

Wuz' up nigga, My niggaz, You nigger!

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Wuz' Up My Nigga:

At what point does a word take on a life of its own? When is a word a representation of a state of mind? At what point does a word represent the ideology of a nation? When does a word have the capacity to communicate the pain of centuries of malevolent disregard?

NIGGER, in all its forms of spelling and pronunciation carries a legacy of slavery that reaches beyond the void of time and history. The genre of Hip-Hop is the new arena in which nigger can audaciously parade itself through the psyche of a new generation, and at the same time continue to distort the image of these oppressed children of slavery with the oppressor's image of the enslaved. The new fields of slavery are in the minds of the Hip-Hop generation. The psyche of this lost cohort is littered with the effects of nigger, which rampantly disfigures the perception of the consumers of Hip-Hop and its contaminated product, rap music. Renowned psychologist Naim Akbar comments on the implications of mental enslavement and the effect on the enslaved when he states:

The slavery that feeds on the mind, invading the soul of man, destroying his loyalties to himself and establishing allegiance to forces which destroy him, is an even worse form of capture. The influences that permit an illusion of freedom, liberation, and self-determination, while tenaciously holding one's mind in subjugation, is the folly of only the sadistic.
(Akbar, VI)

Nigger, and its most infamous synonym nigga, is especially prolific in the realm of Hip-Hop, which is the vehicle in which gangster rap canonized itself into mainstream society with all its hype and controversy. Along with gangster rap came the onslaught of the use of the word nigger in American media, in addition to all of its synonyms. In the dominion of Hip-Hop, those professing allegiance with the image of a "hard-core rapper" or a "gangster rapper" must pepper their lyrics with the mantra of nigga, and promote the attitude that is connected to it. The self-destructive and dehumanizing connection to the racist term goes hand in hand with the rebel without a cause or clue phenomenon, closely associated with many rap artists of the Hip-Hop generation. Murphy Forman et al analyzes how rap disseminates into the consciousness of American culture and its incestuous nature with the human psyche:

By the early '90s, the American pop consciousness was well aware of the Los Angeles Gangsta Ethos. Artists like Ice-T introduced the concept, but it was the collective of DJs and MCs known as Niggaz With Attitude who would define and refine it. Eazy-E, DJ Yella, MC Ren, Dr. Dre, and Ice Cube articulated the style, stance and raw ghetto rhetoric that would not only capture the imagination of young people worldwide but also permanently transform

American pop culture. N.W.A [Niggaz With Attitude] seared their unsettling image onto the contemporary psyche. (Forman, 319)

The union of gangster rap with the “nigga attitude” and “nigger image” demonstrates the diseased psyche of the afflicted Hip-Hop generation. The affliction is self-hatred, self-destructive behavior, thought pattern, and lifestyle. As persons of African descent, there is a dangerous connection to the word and several of its forms. The union of nigger with those, who for centuries were oppressed by it, is one that contorts itself to the heart of the issues of race and ascribed status in the United States of America. The plague of the social structure of this nation is racism. Nigga is the blazing flag of America’s racist doctrine. The doctrine of racism has seeped into the minds of the oppressed persons of African decent. Hip-Hop very distinctly demonstrates the disease of racism by the abundant propagation of the use of nigga in numerous avenues of American culture, while spreading beyond the borders of the urban impoverished communities like an infection. The continuation of the fertile use of the word has undermined and eroded the souls of those originally oppressed by the ethnic slur. A disease left untreated will destroy the host from the inside out. Nigga is a parasite in the souls of those of African descent, and it persists, to our detriment, sucking the self-respect and love right out of us.

...Hip-Hop ‘has probably been the greatest vehicle for promulgating’ the use of the N-word in America today. The trend of young Black men publicly calling one another “nigga” and “my nigga” in song lyrics, comedy routines, film, and television underscores the self-image dilemmas of African Americans. (Cole et al, 205)

Been A Nigga From Way Back:

“Nigger is derived from the Latin word for the color black, niger. According to the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang, it did not originate as a slur but took on a derogatory connotation over time.” (Kennedy, 4) Other dictionaries associated the expression with those of African descent born in the United States. For instance, in Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, the definition is given as, “Negro- usually taken to be offensive, a member of any dark-skinned race.” (798) More controversial, accurate, and profound definitions allude to the psychological implications of self-definition as nigger.

The word Negro is Spanish for BLACK. The Spanish language comes from Latin, which has its origins in Classical Greek. The word Negro in Greek is derived from the root word 'necro', meaning dead. (Schneider)

To align oneself with the notion of death is pathological at best, as well as problematic when attempting to proclaim that nigga is a greeting or a term of endearment. The fact of the matter is, this word, its root meaning, and racist history unequivocally eliminates the possibility of a positive nature being constructed around it to cushion the devastation so closely in conjunction with it. To give psychological space

to the concept of nigger is to swallow-whole the degradation encoded in the DNA of the word. For one to self-inflict dehumanization verges on insanity, and ultimately violates the primary law of nature, which is self-preservation.

The primary objective of slavery was to dehumanize a race of people to give credence to the laziness and greed of European castoffs who were sent to America to further the imperialistic nature and social comfort of Great Britain. The result of the system of slavery was so damaging psychologically that African people rivaled the Europeans in perpetuating the social conditioning of the slave system. Thus, the slave mentality is cemented in the precursor culture of Hip-Hop. In other words, niggas, nigger attitude, nigga ideology, and nigga behavior has been around a long time and is now manifested in the minds of the Hip-Hop generation.

That Nigga Got Problems:

[chattel slavery] this worse form of slavery,... the slavery that captures the mind and imprisons the motivation, perception, aspiration and identity in a web of anti-self images, generating a personal and collective self-destructive, is more cruel than the shackles on the wrists and ankles. (Akbar, V)

Hip-Hop, like European society, has failed to take into consideration the vicious legacy of the word nigger and the implications of its origin and use. Due to the fact that Hip-Hop is an extension of mainstream society's diseased ideology, the same loathsome opinion of persons of African descent is perpetuated through the use of nigger. Hip-Hop's use of nigga in rap music is a byproduct of the psychological chains of slavery, and a clear indication of the cultural posttraumatic stress syndrome suffered by African descendents of the Hip-Hop generation. The culture of American born persons of African descent was propagated in slavery, and thus infected with racism leading to the infusion of oppressive ideology and distorted imagery of self and group. Further evidence of the self-hatred is made apparent by the ingestion of the putrid word nigger, digestion of all its racist derogatory overtones, and verbal defecation of the waste product nigga. According to Naim Akbar, a psychologist of African descent:

As human beings, our limitations rest only in our ignorance. We are ignorant of who we are and what we can do. We have the need to gain consciousness (awareness) and only in consciousness is our true human capacity open to us.... We must acquire consciousness of who we are and what we have been in order to operate to our full human capacity. (Akbar, 29)

Akbar's statement asserts that we cannot allow others to dictate who and what we are, nor can we take on who and what they say we are as truth. For it is our responsibility to engage in self-defining, self-discovering, and self-awakening to truths as pure and unpretentious as the first wave of Hip-Hop with all its self-expression and self-determination. In giving space to the word nigger, along with its treacherous history, we

open up ourselves to the damage that self-destruction and self-hatred not only birth but nurture. Nurturing of such prescribed roles and ideology we give space and weight to the oppressor's images, leaving us in mental bondage:

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. (Freire, 46-47)

Collectively there is a mass attempt to fall in line like sheep to be herded for the slaughter. We fail to see that the axe at our throats is nigga. We slit our own throats every time the virus, nigga, is vomited from our lips.

...the last remaining obstacle to the complete mental liberation of African –American people is the failure to release ourselves from slavery. (Akbar, II)

Out of the mouths of rappers comes the poison that slowly afflicts the minds of the Hip-Hop generation. With every nigga uttered, the disrespect of ancestors, community and self is continued, commodified, and then sold back to the community like a prize to be cherished rather than despised. The glaring issue in this debate is whether or not one can use “nigger” while divorcing the term from its history of racism. To do so would be an attempt to erase over four hundred years of oppression and enslavement. In addition to that harrowing feat, one must take the historically racist term into the psyche and let it fester along with all the ancestral terrorism attached to it.

Ironically we alone, when compared to all the other groups in history, who have suffered at the hands of oppressors, take on the oppressors' weapons of hate. Jewish people do not commonly greet each other, “hey kik”. Nor do you see Mexican-Americans saying, “hey you're a wetback, I'm a wetback, and everyone I love is a wetback.” Additionally, people of Middle Eastern descent have yet to be heard calling each other “towel heads” or “sand niggers.” Nor do you see people of European descent greeting each other with “hey cracker,” or “nice to see you today honky.” No other group so vehemently holds on to ethnic slurs and attempts to embody them like the Hip-Hop generation. The reason for these differences is the cultivation of the culture of U.S. born persons of African descent in the diseased system of slavery. “...Their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression” (Freire, 45).

The foundation of the Hip-Hop culture rests on the mental corruption of the slave system. The diseased ideology in turn created a culture, one filled with distorted images

of self, and group. The need to be a nigga is built into the culture from the psychological damage, or posttraumatic stress syndrome, inflicted upon the group systematically from slavery, through Jim Crow to the present day's covert racism. If one is told they are a nigger, forced to live as a nigga, and treated like a nigger from 1619 to 2006, a nigga is what will be represented. Dyson further expresses the rebirth of the nigga in the modern era by explaining the common thought as presented by the commentary of high profile figures when he states:

Chris Rock is a very complex figure. During a recent *Oprah* appearance, he explained to a white member of the audience why the use of the "N" word is problematic to people outside of African American Communities, but acceptable within at least certain quarters of black life. {The standard argument goes that white American intended such lethal meanings by deploying the word that it's off-limits to whites, whereas black folk use it among themselves as a term of endearment, often wearing it as a badge of honor.} (Dyson, 256)

Who, but the insane, wear a badge to honor their slave master? From the beginning, nigga was the oppressors' word. They created it, they defined it, and they control it through the lexicon. They have all the power in this racist, capitalistic, oppressive system. We cannot empower ourselves with the weapons designed to destroy us; nigga is that weapon.

Say What Nigga:

Understanding the new crises in African American culture that have come about in my generation's [Hip-Hop] lifetime-...blacks selling black self-hatred as entertainment, among other things- I often wonder what life will be like for the next generation of African Americans that follows. (Kitwana, XI)

Upon looking at the lyrics of rap music, the convicting evidence is overwhelmingly obvious, and a bad omen for future generations of Hip-Hop heads; we are irrevocably altered psychologically by chattel slavery as seen by the lyrics of Hip-Hop music. In 1993, A Tribe Called Quest released, "Sucka Nigga" on the album Midnight Marauders off Jive Records. The song supports the use of nigga and demonizes those staunchly against the use.

...See, nigga first was used back in the Deep South Fallin out between the dome of the white man's mouth... em-brace adversity it goes right with the race and being that we use it as a term of endearment Niggas start to bug to the dome is where the fear went Now the little shorties say it all the time And a whole bunch of niggas throw the word in they rhyme... I throw the sucka in the front for the ones that front It's the neo-nigga of the nineties, c'mon... It means that we will never grow, you know the word

dummy Other niggas in the community think it's crummy But I don't, neither does the youth cause we embrace adversity it goes right with the race... (www.sing365.com)

The rap group admittedly takes the racist word on and attempts to say that its use by the youth is culturally sound because the race embraces adversity. The fallacy of the logic is exposed with the line stating, 'that the group will not grow and refers to the group as dummies.' The demonizing of the eradicationists is apparent by the implication of fronting. In Hip-Hop culture, those that "front" are not staying true to themselves and their culture. When aligning the word nigga to the culture, one is conjunctively aligning the oppressor's images of self to the culture and thus spreading the pathology of distorted self-images and paradigms.

Suddenly I see some niggas that I don't like Got 'em A smoking ass nigga robbed me blind I got a tek nine now his smoking ass is mine... Crooked ass niggas Criminal Behavior Suddenly I see a nigga I don't like Now I can be a crooked nigga too when im rolling with my crew now watch what crooked niggaz do... im a crooked nigga too crooked niggaz come in all shapes in sizes they wear disguises, backstab is what they specialize in they'll try to get you they'll sweat you til your in the picture then they'll hit ya son of a bitch now hes richer (www.alleyezonme.com)

On the 2Pacalypse Now album, released in 1991 by Tupac Shakur, the paradoxical nature of the Hip-Hop generation is clearly displayed by the double talk of positivity and sedition in the song "Crooked Ass Nigga" when examining N.I.G.G.A. Shakur's "Crooked Ass Nigga" directly contradicts his acronym N.I.G.G.A: Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished. The problem demonstrated here is that the nigga, who according to Shakur is "Never Ignorant and Getting Goals Accomplished", is simultaneously deceitful, criminal in nature, and animalistic. The two constructs cannot embody the same word let alone the same being; the results are psychoses or split personalities because of the attempted duality. Considering Paulo Freire's statements, this type of conflict is to be expected at this stage of mental healing.

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them... (Freire, 48)

Look At That Ignant Nigga:

Recent attempts within communities of African descendents to address the epidemic that is the use of nigger have gone astray. Acclaimed producer and rapper Kanye West has slipped off the deep end by giving audiences black and white alike the

“privilege” of saying nigga when singing along with his Billboard top 100 song “Gold-digger” during his concert tour. According to Robert Hilburn, The Los Angeles Times staff writer, “West paused playfully at one point in the song Saturday to tell whites in the racially mixed audience that it is OK- this one time- to shout out the N-word.” (Hilburn) The lyrics, “...employs the forbidden N-word at the end: ‘I ain’t sayin’ she’s a gold digger/ But she ain’t messin with no broke...” (Hilburn) Hilburn does not write the last word of the song, nigga. His reluctance exposes the fear, discomfort, and known racism conjunctively resonated throughout American common knowledge; the word should not be used, whether one is of African descent or not. The eagerness with which the crowd leaped at the opportunity to utter the illicit word is mind-boggling. “Most of the whites had appeared to be rapping along, but a bit tentatively. After West’s comment, the volume jumped several decibels.” (Hilburn)

Mr. West is confused at best and lacks the responsibility to understand the callous power he wields when he gives permission to utter an atrocious word with no thought, remorse, or regard for the history connected to it. This same artist purports to be on the “conscious tip.” Consciousness speaks to understanding, respecting, and disseminating the truth of our past, not malicious disregard and disrespect of it. He is making money off the song with the word nigga in it, along with its history, controversy, and pain. He again perfectly demonstrates the confused state of the Hip-Hop generation. Where is the consciousness when West states, “...white people, this is your only chance to say ‘nigger’?” (Herrington) “A particular problem is the duality of the oppressed: they are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence.” (Freire, 55) Kanye West does not represent or amount to the conscious point of view held by the insightful and thoughtful people in the Hip-Hop generation.

Another confused individual who holds dearly to the oppressor’s weapon of annihilation is Aaron McGruder creator of the comic strip Boondocks. (Hutchinson) The comic-strip artist uses nigga gratuitously for pure shock value on the Cartoon Network’s Adult Swim program. McGruder’s objective is to be defiant with little thought to the consequences of his words. Hutchinson quotes McGruder as saying, “If folks don’t like it, then they’ll just have to get over it. After all, everyone uses it.”

McGruder and the N-word users and apologists loudly agree. Their rationale boils down to this, the more a black person uses the word, the less offensive it becomes. They claim that they are cleansing the word of its negative connotations so that racists can no longer use it to hurt blacks. (Hutchinson)

The claim is invalid. By exposing the masses to an offense does not make it any less offensive; the audience has simply been desensitized. The offense is just as offensive; it is the audience that becomes altered.

Words are not value neutral....Often, words reflect society’s standards....It can’t be sanitized, cleansed, inverted, or redeemed as a culturally liberating word.

Nigger can't and shouldn't be made acceptable, no matter whose mouth it comes out of or what excuse is tossed out for using it....nigger pricks agonizing historical and social sores. (Hutchinson)

Nigga Kick Rocks:

The infliction of the Euro-American philosophical tradition, as it relates to self-conception (i.e., individuality, separateness, etc.) for African peoples causes many of us to falsely believe that our natural temperamental tendencies and characteristic spirit were and are “wrong” and/or “uncivilized.” This confusion is fundamentally based on the fact that the Euro-American tradition denies the African his historical roots or the grounding of self into the collective and social definition of one's peoples, and that the so-called “Negro” is taught (tricked) that the Euro-American culture is (1) the “right” (only civilized) culture and (2) that he will or can be (under prescribed conditions) assimilated into it. (Nobles, 596)

Although physical slavery ended in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, and in 1965 the Voting Rights Act brought an end to legal disenfranchisement, the war against mental slavery clearly still rages on. When an entire generation seeks to build themselves up with diseased ideology and the terrorist's tools while trying to disengage the slave master's tyrannical reign, it will not work. We must **give it back**. Give back all that has ever oppressed us. Stop hating yourselves by calling our people nigga. We do not need to delve into the box of ethnic slurs to build ourselves up. We need to create our own devices for self-identification, empowerment, and upliftment. “So much of the European-American consciousness is based on its affirmation of greatness and superiority in contrast to the inferiority and wretchedness of Africans.”(Akbar, 33) With European-American consciousness comes the birth of this nation, and with this nation comes the molding of the concept of the African descendents born here. If the consciousness of the nation is based upon the precept of Caucasian supremacy and African inferiority, how can the appendages of this nation be trusted, respected, or used by the descendents of Africa? “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house”—Audrey Lorde

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can only be done by means of praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (Freire, 51)

In 2006, the social climate of Hip-Hop condones the use of the word nigga by all people. Previous generations adamantly persevered in the long and tedious processes of demonizing nigger; however, the Hip-Hop generation has sought to internalize the Eurocentric worldview, specifically the vilified images presented of self. In doing so we disrespect our ancestors, our future seeds, and ourselves. All remnants of chattel slavery were crafted to destroy persons of African descent. To harbor weapons of mass destruction in our hearts and minds is a red flag in the game of psychological warfare; a game we will never win as long as we continue to strap bombs to our mouths and drop them every time we speak. Nigger and nigga are not our words. We will never find empowerment by embodying the destructive images of the oppressor.

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Study Questions

- 1 Can a word such as nigger, which has been so highly charged politically and emotionally throughout its history, simply lose its negative connotation when expressed in certain social contexts?
- 2 Given the fact that for multiple centuries, Blacks have been exposed to a climate of White Supremacy wherein “nigger” is the word most often used to reference their ethnicity, is there, consequentially, a possible subconscious, subatomic relationship between the sound signature of the word “nigger” and the literal auricle field of the African-American receiver and or sender?
- 3 Does the prevalent use of the word “nigger” in society speak to the notion of creative vitality, due to ones ability to adapt the word to symbolize the concept of an “urban survivor”, or is it essentially a negative by product of slavery, and thus reflective of a slave mentality?
- 4 Is it finally “Hip-Hop” for Whites to freely use the word “Nigger,” Kanye West said it was cool. Is it?