Guest Editor's Introduction:
Edu-tainment: Popular Culture in the Making of Schools for the 21st Century

By: Charles P. Gause

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Article:

> As we head into the 21st century, rap music/hip-hop is in the earth-wide sound stream, the child of soul, R B and rock n roll, the by-product of the strategic marketing of Big Business, ready to pulse out to the millions on the wild, wild web. It's difficult to stop a cultural revolution that bridges people together.
> —Chuck D, *The Sound of Our Young World*

Popular culture is the very sea of our existence, It is often contextualized in terms of the "music of the day" or "music of the generation." From that perspective let us just for a moment entertain the thought of rap music. Rap music, in its brief history, has been coded as the "voice" of the urban African American male whose desire is to express his manhood and disrupt society. Hip-hop culture and rap music as an art form, which began as a contemporary form of African American expression, has emerged as an articulation of a culturally specific art form in a dominant cultural context. Initially, its popularity and global impact or hybridity positioned it as a counter-hegemonic musical medium with counter-narratives to dominator culture—although presently this is no longer true.

Hip-hop culture has been commodified by the dominant culture to evolve into a multitrillion-dollar media industry, but continues Jo be marginalized by "organized educational spaces." This marginalization continues to privilege an official or "high" culture over "pop" culture. Because of hip-hop's global appeal, I have conducted research to investigate African American teachers' perspectives regarding the genre (Gause, 2001). Implications suggest that the genre in particular, and popular culture more broadly, has a profound impact on "schooling" and "public learning communities."

In today's society, particularly U.S. society, we are bombarded on a 24- hour daily basis with mediated imagery and sounds that shape our values, belief systems, and moral structures. The social institutions of our society, including families, public schools, and the communities in which we live and work, are affected. Even those institutions engrossed in their own "traditions"—legal, religious, and political communities—are "infected." Because of this constant bombardment of "popular culture," how we, and particularly present day youth, form our identities and cultural politics is influenced and based upon what is "popular."

Due to technological advances, popular culture, broadly defined, encompasses print, digital, virtual, and enhanced mediated imagery that is delivered via 'tech" devices (e.g., BlackBerry, iPods, digital phones, HDTV, and handheld computers) on a 24-hour basis. It consists of chat rooms, virtual text, scripted and unscripted reality TV, music videos, websites, and blogs.

The academy is often slow in keeping up with what is popular; however, a shift is upon the horizon in academic circles. At issue: How has the terrain within the educational arena evolved from the "sea of possibility" to the "background noise" of popular culture?

We know the meaning and purpose of schooling is being redefined. The relationship between teachers and students, particularly at the secondary level in high schools around the country, has entered into a critical stage

of renegotiating what and whose knowledge is of greater value because of a mediated culture (popular culture). Because of this teachers are beginning to question their own pedagogy and are looking for answers about how to teach popular culture in the high school classroom (Walker, 2001).

This special issue of the *Journal of School Leadership* strives to create a space for critical dialogue regarding the influence of popular culture on today's schools. Popular culture presents enormous possibilities for assisting educators to rethink "ways of knowing." Students in U.S. public schools are concerned with issues surrounding rap music, racial injustices, and notions of resistance. All of these concerns are situated within the context of their own identity. This identity is heavily influenced by choices that are driven by the media.

Publicity turns consumption into a substitute for democracy. The choice of what one eats (or wears or drives) takes the place of significant political choice. Publicity helps to mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society. And it also masks what is happening in the rest of the world. (Berger, 1977, p. 149)

This special issue seeks to serve as a platform for teachers, administrators, educational leaders, and researchers to further investigate the implications of popular culture in the making of today's public schools. As we address these issues, the world in which educator's exist continues to evolve with an increasingly greater impact exerted by transnational corporations. We are educating in a time of expanding globalization whose impact we witness via 24-hour digitally mediated discourses. How are schools and educational leaders keeping up with this global transformation? What type of impact does this transformation of schools from sites of democracy to "bedfellows" of consumerism have upon the school and much larger global community? How are the "souls" of schools affected? In the journey of school reform are educational leaders acknowledging that the "process of schooling" is filled with "cultural politics"? How are educational leadership programs preparing future school leaders? Are educational leadership preparation programs equipping schools' leaders for the "journey of the self" or for the "journey of the soul"?

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