

## **Book Review: *For the Culture*, Bonnette-Bailey and Bell, eds.**

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*For the Culture: Hip-Hop and the Fight for Social Justice.*

Edited by Lakeyta Bonnette-Bailey and Adolphus Belk.

University of Michigan Press, 2022. 346 pp.

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**F**or the Culture explores Hip Hop and social justice, providing tremendous insight to this vital intersection at a critical moment. This edited volume examines themes such as identity politics, race, ethnicity, gender, activism, electoral politics, mass movement leadership, human rights, education, and global social justice. This review describes the book's main content and sections, focusing on the gains for scholars of Hip Hop culture, rap music, social justice, social movements, and popular culture.

*For the Culture* features five sections and 18 chapters. Each chapter advances an understanding of Hip Hop and social justice in some significant way. The book's chapters are introduced ("Intro: 'Do It for the Culture'") and concluded ("Outro: 'The Beautiful Struggle'") with outstanding context from the editors. The "Intro" presents the basis for the entire book discussion by highlighting common themes with a clear structure, sharp language, and great balance. This section is vital in setting the framework because each chapter voices a different relationship to Hip Hop and uses a unique framework and methodology. The chapter authorship features artists, activists, and academics, and the chapters are united by the editors' vision of a better understanding of social movements and Hip Hop.

Section One, titled “Activism or Perpetuation? Hip-Hoppers, Protest Movements, and Mass Incarceration,” features four chapters with exceptional strength in political analysis of Hip Hop culture and rap music. These chapters contain important data and narratives, present innovative case study information, and highlight musical examples related to political participation. The analysis is thorough in most places. An example is the “Going Upstate” chapter, which includes a sample list of about 20 songs from NYC artists about the impact of the Rockefeller Drug Laws of the 1970s (22-23). Specific examples like these are the norm in this section and in the edited volume.

Section Two, “Old-School and New-School Methods of Political Engagement,” contains four chapters, which add a level of methodological diversity to the edited volume. It is a solid examination of participation; for example, one chapter (“Don’t Call It a Comeback”) features a detailed examination of the participation from *The Breakfast Club* guests. The chapter contains a listing of over 20 artists with their hometown information, and a brief biography (132-133). This exceptional level of detail at the chapter level is uncommon in an edited volume on Hip Hop. Section Three, “Education and Social Justice: Getting an Education in ‘They Schools,’” features three chapters with strong examinations of related literature, outstanding technical details, and clear discussions of education, curricula, and social justice. Clarity is a shining feature of this section, its chapters, and the book overall.

Section Four, “Gender, Identity, and Sexuality in Hip-Hop,” presents three chapters. There is an important examination focused on Hip Hop and gender. One chapter (“That’s Them...”) examines “anti-Black female sentiment.” Another chapter’s (“Atrevidas”) vivid example is the case of TLC’s mu-

sic as the only form of representation to be found while grade school and the empowerment entailed in getting their first records leading to an understanding of “girl power” (240). This same chapter also begins to introduce some international perspective to the volume as it relates to gender. This international perspective continues in Section Five, making for a great transition. The writing here is incredibly engaging, even humorous at times. Yet overall, Section Four is driven by extremely powerful personal stories and connections to Hip Hop and gender. Section Five, “Mixing it up: Hip-Hoppers and Social Justice Around the World,” presents four chapters that move scholars of Hip Hop and social justice beyond the U.S. There are outstanding points made about the links between politics and music, great areas of lyrical analysis, and perspectives that are not frequently discussed in studies of Hip Hop.

For scholars of Hip Hop and social movements, the diversity of perspective and mixture of new and deeply entrenched authors in the field should be a great interest. It is apparent that this was actively cultivated by the editors’ work in uniting the volume. The different types of practitioners, activists, and academic perspectives among other positionalities around Hip Hop and social justice is great for this book. The range of authors should excite many readers, from those who are looking for fresh, on-the-scene perspectives as well as those looking towards new work from their favorite authors. When looking at the table of contents, one of the standouts are some of the names of scholars who contributed to this edited volume. The editors themselves are essential authors in the field *and* they also provide great chapter contributions to the edited volume in addition to the aforementioned “Intro” and “Outro.” The indexing, table of contents, and charts are also extremely well done.

*For the Culture* should appeal to anyone interested in social activism areas such as forms education, activism, electoral politics and mass movement leadership, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, or human rights and global justice. The book is eclectic and balances an array of voices. The scholarship is especially rich, thoughtful, and sound. The editors have assembled a great diversity of methods and scopes, all united by their outstanding framework, chapter content, and documentation. This diversity mirrors the diversity in Hip Hop and in social justice activity.

**Reviewed by Lavar Pope, Loyola University Chicago**