

Why does the Music Industry keep “Underground Hip-Hop Music” Underground?

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Music is everybody's possession . It's only publishers who think that people own it.
John Lennon

The Corporate Music industry has had a monopoly on what youths from all around the world listen to.

They have been controlling the thoughts and beliefs of our youths and even adults through their control of the music industry. The Music industry is a multi-billion dollar business. There are now “Big Three” record labels since 2012 that include Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music Group and Universal Music Group that dominate the market. They control the artist and set what percentage of the sales receipts they keep as profits. They also keep the competition between the major record labels at a minimum since they are already a monopoly.

There are many underground hip-hop artists that the political and corporate elite don't want the public to know about. They control what kind of music is produced and sold to the public. In an interview with Jay Woodson, organizer of *National Hip Hop Political Convention (NHHPC)* in Philadelphia with online news source *The Final Call*:




FINAL CALL (FC): A recent study of rap songs and music videos on BET and MTV found that several major corporations advertise their products or services during programs that often expose explicit lyrics and images to children. I remember the time when the music industry and society held that rap and hip-hop music was just a fad that would pass. What's happening now that “everyone” seems to be on board?

JAY WOODSON (JW): What our options are in this political economy are options for profit, which benefits large corporations. This includes the entertainment industry. They give a very narrow message and image of what Black life is. It's materialistic, about death, it's about violence, and it's about misogyny and any diverse or alternative messages and images of that, they don't seem to support because they don't find it profitable to have diverse aesthetics within the entertainment industry for people to purchase and to view on television. A lot of time when it comes down to critiquing BET and Viacom, we really need to look at the policy of communications. Like, we understand that the airways are owned by people, who give licenses through the Federal Communication Commission. With legislation that was passed in the mid-90s under Bill Clinton, Congress narrowed the plan for people to tap into the media. A lot of larger media bought up media in smaller markets and it

narrowed the choices for smaller media or even public access to have cable programming or even local radio stations. So you have these large corporations such as Clear Channel giving such small packages of 20 songs that are played over and over again.

Lauryn Hill is a Grammy award winning singer, songwriter, rapper and a former member of the Fugees explains how the music industry operates in a letter she wrote on *Tumblr* to the public about the music business and her tax evasion case where a judge sentenced her to 3 months in prison earlier this year:

For the past several years, I have remained what others would consider underground. I did this in order to build a community of people, like-minded in their desire for freedom and the right to pursue their goals and lives without being manipulated and controlled by a media protected military industrial complex with a completely different agenda. Having put the lives and needs of other people before my own for multiple years, and having made hundreds of millions of dollars for certain institutions, under complex and sometimes severe circumstances, I began to require growth and more equitable treatment, but was met with resistance. I entered into my craft full of optimism (which I still possess), but immediately saw the suppressive force with which the system attempts to maintain it's control over a given paradigm. I've seen people promote addiction, use sabotage, black listing, media bullying and any other coercion technique they could, to prevent artists from knowing their true value, or exercising their full power. These devices of control, no matter how well intentioned (or not), can have a devastating outcome on the lives of people, especially creative types who must grow and exist within a certain environment and according to a certain pace, in order to live and create optimally.

I kept my life relatively simple, even after huge successes, but it became increasingly obvious that certain indulgences and privileges were  expected to come at the expense of my free soul, free mind, and therefore my health and integrity. So I left a more mainstream and public life, in order to wean both myself, and my family, away from a lifestyle that required distortion and compromise as a means for maintaining it. During this critical healing time, there were very few people accessible to me who had not already been seduced or affected by this machine, and therefore who could be trusted to not try and influence or coerce me back into a dynamic of compromise. Individual growth was expected to take place unnaturally, or stagnated outright, subject to marketing and politics. Addressing critical issues like pop culture cannibalism or its manipulation of the young at the expense of everything, was frowned upon and discouraged by limiting funding, or denying it outright. When one has a prolific creative output like I did/do, and is then forced to stop, the effects can be dangerous both emotionally and psychologically, both for the artist and those in need of that resource. It was critically important that I find a suitable pathway within which to exist, without being distorted or economically strong-armed. During this period of crisis, much was said about me, both slanted and inaccurate, by those who had become dependent on my creative force, yet unwilling to fully acknowledge the importance of my contribution, nor compensate me equitably for it. This was done in an effort to smear my public image, in order to directly affect my ability to earn independently of this system. It took a long time to locate and nurture a community of people strong enough to resist the incredibly unhealthy tide, and more importantly see through it. If I had not been able to make contact with, and establish this community, my life, safety and freedom, would have been directly affected as well as the lives, safety and freedom of my family.

Failure to create a non toxic, non exploitative environment was not an option.

As my potential to work, and therefore earn freely, was being threatened, I did whatever needed to be done in order to insulate my family from the climate of hostility, false entitlement, manipulation, racial prejudice, sexism and ageism that I was surrounded by. This was absolutely critical while trying to find and establish a new and very necessary community of healthy people, and also heal and detoxify myself and my family while raising my young children. There were no exotic trips, no fleet of cars, just an all out war for safety, integrity, wholeness and health, without mistreatment denial, and/or exploitation. In order to liberate myself from those who found it ok to oppose my wholeness, free speech and integral growth by inflicting different forms of punitive action against it, I used my resources to sustain our safety and survival until I was able to restore my ability to earn outside of it!

When artists experience danger and crisis under the effects of this kind of insidious manipulation, everyone easily accepts that there was something either dysfunctional or defective with the artist, rather than look at, and fully examine, the system and its means and policies of exploiting/'doing business'. Not only is this unrealistic, it is very dark in its motivation, conveniently targeting the object of their hero worship by removing any evidence that they 'needed' or celebrated this very same resource just years, months or moments before. Since those who believe they need a hero/celebrity outnumber the actual heroes/celebrities, people feel safe and comfortably justified in numbers, committing egregious crimes in the name of the greater social ego. Ironically diminishing their own true hero-celebrity nature in the process.

It was this schism and the hypocrisy, violence and social cannibalism it enabled, that I wanted and needed to be freed from, not from art or music, but the suppression/repression and reduction of that art and music to a bottom line alone, without regard for anything else. Over-commercialization and its resulting restrictions and limitations can be very damaging and distorting to the inherent nature of the individual. I Love making art, I Love making music, these are as natural and necessary for me almost as breathing or talking. To be denied the right to pursue it according to my ability, as well as be properly acknowledged and compensated for it, in an attempt to control, is manipulation directed at my most basic rights! These forms of expression, along with others, effectively comprise my free speech! Defending, preserving, and protecting these rights are critically important, especially in a paradigm where veiled racism, sexism, ageism, nepotism, and deliberate economic control are still blatant realities!!!

Learning from the past, insulating friends and family from the influence of external manipulation and corruption, is far more important to me than being misunderstood for a season! I did not deliberately abandon my fans, nor did I deliberately abandon any responsibilities, but I did however put my safety, health and freedom and the freedom, safety and health of my family first over all other material concerns! I also embraced my right to resist a system intentionally opposing my right to whole and integral survival. I conveyed all of this when questioned as to why I did not file taxes during this time period. Obviously, the danger I faced was not accepted as reasonable grounds for deferring my tax payments, as authorities, who despite being told all of this, still chose to pursue action against me, as opposed to finding an alternative solution. My intention has always been to get this situation rectified. When I was working consistently without

being affected by the interferences mentioned above, I filed and paid my taxes. This only stopped when it was necessary to withdraw from society, in order to guarantee the safety and well-being of myself and my family. As this, and other areas of issue are resolved and set straight, I am able to get back to doing what I should be doing, the way it should be done. This is part of that process. To those supporters who were told that I abandoned them, that is untrue. I abandoned greed, corruption, and compromise, never you, and never the artistic gifts and abilities that sustained me."

There are many "underground Hip-Hop artists that are politically conscious-driven such as Common, Flobots, Dead Prez, Rebel Diaz and many others. Lowkey is another underground Hip-Hop artist, a former member of Poisonous Poets, lives in the UK and has traveled the world in support of Anti-war and human rights causes. He announced last year that he will leave the Music Industry to pursue his studies. Lowkey is a rapper that can easily be distinguished from main stream rappers. He has numerous albums produced independently that include *Dear Listener*, *Soundtrack to the Struggle* and *Uncensored*. One of his most popular songs is called 'Obama Nation'. He has toured the world with several rappers including Talib Kweli and Lupe Fiasco. He is an influential part of the underground world of Hip-Hop music transforming how rap music can be used to inform and educate people not to turn them into consumers. Lowkey is one of several rappers who are at the forefront. The main stream media does not mention Lowkey, instead they continue to play Hip-Hop music from the likes of Kanye West, Jay-Z, Snopp Dog among many others. Their Music has no substance or positive meaning behind the lyrics. It is music that destroys the minds of urban youths. But according to the media whether based in the United States, Great Britain and Israel, all criticize Lowkey. *The Jewish Chronicle Online* describes in a 2011 article how Lowkey and other artists such as Elvis Costello can become a "Potential Nightmare" that can influence youths during an event organized by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign for the second anniversary of Operation Cast Lead and the Gaza conflict that killed thousands:

One expert studying anti-Israel activity described the increasing influence of performers such as Lowkey as a "potential nightmare," and compared the impact of his backing for the campaign to the effect of artists such as Annie Lennox and Elvis Costello attacking the Jewish state.

Lowkey was heavily criticized by the Jewish Chronicle when it said "At last week's rally he spoke of his pride at being an anti-Zionist and called Israel a "terrorist state". The event organisers and audience later successfully persuaded him to perform his track "Long Live Palestine", written during the Gaza conflict. It accuses Israel of bombing hospitals and mosques and criticises everyone from Barack Obama to Coca Cola and Huggies nappies. Fox news jumped on the bandwagon with Glen Beck mocking Lowkey when he danced and showed gang signs to his song "Terrorist? In his Website www.glennbeck.com describes why he did what he did on his show:

Sometimes a story comes along and it's almost impossible to find the words to really capture what's happening. More often than not, the story involves tragedy, riots, and possibly some kind of new world order/Edward Bernays "conspiracy". Sometimes Glenn just breaks down in tears because of, well, anything really. It could be the death of the Republic, uncensored pictures of the Alamo, or the latest Jennifer Aniston romantic comedy. And sometimes the stories that take the words away involve Glenn dancing and throwing up gang signs.

Is it a coincidence that big name rappers who are known throughout the world are

sponsored by the biggest corporations in the world? Hip-Hop music gets nominated for the Grammy awards based on the number of sales and popularity of the rappers. Lowkey lives in London, the heart of the former empire known to support numerous causes especially the Palestinian struggle against Israel. What drives Lowkey to focus his music on human rights issues? In an interview conducted by 'Ceasefire' an independent political and cultural quarterly publication by Jody McIntyre, Lowkey was asked what has "hurt or inspired him the most?" He replied:

Well, I have been privileged enough to travel to many different countries, particularly doing what I do for a living, it is a real blessing. Recently I travelled to Australia, a nation founded upon the genocide of over 500+ separate nations, I heard some harrowing stories of what life has been like for the indigenous people of that land the last 223 years since Captain James Cook arrived there with a British flag. I learned that until the 1967 Referendum, the indigenous, native people of that land were considered "Fauna and Flora" ie Plants and Animals within Australian Law. True justice can only come with acknowledgement of the historical context within which we live. The fact that his date of arrival on the land is still celebrated as "Australia Day" shows that justice for the indigenous people of that land is something we all must fight for, especially those of us who are British citizens. Travelling and touring throughout the United States alongside my friend Norman Finkelstein, showed me that despite the constant manipulation by the mainstream media in that country, there are millions of US citizens who do NOT believe US security is dependent upon on its supremacy and global dominance.

There are millions of US citizens who do not believe it is a good idea to have over 1,000 military bases worldwide from Japan to Colombia to Diego Garcia, these people are just so marginalised in the mainstream discourse that in the rest of the world it is easy to forget they even exist. Being detained twice in Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv was an interesting experience; particularly the second time, when I was held for 12 hours. It made me realise that a state which is built upon the foundations of injustice will never feel secure. The ever-changing and diverse citizens of Israel will always be united by one thing and one thing only; fear. The IDF are a colonial force of scared teenage supremacists who would shoot at their own shadow. The worst thing about that, is that they are supplied with the most sophisticated weaponry on the face of this planet by the United States and Britain. Israel is a colonial supremacist state which is rapidly expanding, and the Zionist dream which Theodor Herzl had is still yet to be reached.

Many rappers in the West come from poor neighborhoods where crime, drugs and high incarceration rates affects their communities and do rap about "life in the ghetto". But many rap about sex, drugs, prison and money. I have seen rap videos where they have numerous women on multi-million dollar yachts as Jay-Z's video called 'Big Pimpin'. According to Dr. Carolyn West, associate professor of psychology and the study of prevention of violence at the University of Washington said "What's changed over time is the greater sexualization of hip-hop. Initially, it started off as a revolutionary form of music. Now, large corporations produce images that sell, and there is a blatant link between hip-hop and pornography" in a Pittsburg Post-Gazette article in 2008 called 'Researcher cites negative influences of hip-hop.' Rappers promote business agenda's for the music industry where advertisements and propaganda prevail over young minds. Lowkey raps about real issues that affect life on earth. He wants his music to make a change in society. Why does the main stream media (MSM) and the Music industry criticize Lowkey?

Why does the Jewish Chronicle Online call him and other musicians of consciousness a “Potential Nightmare?” Can Lowkey’s music inspire youth to seek change or the truth for that matter? Yes, the MSM and the music industry want to keep youths interested in issues that don’t matter. They want them to follow “Uninspiring rappers” who are about nothing. The majority of rappers are used by the major labels to sell propaganda. They use rappers to further demoralize people who have no idea what is happening in their communities and the world. Do music fans who follow main stream rappers know who Lowkey is? I doubt it. But I will bet that the state of Israel does. In 2009, Lowkey was detained in Israel, when he arrived in Tel Aviv’s airport for 9 hours. According to www.nme.com:

The musician had been travelling to Tel Aviv to take part in a series of charity shows in the country, including sites in Palestine and Palestinian refugee camps, to raise funds to help rebuild the Gaza Strip.

He told NME.COM that his passport was confiscated at Tel Aviv airport on February 27, after which he was questioned, detained for nine hours then released.

“As soon as I stepped off the plane with my AA guide to Israel tucked under my arm, I was pulled away to the side and interrogated as to why I was in Israel, by a man who wore no uniform identifying himself as any type of security but was clearly heavily armed,” Lowkey explained.

“After this I carried on through to passport control. After giving over my British passport it was confiscated. I was then detained for nine hours. During this time I was interrogated about many aspects of my life, what the purpose of my trip was, where my parents are from and where I planned to go in Israel.

“Eventually I was told my story was a lie and was subjected to a bout of the Israeli police’s paranoid mind games. I was eventually released, knowing that no matter how frustrating what I just went through was, I knew that it was not even a miniscule fraction of the degradation Palestinian people are subjected to on a daily basis.”

Lowkey and many other underground Hip-Hop artists are controversial to the corporate music world and even to average people who follow the main stream rappers. Some people may not like his style. People do have different tastes, styles or other musical preferences. All legitimate reasons.

Hip-Hop is controlled by major corporations, they have a monopoly on several record labels mentioned earlier. Singer Cee-Lo even commented on how and why corporate influence is relevant to hip-hop music. In an interview with *The Daily Beast*, platinum recording artist, Cee-Lo commented on the current state of Hip-Hop and what is the agenda behind corporate control of the industry:

We don’t judge, but we acknowledge that acting and performing music are very kindred spirits. You write something down, go into a recording booth, and reenact the emotion onstage. At one point in time, there was a code of conduct: creed and credential. And I’ve said this before on Twitter, but hip-hop was once an Ivy League institution, and now it’s become a community college—you don’t need any qualifications to come on in. And, quite frankly, it can be a little embellished-upon. There’s a low entry level, and it’s become monotonous and congested. All you need to do is be able to rhyme “cat” and “hat,” and you can become an MC. But executives have a lot to do with the larger

agenda to emasculate and colonize. I believe hip hop is being used in some mass way to influence underachievement. Maybe these individuals may not be aware of the larger agenda, and how they're being puppeteered, but if they are, that's even more shameful.

He is correct to point out that corporations “colonize” youth through music which promotes “underachievement” and depicts women in a negative way.

Lowkey is an example of what major corporate record labels do not want people to listen to. Down below is one of Lowkey’s music videos which I recommend to those who never heard his music before. It is worth a listen.

So I ask the question once again, why does the music industry keep “hip-hop underground music” underground?

Here is Lowkey featuring Klashnekoff in ‘Blood, Sweat and Tears’:

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