

# De (Re) Constructing Ideas of Genius

## Hip Hop, Knowledge, and Intelligence

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The term “genius” here has an older meaning than IQ scores or accomplishment in physics. We understand genius to be that quality which crystallizes the hopes and talents and character of a people. This kind of genius is something we all share...it is the possibility for people to look into their hearts and see a life worth living.”(Mosley, et al; 1999)

### DECONSTRUCTING GENIUS

**W**hat does it take to be labeled a genius—Unusually high intellectual capacity? Exceptional academic achievement? The very idea of genius brings to mind issues of exclusivity—membership in a select group of elite thinkers. And membership does not come easy. Some of the greatest thinkers of the Western world were connected through a social network of sorts. Plato was a student of Socrates. Aristotle was a student of Plato. Alexander the Great was a student of Aristotle. Do you see a pattern emerging? Undoubtedly these men were exceptional thinkers, but association also played a large role. Someone of importance essentially has to label you a “genius.” This culture of academic association continues in most institutions of higher learning today. There actually hasn’t been much ingenuity to imagine a new culture within academia. Graduate students often serve as research assistants for the faculty in their department. Through

their work with this faculty member, the student is academically prepared, professionally groomed, and socially networked to ensure their success in the world of academia. Leaving graduate school with the stamp of approval from a well-known professor is like gold to a budding scholar. Association. Belonging. Acknowledgement of your existence. These are as much factors in being labeled genius as a high IQ score. In many ways, one must be situated in a *place* within society where important others can acknowledge your intelligence. Spaces like universities, academies, corporations, law firms, and teaching hospitals often fit the bill. In fact, the very idea of “academic” is derived from the concept of place. In his book, *Out of Our Minds*, Sir Ken Robinson (2011) explains that the word academic was derived from a plot of land near ancient Athens called Academeia. This was the thinking ground for the great minds listed above—Plato, Aristotle and the like. So to situate genius within the culture of academia is to center it as a largely European and male experience. Of course, other individuals have been named “genius” since those days of ancient Greece, but many would argue that not only did geniuses live before Socrates (within ancient Kemet communities), but they have always and continue to live both within and beyond Western cultures (Browder, 1992). Institutionalizing genius places all of those unable to associate with these institutions, on the outskirts of the academic circle. But can genius sit in contemplation on a porch or stoop? Can genius be penned in both a book and a recording studio? Can a hip-hop artist be appreciated as a genius?

### **DON'T GET IT TWISTED: THE PEDAGOGICAL PROMISE OF HIP HOP**

It is first important to re-conceptualize the idea of what a “text” is or what a “school” looks like. In a first year seminar that I teach on identity, we challenge the students to read various types of life experiences as “texts.” How might you read a museum as you would a book? How can we read a community immersion experience as a text? We must begin to appreciate life in itself as a form of school. Again, Robinson (2011) explains:

Nowadays, “school” refers to particular sorts of formal institutions that provide organized instruction, especially to young people. I...use the term in a broader sense to mean any purposeful learning community, whether for children or adults, public or private, compulsory or voluntary. I include formal institutions and voluntary gatherings, from pre-kindergarten to universities, community colleges and home-based learning... When I use the word “student” I mean anyone who is engaged purposefully in learning, whatever their age and whatever their setting (p. 246).

Consumers are learners. Artists can be teachers. When we reinterpret songs, rhymes, and spoken word pieces as texts we push ourselves to appreciate the real knowledge that is being generated within this work. Many consumers that might listen to a hip-hop song might not pick up an academic journal. But this music can still cause them to wrestle with critical social issues. Genius resides on both bound and unbound pages. Several years ago, I published an article called “Mr. Nigger: The Challenges of Educating African American Men in American Society,” which speaks to the academic value of hip-hop lyrical content:

The lyrics of these artists summarize in less than five minutes and in a poetic form many of the key aspects that researchers have come to align with the black male experience in America—poor health, negative interactions with the criminal justice system, love for family, social oppression, violence, social rage and frustration, community leadership and activism, depression, prison industry complex, enslavement, unemployment, poverty, and the need for communal and self love (Jenkins, 2006; p. 148).

Hip-hop is not just relevant to those outside of traditional academic spaces. Although it is important to acknowledge the intellectual merit of oppositional spaces within hip hop culture, hip-hop can still hold its intellectual own within traditional academic spaces. We must not get it confused. The thoughts, perspectives, and ways of knowing within hip-hop are relevant on both the corner and the campus. As a field of academic inquiry, the study of hip-hop culture has proven to be an important and relevant form of scholarship. Interdisciplinary in nature, the study of hip-hop merges sociology, cultural and ethnic studies, history, education, and the arts. Scholars have examined issues such as the historical development of hip-hop among West Indian, Latino, and African American youth; the culture of resistance and activism within the hip-hop community; the global impact of hip-hop culture; the problems with misogyny, homophobia, and violence in hip-hop songs; and the pedagogical promise of hip-hop music (Bynoe, 2004; hooks, 2003; Kitwana, 2002; Dyson, 2001; Cobb, 2007; hooks, 2004; Watkins, 2005; Hurt, 2006; Morgan, 1999). In many ways, the emergence of hip-hop as a field of study has transformed the culture of the professorate. It has reshaped the nature of knowledge—the types of expertise and scholarship that so-called “intellectuals” produce. In this way, it has created room in the academy for another community of oppositional thinkers—academics whose interests and passions both intersect with and expand beyond the traditional parameters of most major disciplines.

Hip-hop music also has much to offer as a pedagogical tool. Beyond simply using lyrics or the art of rhyme in teaching practice, the creative writing style, ideologies and commentary of artists are critical contemporary forms of nontraditional scholarship to be analyzed and studied. The very spirit of hip-hop culture

can inform classrooms, community programs, and educational experiences. This culture, which advances a spirit of healthy competition, a dedication to excellence, the act of truly listening to young people (microphone), and immediate positive feedback (applause) can help us to design more inclusive and effective educational environments. Hip-hop communities naturally show us what it takes to reach young people. “Hip-hop is a cultural space where individuals that have been kicked out of schools, locked out of opportunity, and imprisoned in oppression have created a space where they can shine, excel, and be great (Jenkins, 2006).” And so it is a critical space to examine issues of transformative education, knowledge production, and contemporary forms of “genius.”

Rautins & Ibrahim (2011) argue for educators to embrace a critical pedagogy of “imagination, humanism, agency and becoming (p.1).” This transformative approach to education reshapes the act of learning from a structured, “mechanized” experience into a creative, imaginative, and socially conscious endeavor. It is not only essential to challenge the ways that traditional education spaces are privileged as the only points of knowledge production; but there must also be a critique of the structure of learning within these traditional environments. The classroom must be contested in order for it to truly evolve. A critical pedagogy of imagination and humanism concerns creating educational spaces where the educational content matters to students.

Imagination embodies voice, consciousness, community, pluralism, and the human condition. A critical pedagogy opens up spaces for imaginative possibilities and a caring, unconditional dialogue, within the bureaucracy of schooling. The invigorating spaces of imagination also provide learners with the capacity to reach beyond conventional ideology to engage in free, unpredictable and internalized thought, while also building on lived experience (Egan, 2005; Eisner, 2005). (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011; p. 27)

Hip-hop cultural expression often offers this type of educational experience. It is a space where uninhibited social critique and unlimited creativity can intersect in order to lead listeners down a path of understanding the raw lived experience. Envisioning learning as an imaginative, conscious, humanistic, and creative space revises the purpose of educational institutions. It brings “school” closer to the community experience and deeper into the real lives of students. Within the field of higher education, scholars affirm the need for the institution at large to embrace its responsibility to educate for the public good. There is a call to revise the concept of “scholarship” and to center it on the engagement of real problems and communities.

The scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers and to our cities. . . Higher education leaders are

acknowledging that diversity brings with it important new obligations. We have, on campuses today, students of many backgrounds. Colleges and universities are being called upon to respond to a large and increasingly varied group of students, many of whom have special talents, as well as special needs... Indeed, the real danger is that...students will become specialists without perspective, that they will have technical competence but lack larger insights... The aim of education is not only to prepare students for productive careers, but also to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose; not only to generate new knowledge, but to channel that knowledge to humane ends; not merely to study government, but to help shape a citizenry that can promote the public good. (Boyer, 1997; p. 77- p. 76)

Beyond the concept of critical pedagogy, other educational experts have identified this type of socially relevant academic experience as a form of “significant learning” (Fink, 2003). Essentially, a critical pedagogy of imagination and humanism is an argument for creating such spaces of significant learning. Fink (2003) defines significant learning as an educational experience that motivates a lasting change in a student. In other words, the content of what is learned has deep impact, significant relevance, and strong staying power. Learning is personal and practical. Transforming the structure of learning and the nature of knowledge broadens the academic playing field and invites marginalized minds into the fold. It is when this new vision of learning, knowledge and scholarship is fully formed that we can appreciate hip-hop artists as thinkers, innovators, storytellers, and community scholars.

## **STREET SMARTS: HIP-HOP ARTISTS AS PHILOSOPHERS, THEORISTS, AND STORYTELLERS**

More public critiques are needed of the way that “genius” is traditionally conceptualized as Western, White and male. In contemporary dialogues these outdated ideologies still persist. A 2008 blog post sharing the “Top 50 Geniuses of All Time,” listed 50 White men from the Western world (<http://4mind4life.com/blog/2008/03/30/list-of-geniuses-top-50-influential-minds/>). New ways to define and appreciate genius and intellectual contributions must be developed. Clearly, people of color, artists, community organizers, women, and radical activists have transformed our society for the better in deep and meaningful ways. But their work has often been unappreciated by the larger society. In the book, *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, Joy James (1997) explains the history of marginalizing black intellectual thought:

Since emancipation, black intellectuals have confronted lynching, Jim Crow, electoral and economic disenfranchisement, restrictions to higher education, racist violence, and police brutality. In times of crisis, in the national tumult for

identity and stability, our interventions expand democratic thought and practice. They shape America's national discourse, even while agitating for inclusion within it. Given its mission and longevity, black intellectualism has become the form of American intellectualism best adept and well versed in truth telling about democracy crippled by racism. Consequently, it is one of the least valued and most contested forms of intellectualism in a racialized society (p.3).

Great oppositional thinkers have pushed to expand our laws, our behavior, and our opinions. And hip-hop artists have been some of our most public and resistant voices. In a direct and unapologetic manner, hip-hop artists creatively give voice to the unique experiences and perspectives of the marginalized and oppressed. This type of commitment to telling the authentic story and voicing the unique viewpoints of under-represented communities forms the foundation of Critical Race Theory. Hip-hop artists probably wouldn't even label themselves as theorists. But they are. A component of critical race theory that is particularly salient to the hip-hop community is the concept of cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism places an inherent value on self-created cultural structures that allow people of color to continue the tradition of raising, teaching, and empowering the cultural orientation of their youth. Barnes (1990) offers an important explanation of the relevance of this theory:

Minority perspectives make explicit the need for fundamental change in the ways we think and construct knowledge...Exposing how minority cultural viewpoints differ from white cultural viewpoints requires a delineation of the complex set of social interactions through which minority consciousness has developed. Distinguishing the consciousness of racial minorities requires acknowledgement of the feelings and intangible modes of perception unique to those who have historically been socially, structurally, and intellectually marginalized in the United States (p.1864).

A critical component of acknowledging such feelings and modes of perception includes hearing the authentic stories of the cultural experience. As Delgado (1990) argues, people of color may speak from a very different experience. Thus, the concepts of authentic voice, story exchange, and naming one's own reality are essential to the critical race theorist (Delgado, 1990). These concepts are also critical to the hip-hop artist, because hip-hop music is largely about storytelling. Tate (1997) lists four justifications for the use of story to understand the experience of people of color: (1) The social construction of reality (2) the potential of stories to change mind-sets (3) the community-building potential of stories; and (4) stories provide under-represented cultures a means of self-preservation. Marable (2005) shares how such story sharing has been central to the act of cultural protection engaged by many past intellectuals of color. He relates how public intellectuals like Malcolm X (through raw and uninhibited oral story sharing),

James Weldon Johnson (through creative and artistic story sharing), and W.E.B. Dubois (through ethnographic story sharing) have contested dominant cultural narratives. Through telling and documenting their cultural histories, these great thinkers validated the importance of the cultural experience.

According to Banks-Wallace (2002), story telling is a vehicle of preserving culture and passing it on to future generations. In some cases, stories can serve as touchstones that evoke shared memories and feelings between the story teller and the listener (Banks-Wallace, 2002). As a touchstone experience, listening to another person's story may bring forth memories or feelings and can help the listener to better contextualize and understand her own experience--what it is to be a black woman, what being a latino male in the United States involves, or how poverty affects us all. Storytelling's historical role in African/African-American and Native American cultures has been most widely noted. In many traditional African cultures, storytelling was an important and necessary social practice, with the griot, or story keeper being held in high regard (Banks-Wallace, 2002). The griot was the community intellectual. Their stories sustain legacies by providing verbal pictures of the past that put the present more clearly into focus.

The technique of storytelling transcends race, class, generations, and other differences and allows people to communicate on common ground through a common story. Storytelling is universal. It has its roots in ancient African societies, and for centuries, people have used stories to entertain and educate as well as to instill values and inspire people to action. Describing storytelling as a new nontraditional approach to advocacy sounds strange, given its historical roots, but in modern times, with the advent of complicated electronic media communication methods, storytelling has become a lost art. Organizers and advocates often overlook the power of the spoken word and of shared experiences as a way of communicating and moving people to action (Smiley, 2006, p.74).

Featherstone (1989) has noted the value of the use of storytelling to inform research. He explains both the richness and complexity of the information gained through story as well as the significant responsibility of the researcher.

The telling of stories can be a profound form of scholarship moving serious study close to the frontiers of art in the capacity to express complex truth and moral context in intelligible ways...The methodologies are inseparable from the vision. Historians have used narrative as a way in which to make sense of lives and institutions over time, but over years they have grown abashed by its lack of scientific rigor. Now, as we look for ways to explore context and describe the thick textures of lives over time in institutions with a history, we want to reckon with the author's own stance and commitment to the people being written about. Storytelling takes on a fresh importance (p.377).

In the web based blog, *Hip Hop History: The Art of Storytelling*, Wisdom Supreme shares his personal list of the 10 greatest storytellers in hip-hop history. In many ways, this is a list of oppositional genius. In both the minds that are listed and the particular type of genius that they represent, this list is in stark contrast to the list of White male geniuses mentioned earlier. Wisdom Supreme explains his list, which is shared in full in figure 1:

The art of story telling! The ability to use one's imagination and mix it with an original and unique poetic gift or words is a level of the Hip-Hop art form that only very few emcees fully master. These top 10 artists displayed mastery in the art of story telling like no other authors before or since them. I mean these people have a catalogue of intriguing, engaging, creative, amazing, edge of your seat thrill seeking, adrenaline rushed, controversy drenched sagas, which are timeless masterpieces appreciated by the masses. Their style, voice, content, point of view, word play, lyrical ability, poetic imagery and commanding presence navigate the story and characters in it, in a way a great turn paging novel should. And the level of intensity, intrigue, mystery, suspense, drama, and interesting events will leave you not wanting to turn away or put it down until your finished. So allow me to showcase for you the ultimate authors of lyrical fiction, as I mention the top 10 Greatest Story Tellers in Hip-Hop history! ([http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/451158/the\\_top\\_10\\_greatest\\_story\\_tellers\\_in.html](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/451158/the_top_10_greatest_story_tellers_in.html))

*Figure 1: Ten Greatest Story Tellers in Hip Hop History*

10. **The Notorious B.I.G.** - Big was charismatic and acrobatic with his word play and sarcastic sharp wit! Best example of ability: Juicy, I Got A Story to Tell, Sky's the Limit!

9. **Rakim** - His superior lyrical vocabulary always kept you on your toes and at attention (or with a head buried in a dictionary, lol). Best example of ability: Mahogany, What's on your mind, Juice, In The Ghetto

8. **2 Pac** - There were a lot of political, social, and personal issues in the material he did and many times he told a story. But it was the way Pac could translate pain to paper so effortlessly that separated his stories from all the others! Best example of ability: Souljah's Story, Dear Mama, Papaz Song, I Ain't Mad Atcha

7. **Nas** - One of the most amazing poets of the 21st century, period! Nas probably should be credited for dropping 2 of Hip-Hop's most amazingly creative stories ever written with "I Gave You Power" where he rhymes from the perspective of being a gun, and "Rewind", where he rhymes an entire story backwards from the end to the beginning.

6. **Big Daddy Kane** - Kane is often remembered for the battle rhyme ready, lyrical heavy & simile laced, smooth and pimped out sex charged flava he kicked, and for the knowledge he dropped. Best example of ability: Calling Mr. Welfare, No Damn Good, Cause I Can Do It Right

5. **Special Ed** - With a lyrical comprehension and clever word play far beyond his years, this was a true genius boy wonder that could roll with the titans of Hip-Hop long before he was old enough to get into the clubs and party with them! Best example of ability: The Mission, Hoe Down

4. **K-Solo** - Kevin Madison aka K-Solo was a member of EPMD's now legendary Hit Squad crew back in the early 90's. Solo had a wickedly creative imagination. Best example of ability: Tales from the Crackside, Sneak Tip, Fugitive, Your Moms in My Business

3. **KRS-1** - Another complete package MC, who could battle, teach, inspire, incite a riot with blatant truth telling rhymes, and edutain through amazing stories as well! Best example of ability: Love's Gonna Get Cha, 100 Guns, 13 & Good, Uh-Oh, The P is Still Free, Can't Wake Up

2. **Ice Cube** - before he was Calvin at the "Barbershop", he was Amerikkka'z Most Wanted because of his in your face, take no mess, straight up & no chaser ... style of truth telling stories! From "It Was A Good Day" to "True To The Game" & "Who's the Mack," Cube hit people with a raw type of realness...it came with such a righteous indignation, zealous fervor, uncompromising sincerity and creative talent that was a notch above the rest.

1. **Slick Rick** - The Greatest Story teller in Hip-Hop history hands down! If story telling is truly respected as an art form, well here is its blueprint! The Slick voice, the flawless flow, playful cadence and voice inflections, sing song harmonies, pop culture references, the mind blowing plot twists and profound to sometimes profane wordplay that leaves you breathless and speechless and still yearning for more! Best example of ability: The Great Adventures of Slick Rick! That's right, the whole...first debut album.

Yes indeed. Our cultural storytellers matter. Our creative resistant thinkers matter. Our divergent voices matter. This list is in no way exhaustive of the many brilliant storytellers in hip-hop history, but it is a wonderful start to acknowledging their minds. I return to Sir Ken Robinson's (2011) work on the value of creativity because it is so relevant to this discussion on hip-hop storytellers. Focusing on the value of creativity in a contemporary world offers an important foundation upon which we can reshape the form that genius takes. Robinson

views creativity as a marker of genius. He challenges us to oppose traditional ideas about intellectual worth lying solely in fields that focus on “hard” science or epistemology. He challenges us to resist the ways that the arts have been pushed into a sentimental and feel good corner of society and schools. Instead, he situates creativity and innovation in the center of human genius. Robinson (2011) defines creativity as “the process of having an original idea that has value (p.151).” He shares three requirements to cultivating true genius: Imagination (ability to bring to mind events and ideas that are not present in our senses), creativity (original ideas that have value), and innovation (putting original ideas to practice). If we define genius in this way, do hip hop artists meet the standard? The answer is undoubtedly yes.

In contemporary hip-hop, Jay-Z is one of the strongest examples of this spirit of genius. Though probably not his most popular work, one of his most intelligent cds was “American Gangster” (Carter, 2007). The cd can be read like a book that tells the story of the rise and fall of a gangster. Jay-Z’s decision to make each song sequential is an important one because it challenges the way that we conceptualize a “text.” This cd is a story, a book put to music. In the beginning, songs like “Pray” and “American Dreamin’” speak to the ambition, drive, and desires of a poor kid who wants more out of life. Moving forward, songs like “Hello Brooklyn” and “No Hook” then follow this young man as he gets the first taste of the only type of opportunity offered in his community. These songs tell the story of the come-up. As fortunes rise, songs like “Roc Boys” “Sweet” and “Party Life” share the highpoint of the lifestyle—when money, parties, women, and good times are plentiful. And then we see it all begin to take a toll. Stress, enemies, and community judgment are all the focus of songs like “Say Hello” and “Success.” These songs show us that this type of success comes with consequences. Finally, through songs like “Fallin’” and “Blue Magic” we witness the fall—the reality that it is all destined to eventually come to an end. But we also see the potential of coming through to the other side. We are pushed to understand that any person with the smarts, resilience, and social capacity to become successful on the streets can translate those abilities to success in other aspects of life if given the chance. True genius takes guts. Traditional men that have been labeled as geniuses like the Wright brothers or Isaac Newton didn’t just have a good idea, they had the guts to put their ideas into practice. Similarly, it takes guts for young people who do not have the privilege of affluent social networks or the benefit of social opportunity to take the only asset that they possess (their mind) and literally transform their life experience. Though he may possess a lot of it, Jay-Z’s “swag” didn’t get him to where he is today—his mind did. The song “Blue Magic” is such an important piece of writing. At the most basic level, “Blue Magic” was the street name given to a certain type of drug. But in a more philosophical sense, it is indeed a show of magic and genius when we look at how Jay-Z has transformed his life outlook

from drug dealer to writer, entrepreneur, investor, and millionaire. Biography, autobiography, drama, saga, whatever you want to name it, this is quality writing and creative thinking. But, hip-hop artists like Jay-Z have largely been dismissed as simple entertainers and not critical thinkers or imaginative storytellers. In my recent article, “A Beautiful Mind: Black Male Intellectual Identity and Hip-Hop,” I offer the following explanation:

In a field like hip hop, where written and verbal communication are the two primary forms of work production, the mind or intellect of the artist should be viewed as the very thing responsible for success. However, unlike other writing intense fields, the intellect of the hip hop artist is often the least valued and least lauded trait. Materialism is the marker for success in the entertainment industry. But hip-hop artists have more to offer. They are more than the things that they possess. They are writers. They are thinkers. When artists write their own lyrics and those lyrics are brilliant examples of critical thought, social critique, or creative writing; they are showcasing intelligence. Throughout each song, lyricists often use metaphors, similes, puns, and various forms of word play. Their work production has merit in its mastery of the schemes and tropes of stylistic writing and speaking (Jenkins, 2011; p.3).

In their recent book, “Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas’s *Illmatic*,” Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai (Dyson & Daulatzai, 2009) acknowledge the depth and critical meaning often found in the lyrics written by rappers. Because many traditionally marginalized communities have a history of valuing community based knowledge; of understanding that knowledge is produced in our homes, on our streets, and through our cultural production; it is important that our communities continue to challenge the notion of who is allowed to be considered knowledge producers and what venues (beyond educational institutions) are allowed to be viewed as points of knowledge production (Hill-Collins, 1986). As citizens, teachers, students, parents, and workers we must challenge the portrait of genius often painted in America. The author, C.L.R. James (1997) once said, “No intelligence in the world can enable a social group to think of itself as something to be abolished (p.15).” In other words, communities that are respected as intellectuals probably wont put forth much effort to challenge this way of thinking and to have themselves labeled as average like the rest of us. People most often choose acclaim over equality. And so the work of transforming the look of genius must be done both within institutions and within communities. Intellectual and corporate allies, as well as community residents, consumers, and artists must advance it. We owe this to our sons and daughters who have dared to become creators and thinkers in spite of all of the barriers placed before them. Whether it was educators and authors at the turn of the century, Harlem Renaissance intellectuals, or hip hop artists in the new millennium, our great thinkers have often focused their thought process on us—our lives and our struggles. They

have thought, wondered, dreamed, and rapped about our lives when no one else cared. We must dedicate ourselves to acknowledging and celebrating those geniuses whose minds have been placed in the margins, simply because they have been so dedicated to us.

## RE-CONSTRUCTING GENIUS

One of the first factors in reconstructing the current image of “genius” is to allow it to reside in any type of space—classrooms and street corners, labs and libraries, stoops and study halls. We must first bring “genius” closer and allow it to touch and live within even the most disenfranchised communities. We are able to observe genius in its true, organic form when it hasn’t been manufactured by expensive resources, nurtured by exclusive social networks, or preserved by socially engineered ideas of whose knowledge matters. Placing genius in an open and democratic space is important.

Re-conceptualizing genius also compels us to revolutionize the way that we conceive of concepts like “knowledge,” “school” and “texts.” This means challenging ourselves to imagine various types of life experiences as spaces of significant learning and to view many different forms of work (songs, videos, performance poetry, etc) as critical texts to be analyzed. Hip-hop as a space of knowledge production has expanded the boundaries of academic inquiry and transformed our approach to pedagogy. It pushes against the traditional tendency to view art as simply a form of cultural entertainment and instead posits art as an important form of political and social commentary. Hip-hop artists have demonstrated genius both in the content and format of their work. They consistently push the standards of creativity and innovation and they make work that has meaning to a wide audience base. Their work often helps us to better understand our world, which has been a marker of almost all traditional geniuses. There is a need for much more scholarship on this subject. In the field of education, we can examine not only how hip-hop can be used as a teaching tool, but also how the culture and values of hip-hop can be used to inspire genius in youth. In fields like sociology, ethnic studies, English, and cultural studies we can begin to dissect and analyze the content of hip hop music—to study it in the same way that we might study traditional research and literature. Beyond appreciating the history of the music and its role in the community we must also appreciate the mind of the music—the sheer intelligence and raw insight that have been creatively put to a beat.

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