

Losing My Cool: How a Father's Love and 15,000 Books Beat Hip-Hop Culture

Written by Book Review by Kam Williams
Tuesday, 01 June 2010 14:10



“Since the dawn of the hip-hop era in the 1970s, Black people have become increasingly freer and freer as individuals, with a wider range of possibilities spread out before us now than at any time in our past. Yet the circumstances of our collective life have degenerated in direct contrast to this fact, with a more impoverished vision of what it means to be Black today than ever before. If these exciting new circumstances we now find ourselves in, of which our president is the apotheosis, are to mean anything of lasting value, the zeitgeist... is going to have to change, too—permanently...

Will we, at long last, allow ourselves to abandon the instinct to self-sabotage and the narcissistic glorification of our own failure? Will the fact of daily exposure to a Black president in turn expose once and for all the lie that is and always has been *keeping it real*?

-- Excerpted from the Epilogue (pgs. 213-214i)

From its title, *Losing My Cool* sounds like it might be about by a guy with a short temper. But that's not the case. In fact, it's quite the opposite, since Thomas Chatterton Williams is a rather erudite and introspective academic with a degree in philosophy from Georgetown University. What *Losing My Cool* actually refers to is the maturation process he went through while in college which enabled him to shed the anti-intellectual veneer he had embraced growing up in Northern New Jersey as a card-carrying member of the Hip-Hop Generation.

Williams, whose mother is white and father is Black, credits his dad's emphasis on education with ultimately enabling him to appreciate the value of a college degree as a ticket out of the hood, as opposed to music, sports or illegal activities. This would prove to be no mean feat, however, as a teenager the author found the materialist trappings and anti-social attitudes of the thug lifestyle ever so seductive. Thus, he cared little about grades and attending classes, while considering the conspicuous consumption and general degeneracy celebrated in gangsta' rap videos worthy of emulation.

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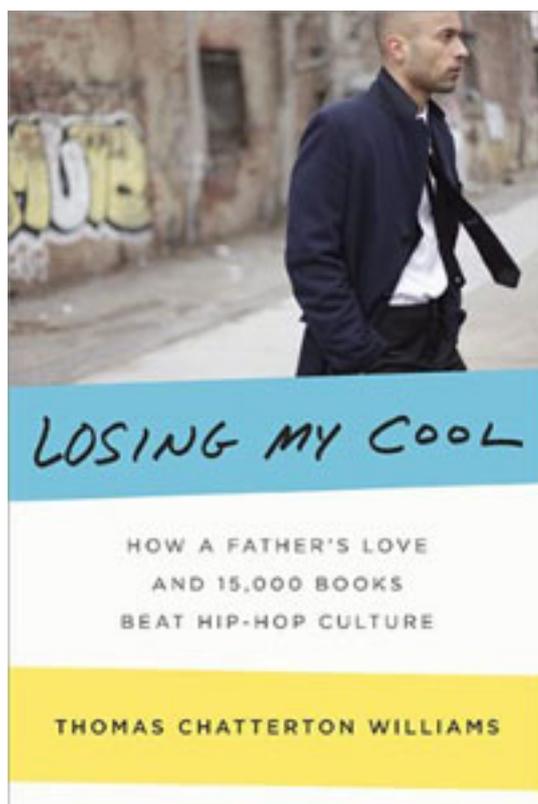
This very gifted writer recounts his perilous route from rebellion to redemption in *Losing My Cool:* *How a*

Father's Love and 15,000 Books Beat Hip-Hop Culture

, a thought-provoking memoir which suggests we redefine exactly what it means to be Black. What ought to make the iconoclastic ideas shared in this engaging autobiography of value to impressionable young minds is that the words are coming not out of the mouth of an older person who always hated rap music, but from a former diehard fan who has seen the error of his ways.

After all, it takes an admirable maturity for one to admit that a self-defeating, ghetto fabulous culture had “exerted a seriously negative influence on my Black peers and me, and it did so in a way that we tended to approach hip-hop seriously and earnestly, striving to ‘keep it real’ and viewing a lifestyle governed by hip-hop values as some kind of prerequisite to an authentically Black existence.”

A sobering deconstruction of the harmful hip-hop mindset by a brother who very easily could've ended up a casualty of that dead-end path instead of a role model.



Losing My Cool:
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by Thomas Chatterton Williams
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