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**Dr. Ogbar:** Another thing is looking at civic engagement. Um, in the election of 2008 the presidential election, clearly the role of Barack Obama generated creditable interest among my African Americans including young African Americans. African Americans out voted, those between 18 and 24, out voted all other groups between 18 and 24. And people say that’s good but that was because there was a black candidate. If you look at the midterm years 2002 this is before Barack Obama had any kind of national name recognition. In 2002, in the midterms elections African Americans out voted any other group between the ages 18 to 24. So, so we actually have civic engagement. The ways in which um people give money that contributes to political campaigns they have posters, buttons, they write letters to their congress people or other elected officials and vote. According to those organizations that study and watch civic engagement and not just African Americans they looking at all groups. They’re looking at senior citizens they’re looking at Latinos, Whites, women, men looking at all these demographic groups and that African Americans um young African Americans are the most civically engaged group of young people in the United States. And so these are also the people who folks line as lazy and shiftless uh influenced by Hip Hop. And so to my surprise in fact, when I begin my research I found that un much of the argument about how Hip Hop had been in danger to Black folks making them again lazy, shiftless, civically disengaged, politically apathetic that all of these thing proved to be untrue and uh not scientifically measured, measurable. And if there’s any sort of indication of one might find a negative correlation that perhaps listening to more Hip-Hop might make you um less willing to kill people less willing to drop out of high school, less willing to uh to uh get pregnant as a teenager. So, these are some of the things I don’t think that I wouldn’t argue that Hip-Hop are the reason why we have these advances. I don’t think that life is that simple. I think that there are all these other factors why young African Americans have been civically engaged and why they have done all of these things. And it doesn’t mean that we are out of the woods. I mean we clearly have and I have to continue to say this to people. There are these huge disparities of good and bad indices between African Americans and Whites. So you can’t get around that but to somehow assume that there’s a cause that is wildly historical and unproven. And if anything those who consume Hip-Hop to the highest rates are those who have
made advances to other groups of African Americans have not made. And so all that to say despite the commercial Hip-Hop’s obsession with problematic uh themes again <2:48-2:50> drug dealing and everything else, it doesn’t seem to have to have had an effect on African Americans on a macro level. Also, you know you go anywhere in the United States and you’ll see people who have Hip-Hop fashion and I can go anywhere and find folks who dress a certain way, who might be thuggish, and they might look like uh like you know “tats” around there neck, they might have gold teeth in the South you know and North but it’s a Southern thing. But you certainly see certain aesthetics that seem to be influenced by Hip-Hop. And you can see people who you know drop out of school, people who are thuggish, people who are misogynistic, people who are homophobic and they only listen to Hip-Hop. It’s easy to make those connections. But I think if you went to Howard University, if you went to Spelman, if you went to Morehouse, if you went to Princeton, if you went to uh Swarthmore, if you went to FAM, I think if you went to any of these schools, and pulled out the average high achieving black students at any of those schools and asked them what kind of music they listen to they would be listening to Hip-Hop. So to think that there’re there because they listen to Jay-Z or there’re there because they listen to Kanye, or there’re there because they listen to Young Jeezy I think is uh a little um simple. I think that an incorrect way to assume that pop culture is to overstate the influence that pop culture has on people’s behavior. Um, so I think that’s like one of the things I found um most gratifying and fascinating about my research is kind of going and pushing some of this research and uh uh looking at social scientific uh approaches to Hip-Hop and melting that with um politics and the cultural wars and everything. Also, I would like to look at how Hip-Hop is uh not just a <4:40-4:42> but there is great diversity in Hip-Hop. So you have commercial rappers who might engage in all of the things that I mentioned before but find underground rappers who are addressing all sorts of things everything from Védism to the prison industrial complex. And you find gagster rappers and commercial rappers who might do some of these things too um various degrees of sophistication and insights but you certainly see a wide cross section of political positions and um sort of lyrical dexterities and creativity among underground rappers. Now underground rappers are sort of defined as rappers who don’t have uh large commercial appeal like radio play. They don’t appear in a lot of the mainstream Hip-Hop magazines. They don’t appear on BET or MTV. They um have very little sort of commercial appeal; they don’t sell gold well a lot of rappers are not selling gold nowadays gold or platinum. But these rappers, and some examples um there are a wide range of some of these folks but think of um people certainly from the early 2000s you know Dilated Peoples, Drastic Five out of my hometown of L.A. and people <5:51-5:53> another underground group Campbell Knox from the North East uh Jedi Mind Tricks also from this region and um Army of the Pharaohs kind of centered here in the Northeast as well. And so a lot of these rappers who some of whom are as violent as commercial rappers and misogynistic as commercial rappers um many of them not. And you have them in different regions <6:14-6:16> But one of the things that I see as a trend in the last few years is Hip-Hop’s moving away from sort of <6:23-6:25> who celebrate drug
dealing. I think that’s sort of like thuggish gangster style. And Kanye I think has kind of ushered in a period where people have become a little more bold with their own expressions of masculinity that isn’t dependant solely on you know deep misogyny like you know beating women, pimping and but Kanye does calls them “Bs” and “H’s” and you find that again in all commercial rappers uh Drake included. But Drake who has become perhaps the hottest rapper to appear in the last several years, he is perhaps actually since Kanye West or 50 Cent actually and to have this type of buzz around him. But um Drake you know came out. He’s very clear that I’m not a thug, I’m not out in the street murdering black people cutting off um heads or stabbing people in their throats. I’m not selling crack, you know I’m not pushing people off buildings or anything or murdering folks. So he’s not a gangster rapper. He makes that very clear that he’s not a gangster rapper. And so he’s um you know he curses like everyone does in Hip-Hop but he’s not someone who sets on black mythologies or a braggadocios rapper in a style that one might even say Big Daddy Kane. And whereas lyricism is very different from Big Daddy Kane but he has a sort of aesthetic that is self promotional and um braggadocios. And uh like Kanye not depending on gangster tropes that have dominated Hip-Hop in the last couple of years. So I think that Kanye has opened up a space where there is a market for folks who decide to be hot MCs uh but not MCs that solely focuses on the destruction of black people. And it becomes actually really cool you know Snoop could have a whole song where he talks about uh like being a thug and he talks about subjecting women and he can talk about pimping and everything else. And you know people only think that he’s celebrating destruction and the suffering of black people and its all fun and games and uh but you have a sort of shift you know in Hip-Hop with people like Drake and Kanye. And then you have a lot of other folks coming out. Um Kid Cudi is one of these rappers who similarly to Drake and others doesn’t have a style that is solely about the mythology. Wale from the D.C. area, Kid Cudi is from the Cleveland area. Um Wale is from the D.C. area is like that uh groups of young rappers and MCs like the new boys and the college boys and even the names college boys departure of sort of like thug curtail type you know naming themselves after big drug dimes you know Rick Ross or Freeway and um of course Noreaga and others. So we have actually had some aesthetic shifts and some um substantive shifts in terms of quality shifts in Hip-Hop over the past few years. And I think that this is encouraging. One of the things I always like to see is a sort of broad range of Hip-Hop. If I turn on the radio I can hear somebody, an MC that is a talented MC that’s hot where I can go to a club and party and enjoy it. Um, it’s something that when I have children in the car I don’t have to you know, stop it. I remember getting Little Wayne CD and putting that joint in and having my goddaughter in the car and um I couldn’t go through the first song cause it was just like alright, let me skip that and the next song he’s like “F that put on my, got on that N” it was like alright, alright, alright. Got to the next one and it was the same thing. So, it was really tough I was actually restricted I couldn’t even hear the song or the album at all because your man was going for it in such a hard way and it was something that was clearly unsuitable. And I guess you know in those situations, you choose to support these artists or not. But uh I guess it would
be nice to have sort of a range of expression not solely gangster mythology. Um in terms of
direction in Hip-Hop I think that’s one of the things that I find um, um interesting. And um to
quote I believe it was Mos Def, People often talk about the direction of Hip-Hop as if Hip-Hop
as if Hip-Hop is sort of you know a giant living on the hill, you know but he said people are Hip-
Hop. Where the people go, Hip-Hop will go. So it really depends on the taste of consuming
market. If someone like Drake can blow up, if someone like Kanye can blow up, someone like
Kid Cudi can blow up, we might have a space where you can have a wide range of rappers. You
know we might have some Young Jeezy. Get Young Jeezy to talk about how much he loves
selling crack to black people and loves killing black people. You might have someone who might
be militant like Dev Prez. Dev Prez can come out and talk about you know revolutionary politics.
You might have someone like Paris out in the Oakland area who can talk about revolutionary
politics. And you might have um someone who is <10:54-10:55> political who might be a party
rapper um like um Charles Hamilton. So I think you have a range of possibilities here in Hip-
Hop that ideally I would like to see a sort of diversity of Hip-Hop not just a sort of restriction of
authenticity that’s predicated upon you know pathology. And so who knows what will come to
Hip-Hops future. Again, it depends on where people will go.