas.

George's outlook is also expressed and confirmed by actor, author, slam poet, and hip-hop artist Saul Williams. [Williams](#), in an interview with MotherJones.com's Jeff Chang, describes and renders a critique of hip-hop when he says:

We can say what makes it hip-hop is this black, urban [experience] da-da-da. But no! Hip-hop is no longer that. I mean, hip-hop has existed in Yugoslavia now for 10 years, has existed in France for 10 years, in Japan for at least 10 years -- has existed where there are no African American experiences. 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.

Williams' last comment in the excerpt is particularly illuminating because he suggests that hip-hop has been watered down and co-opted, while leaving its root as a medium for protest.

[Charles "Chuck D" Ridenour](#), lead vocalist for, arguably, one of hip-hop's seminal groups, Public Enemy, also reflects upon the loss of black control in hip-hop, and, perhaps, the exploitation of hip-hop and black culture by white corporate media:

Black culture became more marketable during the eighties, and white corporations found that they could make big bucks off of it. An example is the rise of Public Enemy, and Black male celebrities like Mike Tyson, Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson, and Arsenio Hall. Once Black images started to infiltrate mainstream white society via Black celebrities and white kids began to imitate Black people, not only from a physical standpoint like in athletics, but also mentally and culturally, that's when a big problem began.

In the early nineties...what occurred during that period was a visual explosion of Black celebrities. Music videos became more pervasive and entertaining, Black movies made a strong return, and simultaneously the NBA and NFL combined with major corporations to magnify and emphasize the individual. To the point whereby in 1995 and 1996 there was a subliminal message that stated, "if you're not a ballplayer, or entertainer, and you're not living a lavish lifestyle then you ain't shit."

This analysis is very important in that speaks to the co-optation of hip-hop and black cultures by white corporations. Moreover, it speaks to larger, more demeaning trends--the devaluation of black life (black people being portrayed as only valuing entertainment careers instead of academic achievement, science, or service to humanity), anti-intellectualism, and over-consumption. Also, [Chuck D](#) adds that the media promotes hip-hop via negative images and messages:

Many in the world of Hip-Hop have begun to believe that the only way to blow up and become megastars is by presenting themselves in a negative light. The two recently slain Hip-Hop artists, Tupac and Notorious B.I.G., as well as other Rap artists who have come under criticism like Dr. Dre, Snoop Dog, Ice Cube, or whoever you want to name, talk positivity in some of their records, but those records have to be picked by the industry executives and program directors to be magnified. MC Eiht talks about "I don't want to get caught in this, I'm trying to go right, but society won't let me go right, but it's hard." The media just doesn't focus on those positive songs, they'd rather dwell on the negative.

Not only do the media promote negative images of hip-hop, but they also encourage those with positive messages to water-down or avoid their messages to become more commercially appealing. Commentary by [Salah Black](#) confirms this notion:

It has come to my attention that a lot of talented rap artists enter the game with a raw, uncut sound and style that reflects hip-hop in its purest form. But sadly enough, as commercial success is not realized, they 'water' down their product and cultivate marquee images for their sophomore efforts. For instance in my opinion, the Fugees were on some next shit with their erratic, but inventive, avant-garde debut, "Blunted on Reality." The first single, 'Nappyheads' was the epitome of originality at a time when this criterion was lacking in the art form. Their second single, 'Vocab' confirmed their status as official microphone controllers. At that

time, Lauryn Hill was turning on her T.V. "to check out Farrakhan on CNN" and had "devils wishing they could send her back to Mogadishu". With raw bass and sweet guitar licks, the Refugees presented the world their own brand of audible treats. Unfortunately their innovation failed to translate into capital, in short they were slept on and it's all about the "Benjamins" (money-RNB), with poor record sales of approximately 150 000 units.

Then three years down the road, just before they were about to be addressed as, "Fugees who?," some member of the camp dusted off an old Roberta Flack vinyl, and killed the Billboard charts softly. This crossover R&B cover hit, propelled their sophomore album to the No. 1 spot for several weeks, with LP sales topping the 7 million mark. This trend could be seen elsewhere, as Nas opted for the more commercial producers, the Trackmasters, for his second coming. MC Lyte traded in her rugged B-girl look and sound for the more marketable, soft, suave sexual persona, with 'Mr. Radio hits' producer, Jermaine Dupri, at the boards.

[Chuck D](#) substantiates this discourse in his examination of Tupac Shakur:

(...) Tupac had a loyalty to Black people without a doubt. His early albums sound like a combination of Public Enemy and N.W.A. (Niggers With Attitudes-RNB). He was raw. Tupac found that when he said things that were pro-Black and militant, people were not paying any attention to what he was saying so, he decided to go more and more into the side of darkness, like Bishop, the character he played in the movie, Juice. "Fuck that--thug life like a motherfucker." The more he played the "bad boy" or "rude boy" image, the bigger and bigger he got. The unfortunate thing is I think Tupac had a plan to bring everybody to the table with the "Thug for Life" image, and then he was going to flip the tables at the last minute and have people thinking. He was rooted in that. He was a brother who was strongly influenced by the Black Panther ideology, and by Black revolutionary political prisoners like Geronimo Pratt, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and others. On Pac's latest release, Makaveli, he has a song on the album called "White Man'z World" in which he states, Use your brain! It's not them that's killing us, it's us that's killing us." In the aftermath of Tupac's murder the conscious, revolutionary; uplifting aspects of Tupac Shakur's existence were played to the side as being unimportant and irrelevant. Another victim of this white man'z world.

Corporate control of hip-hop also presents a serious threat to its significance. As corporations promote a sort of hip-hop opium or mind-numbing art that does not address issues, hip-hop's authenticity and relevance becomes suspect. This concept is underscored by [Chang \(2003\)](#):

Today, the most cursory glance at the Billboard charts or video shows on Viacom-owned MTV and BET suggests rap has been given over to cocaine-cooking, cartoon-watching, Rakim-quoting, gold-rims-coveting, death-worshipping young 'uns. One might even ask whether rap has abandoned the revolution.

Quintessentially, hip-hop is evolving. It is moving beyond, race, ethnicity, and language to create a new culture. However, this new amalgamation of cultures into one culture has its drawbacks. As the new culture forms, it may dilute the voices of black and Latino youth, especially when controlled by white corporate media. The control of hip-hop by corporate media may have dire consequences for black and Latino youth in that it tends to promote artists with messages lacking substance, those who perpetuate the myths surrounding black and Latino anti-intellectualism, those that epitomize sexual avarice, those lacking political awareness, and those that represent unbridled greed. This idea is deftly explained by the co-publisher of *The Black Commentator*, [Glen Ford \(2002\)](#):

Black America's hip-hop generation has been convinced by the social engineers of market capitalism that they are a very special and unique demographic - and who would disagree? Youth are, of course, precious to humanity in every epoch. Their value is inarguable, as repositories of the future, and as the most active elements of any society. Oppressed communities are particularly dependent on their young people - who else will achieve all those murdered dreams? But, what happens when a generation of the oppressed is disconnected from its immediate past and left to the tender mercies of its direct enemies? This is the prospect facing the Black hip-hop generation, many of whom have been rendered politically impotent through an enthusiastic embrace of their own commodification. It is a death-grip that threatens to fracture the community's political coherence. Bombarded by blandishments from merchandisers, flush with illusions of power based solely on market status, Black youth have become vulnerable to political appeals from anyone offering attention and flattery.



Eric Shapiro

In retrospect, Ford's examination is extremely important in that he sheds light on numerous issues: the failure of the generations before the hip-hop generation to explain its histories of struggle and protest, and the failure of youth to embrace its elders and decipher the difference between empty slogans and substantial issues within a context of consumerism. The hip-hop generation must be taught by older generations that when corporations flash pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr., during Black History Month, it does not necessarily mean that they are concerned about black communities and their future sustainability. They must be reminded that they are a market ripe to be given meaningless messages in order to extract their money from them.

### **Leadership, Black Leadership, Hip-Hop & the Black Church**

#### **Leadership**

Understanding the concept of leadership is a tedious endeavor in that one tries to do so under a plethora of contexts and climates: economic, intellectual, historic, political, and social, to name a few. This circumstance provides roadblocks to interpreting leaders and leadership accurately, particularly as they relate to analyzing the goals of leaders and movements. White (1985) highlights this dilemma when he quotes [Harold Cruse \(1968\)](#):

Individual leaders can project ideologies of many different kinds and color them with the hues of their own personal aspirations, which very often obscure the very fundamental issues which are of crucial interest to the people for whom the leaders speak. Then the historians come along and completely overlook or forget what the basic issues were for the people in the mass, and centre their attention on the personal characteristics of these leaders.

For the most part, White warns students of leadership to separate a leader's ambition from the goals of a particular movement or event, especially if they go beyond the aims of the movement.

#### **Dispelling the Myths of Leadership**

In order to come to some understanding of what leadership represents, it is important to dispel the myths associated with leadership and highlight what leadership does not involve:

Leadership skills were once thought a matter of birth. Leaders were born, not made, summoned to their calling through some unfathomable process. This might be called the "Great Man" theory of leadership. It saw power being vested in a very limited number of people whose inheritance and destiny made them leaders. Those of the right breed could lead; all others must be led. Either you had it or you didn't. No amount of learning or yearning could change your fate.

When this view failed to explain leadership, it was replaced by the notion that great events made leaders of otherwise ordinary people. (...) This "Big Bang" idea in which the situation and the followers combined to make a leader, like the "Great Man" theory, was another inadequate definition.

In short, the excerpt indicates that leadership is not genetic, hereditary, or predestined. Moreover, leadership is not arbitrary or whimsical; leaders do not "appear out of thin air." Rather, they are made as a result of their lifelong experiences, training by other leaders, and by their followers.

### ***Definitions & Elements of Leadership***

When one encounters the leadership literature, he or she will find chaos because the study of leadership is "guided by different notions and theories" which "have not concerned themselves with a common phenomena." [McDaniel and Balgopal \(1978\)](#) indicate the vastness and the complexities of the leadership literature when they quote Brown and Cohn:

Through all the history of man's attempts to record human experiences, leadership has been recognized to an increasingly greater extent as one of the significant aspects of human activity. As a result, there is now a great mass of "leadership literature" which, if assembled in one place, would fill many libraries. The great part of the mass, however, would have little organization: it would evidence little in the way of common assumptions and hypotheses, and it would vary widely, in theoretical and research approaches. To a great extent, therefore, the leadership literature is a mass of content without any coagulating substances to bring it together or to produce coordination and point out inter-relationships.

The result of this chaos is numerous definitions of leadership. King (1967) identifies "genuine" leadership as not searching for consensus but molding consensus. [Bass \(1990\)](#) views it as

...the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviors, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated goal, as initiation of structure, and as combinations of these definitions.

This definition suggests that leadership is a phenomenon that varies according to the conditions of a particular situation.

Leadership is also a reflection of the conflict that exists in a given society. [Lisa Sullivan](#), writing for the Local Initiatives Support Training and Education Network's (LISTEN) "Food For Thought" series brings to light how hip-hop heightens generational battles:

In the 1990s, it became clear that the Black civil rights leadership was put off by the attitudes and values of this current generation of young poor people. Without question, a wide and deep gulf exists between a generation of 17 million African Americans born since the passage of 1964 and 1965 civil rights legislation and their elders born before the 1954 Brown Decision. While some Black civil rights leaders blame "Ghetto Fabulous" hip-hop culture and gangsta rap music for the worsening

socioeconomic conditions in Black America, the late 20th century eclipse of Black life has much more to do with the institutional collapse of the inner city and the failure of traditional Black social and civic organizations to mobilize, organize and empower its most isolated, abandoned and abundant asset -- the hip-hop generation. This failure explains the 21st century Hip-hop nation's entrepreneurial spirit, institution building and political awakening.

[Sullivan](#) notes hip-hop's growing impatience with older leaders and established institutions because they have decreasing relevance and are failing to meet their needs:

The early 20th century gave birth to several important African American civil rights organizations, most notably the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League. As the new millennium approaches, these non-profit civil rights advocacy organizations face daunting challenges. The social, economic, political and cultural decay of American institutions threatens to undermine Black civil society and its steady progress toward social justice and racial equality. As the problems of American society mount, African American civil rights organizations face the widespread perception that they are no longer relevant because traditional civil rights advocacy, and its agenda of federal government intervention and social integration has reached its limits. According to a wide range of critics, civil rights advocacy led by traditional civil rights leaders is unresponsive and impotent in this post-civil rights period, which is increasingly characterized by racial intolerance, the renewal of states rights and the dismantling of the federal government's protective domestic social policies and programs.

This harsh critique of the civil rights movement is most pronounced among Black youth. Largely framed as a criticism of traditional Black leaders, most young African Americans, born since the passage of civil and voting rights legislation in 1964 and 1965 have lost their confidence in the leadership of civil rights organizations. Many believe that traditional Black leaders lack the capacity, desire and ingenuity to address the contemporary crises that destabilize Black working-class life and destroy Black neighborhoods and families.

Guest commentator for *The Black World Today* website, [William Jones, Jr.](#), drives home the point on how African-American leadership has failed hip-hop:

As a race Black people in America we have existed (and continue to exist) under some of the worst possible conditions of any racial group. Whatever the social ill-crime, poor education, disease, police brutality, etc.- Black people either lead in or being affected by it.

Amidst this sea of despair, a segment of the Black population has stood up to face these challenges and offer solutions to these problems. This group is most often referred to as "Black Leadership." Unfortunately, Black Leadership is all too often led by White people who do not necessarily have Black people's best interest at heart. Due to this phenomenon, black Leadership (and Black people) oftentimes misses genuine opportunities to greatly improve upon, if not correct, many of the problems that ail us. I believe that this is due in part to the legacy of slavery: we still wait for the cue from 'White masters' before our ideas and innovations are deemed fit for Black people.

One of the most recent examples of this is the opportunity Black Leaders missed with the Hip-Hop movement; in essence, missing an opportunity to speak to an entire generation. It is for this reason Black Leadership owes Hip-Hop an apology. When Hip-Hop began, it was seen as a passing fad at best, and 'jungle music' at worst. Black youth began rapping over break-beats and instruments, generally saying little more than call-and-response or new spins on old nursery rhymes.

At this very early stage, Black Leaders could have taken note of this new art form that was beginning to catch the ear of Black youth. Black Leadership could have helped to mold and shape Hip-Hop, could have teamed up with the likes of Afrika Bambaata and his Zulu Nation, which promoted peace, and given their support-but they did not. Hip-Hop went unnoticed by Black Leaders in my opinion because; mainstream (White) America ignored it as well.

Leadership is also a response to negative situations, injustice, or fear. [Chang \(2003\)](#) notes that hip-hop and its leaders, aims, and goals came as a result of street wars and wars abroad:

At one time, others dissed our generation by saying that we were privileged, that we had never been tested by war. [This was before Bush's father opened the Persian Gulf War.] The fact is that hip-hop was born under the conditions of war. It grew and spread as a global alternative to war.

Before hip-hop, during the early 1970s, Jamaica's bloody tribal wars fostered a music and culture of defiance in roots, dancehall and dub reggae. This music and culture a safe space from the bloody gang runnings on the street immigrated to the Bronx a space so devastated by deindustrialization and governmental neglect that when Ronald Reagan visited in 1980, he declared that it looked like London after World War II. In the Bronx, the Universal Zulu Nation, hip-hop's first institution and organization, literally emerged from a peace forged between racially divided, warring gangs.

As Reagan took office, immigration was rapidly browning the face of America. The "culture war" was declared, a way to contain the nation's growing diversity. Culture warriors went after youth in their schools; they fought multiculturalism, ethnic studies, and affirmative action. In Congress, they sought limits on movie and music content.

Hip-hop turned out to be everything they detested: it was real, truth-telling, unapologetic, and, worst of all, their kids loved it. Imagine how they felt when Chuck D enlisted millions into the opposition by rhyming, "They'll never care for the brothers and sisters cause the country has us up for a war."

DePree (1989) indicates that leadership has a caretaker function in terms of providing and maintaining momentum. He adds that leadership "comes with a lot of debts to the future." These ideas suggest that leadership is a visionary undertaking.

The International City Management Association (ICMA) defines leadership as "a relationship and a set of processes in which unequal authority operates to achieve common purposes." Furthermore, it argues that leadership involves **relationships** (between the leader and the group being led -- this includes two-way interaction that enriches and benefits both parties), **processes** (where the leader and followers influence each other in different ways), **authority** (in which a leader gains legitimacy and is granted power by the followers) and **purposes** (what the leader believes in and seeks to accomplish). The two-way interaction inherent in leadership implies that it is also **distributive**; "that each member of a group exhibits some degree of leadership."

Bennis and Nanus (1985) argue that leadership can be summarized under three major contexts: **commitment** (leaders instilling vision, meaning, and trust in their followers), **complexity** (the intolerance of ambiguity), and **credibility** (part of the leader/follower transaction in which followers are willing or reluctant to follow). This reaffirms the notion that leadership is a process as well as a relationship.

Hersey and Blanchard (1982) point out that leadership is situational; that it "depends on the maturity level of the people the leader is attempting to influence." This assertion can be taken one step further; leadership is also contextual. [Kitwana \(2002\)](#) puts this in perspective in terms of the hip-hop generation:

The hip-hop generation's brand of activism has its own intricacies. To begin with, it is distinguished by the fact that we are the first generation to come of age in an America that has ended legal racial segregation. We are the first generation of African Americans to enjoy the fruits of the civil rights and Black Power movements. Voting rights, affirmative action, and the rise of Black elected officials, and social programs benefiting the poor have all been a part of life, as we know it. At the same time, we've witnessed the steady erosion of the euphoria of racial integration and in some cases civil rights gains themselves. Due to the nature of America we've grown up in, we've developed a different sense of urgency rooted in what we lost in a mere generation-what some critics have deemed the reversal of civil rights gains, such as welfare reform and the decline of affirmative action-as well as in new attacks targeting Black youth like police brutality, anti-youth legislation, and the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of hip-hop generationers. We don't mythologize the social gains of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s because having experienced the benefits of these gains firsthand we know they weren't panaceas. At the same time, we do romanticize them. They, along with other so-called civil rights gains, have been institutionalized in the present as part of America's glorious history. They stand in our collective memory as historical wrongs corrected. Nevertheless, hip-hop generationers realize that no matter how ground breaking the civil rights movement was, unfinished business remains.

[Taylor \(1989\)](#), in his analysis of urban street gangs (primarily focusing on Detroit), draws a different context in which the hip-hop generation exists and derives its leadership:

By the early 1970s a new type of parent was emerging in Detroit. New kinds of parents, eroding morals, hard drugs, troubled schools, and changing attitudes about church changed the...community from a close knit, cooperative network of extended families and friends to a declining, less stable community with no vital organization and transient residents.

Taylor's analysis is of great consequence because, although his emphasis was on Detroit, it could be applied to the rest of America. This fortifies the argument that America created the conditions for hip-hop.

When family structures and, subsequently, communities decline, the youth suffer the brunt of these tragedies. The result of youth depravity is increased activity in gangs, self-hatred, self-destruction in the form of violence and premature sexual activity, and rage. Initially, young people succumbed to these atrocities; however, it redeemed itself by choosing to channel its rage, disillusionment, and alienation via the spoken word, dance, and the formation of a new culture-hip-hop. Hip-hop is the phoenix rising from urban ashes, imbued with the prophetic voice of religious leaders, as analytical as any urban scholar, yet it bears the scars of the degradation from whence it came and forces the observer to confront their own reality.

In [Ladd's \(1966\)](#) classic, *Negro Political Leadership in the South*, he provides a good working description of the elements of African-American leadership styles:

A Negro political leader's style is a composite of (1) the race goals which he chooses to emphasize; (2) the means which he uses in seeking to realize these goals; and (3) his rhetoric--that is the language and manner in which he discusses his race goals and in which he assesses the motives and actions of the Negroes and whites with whom he interacts.

He then identifies a continuum of black leadership styles:

**Conservative:** a style that involves accommodation, where black leaders' effectiveness depends upon its access and acceptability to white leaders. Conservatives try to alter the prevailing pattern of race relations by working within it and its demands. They seek the maximum benefits possible through channels

considered legitimate by whites. They seek "welfare" goals, which include more money, a warmer house, better medical care, and the like.

**Militant:** a style that is "far out" from the white consensus and treads in areas in which maximum white opposition can be expected; their rhetoric tends to sharpen rather than ameliorate racial conflict. They place a greater emphasis on "status" goals, which involve the individual's image of himself and gaining recognition as equal (not inferior) partners in American society based on his race and culture.

**Moderate:** a style, which includes the acceptance of the goals of Militants and Conservatives and will lean or use either style based on a given situation.

Using Ladd as a framework, hip-hop can be described as a militant movement, with a style that challenges preconceived notions on race, sex, abuse, and materialism. It is debated and scrutinized because it was created by the rejected black and brown youth of America. What makes it dangerous is that white youth have embraced the allure and turmoil inherent in hip-hop, which unnerves the status quo because white youth are accepting the music and messages of the rejected. The main trepidation of the status quo is that white youth are becoming "niggers" because when white youth embrace the thought and the plight of the rejected, for better or worse, it inspires a commonality that is diametrically opposed to the attitudes and beliefs of the adult mainstream, which then makes them the rejected and thus, niggers. The status quo now fears the new world that hip-hop is creating—the world that goes beyond race, borders, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. Still, a cultural cointelpro is brewing because as corporations assume control of hip-hop, it puts forth artists that perform void of any moral responsibility, who recite pointless lyrics, and act as black and brown buffoons, which, in turn, reduce hip-hop to meaningless drivel.

As Ladd sought to identify black leadership styles, White argues that in evaluating those styles, it is extremely important to recognize **who** is identifying African-American leadership. He notes that "blacks have had only limited opportunities to select their own leaders," meaning that early black leadership depends on a number of variables. These variables include white and/or black perceptions of black leaders, publicity from the white-controlled media, and approval from black followers. Only under these conditions could blacks speak for other blacks. This idea is shown when he quotes [Huggins \(1978\)](#):

All leaders have had to contend with a caste-like arrangement separating the races, defying all strategies...In practice...blacks were not accepted as part of the political process; even when they were allowed to vote they were not given entree to the political machinery...Caste is the principal determinant of any discussion of historical Afro-American leadership...There was no expectation that a black leadership would arise from the people and be selected and sustained by them...Three characteristics marked the black leader: he did not derive his power from a democratic source, he was a self-styled exemplar, and his position was tenuous and vulnerable.

From this analysis, White distinguishes two black leadership styles; one of **accommodation**, where black leaders establish contact with influential whites for favors, the other of **protest**.

The same kind of argument can be applied to hip-hop: artists that reinforce African-American and Latino stereotypes can be viewed as accommodationist in that they are willing to do or say anything to gain fame and fortune and will accept the restrictions placed on it by the white-controlled media. Artists that challenge societal norms and provide insightful critiques of America could be considered as using hip-hop as a means of protest. However, artists that use hip-hop as protest and social commentary are given the label of "conscious rap" and not given the airplay or promotion that accommodationist artists receive.

[Cone \(1991\)](#), in his study of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., notes that leadership possesses a teaching function. According to Cone, a leader must not only teach his or her followers; he or she must also teach himself or herself, especially if he or she wants to be an effective leader:

Both Malcolm and Martin realized that no people can achieve freedom as long as their leaders lack knowledge and understanding regarding how the economic and political systems of the world came into being, and how they function today. One of the chief roles of the leader is to teach the people how to organize themselves for the purpose of achieving their freedom. Organizing for freedom requires thinking about the meaning of freedom and developing strategies to implement it in the society. No leader can teach others what he or she does not know.

This excerpt is extremely significant because it suggests that leadership seeks to develop and empower leaders and followers.

In the tradition of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Russell Simmons, a hip-hop guru and entrepreneur convened a hip-hop summit. Its goal was to begin a dialogue on the future of hip-hop, which, according to [Muhammad and Shabazz \(2001\)](#) addressed

...greater self-regulation, increased political activism, more enlightened expressions and a deeper understanding of how hip hop culture has moved from Big Apple streets to become a global force and a billion dollar industry.

Hip-hop accounts for 12.9 percent of all domestic record sales, according to the Recording Industry Association of America. In 2000, the overall recording industry made \$14.3 billion, the trade group says.

When rap guru Russell Simmons—who has taken hip hop from records to CDs to fashion to the Internet and other entertainment venues—called the Hip Hop Summit at a Manhattan hotel, major artists, recording industry insiders and execs, members of Congress, academics, civil rights groups and the leader of the Nation of Islam accepted invitations.

"The Hip Hop Summit is about building bridges on a myriad of levels where politicians, civil rights leaders, artists and music executives are coming together to find out where we stand in the world at large," said Mr. Simmons.

Beyond education and organization, [Cone](#) argues that leadership involves commitment:

Creative leadership involves much more than talking loud enough to attract the local or national news media; it involves first and foremost a sincere commitment to serve the "least of these" (to use Martin King's language)—to serve their sociopolitical...needs. Real leaders are not self-appointed but are chosen by the people. They are those who teach and are taught. They are best known by their solidarity, their willingness to serve, to suffer with the people, even to the point of death.

Cone's definition of leadership can be applied to the world of hip-hop. Hip-hop leadership is defined and perpetuated by those who use music and action to articulate and move a social agenda. This is why the co-optation of hip-hop by the white-controlled media has dangerous consequences to African-American communities. [Minister Paul Scott](#) places this situation in perspective (2002):

From the moment Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) grabbed the mic and yelled "Black Power," the phrase has struck fear in the heart of white America. Not that they were overly concerned that we posed some sort of military or economic threat, as the white power structure had those two options on "lock;" but the possibility that the phrase would galvanize the masses of Black youth to action. Motivating them to do more than get their groove on Saturday night and their praise on Sunday morning sent chills up the spines of those who had a vested interest in holding the Black community down. Something had to be done to destroy this uncompromising desire for FREEDOM, JUSTICE and EQUALITY.

(...) So the weapon of choice was a movement of young Black teenagers who had developed a system of organization that could do anything from educate children about the historical struggle of African people to turning the deadliest gang rivalry into a break dance competition.

First, the power structure tried to ban rap music altogether by strengthening indecency laws in states where rappers performed and forcing them to place parental guidance stickers on their albums. But the contradiction of having those who have robbed, killed and murdered every culture on the planet serving, as morality police was too much to swallow. Also problematic was the fact that to them the members of the 2 Live Crew and Public Enemy were interchangeable.

So they fell back on their old standard "if you can't beat them, corrupt them." It was not an overnight, hostile takeover but a slow, cunning infiltration, kind of like the annoying scratchy throat that you ignore until it has you sick in bed for two weeks. By then it is too late.

(...) Hip Hop should serve as the background music for the Black Nation and should be heard pumpin' through speakers at every uprising, protest, or demonstration.

However, the forces, which control Hip Hop, have taken measures to make sure that the Hip Hop Nation and the Black Power Nation never unite. While most rappers would swear on their mammas' graves that they are in control of their Hip Hop destinies, I can not help to think that behind the back stage curtain at every rap concert is an old white "Wizard of the `hood," carefully manipulating the lives of our children.

Another fear within black leadership and hip-hop circles is that control of hip-hop by corporate media will help further devalue African-American men and black nationalism. [Cheney \(1999\)](#) explains the plight of black nationalists:

...the his(s)tory of Black nationalism is characteristic of the androcentric historical narratives put forth by raptivists in the Hip Hop Movement. From East Coast groups such as Public Enemy, KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions, and X-Clan to West Coast artists like Ice Cube, Paris and Kam, rap nationalists intentionally conjure a tradition of model, and militant, Black manhood. They idolize the words and works of political personalities - men like Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Minister Louis Farrakhan - whose uncompromising public personae and urban poor/working-class roots stand as an example to those young Black men whose masculine status has been threatened by modern racial ideologies and a post-industrial, capitalist economy. However, this type of gendered invocation is not an isolated phenomenon, but an inherited one. For instance, Marcus Garvey admired Booker T. Washington while Malcolm X and Farrakhan revere(d) their spiritual father, Elijah Muhammad. In turn, during the Black Power era self-proclaimed "sons of Malcolm" - be they revolutionary nationalists like the Black Panthers or cultural nationalists like the US Organization - cultivated a masculinist memory of (the Nation of Islam) Malcolm X. Twenty years later as the focus of Black nationalist politics shifted from the emasculated Black man to the Black man as an "endangered species," the children of the Civil Rights/Black Power generation are proving once again that the "production of exemplary masculinity," (6) or hero-worship, is a necessary tool in the attempt to rehabilitate Black manhood.

In sum, the definitions imply that leadership encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings, which, at times, are in conflict. There are also many nuances to leadership, as it is an art as well as a science; leaders must be creative in terms of defining and framing issues to be addressed, inspiring potential followers to join a cause, and analytical in understanding group dynamics, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. Most importantly, the definitions indicate that leadership is a ongoing process of taking risks, with stakes for leaders that can range from helping the marginalized to financial hardship to martyrdom. Within the context of hip-hop, leadership has even greater challenges, as

battles between hip-hop minstrelsy and self-loathing and hip-hop relevance and activism remain ever present.

### ***On African-American Leadership and Hip-Hop***

Black leadership has always been hard to define. [White \(1985\)](#) provides some insights into this dilemma when he quotes James Baldwin:

...the problem of Negro leadership...has always been extremely delicate, dangerous, and complex. The term itself becomes remarkably difficult to define, the moment one realizes that the real role of the Negro leader, in the eyes of the American Republic, was not to make the Negro a first-class citizen but to keep him content as a second-class one.

Black leadership is a response or, more accurately, a challenge to help other blacks reject the mental acceptance and behavioral legitimization of the rules of economic and racial etiquette made by the majority community. Also, black leadership is a call for blacks to reacquaint themselves with their leadership history in order to use African-based models of leadership. The concept of black leadership is expanded by [T'Shaka \(1990\)](#):

...African people have great leadership traditions that need to be respected and drawn upon. Unfortunately, we (African-Americans) have been taught by our masters to imitate their philosophies, religious systems, and methods of leadership and organization. But the legacy of slavery and colonialism has instilled a deep sense of self-hatred in the minds of Blacks, making it extremely difficult to develop a creative leadership. As a result, a great barrier of mistrust has developed between leaders, who have contempt for the people they are supposed to lead-- and followers who are suspicious of their leadership.

Hip-hop is addressing the leadership and mental colonialization issues within black America. For example, [Cheney](#) notes how artists use hip-hop to promote self-awareness, religion, and revolution:

Among those artists who use rap music as a forum for politicking, Black nationalism shapes their political position and, with few exceptions, the teachings of Elijah Muhammad informs their nationalist perspective. (2) For example, in his controversial 1989 release *The Devil Made Me Do It* militant Oakland-based raptivist Paris traces his Black nationalist roots to the 1940s and the founding of the Temple of Islam, which would later become known as the Nation of Islam. In "Brutal" Paris, who at the time was a self-proclaimed member of the Nation, describes the legacy of Black nationalism as beginning with W.D. Fard, the founder of the Nation of Islam, and being preserved by Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, who in turn inspired the Black Panther Party. (3) According to Paris, this tradition of "intelligent Black men" continues today with the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan and through men like himself, rap artists who are dedicated to producing music "to spark a revolutionary mind-set" in the Black nation. (4) And, as he declares in "Brutal" his mission is both sacred and secular: "Best believe I won't stop/teachin' science in step with Farrakhan/drop a dope bomb, word to Islam/peace my brothers up on it 'cause I'm/Black and now you know I'm brutal." (5)

Another example of hip-hop as a revolutionary or liberating medium is the Black Panther Party's launching of a new record label, Black Panther Records, "which focuses on releasing more socially conscious rap."

Black leadership is an extremely dangerous and tedious task or crusade in that they must confront black compliance of the majority's rules and expectations on various levels. Not only do black leaders have to fight black legitimization and black compliance, they must do so under the threat of physical reward (being "bought" or co-opted by the majority) or physical harm to themselves or to the people they are trying to help.

In his explanation of why the early "Black Church" did not challenge the majority power structure, [Lincoln \(1974\)](#) stresses the dangers innate to black leadership:

(...) Since all Blacks were equal in their inequity, i.e., their social distance from whites, to trust any Black leader was to assume the miraculous. Self-hatred left little room for imagining any Black man able to deliver in any contest with the white man. Black leaders were not as well prepared. They had little or no experience. Worst of all, since all blacks were deprived, Black leaders could not resist the pressures to "sell out" for a little money or a long title. Present in this attitude was the latent assumption that Black leadership was a game, which Blacks could never expect to win against whites. Hence the real goal of the Black leaders was a pay-off that would in effect permit them to win against Blacks. It was viewed as an in-group exercise in futility, well calculated to produce personal reward for the leaders but only frustration or at best some measure of catharsis for all others. At worst, a foolish or unscrupulous Black leader could bring down the wrath of the white Establishment with great suffering and increased inconvenience for those he presumed to lead.

This political and social impotence is manifesting in hip-hop circles. ["Sway,"](#) a reporter for MTV News, radio host, and participant in the 2001 hip-hop summit convened by Russell Simmons, indicated that:

The state of hip hop today reflects American society-with the attendant confusion, miscommunication, wealth, individualism and disconnected groups working on the same causes, said Sway, a reporter for MTV News and "The Wake-Up Show," a syndicated radio program. Hip-hop needs to police and define itself to preserve power, he said.

"Rap music has become a commodity; it's become a product and we've lost control. We don't have control over who gets signed; we don't have control over the big money as a whole. We have little percentage deals, distribution deals, imprint deals but we don't run the distribution. It's come to a time where we need to take ownership of this, understand its power and affect on the world and do good by it," he said.

This excerpt is significant because it raises, again, a major question in black leadership--**who defines those that are black leaders?**

[Chuck D](#), in his article reviewing the 2001 hip-hop summit for *The Final Call*, remarks on comments by Minister Louis Farrakhan:

In that speech he (Min. Farrakhan directly dealt with the co-opting of Black Radio, The DJs, Record Companies, and Artists for their use of the musical art form; and with the media for manipulating the Black community into a "take from, not give back" mentality.

The one-sided exploitive use of mass communication to influence the masses was nothing new, but now it was done by elitist thinking Black folks themselves, who thought of themselves as super-Negroes. Above the public who gained their profits by the categorization of calling Them Masses...Them Asses.

Based on Chuck D's analysis, it appears that hip-hop has been corrupted by corporate media and undermined by African-American elites.

[Carmichael and Hamilton](#) also address other dilemmas associated with black leadership:

*Those who would assume the responsibility of representing black people in the country must be able to throw off the notion that they can effectively do so and still*

*maintain a maximum amount of security.* Jobs will have to be sacrificed, positions of prestige and status given up, favors forfeited. It may well be--and we think it is--that leadership and security are basically incompatible. When one forcefully challenges the racist system, one cannot, at the same time, expect that system to reward him or even treat him comfortably.

There are those who believe that there are other far more dangerous dilemmas in black leadership, namely black political weakness, black political naiveté, and apathy. [Amiri Baraka](#) (the poet, playwright, teacher, essayist, and civil rights activist formerly known as LeRoi Jones) highlights these dilemmas in his analysis of Jesse Jackson:

If Jesse was doing what he needs to be doing, which is being at the head of an independent new (political) party, a party that would be that thing that he said the Rainbow (Coalition) would be, but then he co-opted out to be a private Jesse Jackson-serving mechanism, he wouldn't even have to talk to Bill Clinton. He wouldn't have to be dissed (slang: disrespected, insulted) by Bill Clinton. He would be taking care of the business he needs to be taking care of: leading all of those people who are clear enough to know that the Democrats and the Republicans don't serve their interests, who have to do with black, brown, Asian, white, Latino, whoever, knows that. That's what he should have been leading. He's forfeiting that.

THERE'S ALWAYS THAT TRADEOFF OF TRYING TO WORK INSIDE OF THE SYSTEM RATHER THAN CREATING SOMETHING FROM THE OUTSIDE. YOU'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE NEED TO DEVELOP A GENUINE ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL PARTY.

That's the only possibility. W.B. Du Bois said in 1934, which shows how our education is so lacking that it took me until 1980-something to find it out, that after this, any black person who votes for the Democratic or Republican Parties ought to be called a jackass. That was in 1934.

Baraka was not the only one disappointed with Jackson. A few members of the hip-hop community are debating whether leaders like Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton have any more relevance to African-American communities. "[COMPI](#)," a columnist for the Nation Time Syndicate, an organization dedicated to the political mobilization of hip-hop culture, had some rather choice words regarding their leadership:

The first thing we gotta do is demand that our leaders talk about the shit that matters to us. No disrespect to **Jesse Jackson** or big **Al Sharpton**, but who gives a fuck about what a fictional character said in a movie? Go head wit' that bullshit that just distracts us from the issues, let's talk about some real shit like what will happen if we go to war with Iraq! Like what's wit' all the corporate gangstas takin' the people's money? What's up wit' the connection between Vice-Prez Dick(head) **Cheney** and **Enron**? Where are the creative solutions to jumpstart this saggin' economy? And yet we're talkin' about spending more money to fight a war which can't be won over some fuckin' oil? What's worth more a human life or a barrel of oil?! We can't continue to chill like this shit don't affect us folk, cause if push comes to shove and they bring back the draft, you know the front line will be disproportionately Black, White, Brown, Yellow and Red members of the Hip-Hop community, so we should be at the forefront of the anti-war efforts, yahmean! The majority of the people do not want to go to war with Iraq, but if we continue to let the minority speak for the majority that's exactly what will happen. We need to be united as we begin to flex our political muscle and maturity. Start on your local level, call your elected officials and let them know how you feel and say it loud, clear and as often as possible, "I ain't goin' to war for a shit talkin' president, fuck, fuck, fuck a war!" **Point Blank!**

[Marable \(1992\)](#) also postulates how black political weakness and naiveté has damaged black leadership, which he believes has created chasms between the black middle class and the black masses:

Throughout Black America, there is a sense that the political strategies, tactics and leadership are profoundly flawed. Part of the problem can be attributed to the basic strategy for Black politics, which can be characterized as "liberal integrationalism." But the other troubling factor is the level of opportunism and ideological chaos, which characterizes major African-American leaders.

...the "strategic vision" for the vast majority of the Black middle class and its mainstream leadership could be accurately described as "liberal integrationalism." Liberal integrationalism, in brief, is an approach towards political action, which calls for the deconstruction of institutional racism through liberal reforms within the state, and the assimilation of Black Americans as individuals within all levels of the labor force, culture and society. At root, this strategy for political change is based on what I term "symbolic representation"--that is, a belief that if an African-American receives a prominent appointment to government, the private sector or in the media, Black people as a group are symbolically empowered. This was essentially the argument of many Black liberals who defended the nomination of Republican conservative Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. (...) But in the post-civil rights era, the structures of accountability on the Black professional middle class began to erode. A new type of African-American leadership emerged inside the public and private sectors, which lived outside the Black community and had little personal contact with African-Americans. "Symbolic representation" no longer works with bureaucrats and politicians, who feel no sense of allegiance to the Black freedom struggle.

The issue of symbolic representation also applies to hip-hop. Many of the artists involved in hip-hop are co-opted to assume the image of the "bling, bling," with gaudy jewelry, expensive houses, and fast cars. Their lyrics represent materialism, not substance. Their symbolic forays into wealth, along with the glamour and promotion of successful athletes, can prove to be quite harmful to the hip-hop generation. As images (and myth) surrounding hip-hop increase, the allure of success in entertainment can be overwhelming to a young person from a distressed community because he or she may view sports or entertainment as a way out of poverty.

The media rarely show that other options exist; black people are usually singing, dancing, telling jokes, bouncing a ball, or going to jail. Rarely do the media show other forms of African-American achievement in the form of doctors, lawyers, scientists, public servants, or astronauts. Just because a few people "make it" in entertainment does not mean that it is an easily attainable profession. For every Ja Rule, there are hundreds of artists just as or even more talented than him that will never gain his fame or success. The white-owned media, and some of its black counterparts, do a great disservice to the hip-hop generation and black communities: they sell pipe dreams and contribute to the growing wave of anti-intellectualism in America. This situation poses a serious challenge to black leadership and adds to the struggle of those who assume the mantle of leadership. Essentially, this forces African-American leaders to fight on three fronts--the media, the legal legitimization of laws and policies that discriminate against blacks, and white supremacy perpetuated by the media.

The expansion of the black middle class creates a rather interesting scenario. Greater numbers of blacks are enjoying higher standards of living and opportunities for advancement in various fields. However, there are consequences to this growth as there are new strains and new dilemmas placed on black leadership and, eventually, hip-hop.

Before integration, when the middle class was much smaller, there were a few leaders to set standards and develop agendas in black communities. Once the middle class expanded, so did the black leadership. Now, there are many more blacks trying to set standards and develop agendas "not all of whom are even speaking to each other at a given time." When this state of affairs is mixed with the hip-hop generation's bouts of apathy towards issues, leadership becomes even more difficult for leaders of all ages.

There has always been ideological and philosophical diversity in black communities. Unfortunately, as the ranks of the black middle class increased (and more of them assume the values and beliefs of majority members of the middle class), those differences have only been magnified. This

threatens black solidarity, which has been, historically, tenuous at best and, at times, further alienates itself from the hip-hop generation.

[Broder \(1981\)](#) indicated additional constraints associated with black leadership, especially black leadership coming from a burgeoning black middle class:

Within the political arena, competition between blacks is increasing and a certain nervousness can be detected probably greater than many black leaders will acknowledge on the record--that the pursuit of both financial and political success may be drawing black leaders away from a primary concern with the mass of blacks still suffering severe effects of discrimination. And there is certainly concern that the political mobilization of the long-disenfranchised black masses, which moved at high speeds in the last half of the 1960s, has now stalled well short of the point at which blacks can command the attention of all politicians--white and black--that their unmet needs deserve.

If this situation becomes more and more of a reality, this will cause blacks to, as Martin Luther King, Jr., noted, position "themselves too far from the inner area of political decision." This will cause many black communities to function "essentially as a pressure group with limited effect."

Likewise, hip-hop may suffer the same fate; as hip-hop artists embrace middle- and upper middle-class society, they may lose touch with the masses. They may "keep it real" by talking about a few things affecting the most disadvantaged members of society except, they will have no kinship with those they left behind. This will cause hip-hop to lose its legitimacy as a form of protest and lose its prophetic voice. A prime example of this can be found in hip-hop superstar "LLCool J" and his embrace of New York's Republican Governor George Pataki during his 2002 election campaign. Most African-Americans do not vote Republican, viewing it as more evil than the Democratic Party, as it has had a long history of racism and developed policies to the detriment of black communities.

Another major challenge (and, in another sense, a benefit) to black leadership and hip-hop has been integration. Integration, according to Martin Luther King, Jr., was a state in which all people can participate in "the total range of human activities." Furthermore, King noted that integration was a means to achieve his vision of the "Beloved Community" -- a "transformed and regenerated human society" where "genuine intergroup and interpersonal living" takes place. In essence, integration, to King, was a two-way street in which whites and blacks could benefit from mutual interaction.

In one sense, integration has benefited black leadership in that there are more blacks holding political office than ever before, many of which who have large, white constituencies. Integration has also benefited hip-hop, as African-American, Latino, and white children have had opportunities to explore each other's culture which, in turn, spread globally to become a nearly \$2 billion industry. On the other hand, there are those that would argue that integration has hurt black leadership and hip-hop as it has become diluted, co-opted and self-serving. [Carmichael and Hamilton](#) magnify this idea:

Next, we must deal with the term "integration." According to its advocates, social justice will be accomplished by "integrating the Negro into the mainstream institutions of the society from which he has been traditionally excluded." This concept is based on the assumption that there is nothing of value in the black community and that little of value could be created among black people. The thing to do is siphon off the "acceptable" black people into the surrounding middle-class white community.

The goals of integrationists are middle-class goals, articulated primarily by a small group of Negroes with middle-class aspirations or status. Their kind of integration has meant that a few blacks "make it," leaving the black community, sapping it of leadership potential and know-how.

[Marable \(1983\)](#) points out how integration diminished black economic leadership, and provides insights on how hip-hop has been co-opted:

Historically, rapid black business growth occurred *only during the period of rigid racial segregation*, when relatively few white corporations made any attempts to attract Black consumers. The Civil Rights Movement and desegregation permitted the white private sector to develop a variety of advertising strategies to extract billions in profits from Black consumers, all in the name of "equality." The net result was the increased marginalization of the Black entrepreneur, the manipulation of Black culture and social habits by white corporations, and a new kind of economic underdevelopment for all Blacks at all income levels.

[Marable \(1991\)](#) also notes that integration has undermined black consciousness and weakened black leaders' resolve to transform a flawed socioeconomic system:

One major factor in the demise of black consciousness and identity was the materialism and greed inherent in the existing American political economy and secular society. By asking to be integrated into the existing structures of society, rather than demanding the basic transformation of the system, blacks became hostage to their own ideological demands.

Beyond its intrinsic dualities, integration is a rather interesting occurrence in that it has enhanced disparities *within* black communities in that it has further separated the black middle and upper classes from the poorer black masses physically, socially, as well as ideologically. This situation provides the greatest challenge to the cohesiveness of black communities and black leadership. Conversely, as hip-hop is breaking down racial, socioeconomic, or geographical barriers, it can be used as a force to build bridges between cultures, and perhaps, generations, as it can provide commentary and spark action on numerous issues.

[Malcolm X](#), in many of his speeches and public statements, also pointed out the class divisions ("house Negroes" and "field Negroes") blacks inherited from slavery:

There were two kinds of slaves, the house Negro and the field Negro. The house Negroes--they lived in the house with master, they dressed pretty good, they ate good because they ate his food--what he left. They lived in the attic or the basement, but they still lived near the master; and they loved the master more than the master loved himself. They would give their life to save the master's house--quicker than the master would. If the master said, "We got a good house here," the house Negro would say, "Yeah, we got a good house here." Whenever the master said "we," he said "we." That's how you can tell a house Negro.

(...) On that same plantation, there was the field Negro. The field Negroes--those were the masses. There were always more Negroes in the field than there were Negroes in the house. The Negro in the field caught hell.

This description of the house Negro and field Negro can be used as an analogy to describe hip-hop artists that advance over-consumption (house Negro) and those that use hip-hop as a means to provide social commentary and social activism (field Negro). Artists that do not challenge the status quo are basically satisfied with the way things are, and see no relationship between their art and the social conditions that created their art. The artists that understand the power of words to build and heal have a greater relationship with the relationship with the masses because they seek to highlight the socioeconomic and racial disparities endemic to society. Unfortunately, those that choose to be more progressive and socially aware usually do not sell as many albums as their nonpolitical counterparts. This circumstance supports Carmichael and Hamilton's contention that "those who would assume the responsibility of representing black people in the country must be able to throw off the notion that they can effectively do so and still maintain a maximum amount of security."

The continuing threat of co-optation inherent for blacks in American society and hip-hop according to [West \(1993\)](#), generates extremely challenging circumstances for the sustainability of black communities and hip-hop:

(...) The present-day black middle class is not simply different than its predecessors--it is more deficient and, to put it strongly, more decadent. For the most part, the dominant outlooks and life-styles of today's black middle class discourage the development of high quality political and intellectual leaders. Needless to say, this holds for the country as a whole. Yet much of what is bad about the United States, that which prevents the cultivation of quality leadership, is accentuated among black middle-class Americans.

With this statement, West implies that future African-American leadership may have to come from the hip-hop generation because the middle class is so preoccupied with itself so, there is no other voice or constituency willing to meet the needs of the poor and the underrepresented.

Finally, the greatest obstacle to the perpetuation of black leadership comes from black leaders themselves in their reluctance to train the next generation of leaders. This scenario became painfully apparent during the 30th anniversary commemoration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech at the Washington Monument in 1963. At the commemoration, established black leaders made speeches in front of thousands of onlookers on the future of leadership and the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement. However, according to Kwame Holman, a correspondent for the *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*, "by the time youth leaders were summoned to address the crowd, much of it had already begun moving off toward the Lincoln Memorial."

This movement by the crowd was significant because, on a symbolic plane, it represented a generation gap in black leadership and the hip-hop generation in terms of addressing the struggle of being black in America. This distance between the generations was articulated by one of the youth speakers:

Some have come at us with words of '63, but it's 1993! And that cannot set our youth free. We need a teacher. I'm sayin' keep hope alive. Let me catch my breath. The rhetoric of African consciousness, which knows that words and thoughts must be spoken into fruition, cannot set the youth free in '93, we need a teacher.

[Aston Greene](#), one of the young participants of the commemoration, had some additional comments on the generation gap and the need of established leaders to "pass the torch" to the next generation:

(...) I'll just say that times have changed. And it is the responsibility of the old leadership for the purpose of continuity to pass the torch. It is a principle you see in all organizations. You see, it's very important that more than one generation are trained to handle the issues and trained for leadership roles and responsibility. And throughout the African-American history there's always been a charismatic leadership style that if someone on the top was assassinated, for example, like Dr. King, it will affect, tragically affect the progress of the organization that the individual headed. Well, how do you stop that? How do you combat that? What you do is pass the torch.

These excerpts indicate that, within the ordeal of bridging the generation gap in black leadership, there has to be some consensus between the generations on the tactics of fighting the inequalities indigenous to American life and a concerted attempt to encourage the hip-hop generation to accept the mantle of leadership. Furthermore, the excerpts indicate the necessity of the "old guard" to let the next generation lead.

The goal of black leadership is black power, which involves the ability to define its own destiny on its own terms. Black power involves activities of self-determination and self-help, which are designed to construct and reconstruct society along desirable lines.

In terms of black power, [Carmichael and Hamilton](#) argue that it is not a code word for black racism:

(...) The ultimate values and goals are not domination or exploitation of other groups, but rather an effective share in the total power of the society.

Nevertheless, some observers have labeled those who advocate Black Power as racists; they have said that the call for self-identification and self-determination is "racism in reverse" or "black supremacy." This is a deliberate and absurd lie. There is no analogy--by any stretch of definition or imagination--between the advocates of Black Power and white racists. Racism is not merely exclusion on the basis of race but exclusion for the purpose of subjugating or maintaining subjugation. The goal of the racists is to keep black people on the bottom, arbitrarily and dictatorially, as they have done in this country for over three hundred years. The goal of black self-determination and black self-identity--Black Power--is full participation in the decision-making processes affecting the lives of black people, and recognition of the virtues in themselves as black people.

Black power, according to [Jones](#) (now Baraka--1969), is more than a means to an end; it is a movement, a process involving a cultural awareness and requiring a spiritual focus:

Black power cannot be complete unless it is the total reflection of black people. Black power must be spiritually, emotionally, and historically in tune with black people, as well as serving their economic and political ends. To be absolutely in tune, the seekers of black power must know what it is they seek. They must know what is this power-culture alternative through which they bring to focus the world's energies. They must have an understanding and grounding in the cultural consciousness of the nation they seek to bring to power. And this is what is being done, bringing to power a nation that has been weak and despised for 400 years.

Most importantly, according to [Jones](#), black power is a solitary, independent movement, entirely defined by black people:

(...) Black power cannot exist WITHIN white power. One or the other. There can only be one or the other. They might exist side by side as separate entities, but never in the same space. Never. They are mutually exclusive.

Additionally, black power represents a call and a challenge to black leaders and black communities to solve their own problems. [McCartney \(1973\)](#) articulates this view when he notes "the black community must take the lead in alleviating the legacies of racism that afflict it." He also notes that many black leaders and organizations reject the notion that "blacks can, by appealing to the consciences of the rest of society, bring about the necessary changes" to correct the injustices that blacks have experienced.

[McCartney](#) concludes that black power goes beyond confrontation and material improvement:

All the advocates of Black Power view themselves as being involved in a process that goes beyond just confronting America with certain contradictions or asking for specific material goals. They see themselves as involved in a process of striving for the true spiritual aspirations of the blacks. Or, to put it another way, the Black Power advocates see themselves as involved in creating the kind of world in which the black man can work toward what he perceives to be ultimate ends.

In addition, black leadership requires that those who choose to accept it be able to comprehend global socioeconomic and political systems and conditions in order to relate them to black communities.

Most importantly, black leadership calls for the formation of coalitions with other oppressed and marginalized populations. This will provide the basis for more far-reaching, substantive change,

particularly as it relates to dismantling exploitive socioeconomic systems. [Carmichael and Hamilton](#) support this idea:

(...) It is hoped that eventually there will be a coalition of poor blacks and poor whites. This is the only coalition, which seems acceptable to us, and we see such a coalition as the major internal instrument of change in the American society. It is purely academic today to talk about bringing poor blacks and poor whites together, but the task of creating a poor-white power block dedicated to the goals of a free, open society--not one based on racism and subordination--must be attempted.

Hip-hop can be the vehicle for this coalition because it inherently breaks down cultural barriers and has been a teaching tool in explaining cultural nuances.

The excerpts suggest that black leadership and hip-hop have a certain sense of urgency about them, in that if their leaders fail to seek common ground with other oppressed groups and those that seek justice, the results may be apocalyptic. Sacrifices must be made, institutions like our socioeconomic structure and the media industry must be dismantled and reestablished, and the result meaning livelihoods and lives will probably be lost.

In essence, black communities must seek and develop strong, articulate leaders and facilitate substantive, physical and social change for black communities. The issues to be addressed should range from economic development to establishing better service provision within black neighborhoods to challenging the institutions and bureaucracies that have consistently failed to meet their needs. Hip-hop has always been at the vanguard of articulating the need for black community development in its portrayal of poverty and community despair. What it has to learn, as in the Civil Rights Movement, that the next phase is developing action strategies and organizing to meet goals.

Finally, black leadership must be realistic about their goals, aims, and methods, and not operate in an atmosphere of myths and half-truths. According to [Cruse \(1987\)](#), the perpetuation of myths by black leaders have had disastrous results:

One of the distressing corollaries of the civil rights movement was the creation of empty slogans and the propagation of myths: the myth about the ultimate meaning of racial integration, the myth about the redemptive powers of moral suasion, the myths surrounding the legalities of equal protection regarding race and economics in a free-market economy. A proliferation and apotheosization of myths by the official black leadership followed the Supreme Court decision of 1954 to the effect that the millennium in complete racial democracy would be realized in just one more decade. However, the reverse occurred. By 1980 *blacks had collapsed and were deteriorating politically* as a result of having been goaded and lured by a false set of assumptions, plus having been driven to march forward under the banners of conflicting and mutually negating priorities. By skirting around the self-evident necessity of organizing politically, civil rights and political leaders would also evade the responsibility to counsel *collective enterprises* among blacks, to inspire *collective determination*, to engage in *cooperative economic* efforts on both *corporate-business* and *commodity-distribution* levels.

Hip-hop has been a double-edged sword regarding myth and truth, in that it highlights the needs of black communities and is an advocate for the powerless and downtrodden, yet it glorifies materialism within a milieu of misogyny. The hip-hop culture must learn how to address these issues while remaining commercially viable and prophetic.

### **Conclusion**

Black faith-based institutions such as churches and mosques, perhaps the most stable and visible organizations in black communities, can seize a golden opportunity to pilot the promotion and development of the hip-hop generation's leaders. Historically, they have successfully provided numerous services to black communities by being centrally located and accessible to the

community, by meeting the community's spiritual and physical needs, by providing black communities with the latest news, by providing conflict mediation in times of strife, by informing the community about jobs and services, and by financing community activities.

Furthermore, one of the greatest contributions of black faith-based institutions to black communities is that they have served as a bridge or a common ground between the black middle class and their poorer counterparts. (Predominantly white, suburban, faith-based institutions may not necessarily meet the spiritual needs of blacks who live in the suburbs. Since there are not many black faith-based institutions in suburban areas, many blacks tend to worship in the institutions which are located in the inner city.)

In addition to black faith-based institutions' legitimacy, their autonomy makes them powerful political institutions, particularly as they relate to youth development. Moreover, black faith-based institutions have a wealth of resources. There are few institutions, public or private, that have doctors, lawyers, educators, administrators, carpenters, nurses, and other professionals and skilled individuals under the same roof, whom profess to believe in the same thing.

Although black faith-based institutions have vast resources (in 1990, according to C. Eric Lincoln of Duke University, black churches took in \$1.7 billion in offerings) they do have their fair share of challenges: there is territoriality, factionalism, and professional jealousies among black pastors and ministers, some black faith-based institutions possess ultra-conservative attitudes (there are those that feel that black churches should not get involved in social or economic issues), dwindling congregations (many are predominantly female), high rates of unemployment within their congregations (especially for black males), an increase in single-parent families, drugs in the community, and changing demographics, as more stable black middle-class families move to the suburbs and away from black faith-based institutions, many of which are located in urban centers.

Also, black faith-based institutions (particularly churches), like black leadership, possess a certain duality, a certain "double consciousness" (to borrow a phrase from W.E.B. DuBois) as articulated by [Mukenge \(1983\)](#) when she quotes Gayraud Wilmore:

...it [the black church] is at once the most reactionary and the most radical of Black institutions, the most imbued with the mythology and values of white America, and yet the most proud, the most independent and indigenous collectivity in the Black community.

Although the duality of black churches creates unique challenges in developing the next generation of leaders, there are a number of reasons why black churches should (and do) get involved in leadership development (and other development) activities. Like black leadership and hip-hop, black churches are a response to the political and economic structure that affects black people:

The origin, growth, and transformation of the black church are a function of the needs of black people and the resources available to the black church. Both the needs and the resources are conditioned by external economic and political factors, which brought on demographic changes in urban America.

Black churches have a philosophical basis behind their involvement in development. Many black churches believe that it is **morally right** to get involved in social and economic justice issues, thus, there is a need to develop the necessary and sustain leadership to address those issues.

[Cone \(1991\)](#), in quoting King, implies that it is almost **mandatory** that black churches (and those that profess to be Christian) develop an active, progressive, leadership because it will take many people and a great deal of work to address the problems created by an unjust society:

"We are gravely misled if we think the struggle [for economic and social justice] will be won only by prayer. God who gave us minds for thinking and bodies for working would defeat his own purpose if he permitted us to obtain through prayer what may come through work and intelligence."

In essence, the previous two excerpts reveal that Christianity, social justice, and economic justice are **inextricably linked**; that in order for black churches and other black faith-based institutions to promote the kingdom of God, they must spread social and economic justice, which, essentially, validates the black faith-based presence in developing black leadership and youth leadership in order to promote community and economic development.

[King](#) presents one of the most strongest arguments behind the philosophical basis behind faith-based development in a sermon entitled, "Remember Who You Are":

There's something wrong with any church that limits the gospel to talkin' about heaven over yonder. (...) There is something wrong with any church that is [so] absolved in the hereafter that it forgets the here. Here where men are trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. Here where thousands of God's children are caught in an airtight cage [of poverty]. (...) A proper religion will not only be concerned not merely about the streets flowing with milk and honey...

This excerpt is significant in that King tells faith-based institutions, particularly black faith-based institutions, that they must be equally involved in spiritual as well as earthly issues, thus justifying their community and economic development activities and developing leadership as a means to accomplish those development activities.

Despite its challenges, black faith-based institutions are considered some of the strongest resources in black communities. This is why these organizations must learn how to better screen individuals and groom them for leadership (political, economic) positions.

Black faith-based institutions have always developed a wide range of leadership. It was the Nation of Islam that transformed a street hustler called "Detroit Red" to Malcolm X, the Nation's spellbinding orator, to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, "one of the most dynamic leaders of his generation" who "began to organize an international approach to the problems besetting African-Americans."

Baptist churches also developed four generations of leadership for Martin Luther King, Jr., as his father and grandfather were activist-ministers and his daughter, Berniece, has carved a niche for herself as a prominent Atlanta minister. King's civil rights activities inspired thousands of faith-based leadership, which includes prominent leaders such as Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, and Hosea Williams.

Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York also provided opportunities for its pastor Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (his father, Adam, Sr., also served as Abyssinian's pastor) to pursue a political career as a United States Congressman from Harlem.

Adam Powell, Jr., also influenced other religious/political leadership. One of his protégés was controversial Pentecostal preacher and activist, Al Sharpton.

Best known for his media-grabbing antics and his involvement with Tawana Brawley (who received national attention for claiming to be raped by white New York public officials) and Yusuf Hawkins (a young teen killed by a white mob in Brooklyn), Sharpton has a long history of faith-based activism. A preacher since he was four, as a teenager he was made youth director of the New York chapter of Operation Breadbasket, the economic arm of the SCLC. He was handpicked for the position by Jesse Jackson.

To [Sharpton's](#) benefit, he has embraced hip-hop culture and understands its value. However, he is not beyond challenging it to clean up its house and do more:

The hip-hop generation has the power to really change this nation for the better. It has already had a tremendous impact. There is no question that American culture has been irrevocably influenced by the hip-hop community. But the hip-hop community has stopped way short of reaching its potential. Hip-hop has already permeated the social fabric of this nation, now it can also change the politics; it can

also change social policy. People in power would have to listen because their children are also walking around at home with the baggy pants, the baseball caps, and the sneakers with no laces.

If those in the hip-hop community who have so much influence would use their power, maybe we would see some real changes in this country. The question is, are those who are in leadership of the hip-hop world mature and strategic enough to take the next step?

The previous examples shows that black faith-based institution have produced and is willing to produce a diverse leadership. However, in order for black communities to have their needs met effectively, these faith-based institutions much carefully scrutinize leaders and provide training and resources for them. Most importantly, they must combine their leadership activities with the development of the entrepreneurial spirit and seek avenues for the creation of capital.

[Cruse](#) would argue that black faith-based institutions **must** be at the forefront of leadership and economic development because it is critical to black community survival and poses what can be construed as a challenge to the hip-hop generation:

Civil rights justice, for all intents and purposes of the United States Constitution, has been won; there are no more frontiers to conquer; no horizons in view that are not mirages that vanish over the hill of the next Court decision on the meaning of equal protection. The bottom line for the next black political manifesto is economic justice, without which there will be no future black survival. *The truth is, however, there exists in black America no such organized black leadership consensus that is either willing or able to replace, oppose, or simply ignore and bypass the organized remains of the old, institutionalized civil rights and social welfare leadership...*

Black faith-based institutions can serve as vehicles to help youth organize around their issues, enhance the possibilities for black consensus and inspire new leadership. Additionally, it can serve as the moral compass of hip-hop, making sure that it continues to provide social commentary and criticism, while limiting its tendencies to promote unchecked covetousness and disrespect to women. As indicated earlier, through their development initiatives, black faith-based institutions **have also expanded the leadership** base by providing their members opportunities to be a part of or collaborators in the development process. As black faith-based development expands, so will its capacity to identify, train, and groom the next generation of leaders. Then again, it must make itself relevant to the hip-hop generation, particularly as it relates to bringing young African-American males back to church.

Collaboration is an important concept in developing new leaders. As black faith-based institutions go about their youth development activities and address controversial problems, they will have to collaborate with the hip-hop culture in order to reach youth and empower them. [Mier \(1993\)](#) points out the necessity of collaboration:

Rich and complex communities need leaders to build common agendas among diverse sectors, organizations, and populations of the community. These leaders must mirror community diversity, its neighborhoods, government, unions businesses, and universities. Some will be professionals, while others will be emergent neighborhood leaders.

Through these collaborative efforts (not partnerships, because as Mier argues, they "narrowly focus on the production of wealth, ignoring redistributive and social justice dimensions of urban problems" ), black churches can use their power to develop task forces, ad hoc networks, and other innovative organizations that will not only address social issues but provide **opportunities for leadership development**, as they would be able to place the people that **they** want in these organizations.

Like any institution, faith-based institutions cannot be all things to all people. However, what they can do is collaborate with the hip-hop culture to make sure young people do not "fall through the cracks" of society.

**Reynard N. Blake, Jr.**, M. S., is the Aftercare Coordinator with Michigan State University's Institute for Children, Youth, & Families (ICYF). He earned his Master of Science degrees in Community Development and Urban Studies from Michigan State University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the College of Charleston. Before joining ICYF, he was a consultant to faith-based and nonprofit organizations. He has co-authored an article with June Manning Thomas on the role of African-American faith-based organizations in community economic development, which was featured in the book, *Revitalizing Urban Neighborhoods* (1996). His master's paper was a study examining civil rights, black politics, and their relationship to community and leadership development over a three-decade period (1960-1990) in Charleston, South Carolina. He has also written an analysis of the Charleston County (SC) school system and desegregation issues which was featured as a series in *The Charleston Chronicle* in 1987. Presently, he is conducting research for a book on faith-based development to be completed in 2004.

Blake is a Bronx, New York, native; he witnessed the birth of hip-hop and has been fascinated by the social, political, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of hip-hop as an art form.

---

NOTES:

\* I will use the terms "African-American" and "black" interchangeably.

\*\*Another example of O'Reilly's ignorance of the cultural significance of hip-hop lies in the recognition that "The Message," a 1982 record by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five will be placed in the first 50 recordings placed in The National Recording Registry. Congress set up the Registry to preserve historical recordings. "The Message" joins Thomas Edison's first recordings, President Roosevelt's "fireside chats," and Scott Joplin's early 1900 ragtime records. This information comes from one of AllHip-Hop.com's Monday, January 27, 2003 alerts.

---

**Endnotes**

Bill O'Reilly, "The Rap on Rap," 8/18/01, <http://www.townhall.com/columnists/billoreilly/printbo20010818.shtml>.

Russell A. Potter, **Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 26.

Davey D, "What Is Hip-Hop?" 9/1/84, <http://www.daveyd.com/whatishipdav.html>.

Davey D, "DJ Kool Herc's Definition of Hip-Hop?" not dated, <http://www.daveyd.com/koolherc.html>.

Michael Eric Dyson, **Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism** (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), 276-277.

Davey D, "Africa Bambaataa's Definition of Hip-Hop?" 9/23/96, <http://www.daveyd.com/whatisbam.html>.

Greg Tate, *Flyboy In The Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary Culture* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 121.

Davey D, p. 1.

## Online Journal of Urban Youth Culture

Vanessa Altman-Siegal, "Raw Like Sushi: Hip-Hop Culture in Japan," not dated, <http://eserver.org/zine375/issue1/living5.html>.

Nelson George, **Buppies, B-Boys, BAPS & Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture** (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), xi-xii.

Jeff Chang, "Slamming Hip-Hop," MotherJones.com, July-August 2001, [http://www.motherjones.com/magazine/JA01/saul\\_williams.html](http://www.motherjones.com/magazine/JA01/saul_williams.html).

Chuck D with Yusuf Jah, **Fight The Power: Rap, Race, and Reality** (New York: Delacorte Press, 1997), 1-2.

Ibid, 3.

Salah Black, "Perspectives: The World According to Black," not dated, taken from the "Educate & Uplift" website, <http://geocities.com/athens/6177/perspectives.html>.

Chuck D, 3-4.

Jeff Chang, "Selling the Political Soul of Hip-Hop," The Black World Today, January 15, 2003, [http://athena.tbwt.com/content/article.asp?articleid=2286\\_1](http://athena.tbwt.com/content/article.asp?articleid=2286_1).

Glen Ford, "Hip-Hop and the Hard Right: Media-made Illusions of Power," The Black Commentator, issue number 22, December 26, 2002, [http://www.blackcommentator.com/22/22\\_commentary\\_2\\_pr.html, p. 1](http://www.blackcommentator.com/22/22_commentary_2_pr.html,p.1).

John White, **Black Leadership in America: 1895-1968** (New York: Longman, 1985), vii-viii.

Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, **Leaders: The Strategies For Taking Charge** (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), p. 5.

Clyde O. McDaniel and Pallassana R. Balgopal, **A Three-Dimensional Analysis Of Black Leadership** (Houston: Graduate School of Social Work, University of Houston, 1978), p. 1.

Ibid.

Martin Luther King, Jr., **Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community** (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 63.

Bernard M. Bass, **Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications**, Third Edition, (New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. 11.

Lisa Sullivan, "The Civil Rights Movement In Review: The political Emergence of Hip-Hop Nation," taken from the LISTEN, Inc. website, [http://www.lisn.org/food/food\\_civil.htm](http://www.lisn.org/food/food_civil.htm).

Ibid.

William Jones, Jr., "TWBT Guest Commentary: Black Leadership Owes Hip-Hop An Apology," The Black World Website, 2/11/02, [http://forwardmotion.home.att.net/BL\\_Owes.html](http://forwardmotion.home.att.net/BL_Owes.html).

Jeff Chang, "Why The Hip-Hop Generation Can Call For Peace," BlackElectorate.com, 2/5/03, [http://blackelectorate.com/print\\_article.asp?ID=439](http://blackelectorate.com/print_article.asp?ID=439).

Max DePree, **Leadership Jazz** (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 220.

## Online Journal of Urban Youth Culture

International City Management Association, *The Effective Local Government Manager*, (Washington, D.C.: International City Management Association, 1983), 111.

Ibid, 11-12.

McDaniel and Balgopal, 49.

Bennis and Nanus, 6-12.

Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, "**Situational Leadership**," **Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources**, Fourth Edition, Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, eds, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1982), 151.

Bakari Kitwana, **The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and The Crisis in African American Culture** (New York: BasicCivitasBooks, 2002), 147-148.

Carl S. Taylor, **Dangerous Society** (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1989), 21-22.

Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., **Negro Political Leadership in the South** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 145-146.

Ibid, 154-155.

Ibid, 176 and 156.

Ibid, 200.

White, 1.

Ibid, 2.

Ibid.

Ibid, 4.

James H. Cone, **Malcolm & Martin & America: A Dream Or A Nightmare** (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 299.

Richard Muhammad and Saeed Shabazz, "Hip Hop Summit convenes in New York," *The Final Call: Online Edition*, posted 6/28/01, <http://www.finalcall.com/national/rapsummit06-26-2001.htm>.

Cone, 299.

Paul Scott, "How Hip-Hop Destroyed Black power," 4/23/02, <http://www.geocities.com/berkloaf/article8>.

Charise Cheney, "Representin' God: Rap, Religion and the Politics of Culture," *The North Star*, volume 3, number 1, Fall 1999, <http://northstar.vassar.edu/volume3/cheney.html>.

White, 1.

Theodore Cross, *The Black Power Imperative: Racial Inequality and the Politics of Nonviolence*, (New York: Faulkner, 1984), p. 49.

## Online Journal of Urban Youth Culture

Oba T'Shaka, *The Art of Leadership: Volume 1* (Richmond: Pan Afrikan Publications, 1990), p. iii. Cheney.

AllHip-Hop.com, 1/30/03 alert.

C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 123. Muhammad and Shabazz.

Chuck D, "Perspectives," *The Final Call: Online Edition*, posted 8/5/01, <http://www.finalcall.com/perspectives/chuckD07-31-2001.htm>.

Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 15.

David Barsamian, "Amiri Baraka: Straight, No Chaser," Excerpts from a July 21, 1992 interview for *Z Magazine*, found via the Internet.

COMPI, "Point Blank" column, not dated, <http://www.nationtime.com/pointblank>.

Manning Marable, "US Commentary: At the end of the Rainbow," *Race and Class*, October-December 1992, 75-76.

David S. Broder, *Changing of the Guard: Power and Leadership in America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 305.

Ibid, 307.

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, (New York: Mentor Books, 1963), 147.

Ibid, 148.

Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *The Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974), p. 120.

Ibid.

Carmichael and Hamilton, 153.

Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 164.

Manning Marable, "Black America in Search of Itself," *The Progressive*, November 1991, 21.

George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 10-11.

Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 54.

Taken from a transcript from the MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour on Monday, August 30, 1993, Show #4743, 7.

Ibid.

Ibid, 8.

## Online Journal of Urban Youth Culture

McCartney, 5.

Carmichael and Hamilton, 47.

LeRoi Jones, "The Need for a Cultural Base to Civil Rites & Bpower Mooments," *The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays*, Floyd B. Barbour, ed. (Boston: Collier Books, 1969), 139.

Ibid, 138.

McCartney, pp. 5-6.

Ibid, 6.

Ibid, 13.

Carmichael and Hamilton, p. 82.

Harold Cruse, *Plural But Equal: A Critical Study of Blacks and Minorities and America's Plural Society* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987), p. 384.

Ida Rousseau Mukenge, *The Black Church in Urban America: A Case Study in Political Economy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 1.

Ibid, 25.

Cone, 147.

Ibid, 147-148.

George E. Curry, "The Last Days of Malcolm X," *Emerge: Black America's Magazine*, February 1995, 36-38.

Mike Sager, "The Sharpton Strategy," *Esquire*, January 1991, 113.

Al Sharpton, "Hip-Hop Fridays: The Hip-Hop Generation," *BlackElectorate.com*, 12/27/02, [http://www.blackelectorate.com/print\\_article.asp?ID=772](http://www.blackelectorate.com/print_article.asp?ID=772).

Cruse, *Plural But Equal*, 385.

Robert Mier, et al., *Social Justice and Local Development Policy* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993), 166.

Ibid, 171.