

David Robbins, thesis director

B.A. Thesis Evaluation

Ladislav Sedlak

Du Bois and Rap Music: Two Ways of Awakening of the African American Self-Consciousness

This thesis explores the historical, genetic, thematic, stylistic, and rhetorical relationships between the work of African American activists and artists such as W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and Maya Angelou and the Rappers who emerged in the late twentieth century as the public and artistic face of Black Hip Hop culture.

In this undertaking, Mr. Sedlak, a poet both knowledgeable about and sensitive to the plight of African Americans, gives primary attention to the controversial and under-examined productions of Black American Rap artists. His unfolding and exposition of the origins, preoccupations, rhetoric, and sociology of Rap music/poetry are empathetic, nuanced, and compelling. He explicates and articulates sympathetically and well the deep feelings of alienation, marginalization, devaluation, anger, and rage that motivate and characterize these works, and, at the same time, he also manages to illuminate the community, the commonality, of Rap utterances with sentiments expressed by DuBois and his African American coadjutors of the first half of the twentieth century. In doing so, Mr. Sedlak very effectively illustrates how vehicles of different emotional and rhetorical "temperatures," and products of very different styles and venues, reveal the emotional depth of this common discontent and frustration.

Mr. Sedlak usefully and effectively traces the roots of Rap music/poetry from DuBois's sentiments, through the work of Hughes and Wright (including a suggestion that Bigger Thomas might provide a literary prototype of the "gangsta" mentality), to the later proclamations of the Black Muslims, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and the Last Poets. While some mention might have been made here of the work of Marcus Garvey as an early pioneer of African American "ourselves alone" liberationist sentiments, Mr. Sedlak has, in general, identified and illustrated a credible cultural genealogy in his thesis.

Since, as Mr. Sedlak says, one of his primary purposes is to validate Rap artists as significant and representative subjects for study by scholars of American literature and culture, his methodology tends to focus on careful reading of primary sources, rather than on secondary ones (which, especially in the case of Rap artists, are often sparse). His concern, given his purposes and his focus, is not with literary and rhetorical theory, but with literary and rhetorical practice.

As Mr. Sedlak moves beyond the bachelor's level in his study, I have no doubt that his knowledge and development of his theoretical apparatus will evolve appropriately to include additional elements of liberationist, post-colonialist, and other interpretative approaches. For a bachelor's thesis, however, I believe that what Mr. Sedlak has

accomplished is laudable, significant, and, most important, very suggestive for further consideration.

Thesis evaluation: “1, vyborne”

Signed:

Prof. David L. Robbins, Ph.D.

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at [drobbins@suffolk.edu](mailto:drobbins@suffolk.edu).