



Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-hop and Black Politics

By Lester K. Spence

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Rap's critique of police brutality in the 1980s. The Hip Hop Political Convention. The rise (and fall) of Kwame Kilpatrick, the "hip-hop mayor" of Detroit. Barack Obama echoing the body language of Jay-Z on the campaign trail.

A growing number of black activists and artists claim that rap and hip-hop are the basis of an influential new urban social movement. Simultaneously, black citizens evince concern with the effect that rap and hip-hop culture exerts on African American communities. According to a recent Pew survey conducted on the opinions of Black Americans, 71 percent of blacks think that rap is a bad influence. To what extent are African American hopes and fears about hip-hop's potential political power justified? In *Stare in the Darkness*, Lester K. Spence answers this question using a blend of neoliberal analysis, survey data, experiments, and case studies.

Spence finds that rap does in fact influence black political attitudes. However, rap also reproduces rather than critiques neoliberal ideology. Furthermore, black activists seeking to create an innovative model of hip-hop politics are hamstrung by their reliance on outmoded forms of organizing. By considering the possibilities inherent in the most prolific and prominent activities of hip-hop politics, *Stare in the Darkness* reveals, in a clear and practical manner, the political consequences of rap culture for black publics.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In *Stare in the Darkness*, Lester K. Spence brings an essential degree of clarity and precision to our understandings of popular culture and political expression. This book is engaging and nuanced, and it will enrich in an original fashion our understanding of hip-hop as well as black politics." —Richard Iton, author of *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era*

"*Stare in the Darkness* offers brilliant insight into the political realities of contemporary black life. More importantly though, *Stare in the Darkness* is remixed, chopped and screwed in ways that hip-hop heads will certainly love and more than a few social scientists will find great value in." —Mark Anthony Neal, coeditor of *That's the Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*

About the Author

Lester K. Spence is assistant professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University.

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