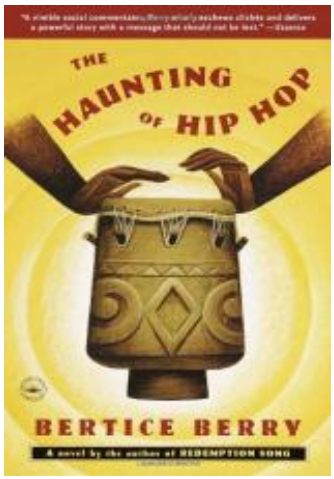
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# The Haunting of Hip Hop

by Bertice Berry




## About the Book

A ghost story with a beat . . . Bertice Berry follows her finely pitched **Blackboard** bestselling debut novel, **Redemption Song**, with a mesmerizing cautionary tale about urban hip hop culture.

In ancient West Africa, the drum was more than a musical instrument, it was a vehicle of communication?it conveyed information, told stories, and passed on the wisdom of generations. The magic of the drum remains alive today, and with her magnificent second novel, Berry brings those powerful beats to the streets of Harlem.

Harry "Freedom" Hudson is the hottest hip hop producer in New York City, earning unbelievable fees for his tunes and the innovative sound that puts his artists on the top of the charts. Harry is used to getting what he wants, so when he's irresistibly drawn to a house in Harlem, he assumes he'll be moving in as soon as the papers can be drawn up. The house, after all, has been abandoned for years. Or has it?

Rumors are rife in the neighborhood that the house is haunted; that mysterious music, shouts, and sobbing can be heard late at night. Ava, Harry's strong-willed, no-nonsense agent, dismisses it all as "old folks" tales?until she opens the door and finds an eerie, silent group of black people, young and old, gathered around a man holding an ancient African drum. They are waiting for Harry and bear a warning that touches his very soul: "We gave the drum back to your generation in the form of rap, but it's being used to send the wrong message."

**The Haunting of Hip Hop** is a reminder of the importance of honoring the past as a means of moving safely and firmly into the future. It is sure to raise eyebrows and stir up controversy about the impact, good and bad, of rap culture.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** Ngozi embodies incredible strength of character: determination, integrity, a loving heart, responsibility, respect for his

family. Who are the Ngozis (male and female) in your life and community?

**2.** Although he named himself Freedom, Harry Hudson faces numerous obstacles, even when he is a little boy. It's only through the spirit world that he can truly set himself free. What constraints are imposed by the modern world? Can ancestors really liberate their descendants?

**3.** Do you share Ava's opinion of Chucky Campbell? Did he sell out?

**4.** The heart of the novel deals with desecration of the sacred drum: "The beat, the rhythm, the words of hip hop music rarely spoke the truth of the drum," (chapter 30). What is your opinion of hip-hop culture? Do raw rap lyrics contribute to violence, or do they expose a painful way of life that would otherwise go unaddressed?

**5.** What does the drum represent to you? How can you honor it in your own life?

**6.** From ragtime to jazz, do-wop, and rap, white culture has often appropriated black musical innovations. Discuss the exploitation issues that Ava and Freedom cleverly defeat.

**7.** Describe the hypnotic music that Ava hears on the night of Freedom's death. If the book had come with a recording, what do you suppose this music would have sounded like?

**8.** From the day Ngozi is born, his mother has many visions about his future. She tells him, "Your life here will be short, but your task is great" (Prologue), and he carries this knowledge with him into the "beast" that entombs him during the Middle Passage. In modern society, what does it take to give a child that same sense of purpose and self-worth?

**9.** Ngozi has no frame of reference for the kind of cruelty he sees in America, perceiving his situation as a battle of the spirits: "Once their hatred matched that of their captor, they would have forgotten the proverb: The only weapon that can do battle with hatred is the weapon of love and peace (page 41). . . . Ngozi was certain that the blood of the lost would be on the heads of those traitors for generations to come (page 51)." How does this philosophy relate to the daily battles in your life, and the wars waging around the world?

**10.** The grandmothers represent a bridge between the novel's two main male characters, Ngozi and Freedom. How do your aunts, mothers, and grandmothers provide a link to your ancestry? How do they interact with the men in your family?

**11.** The brownstone sits at the corner of West 138th Street and Harriet Tubman Terrace, in a "gentrified" stretch of Harlem. What is the significance of the brownstone's location? Why do you suppose Bertice Berry included a southern connection for so many of the characters?

**12.** Why did Freedom have to join the spirit world? What effect does this have on the tone of the book's final chapters?

**13.** The brownstone ghosts cope with a variety of unfulfilled quests. What keeps the spirits from finding peace? Which quests were you most able to identify with?

**14.** Are you skeptical about the existence of a spirit world, or do you feel a connection to it? Discuss any dreams,

intuitive thoughts, or visions that have made a difference in your life.

**15.** The novel ends on a note of triumph and unity. What can be done to make this vision, Ngozi's vision, a reality?

## Author Bio

Bertice Berry is a comedian and inspirational speaker and holds a Ph.D. in sociology. She has about two hundred speaking engagements per year.. She is the author of two novels (**Redemption Song** and **The Haunting of Hip Hop**) and four works of nonfiction. She lives in southern California, where she is raising her sister's three children.

## Critical Praise

"A nimble social commentator, Berry wisely eschews cliches and delivers a powerful story with a message that should not be lost."

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