

HIP-HOP:

Beyond Beats & Rhymes

ITVS COMMUNITY CLASSROOM:
EDUCATOR GUIDE

A FILM BY BYRON HURT

“A hip-hop head weighs in on manhood in hip-hop culture”

HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes takes an in-depth look at representations of manhood, sexism and homophobia in hip-hop culture. This groundbreaking documentary is a “loving critique” of certain disturbing developments in rap music culture from the point of view of a fan who challenges the art form’s representations of masculinity. Leading rap and hip-hop artists including Mos Def, Busta Rhymes, Russell Simmons are interviewed—and pressed—to answer some difficult questions about the violent and sexually explicit content of many hip-hop songs and videos.



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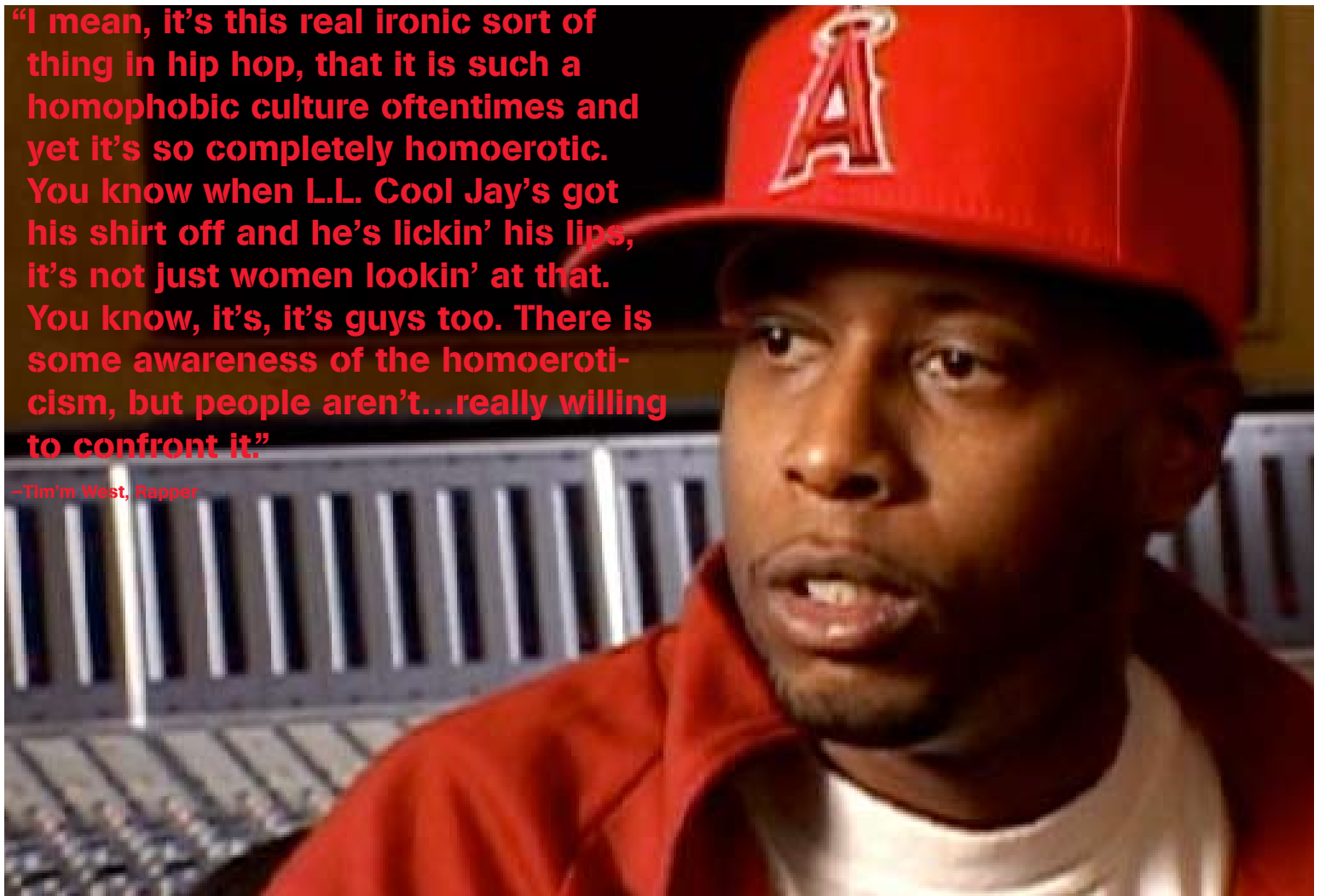


Activity 4

Stalling the Cipher: Homophobia
and Gay Rappers in Hip-Hop
(90 min + assignments)

"I mean, it's this real ironic sort of thing in hip hop, that it is such a homophobic culture oftentimes and yet it's so completely homoerotic. You know when L.L. Cool Jay's got his shirt off and he's lickin' his lips, it's not just women lookin' at that. You know, it's, it's guys too. There is some awareness of the homoeroticism, but people aren't...really willing to confront it."

—Tim'm West, Rapper



Activity 4

Stalling the Cipher: Homophobia and Gay Rappers in Hip-Hop

(90 min + assignments)

As such a visibly and audibly homophobic venue, rap music is a taboo topic that should be examined. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that there are hip-hop artists that have been challenging and redefining hip-hop with their presence. This lesson asks the taboo questions and challenges the listener to consider the role homophobia in hip-hop plays in maintaining the one-dimensional definition of masculinity that boxes in both men and hip-hop. For this activity show **Video Module 3**, "Homophobia in Hip-Hop" (5:27).

1. Ask the class this question, which Byron Hurt poses to rapper Busta Rhymes in the film:

"Would a gay rapper ever be accepted in hip-hop?" Have students write a response using the following sentence stems:

- A gay rapper would/would not be accepted because ...
- A major record label would/would not promote a gay hip-hop artist because ...
- If a gay rapper were the best rapper, ...
- Busta Rhymes refuses to address the question because ...
- The lack of a gay presence in hip-hop is/is not surprising because ...

Have students show their point of view regarding each statement with a "thumbs up/thumbs down," then call on a few students from each perspective to read their sentences.

2. Introduce the article "Stick This Into Your Mind," by Amanda Nowinski. This article, which is a spotlight on Oakland rap crew The Deep Dickollective (D/DC), was the cover story of the *San Francisco Bay Guardian's* Aug. 21, 2002, issue. One of the members of D/DC, Tim'm West, is featured in the film. http://www.sfbg.com/36/47/cover_dickollective.html

3. Have the students read the article together in small groups, then discuss these questions within their group:

- West recounts a time he and Ampu walked up to a cipher and everyone stopped; no one wanted them to join and no one wanted to battle them. Why would the presence of a gay rapper cause that response? Why is it that for many rappers their "skill is bound up in the fact that [they are] hetero[sexual]?" What would happen if a gay rapper out-rhymed a heterosexual opponent in a cipher?
- West also argues that society expects black men to be homophobic, and he gives the example of journalists excusing "conscious" rappers for their homophobia. In fact, Common and Mos Def, arguably the most prominent and mainstream-visible conscious hip hop artists, have homophobic lines in their discography. (See Common's "Doinit": "*Niggas hate you, they ain't payin' you no attention / In a circle of faggots your name is mentioned*" <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/common/water/doinit.cms.txt> and Mos Def's, from Black Star's "RE:DEFinition": "*Cats who claimin' they hard be mad fag / so I run through them like floodwater through sandbags*" <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/blackstr/blackstr/redef.blk.txt>.) Are these artists just reflecting the masculine culture in society that "denotes gay terminology as negative" (refer to the article "Is Hip Hop Homophobia Softening?" from *Southern Voice*, Aug. 29, 2003 http://www.sovo.com/2003/8-29/news/national/hip_hop.cfm) or are they presenting themselves as anti-gay? Do conscious artists have an even greater responsibility than unabashedly derogatory rappers to present an anti-homophobic stance?
- West states that as an artistic entity, "D/DC occupies this space that isn't exactly comfortable for anybody." How do they embrace that role? Why is it important to have artists visible in that role? Do they risk alienating any audiences? How might they contribute to reinforcing or breaking stereotypes? Could D/DC be a commercially successful music group?

4. Present this final quote from West from the San Francisco Bay Guardian article: "*What the D/DC is doing is not about homohop, and it's not really about gay people in hip hop. What it's really about is, we are rappers who believe, struggle and fight for freedom inside of hip hop to the utmost degree.*"

Have students discuss what "freedom inside of hip hop" might mean and might look like.

5. Assignment: Opinion Editorial

Have students write an OpEd to a media outlet of their choice presenting their views on homophobia in hip-hop, the presence of gays in hip-hop, and the impact of the language and messages that artists choose to communicate.

RECOMMENDED NATIONAL STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards for the English Language Arts National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and non-fiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Expectations of Excellence, National Council for the Social Studies

Performance Expectation 1: Culture

- Predict how data and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.
- Demonstrate the value of cultural diversity as well as cohesion within and across groups.
- Interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding.

Performance Expectation 9: Individual Development and Identity

- Examine the interactions of ethnic, national or cultural influences in specific situations or events.
- Compare and evaluate the impact of stereotyping, conformity... and other behaviors on individuals and groups.
- Explain and analyze examples of tensions between expressions of individuality and efforts to promote social conformity by groups and individuals.
- Evaluate the role of institutions in furthering both continuity and change.

Performance Expectation 12: Production, Distribution and Consumption

- Apply economic concepts and reasoning when evaluating historical and contemporary social developments and issues.

For specific content standards on subjects such as ethnic studies, U.S. history, media literacy and art, please refer to your respective State Standards.

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Ken Garcia-Gonzales is a former high school teacher of ethnic studies and history. He has been working for KQED for almost three years and manages the Bay Area Mosaic Project, a workshop series that utilizes PBS films to help teachers integrate ethnic studies and diversity content into the classroom. Please visit Bay Area Mosaic at www.kqed.org/mosaic.

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About ITVS:

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

About *Independent Lens*:

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. Hosted this season by Terrence Howard, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

About KQED Education Network:

KQED Education Network engages with community and educational organizations to broaden and deepen the impact of KQED media to effect positive change. Through parent education and professional development workshops, public screenings, multimedia resources, and special events, Education Network reaches more than 200,000 Bay Area residents a year and serves people of all ages, with a particular emphasis on reaching underserved communities. Learn more about its three unique services, Early Learning, Educational Services, and Community Engagement, at kqed.org/ednet.

About PBS:

PBS is a media enterprise that serves 354 public noncommercial television stations and reaches almost 90 million people each week through on-air and online content. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is a leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of other educational services. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online (pbskids.org), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at pbs.org, one of the leading dot-org Web sites on the Internet.