

Jesus Raps

Is Christian hip-hop sweeping the nation?

It seems that Reverend Run isn't the only one trying to take hip-hop to church. [1] Last week, Newsday published a cover feature claiming a gospel rap movement is gaining steam all across the country.

Come to find out there is a whole other world in hip-hop, a world that rejects "secular hip-hop" in favor of music that "spreads the word."

This world is made up of rappers (also known as "Holy Ghost soldiers"), with names like Da T.R.U.T.H. (www.datruth.net) and The Preachaholicz. It has numerous websites. It holds HipHopE Masses and other church services from New York to Tampa.



It produces Sermon Jams (chopped up sermons mixed with hip-hop instrumentals) and publishes Hip-Hop prayer books. It has radio shows and pop culture columnists. It even has its own concert tours and award shows and record labels. Kurtis Blow is involved, and Play from Kid 'n Play and Mr. Del from Three 6 Mafia.

This world refers to itself as the Holy Hip-Hop movement. Artists feel that they have been called by God to spread his message in the streets through rap.

The movement has its detractors, most famously Reverend G. Craig Lewis of Ex Ministries, who believes that hip-hop culture is inherently demonic. The art form, he argues on his website, is impossible to reconcile with Christian faith.

Despite such criticism, evangelical rap has legions of staunch believers. Rapper Phanatik, for instance, defends Holy Hip-Hop against the Ex Ministries, with a spoken word/pseudo-battle rap at Christ-in-a-hiphopper.com called "Hills Worth Fighting For." The track contains references to the scripture as well as hip-hop history, and happens to be the tamest diss record I have ever heard.

As fascinating as this whole sphere is, I have to wonder if it as prevalent as the media is making it out to be.

I know that gospel music is a huge industry in the States (close to one billion dollars in sales in 2005, an 80% increase since 1995). But how much of that is gospel rap?

Is Christian rap actually a cultural force to be reckoned with?