

Brothers Gonna Work It Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism. By Charise Cheney. New York: New York University Press, 2005. x, 222 pp.

In *Brothers Gonna Work it Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism*, Charise Cheney provides an extremely inclusive and insightful examination of the forces shaping the evolution of Black nationalism in the United States, placing the neonationalist rap of the late 1980s and early 1990s within the historical Black nationalist-masculinist tradition. Cheney is successful in her aim to complicate the too-often oversimplified analysis of American rap, holding it to “the same kind of analytic standards or scholarly gaze” as one might the literature of the Harlem renaissance. Cheney’s examination of neonationalist rap focuses on the careers and work of Public Enemy, KRS, Ice-T, and Paris and is unique in its refusal to turn a blind eye toward its homophobic and misogynistic trends or take these characteristics outside of their social, economic, historical, and often reactionary contexts. *Brothers Gonna Work It Out* examines the aims of Black nationalism through the cultural expression and participation of the masses, calling for a more inclusive nationalism, which empowers all members of the Black community.

Cheney contends that one of the most prominent historical messages of Black nationalism and one that has continued into neonationalism is “I am a man.” The “I am a man” message was created in response to historical conditions that prevented Black men from fulfilling the role of female protector and provider, which embodied definitions of manhood. Cheney contends that the enlistment of 180,000 Black men in the Union army constituted an attempt by Black men to fulfill the role of protector, thus proving their manhood. She examines the use of this message in the 1989 film *Glory*, which dramatized the story of the Massachusetts 54th, one of the first all-Black Union regiments.

Cheney contends that the neonationalism produced during the golden age of rap from the late 1980s to the early 1990s is partially a result of the poor economic conditions mired in the social and economic policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations. The deteriorating economic situation in Black urban areas in the late 1980s and early 1990s and other factors, such as the sexual politics of Black relationships and the nature of the music industry, all came together to shape the neonationalist rap of the golden age. Cheney shows how rappers navigated these factors, utilizing, and sometimes misappropriating, Black religion, the ideologies of the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s, slavery, and the music industry, denouncing the parts of their history that they deemed unworthy in order to create a usable neonationalism. Cheney presents a music that represented the voices of a marginalized and disempowered youth minority, giving sound to their concerns and ideas and continuing the liberation of Black minds that began in the Black Power era. Cheney makes particular pains to demonstrate that the message of neonationalist rap music was often at the expense of women and gay men and ironically supported “mainstream American social, political, economic and cultural values.”

Cheney’s goal is twofold. First, this work is part of a broader attempt by scholars to examine the history of Black nationalism not only as a reaction to White terrorism or as part of the work of a few highly visible Black leaders, but also through the cultural expressions and participation of the masses. It is also a call to the Black community to examine the current understanding of Black nationalism to create a more inclusive, broad-reaching, and less reactionary nationalism, in which all members of the Black community are respected and given voice.

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