

## Hip-Hop Fridays: Big Booty Hoes (and other whack Rap video images) by Ifè Oshun

Big booty video hoes.

You know what I'm talking about.

Ass-all-in-the-camera-wearing-little-more-than-a-weave-and-a-smile shaking all they got (and bought) like it's a contest.

Aren't we tired of this yet?

Rap music has been around a little over 25 years now with hip-hop culture being slightly older. We now have generations of heads who grew or are growing up listening to rap. We are just beginning to see the long term effects and benefits of the imagery gleaned from videos and lyrical content; at this point it's safe to say that the effects are deep and long reaching.

Case in point, gansta rap. For the better half of the 90's decade, rap images and lyrics focused on violence and, while a few artists were coming from a place of real experiences (and real pain), the lion's share of mainstream Rap was a glorification of money-making fiction. The result was a large body of work based almost solely on grossly exaggerated imagery: imagery that served, in part, to inflate the the stereotype of the African-American male as ultra violent and out of control. The backlash from this disproportionate representation in the media is still being felt today. With little to counter it, this imagery exacerbated the very problems it portrayed. From an increase in drug dealing among younger kids; to fashion (the baggy-jean, waistband-at-the-crack-of-the-ass style, based on prison wear); to guys getting shot for rocking the wrong colors in the wrong neighborhoods; the effects to the culture proved devastating. It was also at this time that incidents of police brutality started to rise in urban areas. Is it simply a coincidence that the decade that witnessed the media criminalization of the African-American male also saw an unprecedented growth explosion within the American prison system?

*"Something of a phenomena, baby."*

Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel, *White Lines*

So, with this understanding, what's there to be said about the sexualization and blatant misogyny that runs rampant and unchecked in mainstream Rap today? Is it safe to say that if the aforementioned images caused a chain reaction that transformed society on social, political and cultural levels, that disproportionately negative images of women could have an impact, too?

Consider. What sort of personal values do little girls in our hip-hop nation develop when they are constantly bombarded by images of their future selves as little more than rumpshakers? What do little boys learn when a disproportionate number of Rap videos portray their sisters, mothers, future wives and future daughters as little more than eye candy? Is it possible that adults who came of age in the 90s are now perpetuating the misogyny that grew out of gangsta rap?

"Hey", you say, as you bookmark that Hustler centerfold, "I hear what you're saying, but scantily clad women are fun to look at!" True. However, so are scantily clad men; D'Angelo's "Untitled" video proved that too well. I say that if it's about showing skin then show skin. All of it. Male and female. But the preponderance of women's exposed flesh in Rap media is about more than showing skin and selling sex. It's about power. There is something unbalanced and disturbing when men are fully clothed and surrounded by women who all are naked ass-out. Like the explosion of the prison industry, is it a coincidence that violence against women has been steadily rising at a time when women are more and more sexualized in mainstream media?

Finally, is the sorry plight of the female MC a coincidence as well? There is no question that sisters can flow. This was proven long ago. But if we check the historical facts, we see that most serious female MCs flowed fully clothed. Now, with the exception of a blessed and enlightened few, the opposite is true; we're seeing a growing number of skilled female MCs falling into the "show tits and ass" trap. Tragically, history tells us that artists like these aren't taken seriously. Fun to look at for a hot minute, they

eventually fade into the recesses of the culture's basement while MCs like Roxanne Shante, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Rage, Bahamadia and Lauryn Hill will forever remain imprinted on the frontal lobes of our mass hip-hop consciousness. We need more images like these; strong competent women who can hold their own without taking off their clothes. This is the Light that will help put in check the industry's perpetual darkness and bring balance to the grossly exaggerated stereotype that is the big booty video hoe.

*Ife Oshun is the [Rap and Hip-Hop Guide for About, the Human Internet](#), "where real people help you get whatever you want from the Web." She can be contacted via e-mail at: [rap.guide@about.com](mailto:rap.guide@about.com)*