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Fake Gangsters: Why Do Rappers Have To Pretend To Be Thugs To Sell Records?

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Do we put pressure on rappers to portray the thug image in exchange for success?

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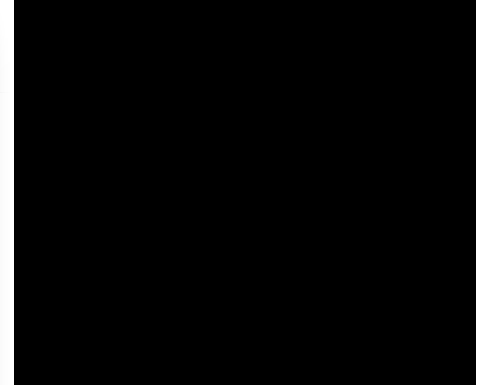
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By: Amanda Anderson

Oh, the controversial world of Rap music. Artists may come and go with each new decade, but the authenticity of music rarely ever changes. Sure, it is totally understandable that an artist needs a certain image to succeed in the tough music business, but just how far should artists be willing to go to sell records? Most rappers nowadays rap about the gang life, drugs, and violence;



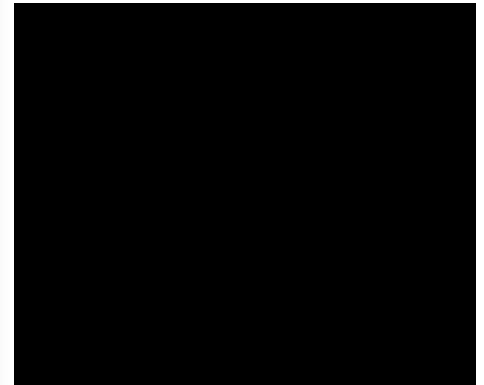
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but most of these artists don't have much personal experience in any of these areas. It makes you wonder if it really takes a false image to sell at a time when people rarely buy albums.

While most of us have enough intelligence to know that most artists aren't who they say they are, none of us can deny how hilarious it is when they are exposed. When Rick Ross first entered the Rap game, he labeled himself as "The Boss." Most of his lyrics revolved around his "experience" as a drug dealer, and he made it known that he was no stranger to the thug life.

The rapper may have found much success initially with the drug dealer image, but it wasn't too long before he was exposed for the real life he had before launching his rap career. Rapper 50 Cent exposed Rick Ross' true past as a Correctional Officer during a recent feud between the two artists. While the Hip Hop world may have been shocked initially by the rapper's true past, none of us can be quite sure that Rick Ross would have embarked on the same amount of success if he was honest about who he really was.

In the earlier days of Hip Hop and Rap, artists were diverse when it came to their messages. There were the original gangster rappers like Bone-Thugz-And Harmony, the Notorious B.I.G. and Ice T. They were controversial in their lyrics, but other artists took different approaches to their music. In contrast, rappers such as Public Enemy and NWA were known for their strong and influential political messages. The deeper messages provided by these artists did not in any shape or form prevent them from reaching much success in the business.

Today, most rappers are cut from the same cloth. They all rap about the drug game, thug life, and violence that most of them have never truly experienced first hand. Lil' Wayne is one of the hottest rappers out right now, but most people don't know that he made straight A's in college. As the youngest artist on Cash Money Records in the beginning of his career, rap kept him out of the danger that the projects of New Orleans is notoriously known for. Wayne isn't much of a thug, but his lyrics continuously suggest otherwise. Lil' Wayne is no fool, he just knows who he has to appear to be to sell millions of records. And so far, the formula has worked well for his career.

And this is one of the reasons we have to ask ourselves why we as a people don't allow artists to be who they truly are. Do we just really love violence and the gangster life or have we gotten to the point where we require all of our artists to project the same image? Whatever it is, it really forces us to take a long look at ourselves to figure out our obsession for a lifestyle that should no longer be glorified in the black community. In a time when black violence is happening at a rate way beyond understanding, maybe it is time we move past a genre of music that glamorizes a lifestyle that is truly killing us.

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