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Seminar in Composition

Essay 2: A Dialogue-Driven Essay

The goal of this essay is to position your ideas among those articulated in Tommie Shelby's "Social Identity and Group Solidarity" and M.K. Asante, Jr.'s *It's Bigger than Hip Hop*, and to do so in such a way that allows for a discussion about hip hop music and culture. As such, your essay—which is more like a staged dialogue between you, Shelby, and Asante—should consist of equal parts: one third you, one third Shelby, and one third Asante. You are both moderator and participant in this conversation.

As an essay that will later be performed in class, converted into an audio essay, or recorded as part of the group media project, it must have suitable transitions in order to ensure clarity. Thus you should quote extensively from Shelby and Asante, but you should write them in with transitional phrases and conversational cues so the audience feels like they are listening to the recording of a legitimate talk show. Think "natural," not mechanical, as you compose this script.

As you complete the document, please commit to the following format and utilize it consistently, including parenthetical citations for quoted material:

SHELBY: What is important to realize is that "there is a generational divide that can only be made worse by insisting that all blacks share an ethnocultural identity. Many of those who came of age during the civil rights era have a different understanding of what it means to be culturally black than those who grew up after Jim Crow was abolished" (601). We have to be fluid.

ASANTE: I hear you, Tommie. It's just like my poet-friend Alton Smith says: hip hop empowered the generation before us "'to be better, to stand up, to stop the violence'" (3). But I use the term "post-hip-hop" to describe something more. It describes "a period of time—*right now*—of great transition for a new generation in search of a deeper, more encompassing understanding of themselves in a context outside of the corporate hip-hop monopoly" (7).

BARLOW: You both make compelling points about generational expectation and change. I think this issue of generational change is crucial for us to think about—you know, what hip hop might have meant to the old school and what hip hop means now to the new school. Still, it seems to me that some of the recent hip hop I listen to is really about changing the status quo, about lifting up struggling communities to fight against injustice. Take the Dead Prez for example. Okay, this song's already twelve years old, but I want to ask you guys to fill me in on whether this song is an example of the hip-hop generation or the post-hip-hop generation. This is from "They Schools" (*FADE IN "They Schools" at 3:58; FADE OUT at 4:18*):

Dead Prez: And they ain't teachin' us nothin' related to solvin' our own problems, know what I'm sayin'? Ain't teachin' us how to get crack out the ghetto. They ain't teachin' us how to stop the police from murdering us and brutalizing us. They ain't teachin' us how to get our rent paid, know what I'm sayin'? They ain't teachin' our families how to interact better with each other, know what I'm sayin'?

BARLOW: Dead Prez are clearly out to shake up the system, right? So according to the ideas you've written, how does this position them generationally?

SHELBY: That really is a powerful song. I can begin to elaborate by considering their statement about the police in juxtaposition with one of W.E.B. Du Bois' well-known principles, which suggests that...

Following this format, including the spacing, your written draft shouldn't be longer than five pages.

In terms of content, the dialogue you create must indicate a thorough understanding of both texts, and you will read them alongside the work of one or more musician or lyricist. Moreover, the essay should represent these texts as examples of thinkers working on a problem that has particular urgency. Consider the following questions to help guide the discussion: How might you illustrate the problem at hand? What examples are available from the texts at hand? *What might this problem have to do with you—as a writer, a thinker, a college student, a human being?* How can you bring your ideas into fruitful dialogue with both Shelby and Asante?

In your essay, pay very close attention to differences in terminology. If the terms come up, and some of them most definitely should, remember to account for the differences between “race,” culture, ethnicity, and nationality with the same level of detail as, say, Tommie Shelby’s essay. Feel free to make room in your essay to clarify these terms for your audience.

This essay must be submitted as a final draft. Again, it will become a part of your group presentation/media project, so invest heavily in the quality of your presentation and in the analytical accuracy of your representation of the texts.

The single-most important criterion for grading this essay is how well you represent the ideas of these authors and forge meaningful connections between them and your own perspective.