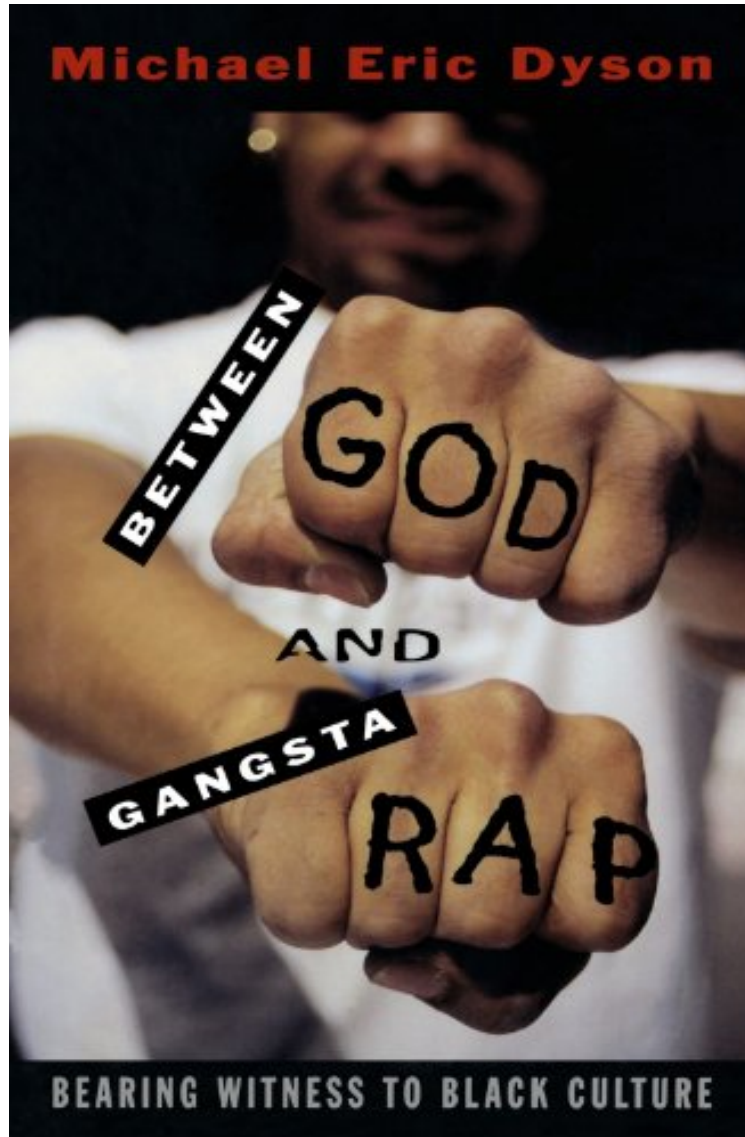


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Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture

Michael Eric Dyson

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#1930390 in Books Michael Eric Dyson 1997-01-30 Original language: English PDF # 1 5.19 x .71 x 7.881, .41 #File Name: 0195115694240 pages Between God and Gangsta Rap Bearing Witness to Black Culture | File size: 48.Mb

Michael Eric Dyson : Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. I don't know...By KennyThis book is filled with Dr. Dyson tackling many subjects, including the O.J Simpson trial, Michael Jordan, Mariah Carey and the issues surrounding her identity

in the eyes of the viewing public (black and white), and others as well. It's not necessarily a tough read; the title of the book is simply misleading. While I read it, I could see the link he attempts to make with his audience while he discusses various subjects, but it is pretty difficult to follow. It's "Between God and Gangsta Rap", but it takes a long time to bridge the links together, and that is what frustrated me. I didn't need certain issues in the book to understand others, but it may take that for other people who read it. The one piece I did enjoy was one about a pastor who is revered in the African-American community, Gardner "Wash" Taylor. Besides that, the book didn't do too much for me, and that is unfortunate, because I am a huge Michael Eric Dyson fan. It will really just depend on what type of reader you are as to whether you like or dislike the book, or whether you finish or don't finish it. 14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: BETWEEN GOD AND MISOGYNIST CRAP

AfroerotiKTo say that preacher, professor, and hip-hop prophet Michael Eric Dyson is a brilliant scholar and prolific writer is to not only make a gross underassessment of his intellectual acumen, but also belies his impact on the transliterative interpretation of Black, urban vernacular and culture into academic fare. Dyson stands poised to ascend to the position of 21st century nouveau Negro Literati—he's an academician and theologian extraordinaire with his finger acutely on the pulse of the ghetto fabulous, and the not so fabulous. His attempt to bridge the gap between the pulpit and the projects, between the hallowed halls of scholastic academy and the temporal alleyways of municipal despair, is to not only be commended, but also to be acknowledged as groundbreaking scholarship. Dyson has created in himself a new paradigm, the rapping apostle who champions the words of the socially oppressed, economically poor, and melanin-rich youth across Amerikkka. While I stand in agreement with a great number of Dyson's arguments and commentaries on Black culture, and I respect and revere his ability to render unbiased and unpopular examinations of historical African American icons, I find him dangerously lacking in his self-proclaimed position of feminist. I cannot in good consciousness harshly critique Professor Dyson's intent when it comes to addressing the issue of gender in the African American community but I most assuredly take issue with his content. The esteemed professor identifies himself as a benevolent champion to the "fairer" sex while hiding behind a thinly-veiled patriarchal and misogynistic mask. Whatever his public beliefs on misogyny might be, Dr. Dyson clearly isn't averse to the excessive adulation of its most gross perpetrators—nowhere less so than in his iconic homage to gangsta rapper Ice Cube in his book entitled *Between God and Gangsta Rap*. To read this unblemished critique, one would think that Cube is the ghetto version of Paul Robeson; brilliant, multi-talented, prolific renaissance man driven to rap about blunts and "bitches" due to extenuating circumstances that propel him to compromise his craft with the profane. Dyson states, "Even when Ice Cube misses the mark, the furious intelligence and rhetorical skill of his gangstafronationalist aesthetic manages to provoke and inspire." Literary brilliance aside, inspire whom and to what end is the question. Nowhere within his tribute to Cube does he state that the rapper goes too far or that he is pathological and diseased in his perception and portrayal of Black women in his music. Dr. Dyson mentions that the artist might have some animus towards women but conveniently forgets to include any lyrics that highlight the rapper's sentiments. Took her to the Comfort Inn/Tucked her in/Pulled out the third leg and pumped it in/She said will you call me/Yeah I'll call you a bitch and a hoe after I ball ya. The term "furious intelligence" as used to describe Ice Cube keeps ringing in my ears as I reread those lyrics and wonder how rhyming the word "Inn" with "in" and "in" is either furious or intelligent. Dyson's continuous failure to criticize Black male rappers is disturbing. It is as if he is giving them carte blanche to degrade Black woman in any vile and disgusting way imaginable and placing his stamp of approval on it to the academic community. Dyson attributes the demise of the political and revolutionary group Public Enemy to their defiant stance against the status quo, yet he failed to mention Flavor Flav's criminal, wife-beating, drug-related activities as contributory in any way. His failure to acknowledge and reprimand rappers smacks of disrespect to the women they vilify and also to the marginalized youth who create this loathsome (c)rap. It says to them that they don't have to have any responsibility for what they say because they are only reflecting their environment. It holds them to no higher standard than their putrid and venomous attacks on women. I do not blame the victims of oppression for their outward manifestations of lyrical enmity, but I also do not condone such behavior either. My one consolation in all of this is that most of the rappers who so egregiously violate the sensibilities of women will never pick up one of Dyson's books to read and comprehend its distortions. It seems that membership into some sort of secret sect of testosterone prohibits in-depth analysis of the pathos of Black men by The Reverend Michael Dyson. In his benedictory tribute to his third wife, Dyson says, ". . .for the most part black men have been unwilling to confront inequities between ourselves and the women in our lives, inequities that we deeply invest in and justify by all sorts of philosophical and rhetorical gyrations." That, in essence, should have been the launching pad for the discussion about the disparity in agendas between Black male/female relationships. Instead, he doesn't even attempt to address what sort of inequities he perceives and gives no attention whatsoever to the topic. He would much rather wax piously about how faultless he was in his failed marriages and how he was justified in his adultery. "The women with whom I was unfaithful were no doubt greatly dissatisfied by my dismal performance," he laments, "and I was profoundly ashamed." I suppose that one is to assume that if he had performed better, and his companions had further enjoyed themselves, that his shame would somehow have been less profound. The entire anecdote seems crafted to assure the reader full comprehension of the fact that he's got skillz in bed, no matter what a few random women might be able to say about him. His declaration of

his sexual prowess mirrors the exact same behavior of rappers talking about how much pipe they can lay and how many women they can turn out, he simply didn't have a beat behind his proclamation. Perhaps he simply forgot to address the issue of Black men choosing to date white women in outrageous numbers, or the propensity for them to revere European standards of beauty in women of color. While he made sure that the reader knew that he was a diligent and loving father, missing was the discussion of single mothers in the African American community and the Black man's role in raising and taking responsibility for their children. Mike Dyson chooses to use his full name publicly, quite possibly to distinguish himself from the convicted rapist/boxer whose name differs by only a single letter, but the discussion of the psychological ramifications of sexual assault in the Black community went unmentioned in his work. The professor states that it is painful for Black women, many of whom have fought valiantly for Black pride, to hear the dissonant chord of disdain carried in the angry epithet "bitch." The true feminist might suggest that it is even more tragic for the generation of young women who have grown up with such vile references daily entertaining them and to not find it offensive at all. As alarming and as disgusting as it may seem, Dyson can be quoted as saying, "Some sisters, ladies, and women might, ironically prefer the rancid, ridiculous, but honest cant of Snoop's undifferentiated demonology: one man's bitch is another man's bitch." Well perhaps the professor wouldn't mind if I called him a dick-sucking, jocking, wanna-be rapper, swinging on the nuts of the fly and the dapper. Hey, put a beat to that and I think I have a platinum selling record there. 12 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Between God and Gangsta Rap: Too much room to cover By Christie_Jones@merck.com Dyson has set a big task for this little book. He has staked out a lot of ground to cover and that's where this book falls short. Maybe three of the essays are worth pursuing, in particular the piece on African American preaching and some of the personal reflections, especially the story about his brother and family, but other pieces, sound more like snippets that appeared in Vibe and seem better suited to liner notes. And please, no more OJ stuff, this man has become a cultural hang nail - enough already!

A former welfare father from the ghetto of Detroit, Michael Eric Dyson is today a critic, scholar, and ordained Baptist minister who has forged a unique role: he is a compelling spokesman for the concerns of the black community, and also a leader who has a genuine rapport with that community, particularly with urban youth. In his essays, lectures, sermons, and books, he has emerged as one of the leading African-American voices of our day. Dyson's passion for contemporary black culture informs *Between God and Gangsta' Rap*, his latest foray into the ongoing debate about African-American identity which embraces the hopes of the church and the cool reality of hip-hop. Bringing together writings on music, religion, politics, and identity, and offering a multi-faceted view of black life, the book charts the progress of Dyson's own soul, from his roots in the Detroit ghetto, to his current status as a Baptist minister, professor, cultural critic, husband, and father. Dyson opens with a letter to his brother, who is serving life in prison on a murder charge. This painful piece reveals a violence in the author's own family that sets the tone for themes that will emerge throughout these writings: violence on the black body and soul; the redemptive power of hope through school, church, and family; sexuality as a source of anguish and of joy; and the struggle with entrenched white racism. There is a section of wonderful profiles Dyson calls "Testimonials"--studies of black men, from O.J. Simpson to Marion Barry, and from Baptist preacher Gardner Taylor to Michael Jordan and Sam Cooke. In "Obsessed with O.J.," Dyson offers an extremely personal and insightful series of reflections on the case. In "Lessons," Dyson takes up the subjects of politics and racial identity. Newt Gingrich and moral panic, Quabillah Shabazz, Carol Moseley Braun, the NAACP, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X all figure in these insightful and accessible pieces. And "Songs of Celebration" draws from Dyson's writings for the popular press such as *Rolling Stone* and *Vibe*, and explores the joys and pitfalls of black expression, from the black vernacular bible to gospel music, R B, and hip-hop. Dyson concludes with an essay framed as a letter to his wife, which offers a positive counterbalance to the opening address to his brother. The letter serves as a tribute to the redemptive powers of love, the black family, spirit, and change. Arguing that the richness of black culture today can be found in the interstices--between god and gangsta' rap--Dyson charts the progress and pain of African Americans over the past decade, showing that brilliance and beauty, pain and drudgery are components of this changing culture. As a compendium of his thinking about contemporary culture *Between God and Gangsta' Rap* will find a wide audience among black and white readers.

From *Publishers Weekly* "[P]reacher and public intellectual" Dyson (*Making Malcolm*) offers a lucid, mostly stimulating roundup of op-eds, reviews and articles about books, music, people and politics. An ordained Baptist minister, at 35 he has his finger on the pulse of the younger generation, so he can criticize the NAACP for losing touch with the grass roots and criticize gangsta rap for sexism and homophobia-but observe that attacks on it divert attention from more important threats to society as a whole. A few articles seem ephemeral, but most pieces on music--from Sam Cooke to Vanessa Williams to Public Enemy--reveal a fan's enthusiasm filtered through the screen of racial history. Dyson opens and closes the book with personal essays: a reflective letter to his incarcerated brother and an almost mawkish letter to his (third) wife in which he recounts his painful path to maturity in relationships. In Dyson's best essay, on the culture wars, he calls for the nation "to own up to its rich and creolized practice"; thus he recalls his own

sturdy education in Detroit, where wise mentors fed him black culture high and low and fueled his omnivorous intellectual appetite. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Dyson (Making Malcolm, Oxford Univ., 1995), a Baptist minister and professor of communications at the University of North Carolina, has written a complex work on race and identity and what is needed to heal the country. The book comprises a series of essays following three themes: Testimonials, or lives of contemporary black men; Lessons, or the politics of black culture, from the Panthers to the current Congress; Songs of Celebration, which cross musical and cultural lines, from gospel to pop and gangsta rap. The book examines the impact of the O.J. Simpson case on the country, as well as the forces of politics and religion brought to bear on American blacks from the start of the Civil Rights movement to the present. This timely account is recommended for all academic and public libraries. ?Kevin Whalen, Union P.L., N.J. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist American culture is sharply divided racially, nowhere more than over "gangsta' rap" music, which appeals to young blacks and repels older blacks and whites who cite it as evidence of moral decay and devolution. But Dyson holds that "the vilification . . . is far out of proportion to the problem [gangsta' rap] presents. The demonization of gangsta' rappers is often a convenient excuse for cultural and political elites to pounce on a group of artists who are easy prey." Dyson makes the fact that this isn't the first time such a group has been scapegoated by a nervous overclass the backdrop for a literate and compelling argument that cultural warfare over popular music and other matters he addresses is just a convenient way for society to avoid dealing with larger issues of race and class. Nervous parents, educators, and others with an interest in future generations and in racial and class hatred would do well to read his thoughtful assessments. Mike Tribby