



Article on Conscious Hip Hop



Excerpt From De La Soul Article

By Sheryl Garret, *Sunday Times (London)*, July 1996

In 1989, De La Soul's debut album *Three Feet High And Rising* was hailed by New York's *Village Voice* as "the *Sergeant Pepper* of hip hop". . . .

The 24 short but sweet tracks rapped about everything from dandruff to their so-called Daisy Age philosophy, but the quirky humour and catchy hooks hid a more serious intent that may have got lost in the face of the album's massive commercial success.

Along with the Jungle Brothers and A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul were part of a loose organisation called Native Tongues, a hip hop collective based around zany humour, eclectic samples and, most of all, positive vibes. . . .

Hip hop meanwhile became dominated by the West Coast sound known as gangsta rap – a verbal cocktail of violence, sexism, guns, drugs and money. . . .

On the phone from the US, De La Soul's main spokesman Pos (Kelvin Mercer) says they're reluctant to be seen as a kind of "hip hop police", but admits they took a back-to-basics approach this time because "there are a lot of messages that we wanted to put across to the people, and if you want to teach something, you can't present eleventh- or twelfth-grade material to ninth-grade students". . . .

The problem, [Pos] points out, is that ... one man's poetry is another's obscenity. If it were left to politicians, many would favour silencing all rap as an inconvenient articulation of black experience. Pos just wants more of a balance. Gangsta rappers may argue that they are telling it like it is, but the reality they show is a selective one. For every gun-toting gang member, there's someone else nearby getting up every day, going to work or school and trying to raise a family. He doesn't dispute the right of someone like Ice T to rap about his past life as a pimp and drug dealer, but wonders why his current success as a movie star and TV presenter as well as a rapper doesn't seem to filter into the mix.