

Humanities Out There Lesson 10: Selling Out

1. Can artistic goals and commercial goals coincide? Or are they always in some type of conflict? In other words, do you believe there is such a thing as “selling out”?
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“The Man of Letters as a Man of Business”

I am glad and proud to be of those who eat their bread in the sweat of their own brows, and not the sweat of other men's brows; I think my bread is the sweeter for it. I know very well that to the vast multitude of our fellow working men we artists are the shadows of names. The prospect is not brilliant for any artist now living, but perhaps the artist of the future will see in the flesh the accomplishment of that human equality of which the instinct has been divinely planted in the human soul.

by William Dean Howells (1893)

There is an instinctive sense, even in the midst of the grotesque confusion of our economic being. People feel that there is something profane, something impious, in taking money for a picture, or a poem, or a statue. Most of all, the artist himself feels this. He puts on a bold front with the world, to be sure, and brazens it out as business, but he knows very well that there is something false and vulgar in it, and that the work which cannot be truly priced in money cannot be truly paid in money.

“Moment of Clarity” – Jay-Z (2003)

Thank God for granting me this moment of clarity
This moment of honesty (the world'll feel my truths)
Through my *Hard Knock Life* time, my *Gift and The Curse*
I gave you volume after volume of my work
So you can feel my truths
I built the dynasty by being one of the realest niggas out
Way beyond a *Reasonable Doubt* (y'all can't fill my shoes)
From my *Blueprint* beginnings to that *Black Album* ending
Listen close you'll hear what I'm about
Nigga feel my truths

The music business hate me
Cause the industry ain't make me
Hustlers and boosters embrace me
And the music I be making
I dumbed down for my audience
And doubled my dollars
They criticize me for it
Yet they all yell, "Holla!"

If skills sold, truth be told

**I'd probably be, lyrically, Talib Kweli
Truthfully I wanna rhyme like common sense
But I did five Mil**

I ain't been rhyming like Common since

When your sense got that much in common
And you been hustling since your inception
Fuck perception go with what makes sense
Since I know what i'm up against
We as rappers must decide what's most important
And I can't help the poor if i'm one of them
So I got rich and gave back
To me that's the win-win
The next time you see the homie and his rims spin
Just know my mind is working just like them
The rims that is

“Ghetto Show” – Talib Kweli f. Common (2004)

Whatever in your heart is where you want to be
My hood is the ghetto
Even when you look it's never what you see
My hood is the ghetto
I've been down before, up is just a reach
Cause my hood is the ghetto
Catch a second wind, then begin again
My hood is the ghetto

Black magic in the hood, it's tragic but understood
Crack addicts, crack windows, crack wood
Even what's bad becomes good, status becomes stood
Up on the pedestal, welcome to the ghetto show
Federal buildings, pissy hallways
Filled with children pushing children
Fiends lips peeling, shit seems real, and
What's real is the estate of mind that we're in
The situation feels great
My man peels weight, so he can fill plates
You might get love but you still feel hate
With gang shakes and chain plates, we communicate
Chicago to Brooklyn nigga real ones do relate

If lyrics sold then truth be told

I'll probably be just as rich and famous as Jay-Z

Truthfully I wanna rhyme like common sense

Next best thing I do a record which Common sent

Cause it's the music, it's blues, it's jazz, it's acoustics
Soul, rock and roll, the hip hop that we producing
Yeah it's the gear, it's the flare, it's the stare
Nowadays they'll shot you where they used to shoot the fair
Remember the lost soldiers, pour a beer, shoot the air
We got our own elected officials, no matter who the mayor
I know you know what I'm talking about
From New York to the South,
Take off your shoes when you walk in the house