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### **Just Say No to Gangster Rap**

Traditionally, African American music has always been the underlying theme of any civil rights movement. From the old Negro spirituals of yesteryear that were used to help deliver us from slavery to “We Shall Overcome” being the main song of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to James Brown’s “Say it Loud (I’m Black and Proud)” anthem, our music has always motivated us to do better, achieve more and have pride in ourselves. Strangely enough, the African American anthem for justice has come to a screeching halt with the proliferation of rap music becoming popular in our community. Now my problem is not with the beats and musical timings of hip hop, but it is with the damaging images and messages that are being portrayed in gangster rap.

Juan Williams’ point about African American youth being destroyed by the hip hop culture is well taken in his book, “Enough.” On too many of our airwaves, young black men and women are being depicted as being nothing more than two-bit hustlers and prostitutes by their own people. In my opinion, modern gangster rappers should be compared to minstrel shows, Amos ‘n Andy, Step and Fetchit and Mammy characters in that it insults our race and shows stereotypes as the norm of Black America. To date, our response to the destructiveness of gangster rap has been nil. There has been some minor uproar about hip hop such as Spellman College denying Nelly a fundraising event on their campus due to his dehumanizing portrayal of a woman getting a credit card run through her behind in a video. In addition, Essence Magazine has also spoken out against the sexist aspects of this music. However, I feel that enough has not been done to eradicate this problem.

There is a popular scripture that states that “our people perish for a lack of knowledge” and I think this is the case in this situation. Many people think that gangster rap is harmless entertainment. They may state that most consumers of violent, sexist rap music are young white males. But even in this case it is dangerous because it is reinforcing

negative stereotypes about black people. To young African American teens, gangster rap is dangerous due to the lack of fathers that are in their homes and the inherent need for male role models. Promiscuous sex, violence, drugs and alcohol abuse are often glamorized in hip hop. It is crucial that African American parents monitor what their kids are listening to. Now, ask yourself, do you want your kids looking up to a gangster rapper such as 50 Cent, Snoop Dogg or Lil' Jon? 50 Cent is well known for his movie "Get Rich or Die Tryin", Snoop Dogg for his song "Drop it like it's Hot" and I won't even tell you what Lil Jon is famous for.

A recent study published by the American Journal of Public Health stated that girls aged 14-18 who watched rap videos were three times more likely to hit a teacher, two and a half times more likely to get arrested and two times more likely to have sexual relations with multiple partners. When you look at the effects of gangster rap on crime the numbers are even more staggering. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that the popularity of gangster rap has caused an increase of violent crimes in urban areas and that interviews with offenders revealed that acts of violence were easier to commit when being stimulated by the lyrics of certain rap songs. Since 1989, one year after pioneer gangster rap group NWA became popular, juveniles committing murder increased by 50% and black on black crime has steadily increased.

With these stats in mind, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that gangster rap is destroying the African American community. With 70% of all black children being born out of wedlock, 40% of all African Americans living in poverty and one million black men populating our nation's prisons, the time has come for the black community to say no to self-destructive behavior. Instead of degrading our self-image with criminal mindsets, we need to remember our rich heritage of civil rights leaders such as Harriet Tubman, Dr. Martin Luther King and Thurgood Marshall and teach these messages to our children. Family, it is truly time to march to the beat of a different drummer.

