



Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement

By S. Craig Watkins

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Avoiding the easy definitions and caricatures that tend to celebrate or condemn the "hip hop generation," *Hip Hop Matters* focuses on fierce and far-reaching battles being waged in politics, pop culture, and academe to assert control over the movement. At stake, Watkins argues, is the impact hip hop has on the lives of the young people who live and breathe the culture. He presents incisive analysis of the corporate takeover of hip hop and the rampant misogyny that undermines the movement's progressive claims. Ultimately, we see how hip hop struggles reverberate in the larger world: global media consolidation; racial and demographic flux; generational cleavages; the reinvention of the pop music industry; and the ongoing struggle to enrich the lives of ordinary youth.

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- Sales Rank: #719012 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Beacon Press
- Published on: 2006-08-01
- Released on: 2006-08-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .92" w x 5.50" l, .80 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Beneath the glitz and glut of mainstream hip-hop, there's an underground movement of "conscious rap," political angst and an anticapitalist ethos that would make even Bill Gates throw his hands in the air. That conscious rap is what Watkins, an associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin, champions in this solid book. It's an ambitious attempt to cover a culture that began in the late '70s and is now an almost universal influence on global youth. Watkins wisely chooses to focus on what has not been said—like that it was a 43-year-old woman who produced hip-hop's first hit, "Rapper's Delight," or that hip-hop lit is one of the fastest-growing markets in book publishing. He tells his version of hip-hop's history in lyrical prose, often mirroring the rhythms and wordplay of the music he's discussing. He doesn't assert an overt thesis, but it's clear he believes that the more conscious, political hip-hop (think Common instead of Fifty Cent) is what has the potential to revolutionize youth, and by extension, America. This is undoubtedly a book for fans, but it is also an intriguing look at how hip-hop has become part of a universal cultural conversation. (Aug.)
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From [Booklist](#)

Watkins considers hip-hop a "vital source of creativity and industry for youth," one that has developed a "reputation as a spectacular cultural movement committed to defying the cultural and political mainstream" while representing "the voices and experiences of a generation of marginal youths." He assesses the social and political aspects of the movement and the music, duly noting the irony of how hip-hop's "livelihood . . . [depends] almost entirely on its ability to sell black death" and requires its performers to "immerse themselves into a world of urban villainy." In service of inquiry, he also surveys "the communities, constituencies, and currents that make up the movement"; introduces readers to Kwame Kilpatrick, the self-billed hip-hop mayor of Detroit; and draws extensively on a wide-ranging interview by Minister Louis Farrakhan of rapper Ja Rule that is concerned with Ja's contretemps with rival rapper 50 Cent and with the message their posturing and negativity sends. Quite an exposition of all things hip-hop. *Mike Tribby*
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Review

Watkins wisely chooses to focus on what has not been said . . . [and] tells his version of hip-hop's history in lyrical prose, often mirroring the rhythms and wordplay of the music he's discussing. This is undoubtedly a book for fans, but it is also an intriguing look at how hip-hop has become part of a universal cultural conversation. -*Publishers Weekly*

"Offering a fast-moving and well-researched book, Watkins successfully unearths some of the disturbing and encouraging implications of hip-hop culture." -*Library Journal*

"Quite an exposition of all things hip-hop." -Mike Tribby, *Booklist*

"Watkins well understands the challenges facing the nascent hip-hop political movement."--Adam Bradley, *Washington Post*

"Watkins sets his tome apart with a meticulous attention to the facts . . . He leaves few stones unturned examining the endless influence of hip-hop on the world around us, always with a critical eye."--*URB*

"Watkins's study is the best yet on the hip-hop industry. Watkins has provided nothing less than a political economy of hip-hop, one that doesn't shy away from the dirty business hip-hop has become . . . He's also attentive to the way hip-hop was affected by the appalling rates of incarceration and AIDS in black communities." --Greg Tate, *The Nation*

"With *Hip Hop Matters*, S. Craig Watkins establishes himself as one of the most insightful observers and critics of hip hop culture."--Michael Eric Dyson

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