Transcript for Dr. Augustus Jordan III on the Study of Black Popular Culture Video

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Dr. Jordan: My name is Dr. Augustus Williams Jordan the third. I am 40 years old. I’m originally from Atlanta, Georgia, but I spent a lot of my life in the state of Florida also Gainsville, Florida and Tampa. I have a doctorate of Arts and Humanities from Clark Atlanta University. I also have a master’s in African and American Studies with an emphasis in literature from Clark Atlanta University, and I have a bachelor’s in broadcast journalism with a minor in English from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). Pretty much I became I guess an expert on hip hop slash popular culture growing up in Tampa, Florida and Atlanta, Georgia. I was a break dancer. I was a human percussionist, or a human beat box as they say, and also a rapper and a spoken word poet. Always loved it. Didn’t really like school a lot. I love reading and love working with words. So, I guess you can say to personify hip hop which was like my first love, and she made it easier for me to express myself. So, when I had assignments that had to be completed I was reluctant to do them. If I didn’t write them on hip hop I would rap them and would make an A. Plus everytime that was my vehicle I guess you could say I was not really that good in math unless money was involved and I tried to get money as the late great Christopher Wallace would say. My master’s thesis which is in the Clark Atlanta Woodruff Library is actually an ideological analysis in hip hop and structural analysis in hip hop in which I first had to validate hip hop is an art form. I validate hip hop as an art form by showing that it had structures of poetry and linguistics. I also proved that it was an art form because I went back to the case of the Miller test. The Miller test is a test of obscenity. That was a test they used in a trial between Broward County and Luke Skywalker and the 2 Live Crew, Luther Campbell and the Two Live Crew. They had to prove that their album “As Nasty As They Wanna Be” was considered obscene. They were the defendants I believe, and the case was you overturned you know in their favor because they proved that one song they had on their album “As Nasty As They Wanna Be” called “Pretty Woman” and that was actually a satire of a “Pretty Woman” song from the 1950s. So they took the “Pretty Woman” song and they made a satire of it. And since they were able to prove that this was a satire with the help of Dr. Henry Louis Gates, he’s an expert in African and African American Studies and African American Literature. He was one of their key witnesses to help them proved that it was a satire. So, satire being a tenant of poetry validated hip hop as an art form and they were set free. They had to do time based on some of the lyrics they considered obscene. Another thing we proved in that study, my thesis study was that I took different popular battles in hip hop. One of the main battles between L.L. Cool J and Kool Moe Dee. In that battle the battle was mostly left in the realm of the lyrics, in the records. For example, Kool Moe Dee had a song called “How You
Like Me Now?” Basically Kool Moe Dee is a rapper. He was in a group Treacherous Three who were out in the in the 1970s to the early 80s. Pretty much he was like a pioneer in hip hop. But he didn’t get a lot of recognition like pioneers in any industry or any genre. So, he was kind of angry about this. So, on the cover of his album he had a picture of himself. He has a white warm-up suit, and he his jeep crushing a red kango. The red kango was symbolic of L.L. Cool J who was this rapper who didn’t really come out until 1987. He was one of the first artists on the Def Jam label, Russell Simmons label -which is one of the pioneering labels in hip hop. Of course, you know, Russell Simmons was one of the first hip hop moguls. So when he came out crushing this Kango symbolically L.L. knew he was talking about him in the song “How You Like Me Now?” pretty much basically stating that he had been doing that style all along, but L. L. Was getting more play for it. So, he and Moe Dee went back and forth. I think L.L. came out with something called “Jack the Ripper” where he was talking about Kool Moe Dee. Kool Moe Dee comes back at him with another song called. It was many of them. So, I analysis going back and forth with those songs. So, I took that classic battle of hip hop, there was no violence involved in that battle. They kept in within the realm of the music. Compare that battle to at the time 96-97 when I was doing my thesis, there was a battle of hip hop going on between Christopher Wallace, who was Notorious BIG, and TuPac Amaru Shakur known as TuPac. Their battle got more controversial and more violent and there were death threats involved. So, I took those two battles and I compared them and how hip has gone from being kept within the realm of the literate, if you will, and into actually confrontation. So that’s what I talked about in my master’s thesis.

In my doctoral dissertation, I did a narrative. I did more narrative and biological studies in the hip hop in works of rappers Nas, T.I., Jay-Z, and Lil Flip. I chose these four rappers because at the time they were very controversial. Nas being very controversial because he was one of those rapper who was underground, and he chose to be underground, and he stuck to what he did. He didn’t do anything commercial to try to stray from that, and he still remained relevant if you will in the genre and the world of hip hop. However, he only went to like the ninth grade as far as schooling goes. Jay-Z same thing. He dropped out of school I think in the ninth to tenth grade. Ended up selling drugs. Never graduated from high school. But his concepts were quite eloquent. In fact, now he has a book out now called Decoded in which he took his own work and transcribed it kind of how I transcribed his work you know prior to that. But I didn’t just transcribe his, I transcribed Nas, Jay-Z, T.I., and Lil Flip. He and Nas had a lyrical battle, so I took excerpts from their works and from their biology compared them and contrast them and also showed how they were referencing one another in the battles. T.I. was very interesting because he is from Atlanta like I am, and he went to high school with one of my cousins. I chose him because he is another high school dropout, but very eloquent with his lyrics, very interpretative. You would never know that this man dropped out of high school in the ninth grade. At the time he was not in and out of jail. He had just gone to jail one time for a weapons charge of you know of violating his probation. But I go into his childhood how he started out as a normal kid, but just inspired by, negatively inspired by uncles to sell drugs and traffic things of that nature. And Lil Flip is the least talented of these four rappers, but ironically had the most schooling. He actually graduated from high school. He had an A average, but lyrically people will not consider him, a hip hop expert would not would consider him a hip hop artist, they would consider him a rap artist because his raps were basic. He was more popular or in the mainstream, if you will.
So I analyzed those four artists biologically and narratively meaning I took their narratives and I got to express more about them.

Currently, I’m a Humanities and an English Professor at Georgia Perimeter College in Decatur Panthersville Campus, and I’m a fulltime Humanities professor at Georgia Piedmont Technical College, formerly Dekalb Tech. I’ve been teaching since the year 2001 starting off in the infamous Clayton County Public School System. So, while I’m teaching in the Clayton County Public School System I noticed that students would not know what a noun or verb was, but they knew all the words to “Gin and Juice” by Snoop Dog. So, I said “Wow, I could use hip hop as a tool to reach these kids.” That’s another thing that led me down the path of using hip hop to accomplish my goals because it was working. So every day I use hip hop and popular culture just to identify with the kids and the generation. I’m 40 years old. They see “Wow! We can’t just say anything to Dr. Jordan. He knows what we’re talking about.” Or “He’s making me understand the Trojan War alot better by comparing it to gang wars between the Bloods and Crypts or comparing it to something that we watched on tv. I like this teacher.” So, that’s pretty much in a nutshell who I am. I do rap myself. I put out music on my own through mixtapes, do spoken word shows through my fraternity. I’m a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated. Pledged here at Tau Chapter Atlanta University Grad Chapter one of the oldest Omega Chapters in the south. And I kind of use that as a vehicle to I guess showcase my talent, if you will. As well as educate people, adults, people of all ages. So, that in a nutshell is pretty much who I am. I’m trying to get published looking pretty well got projects on the horizon with a good friend of mine named Selwyn Baptiste in Tampa, Florida. He’s a member of the 100 Black Men of Tampa. He’s actually Freddy Brathwaite’s cousin. Freddy Brathwaite is Fab 5 Freddy who is one of the first hip hop’s videographers in the game. You might recognize him from Yo! MTV Raps. He was the host of Yo! MTV Raps in the late 80s. That’s his cousin. He’s going around talking to kids trying to get them to stay in school, and he noticed my background on Facebook believe it or not, social networking, and we’ve been collaborating on some things also had the pleasure of meeting brother Marquis Ross from the 2 Live Crew known as Brother Marquis. He lives in Atlanta. He’s been doing standup comedy doing a few videos of his own and his going to appear on my next mix tape along with some other people got some surprises coming up. So, you know I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. When I moved from Atlanta in 1980, when I came back a lot of the people I grew up with that were friends like a gentleman by the name of Willie Knighton now when I came back they were in rap crews like Willie Knighton was in the Goodie Mob. He’s Khujo Goodie from the Goodie Mob. My cousin had a chance to go to Douglass High School with a man named Jon Thomas. Jonathan Thomas, I think his name is. This is Lil Jon. You know form Lil Jon & East Side Boyz. So, it’s like as I returned, I starting realizing wow, people are getting paid off hip hop. So, I was like I got to get paid too. But at the same time, it’s just a good way I think bridge the gap, the generation gap between my generation which is Generation X. Again, I’m 40 years old, and Generation Y which I guess is this new generation which we don’t know, we don’t know what’s going to happen. They don’t use the library anymore, so people like myself we’re trying to change that. It’s alright to use the Internet, but fuse it with. Nothing wrong with a regular book; nothing like curling up with a regular book. Some other genres and other areas of popular culture I guess I’ve been delving into I guess are black heroes
and comic books. I chose delve into this topic because I grew up you know reading comic books and I always viewed Spider Man as a black man even thought when he took off his mask he was a white man you know Peter Parker, but he was in the inner city of New York swing around, capturing criminals dodging bullets and things of that nature. He has to be black. I’m doing a paper on that now. Right now, Marvel universe, Marvel has an alternate universe, Marvel comics where there making the Spider Man black in the alternate universe. They were going to do it for the movie, but they change up. So, their making a lot of characters black. Nick Fury is now played by Samuel L. Jackson who went to Morehouse with my mom. My mom is a Spelman graduate, so you know I’m kind of delving into other aspects of popular culture.