

## Rapper Macklemore acknowledges 'white privilege'

Written by Jineea Butler NNPA Columnist Commentary

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Is Hip Hop losing its color? Recently, rapper Macklemore recognized that it is white privilege that catapulted him to success. In a *Rolling Stone* cover interview, Macklemore, born Ben Haggerty, said, "If you're gonna be a white dude and do this sh—, I think you have to take some level of accountability. You have to acknowledge where the art came from, where it is today, how you're benefiting from it. At the very least, just bringing up those points and acknowledging that, yes, I understand my privilege, I understand how it works for me in society, and how it works for me in 2013 with the success with the success that "The Heist" has had."

He goes on to say, "We made a great album, but do I think we benefited from being white and the media grabbing on to something. A song like 'Thrift Shop' was safe enough for the kids. It was like, 'This is music that my mom likes and that I can like as a teenager,' and even though I'm cussing my a— off in the song, the fact I'm a white guy, parents feel safe. They let their six-year-olds listen to it. I mean it's just... it's different. And would that success have been the same if I would have been a black dude? I think the answer is no."

Why would he need white privilege to be successful in a Black art form? Macklemore says we have to recognize where the art form came from. We know it came from Black and Brown people out of New York and they got their swag from the blues and the blues from slave hymns leading back to Africa. But in 2013, is white privilege selling Hip Hop records?

Let's first analyze the quality of African-American rappers who are signed by major record labels. Most of these artists fit a stereotype and offer no level of empowerment to the art form or the culture itself. We hear rappers with destructive messages that lack logical thought. In an interview with Hardknock TV, Hip Hop veteran Scarface vents, "There is no f—— way that you can tell me that it's not a conspiracy against Blacks in Hip Hop. You make us look dumb. You

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brainwash a generation of Hip Hoppers with this f— crud and then when these other rappers come out, splitting it down the middle, these other rappers' s— sound like 'Wow!' ya'll look great!' 'Ya'll look stupid!' ... Then (MFs) start going over here and pretty soon, Hip Hop is white now."

Vulgarity aside, in so many ways, that's true. The reality is white executives control what we hear on the airwaves. By only allowing artists who are willing to destroy their culture to be heard, you eliminate the fear of white children following behind the buffoonery. When you take the logic out of the music it becomes hard to believe.

Hip Hop was an outlet where Black millionaires were created and at its height the artist made money and branched off into other industries. Black artists and executives met the demand, populated record labels and began heading branches, choosing new records to break, new artists to bring in and new methods of marketing. This left the white executive out in the cold and labels began to go under because they couldn't contain the money that Hip Hop was, making and commanding.

A young Black man who degrades women, talks about selling and doing drugs, killing people and throwing money around is never going to be a role model for white America. But for a young Black man who doesn't know what type of opportunities that are afforded to him, it's a way of life. It's easier to convince young white children that this is not a person to aspire to be like.

In the meantime, white rappers are ushered in with messages that are appealing, non-threatening and vulgar free. I admit it is somewhat amusing to see a white person spit rhymes. But we must remember as we cheer them on, we are cheering ourselves out.

Look at Justin Timberlake, a pop artist, who crossed over into Hip Hop to broaden his appeal and now reigns as the King of Pop. How about Miley Cyrus who is trying to use a bad girl image to promote herself. Twerking a dance made famous by Blacks now is a household conversation because she did it. Kellogg's has even introduced Buzz the Bee with his own Honey Nut Cheerios Hip Hop Video 'It Must be the Honey.' So while Hip Hop is on the decline for Black artists, sales are up for people who want to utilize the power to convince, influence and promote messages.

We need to take a page out of Tyler Perry's book and use our earnings to build our own distribution companies. If we continue to rely on others races to fund our success, we will always rise to the top and end up where we started from – the bottom.

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