



Am I Black Enough for You?: Popular Culture from the 'Hood and Beyond

Todd Edward Boyd

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The most creative moments of African American culture have always emanated from a lower class or "ghetto" perspective. In contemporary society, this ghetto aesthetic has informed a large segment of the popular marketplace from the incendiary nature of gangsta rap, through the choreographed violence of films like *Menace II Society*, to recurrent debates around the use of the word "nigga," and even the assertion of this perspective in professional basketball. In each case, most of the discussion around these cultural circumstances tends to be dismissive, if not completely uninformed.

In analyzing the ranges of images from the O. J. Simpson trial to Snoop Doggy Dogg, *Am I Black Enough for You* looks at the way in which the nuances of ghetto life get translated into the politics of popular culture, and especially the way these politics have become such a profitable venture, for both the entertainment industry and the actual producers of these topical narratives. The book follows the widening generation gap represented by Bill Cosby's pristine "race man" image in the mid-80's, culminating in the proliferation of the hard-core sentiments associated with the nigga in the 1990's.

The book argues for a historical understanding of these contemporary examples, which is rooted in the social policies of the Reagan/Bush era, the declining industrial base of urban communities and the increasing significance of the drug trade and gang culture. In addition, the book follows the evolution of gangster culture in twentieth century American popular culture and the shift from ethnicity to race that slowly begins to emerge over this time period.

Contrary to mainstream conservative sentiment, *Am I Black Enough for You* suggests that the criticism of gangsta culture is a misguided attempt which reaffirms traditional views about Black culture. This criticism is articulated across race, so that in many cases, African Americans articulate the same sentiments as their white conservative counterparts.

Am I Black Enough for You offers astute analysis of the liberating possibilities of representation that lie at the core of contemporary black popular culture.

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